

EPITOME OF THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND.*

By Rev. Dr. Jacob, Fredericton, N. B.

In the fourth year of his accession to the Papal seat (says the learned and pious Northumbrian Monk; that is, in the year of our Lord 596,) Gregory, admonished by divine instinct, sent Augustine, whom he had designed for Bishop of the English nation, accompanied by other zealous Monks, to preach to them the Gospel. The Abbot (for such was Augustine appointed over the rest,) and his associates arrived safely at the isle of Thanet, in number about forty, besides some of the French nation whom they brought with them as interpreters. Ethelbert, the Saxon king of Kent, to whom Augustine sent a new and wondrous message, stating that he had come from Rome to proffer heaven and eternal happiness by the knowledge of another God than the Saxons knew, directed them to remain where they had landed, and to be furnished with necessaries, while he should consult on what was fit to be done. After some days coming himself into the island, Ethelbert selected a place of conference under the open sky. They on the other side, when invited to his presence, advancing for their standard a silver cross and a graphic representation of our Saviour, came slowly forward, singing solemn litanies; till sitting down at the king's desire, they preached to him, and all in that assembly, the tidings of salvation. Whom having heard attentively, the King thus replied: "Fair indeed and ample are the promises you bring, and such things as present the appearance of much good; yet, since they are new and uncertain, I cannot hastily give my assent, quitting the religion which, from my ancestors, with all the English, I have for so many years retained. Nevertheless, because you are strangers, and have undertaken so long a journey, to impart to us the knowledge of things, which I am persuaded you believe to be the truest and best, you may be assured we will not repay you with any molestation, but rather provide you the most friendly entertainment in our power: nor do we forbid you, whomsoever you can by preaching, to gain to your belief." He accordingly assigned them a residence in Canterbury, his chief city; and made provision for their maintenance, with free permission to preach their doctrine wherever they thought proper. By which, and by the example of their holy life, a life spent in prayer, fasting, and continual labour in the conversion of souls, they gained many; on whose bounty and that of the king, receiving what was necessary only, they subsisted. There stood without the city an ancient Church, built in honor of St. Martin while the Romans remained in the country; in which Bertha the queen (for she, we are informed, being the French king's daughter, had been a Christian before her marriage,) usually went out to pray. Here also the Roman missionaries began to preach, baptize and openly perform divine worship. But when the king himself, convinced by their good life and miracles (says the ancient historian) became a Christian and was baptized, which happened within a year of their arrival, then multitudes daily, conforming to the example of their prince, thought it an honor to be reckoned among those of his faith;—ten thousand, we are told, were baptized in the single year 599. To whom Ethelbert indeed principally showed his favor, but compelled none; for so, the Saxon divine assures us, had he been taught by them who were both the instructors and authors of his faith, that the Christian religion must be voluntarily embraced, not professed by compulsion. At length Augustine, being advanced to the dignity of Archbishop of the English, recovered from its ruins and profane uses a Christian church in Canterbury, built of old by the Romans, which he dedicated by the name of Christ's Church; and adjoining it he founded a seat for himself and his successors: a monastery also on the east side of the city, where Ethelbert at his instigation built St. Peter's, and enriched it with great endowments, to be a place of burial as well for the archbishops as the kings of Kent. The number of Christians began now to increase so fast, that Augustine, ordaining two of his assistants, Mellitus and Justus, as subordinate bishops, sent them out to the work of their ministry. And Mellitus by preaching converted the east Saxons, over whom Sebert, the nephew of Ethelbert, by that powerful monarch's permission then reigned; whose conversion to congratu-

late, Ethelbert founded the great church of St. Paul in London to be their bishop's cathedral; the same Mellitus having the satisfaction but a few years after of consecrating St. Peter's church and abbey at Westminster, founded by the piety and zeal of his more immediate sovereign Sebert. Justus also had his cathedral founded at Rochester; and this, as well as St. Paul's was endowed by Ethelbert with fair possessions.

Thus, according to the most authentic testimony, was the Church of England happily established on the mouldering ruins of its British predecessor. So honorable to all the parties concerned, so perfectly agreeable to reason and nature, was the origin of that religious establishment; which, patronized by successive dynasties, cordially embraced by Saxons, Danes and Normans, justly receiving temporal support in grateful return for the spiritual good which it was found to communicate, and improving in knowledge, purity and utility, with the progress of the national mind, survives the changes of more than twelve hundred years, and has now its bishops and cathedrals on the banks of the St. Lawrence and the Ganges.

But to the Saxons our country is indebted for other great and lasting benefits. The free institutions to which they had been accustomed in their native wilds, their *Synods* and *Wittenagemotes*, or conferences of wise men, were the original source of our English *Parliaments*. The same Ethelbert, who first established Christianity among them, is recorded to have given laws and statutes, after the example of Roman Emperors, written with the advice of his sagest counsellors, and in the English tongue. These laws, improved by Ina, enlarged by Alfred, and collected into a systematic code by Edward the Confessor, form in their substance the *Common Law* of England, on which all our subsequent legislation is founded. Literature also found its best patrons among the Anglo-Saxon kings. To them England owes her first schools for liberal education; Sigebert, king of the East Angles, having laid the foundation of the University of Cambridge; while Oxford justly glories in her founder—the truly learned, wise, pious, brave and good—the incomparable and almost perfect Alfred.

The Danish invasions and the Norman conquest, were little more than the predominance of active and valiant divisions of the same people, over those who had become comparatively disolute and enfeebled. The former had at least the good effect of producing a national union and reformation, with all the benefits which England derived from the government of Alfred. The latter, miserable as was the oppression under which our Saxon forefathers groaned for a time, added what was wanting of solidity, dignity and grace to the English Constitution. To the noble Barons, whom the Norman princes called and treated as their *Peers*, we are indebted for the Great Charter, by which the rights and liberties of Englishmen were consecrated for all succeeding ages. To the wise policy of those princes themselves we must attribute the privileges of our shires, cities and boroughs, from which resulted in course of time the *House of the Commons* of England. To them, and the spirit of princely magnificence which they diffused, are due the castles, towers and palaces, the cathedrals and parochial churches; where strength and beauty, majesty and elegance, are still seen combined in admirable harmony. From them originated that extraordinary union of valour with humanity, which mitigated the horrors of war, while it raised the English hero to an unexampled height of glory.

Of the great and happy effects produced by these and such like means, it is not necessary to speak at length. Not only have "we heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us," but the whole world is well aware, what Englishmen have been in fields of battle and in courts of justice; in public council and under the domestic roof; in the various pursuits of industry, art and science; in the noble speculations of a sublime philosophy, and the noble aspirations of a holy faith; and in all the virtues which bless and adorn a people.

In these latter days the effects are most extensively seen and felt. Defects and errors there are and will be in all which belongs to man. But, under the continued blessing of that benign Providence which we are bound most devoutly to acknowledge, our nation has advanced and improved on the deeds and the cha-

acter of its days of old. The Reformation of the national religion by the happy agreement of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and its final settlement on a basis of faith and order, with an unrestrained liberty of conscience and of worship; the consolidation of the Constitution by the *Bill of Rights*, and other measures for the security of personal freedom and the equal protection of the laws; the peaceful union of the sister kingdoms of Scotland and Ireland, productive as it is (notwithstanding peculiar difficulties in the condition of the latter, which time and patience alone can disembarass,) of mutual strength and prosperity; the display of British spirit and energy at home and abroad, by land and by sea; the diligent cultivation of all the resources of the nation, and the undaunted defence of its independence against the most fearful and deadly hostilities; the wonderful extension of the British name and influence by colonies and commerce, portending I know not what kind of empire over the remotest regions of the globe; and the anxious desire and persevering endeavours of our countrymen to communicate to "all the families of the earth" their own blessings—equal liberties and rights, impartial laws, the comforts and enjoyments which are the fruits of knowledge and virtue in this life, and the animating and consoling hopes of a better through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ:—these are, all and every one, so many consequences of God's ancient providence over the distinguished nation to which it is our high privilege to belong—so many evidences and manifestations of "what He hath done in the days of our fathers, in the times of old."

What then remains, but that the inheritors of such recollections should adore with grateful devotion the God of their fathers, and call upon their souls to fulfil the duties of the station in which his providence has been pleased to place them? Reflecting on those who have been before us—the Briton, the Roman, the Saxon, Dane and Norman, the wise and great and good of those successive races blended into one nation,—"what manner of persons ought we to be!" Our care it should unquestionably be, to derive all the benefit which the example of our predecessors is calculated to afford; to shun the vices which we may find occasion to deplore, and imitate the virtues for which posterity holds them in honor. And here we cannot hesitate: because our reason, when it looks at characters from a distance, adopts the same general standard of morals. Can we doubt that the men, who have in any age most contributed to the welfare of our country, were the most devout, the most faithful, the most just and benevolent; and that, as far as any have failed in such qualities, they have failed to contribute to their country's good?

But a review of the history of England conveys more peculiar instruction. Not without a divine providence "have we heard (it) with our ears, and our fathers have told us." In other words, the distinguishing and proper character of a people is derived from hereditary associations. It is natural therefore, it is right, it is agreeable to the mind and will of God, that an Englishman should feel an especial interest in things for which his country has been remarkable. And, among many other things, which are thus associated with our nature, I conceive it impossible not to feel, that a King "the Vicar of Christ,"—as our princes of every race were designated from the establishment of Christianity to the Norman conquest, for which "Defender of the Faith" and "Supreme Head of the Church of England" have not unsapiently been substituted since the Reformation; a national Church under Episcopal government—which has existed in the island for upwards of fifteen centuries, even as long as Christianity itself; and a Parliament—comprising, to use the language of Ina in the first enactment of his reign, "the advice and consent of all the Bishops and Chiefs, and the wise men and People of the whole kingdom;"—are our peculiar heritage. Other institutions may have been better adapted to other nations; we may even admit, as the judicious and candid Hooker did with respect to the reconstruction of the Church of Geneva, that social arrangements on a very different plan may have been the "wisest devices, if we duly consider what the present state" of another country might "require." But our duty and our happiness it surely is, to adhere, with all the veneration and attachment which long prescription inspires and justifies, to the ancient Constitution of England; the great objects and obligations of which cannot per-