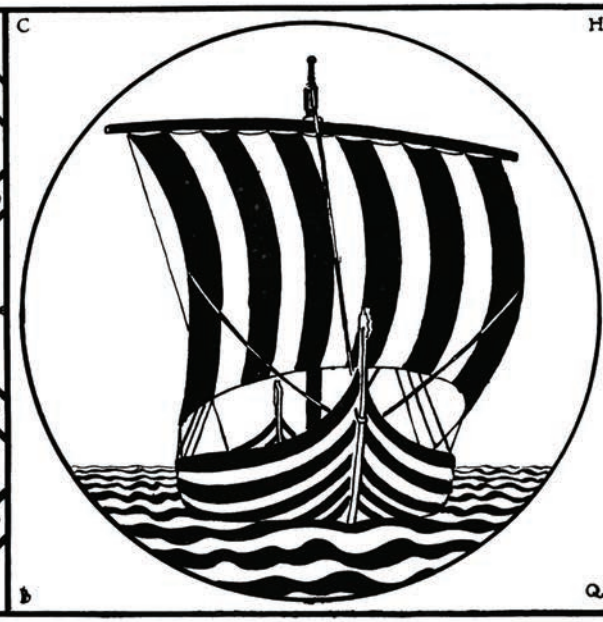
EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANGLO-SAXON, VIKING, AND NORMAN TIMES

Figure 1 — *The Anglo-Saxon Hall*

EVERYDAY LIFE IN ANGLO-SAXON, VIKING, AND NORMAN TIMES



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Battle of Winwaed.
W. Saxons invade to the Parret

W. Saxons retreat across Thames.
Council of Whitby.
Theodore of Tarsus Arch. of Canterbury.

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732 Mohammedans defeated at Poitiers by Charles Martel.

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"He was affable and pleasant to all,
and curiously eager to investigate things unknown."

From *Life of King Alfred*, by Asser

FOREWORD

THIS book completes a cycle which started with the Norman Conquest in Part I of a *History of Everyday Things in England*, and, swinging round by way of the Old Stone Age, in Part I of the "Everyday Life" Series has, with this Part IV, reached the starting point again. The theme of the six books has been the interest of creative work We have endeavoured to show man at work, feeding, clothing, and housing himself. We have tried to indicate the difficulties he has had to overcome, and how he has harnessed the powers of Nature to assist him. It has not been possible to do more than present an outline plan, something which might suggest to the boys and girls for whom we write that here there were paths worth exploring by themselves, or occupations in which they could find pleasure. Beyond this there is little to say.

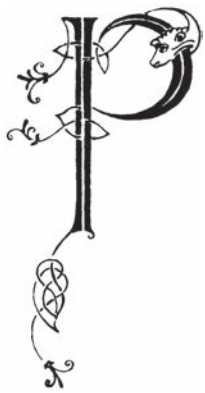
Our publisher, Mr. Harry Batsford, has helped us throughout by his interest, and Mr. Reginald Smith, F.S.A., Deputy-Keeper of the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities at the British Museum, has very kindly read through our MS., and given us a feeling of security in the presentation of our facts.

MARJORIE AND C. H. B. QUENNELL

BERKHAMSTED, HERTS,
September, 1926

CHAPTER I

THE COMING OF THE ENGLISH



ART IV of the *Everyday Life* series deals with a very interesting period of our history. We begin with the arrival of the men who gave us the right to call ourselves English, and then we show how were harried by the Vikings, and finally conquered by the Norsemen, Northmen, or Normans. We have grouped the English, Viking, and Norman together, because all were members of the great Nordic people of which we wrote in the beginning of Part II, *Everyday Life in the New Stone, Bronze, and Early Iron Age*. They were tall and strong, with fair hair, blue eyes, and long heads, and they were all first-rate fighting men. When an Englishman to-day is moved to sing in his bath that Britons never will be slaves, or talks of the British Commonwealth of Nations, he must puzzle the shades of the first Englishmen. When Bede, the historian of the Anglo-Saxons, wrote of the Britons, he meant the people in England before the Saxon Occupation, and

they were not all of the same origin. Asser, writing in the time of Alfred, of Offa's Dyke, describes it as "a great rampart made from sea to sea between Britain (meaning Wales) and Mercia." In Parts I, II and III we have written of the Cro-magnon men, almost as modern in type as ourselves, appearing in Europe in the Old Stone Age; and in the New Stone, Bronze, and Early Iron Ages, before the Roman Occupation, we have Mediterranean man, followed by the Celtic Gael and Brython (from whom we get the name of Briton), followed by the Belgae. The English did not kill all the Britons; many moved into the West, and others were enslaved and perhaps gained their freedom at a later date, when their children, and their children's children, came to call themselves English.

An Englishman may conceivably be a descendant of any of the peoples we have been writing about. A family may come to an end, but it would take a very wise man to say when his own began. This is just as it should be, and it will make our history more intimate; the people we read about are not pale ghosts, but our ancestors.

Before we tell of the doings of the English, it may be well to hark back a little to Roman Britain. In our last book we tried to give our readers some idea of the great advances which were made then. We saw how the inhabitants of Silchester had town-planned their city; how the roads which crossed it led to the civic centre, where the Basilica and Forum were; that it was provided with an inn, public baths, temples, and in the end a Christian Church. We noted that its houses were conveniently planned and scientifically heated.

The word civilization comes from *civis,* a citizen, and a civilized man, in the Roman way of thinking, was a good citizen, in distinction to the *paganus,* or peasant, who was a rougher and more pagan type. If by a wave of some magic wand Silchester, or *Calleva Atrebatum,* the Town in the Wood of the Atrebates, could be rebuilt on its old foundations, and we could walk along its streets, we should have to admit that it was a very civilized place. If we made friends with any of its inhabitants, and asked them to come to see our own town, and if our town dated from the Industrial Revolution, we should have to think of desperate excuses to explain away the slums and squalor, dirt and ugliness, and lack of all plan; but Silchester lies buried in the pleasant country between Reading and Basingstoke, and its inhabitants sleep without their city walls. Our task is concerned with the everyday life of their immediate successors; but unless we bear in our mind this picture of Roman Britain, we shall hardly appreciate the terrible desolation which the English wrought here in England.

Let us imagine a band of Saxons raiding up the Thames until they came to Reading, and then striking down to the south to Silchester. The inhabitants of the city, warned by fugitives, fled to the west, taking with them their lighter valuables, but burying in wells, as we saw in Part III, *Everyday Life in Roman Britain*, their tools for use when they returned. The Saxons came up to a deserted town, and entering by one of the gates, wandered up and down the paved streets, and in and out of the houses. Joyful shouts went up, that what they had heard was true; here was a fat land, and loot

FIGURE 2 — *Symbol of S. Mark (Gospels of S. Chad)*

undreamed of. Warriors staggered out of the shops, their arms full of fine cloths or household gear, and the houses were searched for food and drink. Here the Saxon would have been disappointed, because the Romano-Briton supped in his Triclinium off poultry and vegetable dishes, and liked his food to be set on the table in good red Samian ware, and the raised hearths of their kitchens were not adapted for roasting large joints. The Saxon was a great meat eater. When the Society of Antiquaries were excavating at Silchester, they found a beautiful mosaic floor which was disfigured by a large patch where a fire had been made; perhaps this was where the Saxons roasted the beast they could not cook in any other way.

Their hunger appeased, they wandered over the city, and coming to the Christian church wondered, as pagans, what were its uses; perhaps they kicked over the altar to see if there was any treasure under it. Others went to the baths, which, as we saw in Part III, were large and well planned, and here they splashed about

in the cold pool of the Frigidarium, and then, going outside, discovered the elaborate system of heating by fires under the hollow floors. Peering under they may have discovered some unfortunate not well enough to escape, and dragged him out to be made sport with, and then killed. Skeletons have been discovered, in hypocausts of people who hid in this way.

The elaborate organization of a city, the details of its water supply, and sanitation, and its maintenance, were entirely beyond the comprehension of the Saxons; it was then, just as if to-day, a stranded aeroplane were found by a party of Australian aborigines; they would play with it, and steal the gadgets, and then tire of it and go away. This is what the Saxons did at Silchester; the town does not appear to have been destroyed by fire, but left to moulder into ruin after the raiders moved on to find fresh fields to conquer.

We will now find out something about these Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who worked such changes in our country, and we cannot do better than refer to the writings of the Venerable Bede. Bede was born in 673, and was placed, at the age of 7, with Abbot Biscop in the Abbey of Wearmouth. He was a student all his days, and helped to revive classical learning, and by writing his Ecclesiastical History, about 730, became the first English historian. Bede, writing of the invaders, said: "Those who came over were of the three most powerful nations of Germany — Saxons, Angles, and Jutes," they called themselves *Angelcyn,* the English nation. It must be remembered that the invasion of our country was only a minor detail in a much larger movement of men.

FIGURE 3 — *Symbol of S. Matthew tion of a city; the details (Gospels of S. Chad.)*

We saw in Part II, in the caption of Figure 64, how the dust blown by great blizzards from the moraines of glaciers in the Ice Ages, was deposited as Loess, and formed the grasslands which spread in a broad zone across Europe from the Ural Mountains to the North of France. The central Asian Plains always have been the breeding places of masses of men, who at times, moved perhaps by drought, break their bounds and surge outwards, and the grasslands have afforded them a path. It should be remembered that the Beaker men arrived here in England from South Russia on this same path, Part II. The Anglo-Saxons came to England as a result of disturbance in Central Asia. The Huns came from there, and attacked their neighbours, the Goths, who moved across the Danube, and the Rhine, into the Roman Empire. The Goths captured Rome, and sacked it in 410, and the movement was not stopped until Attila, the King of the Huns, was defeated at Châlons in 451. Another Teutonic people, the Franks, moved into France for the same reason and reached the Loire by 489.

FIGURE 4 — *Symbol of S. Mark (Gospels of S. Chad)*

FIGURE 5 — *Symbol of S. Luke (Gospels of S. Chad)*

"Westward Ho" is a very old cry, but in the days of which we are writing it was one fraught with awful peril for civilization. The Roman Empire spelled civilization, and it was a wonderful fabric. The Empire was bounded by the Danube, and the Rhine, and across these rivers surged hordes of pagan barbarians, as in older days still the Achaeans had borne down on the Mycenaeans in Greece.

Very truly the historians talk of the Dark Ages; yet through the Darkness come flashes. If we know little of the period, yet what is known is always coloured by life and movement. On one page we shall have to write of Vikings; of bloodshed and battles under the standard of the Raven; on another of the saving of souls by men like Columba, Augustine, Paulinus, and Aidan. Here in England Christianity had become the great central fact of man's existence, and it was assailed by Odin, and Thor the god of Thunder. It will be part of our tale to show how the Christian Church saved Western civilization. It was a

FIGURE 6 — *Symbol of S. John(Gospels of S. Chad)*

long fight, and before the battle was won Christianity was assailed from another quarter.

Mohammed was born about 570, and his followers conquered Egypt and Palestine 634-640, and Persia in 651. By 709 they, had taken N. Africa from the Byzantine Empire, and Spain in 711 from the Visigoths. Their further inroads were not stopped until they were defeated by Charles Martel at Poitiers in 732. This was only the beginning of the long struggle between the Cross and Crescent, which was to culminate later in the Crusades. Enough has been written to show that when the Anglo-Saxons came to England, they were not moved to do so because they felt in need of a holiday, but were forced to it by the stress of circumstance. One point should be noted. In their early migrations they had come into contact with Gothic culture in S. Russia, and their love of colour and jewelry can be traced back to this source.

FIGURE 7 — *Figure from Book of Kells*

When the Roman legions left in 410, the Britons struggled against their enemies as best they could. Harried by the Picts from the North, they finally called to their assistance Hengest, a chief of the Anglo-Saxons. This was rather like trying to put out a fire by throwing petrol on it. Hengest came with his war band, to Ebbsfleet in Thanet, in 449, and repulsed the Picts, but by 457 he had conquered Kent on his own account. The glad news went across the North Sea, that here was a

fat land where one could feel safe, so Hengest was followed by continually increasing swarms.

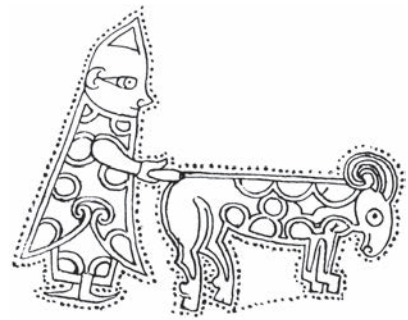


FIGURE 8 — *David rescuing the lamb from the lion (Psalter, S. John's College, Cambridge)*

Go yourselves to Richborough, the old Roman fort guarding the port of Rutupiae, the door into England at the beginning of Watling Street. Look across the flats, which once were sea, to Ebbsfleet, and then imagine the hungry Saxons roving round Thanet; spying out the land opposite and settling to conquer it.

Bede wrote: "From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent, and of the Isle of Wight, and those also in the province of the West Saxons who are to this day called Jutes, seated opposite the Isle of Wight. From the Saxons came the East Saxons, the South Saxons, and the West Saxons. From the Angles are descended the East Angles, the Middle Angles, Mercians, and all the race of the Northumbrians."

The period of conquest extended from 449, until the final defeat of the British by Egbert, King of Wessex, in 815. We have taken this as the first of the three chapters into which this book is divided. During this 366 years the Britons were being pushed continually into the West, that is for a period which, from our own time, would take us back to the days of Elizabeth's reign. The Legend of Arthur may rest on the doings of a British

FIGURE 9 — *Border (Gospels of Burrow)*

king, who resisted the Saxon invaders between 467-493. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, compiled in the time of Alfred, 891-892, should be consulted for the details of the invasion. As we do not wish to stain these pages too deeply in blood, we shall content ourselves with one quotation from Bede, to show how desperate the struggle was. "Public as well as private structures were overturned; the priests were everywhere slain before the altars; the prelates and the people, without any respect of persons, were destroyed with fire and sword; nor was there any to bury those who had been thus cruelly slaughtered. Some of the miserable remainder, being taken in the mountains, were butchered in heaps. Others, spent with hunger, came forth and submitted themselves to the enemy for food, being destined to undergo perpetual servitude, if they were not killed upon the spot."

This passage gives a far better idea than any words of ours, of what the impact of barbarism meant to the Romano-British civilization, and we are apt to forget the debt we may owe to the Britons to-day, in keeping Christianity alive in the West. In fact, we may not even think of them as Christians, until we remember that S. Alban was martyred as early as 304, here in England.

S. Patrick went to Ireland about 427, before the coming of Hengest in 449, and it was the Irish Church which sent Columba to Iona about 563, and from Iona, Aidan went at a later date to Holy Isle, as we shall presently see. We must always remember that Great Britain was an outlier on the Roman Empire; a North-West Province which was the outpost of its civilization, and by its island position cut off from Rome by the barbarian inroads. It may well be that the whole history of this country would have been different, if the Irish Church had not humanized life in the West, while the Anglo-Saxons were giving a very fair imitation of the Devil and all his works elsewhere.

Before we trace the work of the Church in more detail, it may be well to go back and endeavour to find out if our Anglo-Saxon ancestors had any other qualities wherewith to qualify their ferocity.

Tacitus who knew the people, wrote: "They live apart, each by himself, as woodside, plain, or fresh spring attracts him" and this has remained a characteristic of Englishmen ever since; they have little civic pride, but love the country. Tacitus of course did not mean solitary men living by themselves, or even single families, as today, in ridiculous little houses in the suburbs. Even as late as the time of Sir Thomas More, we read that he built himself a house at Chelsea, where he lived with his wife, his son, and his daughter-in-law, his three daughters, and their husbands, with eleven grandchildren. In Anglo-Saxon times the families which lived together were even larger than this, and more like a tribe or clan. glitt always counts, not the number of inhabitants in a

FIGURE 10 — *Symbol of S. Mark (Gospels of Durrow)*

province, but tells you how many families it contained. As well he throws an interesting sidelight on family customs, he wrote of one "Orric, surnamed Oisc, from whom the kings of Kent are wont to be called Oiscings," and again "The son of Tytilus, whose father was Uuffa, from whom the kings of the East Angles are called Uuffings." If we turn to Bede again we find that the kings at first were what we should call chiefs, "for those Ancient Saxons have no king, but several lords that rule their nation; and when any war happens, they cast lots indifferently, and on whomsoever the lot falls, him they follow and obey during the war; but soon as the war is ended, all those lords are again equal in power." When the Saxons came to England, we must think of these chiefs settling down, and calling their home Uuffing-ham, because it was the home of the Uuffings, who were the decendants of Uuffa.

From such simple beginnings our English villages have grown up. The chief built his Hall, and grouped around it were the huts of his followers, and the bowers for the women-folk. The village had its Moot Hill, or places where Dooms or judgment was given, and a spring for water. The whole was girt round with a ditch

and bank, with a palisaded fence on top. There were the common fields, and outside all, the Mark, where the stranger coming must blow his horn or risk death. The freeman was the freeholder of part of the land, and there cannot have been many slaves in the bands of warriors who came first, but later the Britons who were captured were enslaved, and as society became more settled, and the chieftains became kings, some men went up, and others sank into a servile class.

Domesday Book, completed in 1086, mentions parishes of the time of Edward the Confessor, which still remain, and which had their beginnings in the time we write of. The Hall of the chief became the Hall of the lord, and his Chapel, built when he became a Christian, developed into the Parish Church. Bede writes of an inn, and there would have been a mill for grinding corn. The system of farming was to remain as the general one until the enclosures in the eighteenth century gave it the death blow.

This is the outline on to which we have to graft fuller details, and our first step will be to familiarize ourselves with the appearance of the Anglo-Saxons, so that we may be able to fit them into the picture.

We may take it that the dress of the first Saxons who arrived here resembled that illustrated in Figure 56, Part II; this again was like that of the barbarians shown on the Trajan Column, and must have been common to the tribes, outside the Empire, across the Rhine and Danube. The Anglo-Saxon dress was a development of this.

In our plate, Figure 11, the first figure on the left is a Thane. He wore a shirt, and breeches, sometimes to the ankles, and at others cut off at the knee, when hose like leggings were added, and fastened by cross garters which were part of the leather shoes. These latter were sometimes gilded. The breeches were probably fastened at the waist, by a belt passed through loops like cricketing trousers. Over the shirt, a wool, or linen, tunic reaching to the knee was worn. This was belted at the waist, and had long sleeves tight at the wrist, and fastened with metal clasps. The cloak was fastened on breast or shoulder with a brooch. For everyday use caps of Phrygian shape were worn.

The next man has much the same clothes, but is shown bearing arms. His tunic is a coat of mail formed of iron rings sewn on to the strong cloth. His helmet has an iron frame, filled in between with horn with a boar on the crest (see Beowulf page 26). The spear was the commonest weapon in the early pagan days; sometimes it had wings on it (as C Figure 12), and the socket was formed by hammering the iron mound until the sides met. The shaft of ash, 6 to 7 feet long, had an iron ferule. Some were thrown as javelins. The early swords were formidable weapons, a yard long, with a wooden scabbard (as A Figure 12). The later types had a tapered blade, as B, Scramasaxes were sword-like knives, as C.

Battle-axes were used, and some were thrown, as D Figure 12. Shields were of wood covered with hide, painted and gilded, sometimes oval, and at others round.

FIGURE 11 — *Anglo-Saxon Costume*

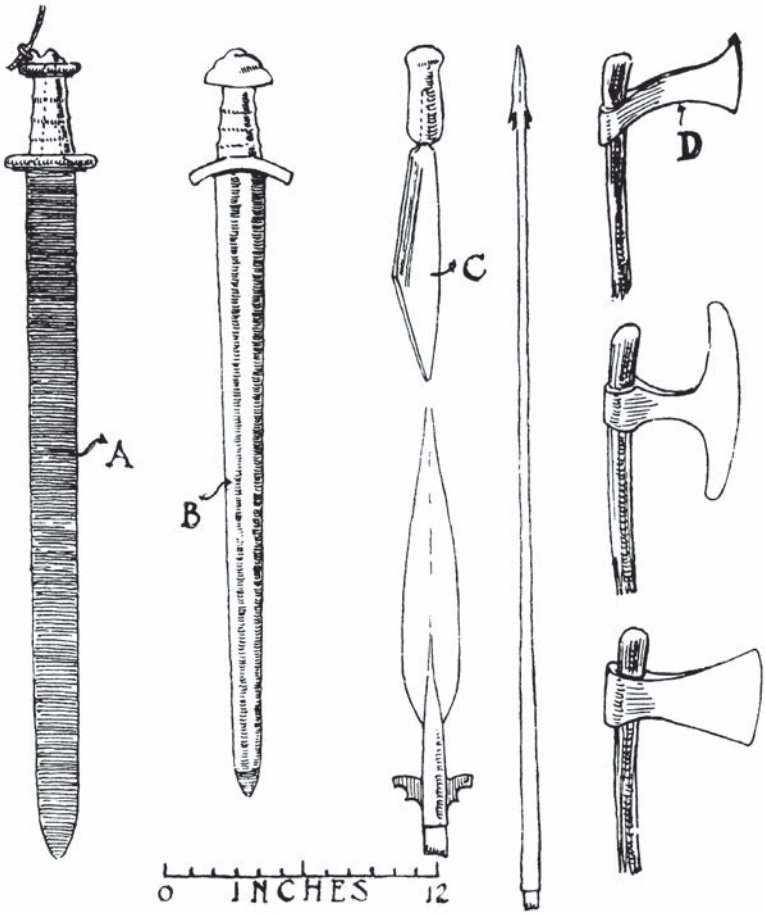


FIGURE 12 — *Saxon and Viking Arms*

Figure 13 shows the hand-grip of one. The bow was not very much used.

The central figure in Figure 11 shows how women were dressed. They had one linen undergarment, and a tunic to the feet. Sometimes there were two tunics girdled at the waist, the inner having long sleeves, and the outer shorter and wider ones. Over these came the mantle, hanging down at back and front, in a way which

suggests a poncho pattern with a central hole for the head. The brooches, which we discuss later, appear to have been worn in pairs. The head was covered with a silk or linen wrap. The women wore girdles, and girdle hangers like chatelaines have been found in their graves, and they had little bags.

They adorned themselves with fine barbaric necklaces; big lumps of amber, crystal, amethyst, or beads of glass coloured in many ways. One in the British Museum has beads made of gold wire coiled to a barrel-like shape, with garnet pendants hanging between. Sometimes these were worn festooned across the chest, or as bracelets.

We cannot illustrate all the beautiful things which were used. Belts had jewelled buckles, and there were armlets, and rings. Pins of all patterns were made; Ireland was the home of what are called hand-pins, with the head cranked like a modern tie-pin. The horse was trapped out as beautifully as his master. Children's

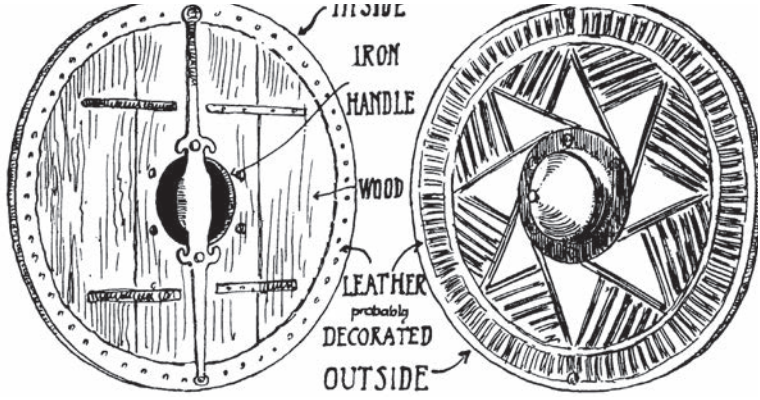


FIGURE 13 — *Anglo-Saxon Shield*