

Saxon Shore, to defend those regions; but as the power of Rome declined the audacity of the Saxons increased, their expeditions became more frequent, their descents more destructive. In 449 Hengist and Horsa succeeded in effecting a settlement on the coast of Britain. Vortegern a British prince availed himself of this warlike band to repel the incursions of the Picts and Scots. Receiving Kent for their services, successive bands attracted by the good fortune of their compatriots, settled likewise in the country. Impelled by their natural ferocity and goaded on by the stubborn resistance of the natives, the Saxons showed themselves such merciless enemies that at the end of a century the British race was confined to the mountains of Wales and the maritime districts of Cornwall. The Britons in their distress sent the following letter to Aëtius, then Governor of Roman Gaul: "To Aëtius, now consul for the third time; the groans of the Britons. The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea throws us back on the barbarians; thus two modes of death await us; we are either slain or drowned." As the Saxons advanced they established independent kingdoms, which numbered seven and were known as the Heptarchy. These were absorbed into one in the ninth century under Egbert of Wessex. From this date until the middle of the eleventh century the Danes endeavored to treat the Saxons as these latter had treated the native Britons and the history of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy presents but a confused and melancholy picture of incursions and resistance. The greatest monument of the Anglo-Saxons is Beowulf, from the name of its hero. It is the oldest epic poem of the Teutonic race and affords valuable insight into the characteristics of the age. In it we look upon the scenery with which these tribes were familiar; we are brought face to face with their hopes and fears, their ideas of duty, their manner of regarding life and the way they took their exit from it. Much of the information gleaned from this poem varies from that given us by Tacitus and Caesar and we are pleased to brighten the picture already drawn by such an unselfish model as Beowulf, the great prototype of King Alfred. The generous grief of his people, ignoring gold and jewels in the thought of the greater treasure they had lost, the memorial on the low cliff, which would cause every returning mariner to steer a straight course to harbour in the remembrance of his dead hero; and the pure poetry which marks every noble line, raises the chief already described otherwise by Tacitus to the position of a hero and a model. In the literature of the world we will find no other such picture of a brave man's death. So we see that those early sea-kings were a