

indeed, which was not confined to the Saxon period, but which existed long afterwards, and which has been not unfaintly mirrored in certain cities of the Dominion, quite within the memory of the "oldest inhabitant."

The government of the city was, upon the whole, free; the heads of the city managing their own municipal affairs. A head magistrate, called a port-reeve, was chosen; he, assisted by a court of the principal burghers, deliberated on affairs. But constitutional rights were subjected to external disturbance in those days, and there were two great powers existing in the vicinity of London, who were able to cause serious annoyance. Anglo-Saxon kings did, indeed, interfere with the city government; at times they appointed royal port-reeves, and otherwise infringed upon the popular liberties; the ecclesiastical power, however, pursued an opposite course, and the bishops of London, so far from exerting their influence in opposition to the people, appear, rather, to have united with the citizens in maintaining the interests of a free community.

There was a peculiar feature in the civic society of the Saxons, in what were called *gylfs*, or guilds. The term is derived from *gildan*, to pay, because the persons who formed the association or guild paid each a certain amount into a common stock. The nature of these associations varied considerably; there were religious, political, trading guilds, and sometimes the association was only of a social and friendly nature, but in all cases the members were bound together by solemn oaths and pledges. These guilds were instituted in London at a very early period. Stow describes one which was formed in the days of King Edgar, in these words: "In the days of King Edgar, more than six hundred years since, there were thirteen knights or soldiers, well-beloved of the King and the realm, for service by them done, which requested to have a certain portion of the land on the east part of the city, left desolate and forsaken by the inhabitants, by reason of too much servitude. They besought the King to have this land, with the liberty of a guild forever; the King grant-

ed their request with conditions following: that is to say, that each of them should victoriously accomplish three combats; one above ground, one under ground, and the third in the water; and after this, at a certain day, in East Smithfield, they should run with spears against all comers, all which was gloriously performed, and the same day the King named it Knighten Gild." Edward the Confessor bestowed, and William Rufus confirmed, the charter on this guild. Two of the combats which constituted the royal conditions of privilege are easily explained; the first being the joust, or foot combat, fought with sword or battle-axe over a barrier breast-high; the last being the water-tilting, carried on by two persons, armed with staves and shields, the one trying to ward off the blows of the other, and plunge his opponent in the river. The second kind of combat, described as underground, is a problem whose solution has puzzled the antiquaries. It is not improbable that the knights alluded to by Stow, were not soldiers, but simply young men, the word *cneights* bearing that signification, their descendants being described by that author as being burgesses of London; but whether this be so or not, it is evident from the tenure on which the guild was held, that the persons composing it were skilled in the martial exercises of those days. This guild was called the Portsoke, from the situation of the land held by the company, and while the memory of the original designation is preserved in the name Portsoke Ward, there remain traces of the original company in the etymology of a lane in the neighborhood. When we hear the name of Nightingale lane, we naturally carry back our minds to the time when the crowded thoroughfare of our days ran under shady coverts, and the melodies of the nightingales rendered the solitudes vocal; but, alas for romantic impressions, this Nightingale lane is no other than Cnighena-guild land.

Before the close of the Saxon period, and earlier than the date of the origin of the Knighten guild, there existed a foreign fraternity in London, which came under the same denomination; this was the guild of