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Saxon towers and their social background

Rokuro Sahara

It is said that there is hardly a house in England which is out of the hearing of the church bell. Indeed I may say, from one point of view, that each period of the history of England since the Anglo-Saxon days is illustrated by the church towers of the times, which have something to tell us about the people who built them. The story of the English church towers and of the people who erected them may reveal the social development of a nation which has evolved from many different races and absorbed much from different ways of life. It may reflect too the intrinsic nature of the English temperament and show the influences which moulded the national character as well as the elements from which it has sprung. Entertaining these views, I tried in these papers, as the first part of my socio-historical study of the English church towers, to explain: (1) Christianity of Roman-Britons and Anglo-Saxons, (2) Churches in the Saxon period, (3) Saxon architecture and its styles, (4) Usages and characteristics of Saxon towers.

Driven by the Germanic invaders, the Roman-British Christianity was pushed to the west and north, there coming closer contact than before with the Celtic Christianity, and gradually solidifying itself into a Christian system which had its center at a point as far away from the shadow of the Saxon invasion. Towards the end of the 6th century, the Saxons themselves began to adopt Christianity and then to erect their churches. The name of the Saxon architecture was given to the style of buildings supposed to have been erected by the English in England before the Norman Conquest. The earliest Saxon buildings were crude combinations of ideas partly their own and partly Roman-British. From this the Saxons gradually passed to a style which was afterwards called the Saxon architecture, combining the influences of the Roman, Gaulish, and Celtic tradi-

tions. This Saxon character of its own marked almost whole of the period of nearly five centuries over which it extended.