

The Monastic system, which enters so largely into the Church's history from the reign of Ethelbert to that of Henry VIII., had not, up to the time of Augustin's death, assumed so prominent a position. There were, indeed, monasteries in the early British Church, as that of Bangor, founded by Germanus, and as this contained in Augustin's age so large a body of monks, we may fairly suppose it to have been, if not the only one, by far the most important then existing in the native Church. The idea of monasticism is said to have been first started, as far as England is concerned, by Pelagius, and carried out by Germanus on his second visit to Britain; and, as this cannot well have taken place more than twenty years before the arrival of the Saxons, it is not surprising that we do not find traces of the general prevalence of the system at that period. For permanent monastic institutions in any country are inconsistent with general insecurity to person and property, such as must have prevailed in England after the Saxon invasion: religious retirement and learning, no less than wealth, shrink from the approach of an armed enemy. The places of Christian worship were certainly not spared in the common spoliation; and the monasteries connected with them doubtless shared the same fate. Monasticism in England, up to the end of the sixth century, is chiefly notable for the strong contrast it presents to its subsequent condition in the Anglo-Saxon Church as established by Augustin and his successors; a contrast which has been before remarked as holding good of the Church generally, before and after the period we have been considering. This contrast consists in the change from simplicity of life and manners to a more artificial state, accompanied too often, as it must needs be, by the loss, to a certain extent, of Christian purity and sincerity. It is probable that monastic life, here as elsewhere, was at first of that solitary nature which its name imports, and that in this form it existed long before the foundation of the monastery of Bangor. Thus, it may well have been of native growth, and have arisen in troublous times, just as it did in other parts of the Roman empire, where it is said to have owed its origin to the *Decian persecution. The Christian confessors, driven into dens and caves of the earth by their persecutors, seem, many of them, to have continued this mode of life, by choice, after the necessity had ceased; and from this would arise, by a natural and healthy change of feeling, the idea of a gregarious life of the same kind. Germanus appears to have organised such a system in Britain, and his monastery may perhaps have been intended as a model for the establishment of others on the same plan. Such societies were most probably based only on mutual consent, and this must have

* Bingham's Antiq., Bk. vii. c. 1.