

**LIVES OF EMINENT ANGLO-  
SAXONS; ILLUSTRATING THE  
DAWN OF  
CHRISTIANITY AND CIVILIZATION  
IN GREAT BRITAIN. PART 2**

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Lives of eminent Anglo-Saxons; illustrating the dawn of Christianity and civilization in Great Britain. Part 2 by Various

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**VARIOUS**

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PART II.

LONDON:  
THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY;

*Instituted 1729.*

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LIVES  
OF  
EMINENT ANGLO-SAXONS.

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CHAPTER I.

EGBERT OF YORK, AND THE NORTHUMBRIAN  
KINGDOM.

A FALSE impression respecting the early Anglo-Saxon age may be made upon the mind by the biographies in the preceding volume, if attention be exclusively confined to them. In order to have a just view of the period, the individuals noticed must not be regarded as types of the condition of society, but as rare exceptional cases of mental culture, correct habits, and a sincere reception of the gospel, bearing a relation to the general state of the community similar to that of a few bright stars to a clouded nocturnal sky. Only within a very small circle was there any apprehension of the necessity and value of that redemption from the guilt and wages of sin by Jesus Christ, which it is the glory of the Scriptures to



declare; any humble and cordial reliance on it; any experience of its spiritual and saving power, and conscientious efforts, as the consequence, to walk according to its ordinances and commandments. Beyond this circle, a ceremonial change from the profession of paganism to that of Christianity is the utmost that is apparent. The new religion, imperfectly manifested, and in various respects misrepresented, came to the mass of the nation "in word only," improving, to a certain extent, exterior appearances, but not effecting that change of the heart and life which the truth as it is in Jesus is designed to accomplish. The nominal adoption of Christianity was induced by the influence of authority, or the force of example, to which also the charm of novelty contributed, together with a persuasion on many minds of its superiority and truth, undoubtedly strong and deep-rooted, though not intelligently and cordially embraced. Yet pagan superstitions blended with Christian forms in the habits of many. In great numbers, too, the laity connected the zealous observance of ecclesiastical rites with gross sensual indulgence, while among those devoted to the service of the church there was a class, by no means inconsiderable, not only disqualified for their vocation by want of literary attainments, but addicted to the most dissolute practices. These painful particulars become increasingly apparent as we proceed towards the middle of the eighth century. Hence the canons

repeatedly passed to uproot surviving heathenism, to stem the torrent of popular vice, repress sacerdotal immorality, and urge the attainment of the most ordinary competency for giving instruction upon the teachers of the people.

Still, while the great majority remained far distant from a truly Christian condition, there was an extensive change in profession, leading to usages which involved so large an amount of self-sacrifice, as to indicate the existence of a deep impression that truth was on the side of the Christian system, however mistakenly its rules of life were interpreted, and however some of its all-glorious doctrines were thrown into concealment by that cloud of vain devices which the authority of tradition associated with them. "Not only," as Mr. Kemble remarks, "do we see the high nobles and the near relatives of kings among the bishops and archbishops, but kings themselves—warlike and fortunate kings—suddenly and voluntarily renouncing their temporal advantages, retiring into monasteries, and abdicating their crowns, that they may wander as pilgrims to the shrines of the apostles at Rome. We find princesses and other high-born ladies devoting themselves to a life of celibacy, or separating from their husbands to preside over congregations of nuns; well-descended men cannot rest till they have wandered forth to carry the tidings of redemption into distant and barbarous lands; a life of abstinence and hardship, to be crowned by a martyr's death, seems to have been hungered

and thirsted after by the wealthy and the noble—assuredly an extraordinary and an edifying spectacle among a race not at all adverse to the pomps and pleasures of worldly life.” Illustrations of the preceding remarks will be supplied in tracing the career of Egbert of York, and in some of the subsequent chapters, as well as evidences of the deep ungodliness grafted upon the monastic institute and the practice of pilgrimage.

EGBERT, one of the intimate friends of Bede, was born in the kingdom of Northumbria, probably about the year 678, and belonged to the royal house. His childhood was passed at Hexham, under the tutelage of Eata, the bishop; and upon reaching manhood he repaired to Rome, with his brother Egred, to inspect the wonders of the city, and become further qualified for the discharge of ecclesiastical duties. The brother did not live to return, but Egbert was there admitted to deacon's orders, which brings us to the year 703, when he was of the age of twenty-five, the earliest term fixed by the canons for admission to that rank. In 720, the Northumbrian throne falling vacant, his cousin, Ceolwulf, was placed upon it, whose love for piety and learning is honourably commemorated by Bede, who dedicated to him his Ecclesiastical History. This prince voluntarily renounced the sovereignty in a few years, and sought retirement from worldly anxieties; perhaps as much influenced to do so by the disturbances of his