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THE
CHURCHMAN

DECEMBER, 1891.

ART. I.—THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE AND THE
JEWISH HISTORIES.

THERE lies before me a fine quarto volume entitled "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, with an English Translation and Notes," by the Rev. J. Ingram, B.D., late Professor of Anglo-Saxon in Oxford, published in London in 1823. This work is printed in double columns, which give the original and the translation, and it thus presents to our view one of the greatest treasures among our ancestral literature. It contains the story of our country from the time of Christ to the reign of Henry II., written in the pure language of our fathers, chiefly in prose, with occasional sections in poetry; and it represents the golden age of Anglo-Saxon, which, in fact, melted into English shortly after its completion. The book is pure in another sense, for it contains no unpleasant gossip such as occasionally disfigures early chronicles. Let us look at its structure.

After a brief introduction concerning Britain and its first inhabitants, the Chronicle starts with A.D. 1, drawing from two sources, the one ecclesiastical and the other national, combining written and oral traditions and records with the testimony of contemporaries, which increase in proportion as the work proceeds. At first there are many intervals between the years, and the contents are the barest outlines—very little more in bulk than may be seen in the lately-discovered Assyrian Canon; but gradually the Chronicle takes the nature of true annals, recording something more or less important for each year. The manuscripts from which it is printed are chiefly of the tenth and eleventh centuries, and we can readily perceive that copyists were tempted to interpolate what they had learnt from private sources, or to add some

expression of their feeling when relating anything which distressed them. Whoever the writers were they were not historians in the modern sense of the word. They did not attempt to give things in their true proportions or in their right perspective; but their materials are all the more valuable for the purposes of the student. Usually they keep themselves out of sight, though the first person plural, and even the singular, may be observed in certain general expressions, thus under A.D. 1009, "This year were the ships ready that we before spoke about"; under A.D. 1065, "Wist we not who first advised the wicked deed"; under A.D. 1100, "And—though I be tedious — (he did) all that was loathsome to God and to righteous men." How far the work is to be called original, and how far it has incorporated at certain stages the writings of Bede and others, it may be difficult to say. The writers never quote authorities, whilst Bede does. They are more condensed than Bede, and as their work is manifestly a growth, it is possible that Bede owes more to them than they to him.

It is time now to give some idea of the contents so far as they are of special interest to us as students of the past history of our Church and country. Mr. Ingram says in his Preface that the Chronicle "contains the original and authentic testimony of contemporary writers to the most important transactions of our forefathers, both by sea and land, from their first arrival in this country to the year 1154." "Philosophically considered," he continues, "this ancient record is the second great phenomenon in the history of mankind. For, if we except the sacred annals of the Jews, there is no other work extant, ancient or modern, which exhibits at one view a regular and chronological panorama of a people, described in rapid succession by different writers, through so many ages, in their own vernacular language."

A few instances will illustrate the nature of the work more closely.

A.D. 430: "This year Patricius (Patrick) was sent from Pope Celestinus to preach baptism to the Scots (*i.e.*, the Irish)."

A.D. 435: "This year the Goths sacked the city of Rome; and never since have the Romans reigned in Britain. This was about 1,110 winters after it was built. They reigned altogether in Britain 470 winters since Gaius Julius first sought that land."

A.D. 1042: "This year died King Hardicanute at Lambeth as he stood drinking. He fell suddenly to the earth with a tremendous struggle, and spoke not a word afterwards, but expired on the 6th day before the ides of June. He was king over all England two years wanting ten nights; and he is

buried in the old Minster at Winchester with King Canute his father."

A.D. 1065: "About midwinter King Edward came to Westminster, and had the Minster there consecrated, which he had himself built to the honour of God, and St. Peter, and all God's Saints. This Church-hallowing was on Childermass-day. He died on the eve of twelfth-day; and he was buried on twelfth-day in the same Minster."

To the student of Saxon topography and archæology it is pleasant to come across such names as Portsmouth, Sherburne, Bampton, Dorchester, Wimborne, Beverley, Carisbrooke, Hatfield, Wimbledon, Oundle, Ripon, Lichfield, Aylesbury, Flat-Holmes, Reading, Wallingford, Cirencester, and Bath-cestor, in writings which have come down from the early centuries of our era. It is interesting also to read the original of the Domesday Book (A.D. 1085), how "the King had a large meeting, and very deep consultation with his council about this land, how it was occupied and by what sort of men." The chronicler evidently thought his Majesty too particular in his investigations, for he concludes the account by saying that "so narrowly did the king commission them to trace it out, that there was not a single hide nor a yard of land, nay, moreover (it is shameful to tell, though he thought it no shame to do it), not even an ox, a cow, nor a swine, was there left that was not set down in his writ."

Politicians will do well to notice what is said about tithing in the days of Ethelwulf (A.D. 854); missionaries will be struck with the notice of alms sent to India by King Alfred (A.D. 883); and ecclesiastics will notice with curiosity the referring to the English College at Rome, which was burnt down in A.D. 816, and subsequently rebuilt. The Easter controversy finds a place in the Chronicle, for we are told that in A.D. 627 an injunction was sent to the Scots (Irish) on the matter by Pope Honorius, and that in A.D. 716 the venerable Egbert converted the monks of Iona to the right faith, in the matter of the regulation of Easter and the ecclesiastical tonsure. Baptisms of kings are frequently recorded. Thus we read of Cynegils that he first of West-Saxon kings received baptism. The same thing is said of Ethelbert, King of Kent.

The writers are very respectful to Rome, and again and again refer to the papal influence over England, the conferring of the archiepiscopal pall, etc., but they are not altogether blind to Rome's weakness. When there was a quarrel between the Archbishops of York and Canterbury (A.D. 1123), both parties repaired to Rome, and "that overcame Rome which overcometh all the world, *i.e.*, gold and silver." A similar difficulty had arisen between the archbishops half a

century earlier (A.D. 1070). Rome had been appealed to, but had been overcome by the force of Lanfranc's argument without the aid of bribery.

Before leaving episcopal matters, it may be well to refer to the date A.D. 604, where we read, "This year Augustine consecrated two bishops, Mellitus and Justus. Mellitus he sent to preach baptism to the East-Saxons. Their king was called Seabert, the son of Ricola Ethelbert's sister, whom Ethelbert placed there as king. Ethelbert also gave Mellitus the bishopric of London; and to Justus he gave the bishopric of Rochester, which is twenty-four miles from Canterbury."

Among the phenomena noticed in the Chronicle we shall not be surprised to find mention of eclipses and other celestial marvels. Thus, the only event in A.D. 538 is an eclipse of the sun, fourteen days before the calends of March, from before morning until nine. Of solar effects, the most remarkable was that of A.D. 1104, when, on the Tuesday following Pentecost (which was on the nones of June) were seen four circles at mid-day about the sun, of a white line, each described under the other, as if they were measured. All that saw it wondered, for they had never remembered such before." An *aurora borealis* is apparently described as having been seen in 1122, when the shipmen "saw in the north-east, level with the earth, a fire, huge and broad, which anon waxed in length up to the welkin; and the welkin undid itself in four parts, and fought against it, as if it would quench it; and the fire waxed nevertheless up to the heaven. That was on the seventh day before the ides of December." Of comets we read, in A.D. 729, "This year appeared the comet-star," and in the celebrated year 1066, "This year came King Harold from York to Westminster, on the Easter succeeding the mid-winter when the King (Edward) died. Easter was then on the sixteenth day before the Calends of May. Then was over all England such a token seen as no man ever saw before. Some men said that it was the comet-star, which others denominate the long-haired star. It appeared first on the eve called *Litania major*, that is, on the eighth before the calends of May; and so shone all the week." In A.D. 685, we read, "This year there was in Britain a bloody rain, and milk and butter were turned to blood."; whilst, in 1087, we are told of "a heavy and pestilent season. Such a sickness came on men that full nigh every other man was in the worst disorder, that is, in the diarrhoea; and that so dreadfully, that many men died in the disorder. Afterwards came, through the badness of the weather, as we before mentioned, so great a famine over all England, that many hundreds of men died a miserable death through hunger. Alas! how wretched

and rueful a time was there. When the poor wretches lay full nigh driven to death prematurely, and afterwards came sharp hunger, and despatched them withal. Who will not be penetrated with grief at such a season? Or, who is so hard-hearted as not to weep at such misfortune? Yet such things happen for folk's sins, that they will not love God and righteousness."

The expression of feeling noticeable in this last extract may be illustrated by other passages. Thus the invasions of the Danes are described with brevity but with bitterness. In 1006, we are told that "they harrowed and burned and slew as they were wont." "They provided themselves everywhere with what they wanted." "About midwinter they went to their ready farm throughout Hampshire into Berkshire to Reading. And they did according to their custom; they lighted their camp-fires as they advanced . . . afterwards they carried their spoils to the sea. There, might the people of Winchester see the rank and iniquitous foe as they passed by their gates to the sea, fetching their meat and plunder over an extent of fifty miles from sea." "Everywhere they plundered and burnt, as their custom is." The Norman conquest is not described with quite so much feeling; but the narrator of the death of William, after describing some of his unjust deeds, speaks thus of his death: "Rueful was the thing he did, but a more rueful him befell. How more rueful? He fell sick, and it dreadfully ailed him—what shall I say? Sharp death, that passes by neither rich man nor poor, seized him also. He died in Normandy, on the next day after the nativity of St. Mary, and he was buried at Caen in St. Stephen's Minster, which he had formerly reared and afterwards endowed with manifold gifts. Alas! how false and how uncertain is this world's weal! He that was before a rich king and lord of many lands, had not then of all his land more than a space of seven feet; and he that was whilom enshrouded in gold and gems lay there covered with mould." The writer then surveys the Conqueror's life, and sketches his character with considerable power and vividness.

Enough has now been said to show the nature of this wonderful book, and to illustrate its style. The question of authorship remains to be considered. The work is anonymous. Experts tell us that, so far as language is concerned, the whole is in the main of one style, though simpler and purer in the oldest parts. It would seem to be the work of a series of men who kept the records and added to them from time to time. Were these men civilians? were they politicians? were they ecclesiastics? There cannot be a doubt as to the true answer. These chronicles were kept up in the old

religious houses. Probably one monastery set the example, and others not only took the hint but borrowed the materials. This idea, which naturally suggests itself to the mind from one's knowledge of the state of things in those ages, is confirmed by the fact that there is a strong monastic element in the book itself. Events bearing on the rights of the Church are carefully related.

Thus (A.D. 560), in the reign of Ethelbert, we are told that "Columba, the mass-priest, came to the Picts, and converted them to the belief of Christ. They are the dwellers by the northern moors. And their king gave him the island of Hii, where he built a monastery. There he was abbot 32 winters, and there he died when he was 77 years old. The place his successors yet have. . . . Now, therefore, shall there ever be in Hii an abbot, and no bishop; and to him shall be subject all the bishops of the Scots; because Columba was an abbot—no bishop." In A.D. 694, we are told that "King Wihtred ordained a great council to meet at Bapchild, in which presided Wihtred, King of Kent, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Brihtwald, and Bishop Tobias of Rochester, and with them were collected abbots and abbesses and many wise men, all to consult about the advantage of God's Churches that are in Kent." Then is given, apparently *verbatim*, the king's grant of rights to the Church in the matter of property and appointment to office. Another ratification of grants to monasteries is given under A.D. 796, when Ethelard, the new archbishop, acting in the name of Pope Leo, decrees "that henceforth none dare choose their lords from lewd men (laymen) over God's inheritance."

It is natural that special interest gathers round Canterbury in the Chronicle. Up to the year 596 British ecclesiastical affairs are most slenderly dealt with, and no special interest is shown in the Church, attention rather being directed to warfare; but in that year we read, "Pope Gregory sent Augustine to Britain with very many monks to preach the Word of God to the English people." In 597 there is the dry statement, "This year came Augustine and his companions to England." But the ecclesiastical element in the Chronicle rapidly develops, and largely gathers round Canterbury. In 1023 there is a full and graphic account of the translation of St. Alphege's bones from London to Canterbury. In 1031 Canute grants "to Christ's Church in Canterbury the haven of Sandwich and all the rights that arise therefrom, on either side of the haven; so that when the tide is highest and fullest, and there be a ship floating as near the land as possible, and there be a man standing upon the ship with a taper-axe in his hand, whithersoever the larger taper-axe might be thrown out

of the ship, throughout all that land the ministers of Christ's Church should enjoy their rights."

It might be thought from these passages that the Chronicle is derived from Canterbury; but this is improbable. Some of the contents point to Abingdon; but on the whole there can be little doubt that the Chronicle as we have it is traceable to *Peterborough*. So far back as A.D. 655 we read that when the Mercians had become Christians it was resolved to build a minster to the glory of Christ and the honour of St. Peter. "And they did so, and gave it the name of Medhamsted, because there is a well there called Meadswell. And they begun the ground-wall and wrought thereon; after which they committed the work to a monk whose name was Saxulf. He was very much the friend of God, and himself also loved all people. He was nobly born in the world, and rich; he is now much richer with Christ." In the next year there is a full and elaborate account of its dedication and of the borders of its property, all described in the name of the king in the first person, and with the names of all who signed the deeds, including six royal personages, the archbishop (*Deus-Dedit*), and various bishops, priests, abbots, aldermen and others, the whole being subsequently ratified by the pope. "Thus was the minster of Medhamsted begun, that was afterwards called (*Peter*) *Borough*." In 963 the minster is found to be in ruins, "and in the old walls were found hidden the writings which Abbot Hedda had formerly written," containing the grants referred to above. Bishop Athelwold, the finder, ordered the minster to be rebuilt. "He then came to the king (*Edgar*) and let him look at the writings which before were found." The king made, in consequence, various fresh grants, which are given in full with the names of those who signed. Again and again, as the Chronicle proceeds, reference is made to the affairs of *Peterborough*, notably in the time of the Abbot *Thorold*, "a very stern man, who was then come into *Stamford* with all his Frenchmen." A detailed account is given of the burning of the minster and all its contents in those days. In the days of *Henry II.*, *Ernulf*, Abbot of *Peterborough*, was made Bishop of *Rochester*, to his own great grief and to the sorrow of the monks: "God Almighty abide ever with him." When, shortly afterwards, *Henry* gave the abbacy to *Henry of Poitou*, the chronicler is still more grieved; all the details of the appointment are given. "Thus wretchedly was the abbacy given away, and so he went with the king to *Winchester*, and thence he came to *Peterbro'* and there he dwelt right so as a drone doth in a hive. . . . This was his entry; of his exit we can as yet say nought. God provide." Probably the abbot was not allowed to see this Chronicle; at any rate, being

written in Anglo-Saxon he could not understand it. Another monk took up the pen in 1132, and tells of the abbot's disgrace and how he desired that his nephew should succeed him, "but Christ forbad." The last entry in the Chronicle, A.D. 1154, has to do with the election of a new abbot, "a good clerk, a good man, and well beloved of the king and of all good men." So the story ends.

There are two other elements in the book to be mentioned, though we have no space to dwell on them: one is the inter-spersion of bits of old Anglo-Saxon lyrical poetry, consisting of war-songs, memorial lines, something in the Saga style. They are deeply interesting to the student of our early poetry. The other is the frequent extracts from genealogies, especially in the early part. These genealogies sometimes go down; *e.g.*, under A.D. 495, "Cerdic died and his son Cynric succeeded to the government and held it twenty-six winters. Then he died and Ceawlin his son succeeded," etc. Sometimes they run upward. Thus in the same year, "Ethelwulf was the son of Egbert, Egbert of Ealmund, Ealmund of Eoppa," etc. In many these are inserted by copyists from other sources, *e.g.*, from that of King Alfred. Ethelwulf's genealogy is given again in his own lifetime (under A.D. 854), and it travels up through various people until it reaches one Sceaf, who was born in Noah's ark (!), whence it goes on to Adam, "and our Father, that is Christ."

In closing this sketch of the Chronicle I desire to point out its remarkable analogy with some of the historical books of the Old Testament, on the composition of which it throws a very interesting light. The series of monks who kept up the one answer to the sons of the prophets who kept up the other. The Levitical element in the Book of Chronicles answers to the Peterborough element in the Anglo-Saxon work. Each is historical. Each combines things sacred and secular, things pacific and warlike. Each gives us fragments of poetry, and verbatim extracts from important documents. Each has its genealogical element and its ancient topography. But there are notable differences between the two classes of document. The Anglo-Saxon work is much more of the nature of *annals*; it betrays more personal feeling; it is given to introduce matters of purely local interest. The Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles, on the contrary, never attempt anything like annals; everything political, local and personal is subordinated to a common end—to exhibit the working out of the laws, promises and providences of God; all bears the marks of being instinct with that wonderful breath of God's Spirit which we call inspiration, and which leads us to regard the books as canonical and authoritative. R. B. GIRDLESTONE.