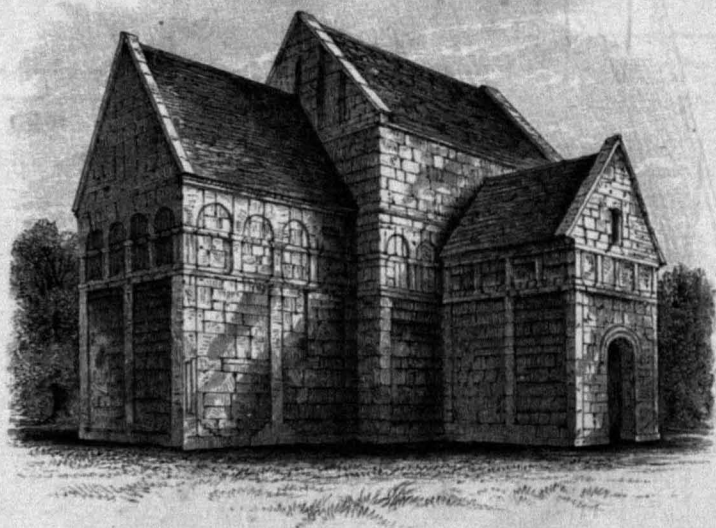


SEC. IV
 THE THREE
 KINGDOMS
 685
 TO
 828
 —

Wanborough. Able however as Ine was to hold Mercia at bay, he was unable to hush the civil strife that was the curse of Wessex, and a wild legend tells the story of the disgust which drove him from the world. He had feasted royally at one of his country houses, and on the morrow, as he rode from it, his queen bade him turn back thither. The king returned to find his house stripped of curtains and vessels, and foul with refuse and the dung of cattle,



CHURCH AT BRADFORD ON AVON, BUILT BY EALDHELM.
"Journal of Archaeological Association."

while in the royal bed where he had slept with Æthelburh rested a sow with her farrow of pigs. The scene had no need of the queen's comment: "See, my lord, how the fashion of this world passeth away!" In 726 Ine laid down his crown, and sought peace and death in a pilgrimage to Rome.

Æthel-
 bald of
 Mercia
 716-757

The anarchy that had driven Ine from the throne broke out on his departure in civil strife which left Wessex an easy prey to the successor of Ceolred. Among those who sought Guthlac's retirement at Crowland came Æthelbald, a son of Penda's brother, flying

from Ceolred's hate. Driven off again and again by the king's pursuit, Æthelbald still returned to the little hut he had built beside the hermitage, and comforted himself in hours of despair with his companion's words. "Know how to wait," said Guthlac, "and the kingdom will come to thee; not by violence or rapine, but by the hand of God." In 716 Ceolred fell frenzy-smitten at his board, and Mercia chose Æthelbald for its king. For the first ten years of his reign he shrank from a conflict with the victor of Wanborough; but with Ine's withdrawal he took up again the fierce struggle with Wessex for the complete supremacy of the south. He penetrated into the very heart of the West-Saxon kingdom, and his siege and capture of the royal town of Somerton in 733 ended the war. For twenty years the overlordship of Mercia was recognized by all Britain south of the Humber. It was at the head of the forces, not of Mercia only, but of East Anglia and Kent, as well as of the West-Saxons, that Æthelbald marched against the Welsh; and he styled himself "King not of the Mercians only, but of all the neighbouring peoples who are called by the common name of Southern English." But the aim of Æthelbald was destined to the same failure as that of his predecessors. For twenty years indeed he met the constant outbreaks of his new subjects with success; and it was not till 754 that a general rising forced him to call his whole strength to the field. At the head of his own Mercians and of the subject hosts of Kent, Essex, and East Anglia, Æthelbald marched to the field of Burford, where the West-Saxons were again marshalled under the golden dragon of their race; but after hours of desperate fighting in the forefront of the battle, a sudden panic seized the Mercian king, and the supremacy of Mid-Britain passed away for ever as he fled first of his army from the field. Three years later he was surprised and slain in a night attack by his ealdormen; and in the anarchy that followed, Kent, Essex, and East Anglia threw off the yoke of Mercia.

While the two southern kingdoms were wasting their energies in this desperate struggle, Northumbria had set aside its efforts at conquest for the pursuits of peace. Under the reigns of Ecgfrith's successors, Aldfrith the Learned and the four kings who followed him, the kingdom became in the middle of the eighth century the literary centre of Western Europe. No schools were more famous

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828
—

Bæda
673-735

† Lucas uirailus
on gindor gōa rphēl
 incipit euangelium

cepe Lucy
 secundum lucam
f. ex. den



BEGINNING OF S. LUKE'S GOSPEL.
 Lindisfarne Gospel-book. MS. Cott. Nero D. iv.

than those of Jarrow and York. The whole learning of the age seemed to be summed up in a Northumbrian scholar. Bæda—the Venerable Bede, as later times styled him—was born in 673, nine years after the Synod of Whitby, on ground which passed a year later to Benedict Biscop as the site of the great abbey which he reared by the mouth of the Wear. His youth was trained and his long tranquil life was wholly spent in an off-shoot of Benedict's house which was founded by his friend Ceolfrid. Bæda never stirred from Jarrow. "I have spent my whole life in the same monastery," he says, "and while attentive to the rule of my order and the service of the Church my constant pleasure lay in learning, or teaching, or writing." The words sketch for us a scholar's life, the more touching in its simplicity that it is the life of the first great English scholar. The quiet grandeur of a life consecrated to knowledge, the tranquil pleasure that lies in learning and teaching and writing, dawned for Englishmen in the story of Bæda. While still young, he became teacher; and six hundred monks, besides strangers that flocked thither for instruction, formed his school of Jarrow. It is hard to imagine how among the toils of the schoolmaster and the duties of the monk Bæda could have found time for the composition of the numerous works that made his name famous in the west. But materials for study had accumulated in Northumbria through the journeys of Wilfrid and Benedict Biscop and the libraries which were forming at Wearmouth and York. The tradition of the older Irish teachers still lingered to direct the young scholar into that path of Scriptural interpretation to which he chiefly owed his fame. Greek, a rare accomplishment in the west, came to him from the school which the Greek Archbishop Theodore founded beneath the walls of Canterbury. His skill in the ecclesiastical chant was derived from a Roman cantor whom Pope Vitalian sent in the train of Benedict Biscop. Little by little the young scholar thus made himself master of the whole range of the science of his time; he became, as Burke rightly styled him, "the father of English learning." The tradition of the older classic culture was first revived for England in his quotations of Plato and Aristotle, of Seneca and Cicero, of Lucretius and Ovid. Virgil cast over him the same spell that he cast over Dante; verses from the *Æneid* break his narratives of martyrdoms, and the disciple

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828



DAVID, AS PSALMIST.

MS. traditionally ascribed to Bede, in Durham Cathedral Library.

ventures on the track of the great master in a little eclogue descriptive of the approach of spring. His work was done with small aid from others. "I am my own secretary," he writes; "I make my own notes. I am my own librarian." But forty-five works remained after his death to attest his prodigious industry. In his own eyes and those of his contemporaries the most important among these were the commentaries and homilies upon various books of the Bible which he had drawn from the writings of the Fathers. But he was far from confining himself to theology. In treatises compiled as text-books for his scholars Bæda threw together all that the world had then accumulated in astronomy and meteorology, in physics and music, in philosophy, grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, medicine. But the encyclopædic character of his researches left him in heart a simple Englishman. He loved his own English tongue; he was skilled in English song; his last work was a translation into English of the Gospel of St. John, and almost the last words that broke from his lips were some English rimes upon death.

But the noblest proof of his love of England lies in the work which immortalizes his name. In his "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation" Bæda became the first English historian. All that we really know of the century and a half that follows the landing of Augustine we know from him. Wherever his own personal observation extended the story is told with admirable detail and force. He is hardly less full or accurate in the portions which he owed to his Kentish friends, Albinus and Nothelm. What he owed to no informant was his own exquisite faculty of story-telling, and yet no story of his own telling is so touching as the story of his death. Two weeks before the Easter of 735 the old man was seized with an extreme weakness and loss of breath. He still preserved, however, his usual pleasantness and good humour, and in spite of prolonged sleeplessness continued his lectures to the pupils about him. Verses of his own English tongue broke from time to time from the master's lips—rude rimes that told how before the "need-fare," Death's stern "must go," none can enough bethink him what is to be his doom for good or ill. The tears of Bæda's scholars mingled with his song. "We never read without weeping," writes one of them. So the days rolled on to Ascensontide, and still

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

Death of
Bæda

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

master and pupils toiled at their work, for Bæda longed to bring to an end his version of St. John's Gospel into the English tongue, and his extracts from Bishop Isidore. "I don't want my boys to read a lie," he answered those who would have had him rest, "or to work to no purpose after I am gone." A few days before Ascensiontide his sickness grew upon him, but he spent the whole day in teaching, only saying cheerfully to his scholars, "Learn with what speed you may; I know not how long I may last." The dawn broke on another sleepless night, and again the old man called his scholars round him and bade them write. "There is still a chapter wanting," said the scribe, as the morning drew on, "and it is hard for thee to question thyself any longer." "It is easily done," said Bæda; "take thy pen and write quickly." Amid tears and farewells the day wore away to eventide. "There is yet one sentence unwritten, dear master," said the boy. "Write it quickly," bade the dying man. "It is finished now," said the little scribe at last. "You speak truth," said the master; "all is finished now." Placed upon the pavement, his head supported in his scholars' arms, his face turned to the spot where he was wont to pray, Bæda chanted the solemn "Glory to God." As his voice reached the close of his song he passed quietly away.

Anarchy
of North-
umbria

738

First among English scholars, first among English theologians, first among English historians, it is in the monk of Jarrow that English literature strikes its roots. In the six hundred scholars who gathered round him for instruction he is the father of our national education. In his physical treatises he is the first figure to which our science looks back. Bæda was a statesman as well as a scholar, and the letter which in the last year of his life he addressed to Ecgberht of York shows how vigorously he proposed to battle against the growing anarchy of Northumbria. But his plans of reform came too late, though a king like Eadberht, with his brother Ecgberht, the first Archbishop of York, might for a time revive the fading glories of his kingdom. Eadberht repelled an attack of Æthelbald on his southern border; while at the same time he carried on a successful war against the Picts. Ten years later he penetrated into Ayrshire, and finally made an alliance with the Picts, which enabled him in 756 to conquer Strathclyde and take its capital Alclud, or Dumbarton. But at the moment when his



DAVID, AS WARRIOR.

MS. traditionally ascribed to Bede, in Durham Cathedral Library.

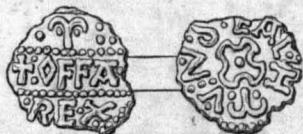
SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

triumph seemed complete, his army was utterly destroyed as it withdrew homewards, and so crushing was the calamity that even Eadberht could only fling down his sceptre and withdraw with his brother the Archbishop to a monastery. From this time the history of Northumbria is only a wild story of lawlessness and bloodshed. King after king was swept away by treason and revolt, the country fell into the hands of its turbulent nobles, the very fields lay waste, and the land was scourged by famine and plague. Isolated from the rest of the country during fifty years of anarchy, the northern realm hardly seemed to form part of the English people.

Offa of
Mercia
758-796

The work in fact of national consolidation among the English seemed to be fatally arrested. The battle of Burford had finally settled the division of Britain into three equal powers. Wessex was now as firmly planted south of the Thames as Northumbria north of the Humber. But this crushing defeat was far from having broken the Mercian power; and under Offa, whose reign from 758 to 796 covers with that of Æthelbald nearly the whole of the eighth century, it rose to a height unknown since the days of Wulfhere. Years however had to pass before the new king could set about the re-

covery of Kent; and it was only after a war of three years that in 775 a victory at Otford gave it back to the Mercian realm. With Kent Offa doubtless recovered Sussex and Surrey, as well as Essex and London; and four years later a victory at Bensington com-



COIN OF OFFA.

pleted the conquest of the district that now forms the shires of Oxford and Buckingham. For the nine years that followed however Mercia ventured on no further attempt to extend her power over her English neighbours. Like her rivals, she turned on the Welsh. Pushing after 779 over the Severn, whose upper course had served till now as the frontier between Briton and Englishman, Offa drove the King of Powys from his capital, which changed its old name of Pengwyrn for the significant English title of the Town in the Scrub or bush, Scrobsbyryg, or Shrewsbury. The border-line he drew after his inroad is marked by a huge earthwork, which runs from the mouth of Wye to that of Dee, and is still called Offa's Dyke. A

settlement of Englishmen on the land between this dyke and the Severn served as a military frontier for the Mercian realm. Here, SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS

685
TO
828



Stanford's Geography, Revised

as in the later conquests of the Northumbrians and the West-Saxons, the older plan of driving off the conquered from the soil

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

was definitely abandoned. The Welsh who chose to remain dwelt undisturbed among their English conquerors; and it was probably to regulate the mutual relations of the two races that Offa drew up the code of laws which bore his name. In Mercia as in Northumbria attacks on the Britons marked the close of all dreams of supremacy over the English themselves. Under Offa Mercia sank into virtual isolation. The anarchy into which Northumbria sank after Eadberht's death never tempted him to cross the Humber; nor was he shaken from his inaction by as tempting an opportunity which presented itself across the Thames. It must have been in the years that followed the battle of Burford that the West-Saxons made themselves masters of the shrunken realm of Dyvnaint, which still retains its old name in the form of Devon, and pushed their frontier westward to the Tamar. But in 786 their progress was stayed by a fresh outbreak of anarchy. The strife between the rivals that disputed the throne was ended by the defeat of Ecgberht, the heir of Ceawlin's line, and his flight to Offa's court. The Mercian king however used his presence not so much for schemes of aggrandizement as to bring about a peaceful alliance; and in 789 Ecgberht was driven from Mercia, while Offa wedded his daughter to the West-Saxon king Beorhtric. The true aim of Offa indeed was to unite firmly the whole of Mid-Britain, with Kent as its outlet towards Europe, under the Mercian crown, and to mark its ecclesiastical as well as its political independence by the formation in 787 of an archbishopric of Lichfield, as a check to the see of Canterbury in the south, and a rival to the see of York in the north.

England
and the
Franks

But while Offa was hampered in his projects by the dread of the West-Saxons at home, he was forced to watch jealously a power which had risen to dangerous greatness over sea, the power of the Franks. Till now, the interests of the English people had lain wholly within the bounds of the Britain they had won. But at this moment our national horizon suddenly widened, and the fortunes of England became linked to the general fortunes of Western Christendom. It was by the work of English missionaries that Britain was first drawn into political relations with the Frankish court. The Northumbrian Willibrord, and the more famous West-Saxon Boniface or Winfrith, followed in the track of earlier preachers, both Irish and English, who had been labouring among the heathens

of Germany, and especially among those who had now become subject to the Franks. The Frank king Pippin's connexion with the English preachers led to constant intercourse with England ; a Northumbrian scholar, Alcuin, was the centre of the literary revival

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828



S. MATTHEW.

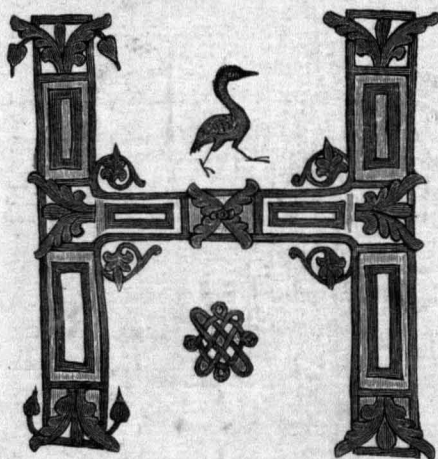
Gospel-book of S. Boniface, at Fulda.

at his court. Pippin's son Charles, known in after days as Charles the Great, maintained the same interest in English affairs. His friendship with Alcuin drew him into close relations with Northern Britain. Egberht, the claimant of the West-Saxon throne, had found a refuge with him since Offa's league with Beorhtric in 787. With Offa too his relations seem to have been generally friendly.

SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

But the Mercian king shrank cautiously from any connexion which might imply a recognition of Frankish supremacy. He had indeed good grounds for caution. The costly gifts sent by Charles to the monasteries of England as of Ireland showed his will to obtain an influence in both countries; he maintained relations with Northumbria, with Kent, with the whole English Church. Above all, he

INCIPIT LIBER EXODVS



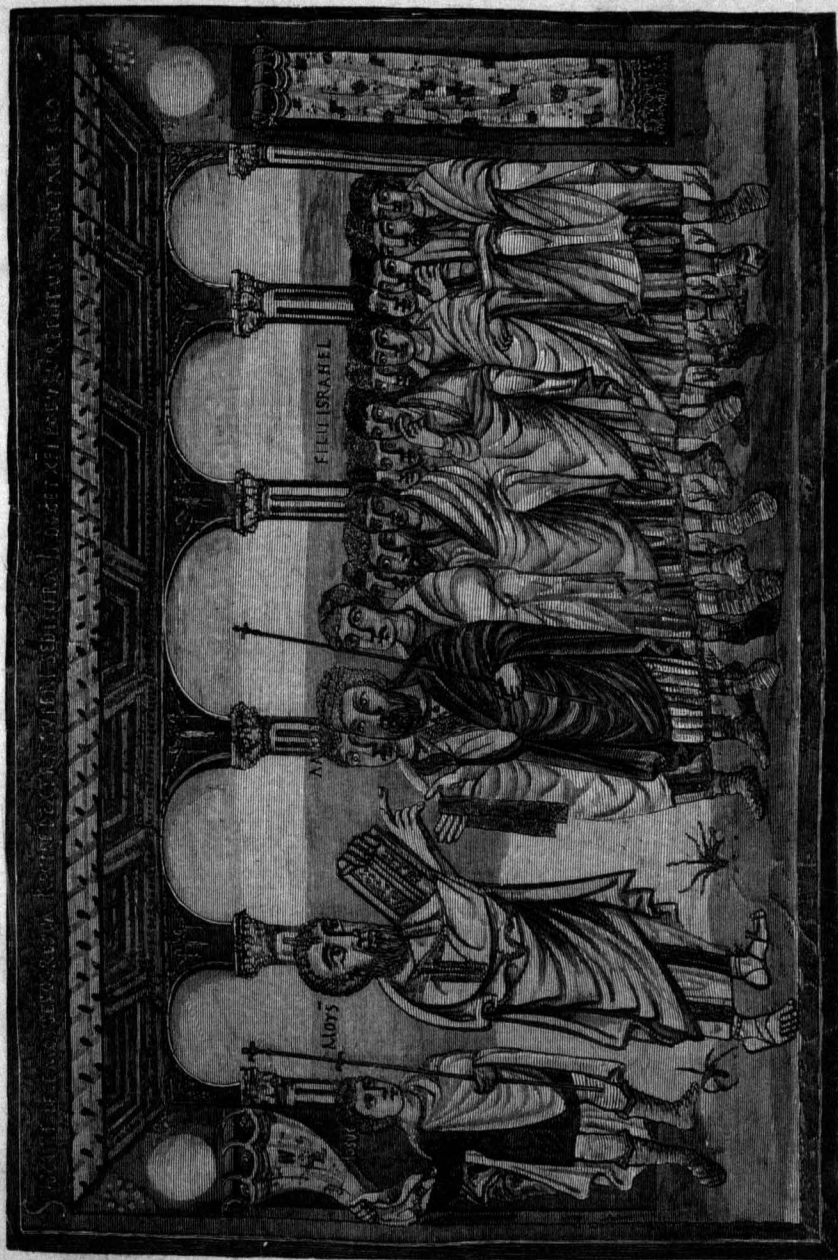
ÆCSUNT *Cap: 1.*
NOMINA
FILIORŪ
ISRAHEL
QUINGRES
SISUNT IN
ÆGYPTŪ
CUM IACOB
SINGULI
CUM DOMI
BUS SUI
INTROIE
RUNT

Ruben. Simeon. Levi. Iuda. Issachar. Zabulon.
Beniamin. Dan. Ephraim. Gad. Asafer

BEGINNING OF THE BOOK OF EXODUS.
Alcuin's Bible. MS. Add. 10346, British Museum.

800

harboured at his court exiles from every English realm, exiled kings from Northumbria, East-Anglian thegns, fugitives from Mercia itself; and Egberht probably marched in his train when the shouts of the people and priesthood of Rome hailed him as Roman Emperor. When the death of Beorhtric in 802 opened a way for the exile's return to Wessex, the relations of Charles with the English were still guided by the dream that Britain, lost to the Empire at the



MOSES GIVING THE LAW.
Alcuin's Bible. MS. Add. 10346, British Museum.

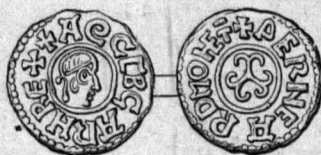
SEC. IV
THE THREE
KINGDOMS
685
TO
828

The Fall
of Mercia

802

hour when the rest of the western provinces were lost, should return to the Empire now that Rome had risen again to more than its old greatness in the west ; and the revolutions which were distracting the English kingdoms, told steadily in his favour.

The years since Ecgberht's flight had made little change in the state of Britain. Offa's completion of his kingdom by the seizure of East Anglia had been followed by his death in 796 ; and under his successor Cenwulf the Mercian archbishopric was suppressed, and there was no attempt to carry further the supremacy of the Mid-land kingdom. Cenwulf stood silently by when Ecgberht mounted



COIN OF ECGBERHT.

the West-Saxon throne, and maintained peace with the new ruler of Wessex throughout his reign. The first enterprise of Ecgberht indeed was not directed against his English but his Welsh neighbours. In 815 he marched into the heart of Cornwall, and after eight years of fighting, the last fragment of British dominion in the west came to an end. As a nation Britain had passed away with the victories of Deorham and Chester ; of the separate British peoples who had still carried on the struggle with the three English kingdoms, the Britons of Cumbria and of Strathclyde had already bowed to Northumbrian rule ; the Britons of Wales had owned by tribute to Offa the supremacy of Mercia ; the last unconquered British state of West Wales as far as the Land's End now passed under the mastery of Wessex.

While Wessex was regaining the strength it had so long lost, its rival in Mid-Britain was sinking into helpless anarchy. Within, Mercia was torn by a civil war which broke out on Cenwulf's death in 821 ; and the weakness which this left behind was seen when the old strife with Wessex was renewed by his successor Beornwulf, who in 825 penetrated into Wiltshire, and was defeated in a bloody battle at Ellandun. All England south of the Thames at once submitted to Ecgberht of Wessex, and East Anglia rose in a desperate revolt which proved fatal to its Mercian rulers. Two of these kings in succession fell fighting on East-Anglian soil ; and a third, Wiglaf, had hardly mounted the Mercian throne when his

exhausted kingdom was called on again to encounter the West-Saxon. Ecgberht saw that the hour had come for a decisive onset. In 828 his army marched northward without a struggle; Wiglaf fled helplessly before it; and Mercia bowed to the West-Saxon overlordship. From Mercia Ecgberht marched on Northumbria; but half a century of anarchy had robbed that kingdom of all vigour, and pirates were already harrying its coast; its nobles met him at Dore in Derbyshire, and owned him as their overlord. The work that Oswiu and Æthelbald had failed to do was done, and the whole English race in Britain was for the first time knit together under a single ruler. Long and bitter as the struggle for independence was still to be in Mercia and in the north, yet from the moment that Northumbria bowed to its West-Saxon overlord, England was made in fact if not as yet in name.

SEC. V
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
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Section V.—Wessex and the Danes, 802—880

[*Authorities.*—Our history here rests mainly on the English (or Anglo-Saxon) Chronicle. The earlier part of this is a compilation, and consists of (1) Annals of the conquest of South Britain, (2) Short notices of the kings and bishops of Wessex, expanded into larger form by copious insertions from Bæda, and after his death by briefer additions from some northern sources. (3) It is probable that these materials were thrown together, and perhaps translated from Latin into English, in Ælfred's time, as a preface to the far fuller annals which begin with the reign of Æthelwulf, and widen into a great contemporary history when they reach that of Ælfred himself. Of their character and import as a part of English literature, I have spoken in the text. The "Life of Ælfred" which bears the name of Asser is probably contemporary, or at any rate founded on contemporary authority. There is an admirable modern life of the king by Dr. Pauli. For the Danish wars, see "The Conquest of England" by J. R. Green.]

The effort after a national sovereignty had hardly been begun, when the Dane struck down the short-lived greatness of Wessex. While Britain was passing through her ages of conquest and settlement, the dwellers in the Scandinavian peninsula and the isles of the Baltic had lain hidden from Christendom, waging their battle for existence with a stern climate, a barren soil, and stormy seas. Forays and plunder-raids over sea eked out their scanty livelihood, and as the eighth century closed, these raids found a wider sphere

The
 North-
 men

SEC. V
 ———
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 ———
 787

than the waters of the north. Ecgberht had not yet brought all Britain under his sway when the Wikings or "creek-men," as the adventurers were called, were seen hovering off the English coast, and growing in numbers and hardihood as they crept southward to the Thames. The first sight of the northmen is as if the hand on the dial of history had gone back three hundred years.

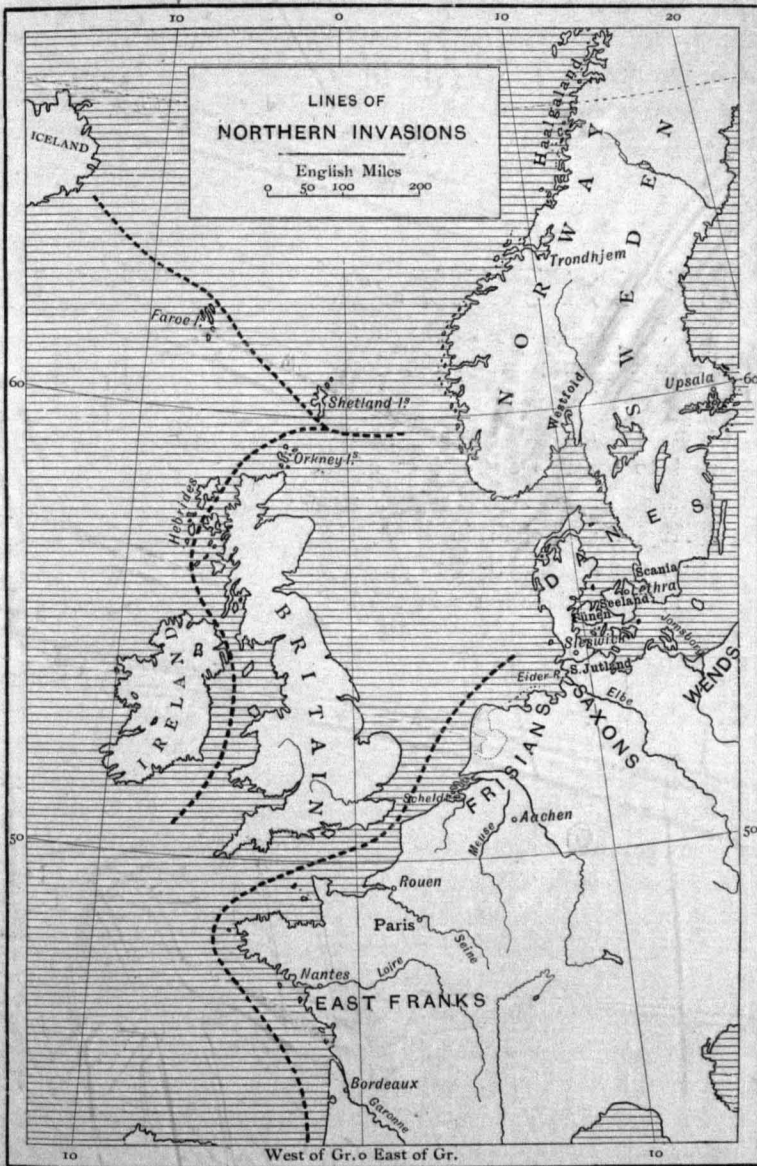


BRONZE PLATE, WITH FIGURES OF NORTHERN
 WARRIORS.

Montelius, "Civilization of Sweden."

The Norwegian fiords, the Frisian sandbanks, poured forth pirate fleets such as had swept the seas in the days of Hengest and Cerdic. There was the same wild panic as the black boats of the invaders struck inland along the river-reaches, or moored around the river islets, the same sights of horror, firing of homesteads, slaughter of men, women driven off to slavery or shame, children tossed

on pikes or sold in the market-place, as when the English invaders attacked Britain. Christian priests were again slain at the altar by worshippers of Woden; letters, arts, religion, government disappeared before these northmen as before the northmen of old. But when the wild burst of the storm was over, land, people, government reappeared unchanged. England still remained England; the conquerors sank quietly into the mass of those around them; and Woden yielded without a struggle to Christ. The secret of this difference between the two invasions was that the battle was no longer between men of different races. It was no longer a fight between Briton and German, between Englishman and Welshman. The life of these northern folk was in the main the life of the earlier Englishmen. Their customs, their religion, their social order were the same; they were in fact kinsmen bringing back to an England that had forgotten its origins the barbaric



SEC. V
WESSEX
AND THE
DANES
802
TO
880

England of its pirate forefathers. Nowhere over Europe was the fight so fierce, because nowhere else were the combatants men of

SEC. V
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —
 The
 Danish
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 quests

one blood and one speech. But just for this reason the fusion of the northmen with their foes was nowhere so peaceful and so complete.

Britain had to meet a double attack from its new assailants. The northmen of Norway had struck westward to the Shetlands and Orkneys, and passed thence by the Hebrides to Ireland; while their kinsmen who now dwelt in the old Engle-land steered along the coasts of Frisia and Gaul. Shut in between the two lines of their advance,

Britain lay in the very centre of their field of operations; and at the close of Egberht's reign, when the decisive struggle first began, their attacks were directed to the two extremities of the West-Saxon realm. After having harried

834-837

East Anglia and slain in Kent, they swept up the Thames to the plunder of London; while the pirates in the Irish Channel roused all Cornwall to revolt. It was in the alliance of the northmen with the Britons that the danger of these earlier inroads lay. Egberht indeed defeated the united forces of these two enemies in a victory at Hengest-dun, but an unequal struggle was carried on for years to come in the Wessex west of Selwood. King Æthelwulf, who followed Egberht in 839, fought strenuously in the defence of his realm; in the defeat

851

of Charmouth, as in the victory at Aclea, he led his troops in person against the

853

sea-robbers; and he drove back the Welsh of North Wales, who were encouraged by the invaders to rise in arms. Northmen and Welshmen were beaten again and again, and yet the peril grew greater year by year. The dangers to the Christian faith from these heathen assailants roused the clergy to his aid. Swithun, Bishop of Winchester, became Æthelwulf's minister;



SOLDIER.

Ninth Century.

Gospel-book of Mac Durman, Lambeth Palace Library.

Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherborne, was among the soldiers of the Cross, and with the ealdormen led the fyrds of Somerset and Dorset to drive the invaders from the mouth of the Parret. At last hard fighting gained the realm a little respite; in 858 Æthelwulf died in peace, and for eight years the Northmen left the land in quiet. But these earlier forays had been mere preludes to the real burst of the storm. When it broke in its full force upon the island, it was no longer a series of plunder-raids, but the invasion of Britain by a host of conquerors who settled as they conquered. The work was now taken up by another people of Scandinavian blood, the Danes. At the accession of Æthelred, the third of Æthelwulf's sons, who had mounted the throne after the short reigns of his brothers, these new assailants fell on Britain. As they came to the front, the character of the attack wholly changed. The petty squadrons which had till now harassed the coast of Britain made way for larger hosts than had as yet fallen on any country in the west; while raid and foray were replaced by the regular campaign of armies who marched to conquer, and whose aim was to settle on the land they won. In 866 the Danes landed in East Anglia, and marched in the next spring across the Humber upon York. Civil strife as usual distracted the energies of Northumbria. Its subject-crown was disputed by two claimants, and when they united to meet this common danger both fell in the same defeat before the walls of their capital. Northumbria at once submitted to the Danes, and Mercia was only saved by a hasty march of King Æthelred to its aid. But the Peace of Nottingham, by which Æthelred rescued Mercia in 868, left the Danes free to turn to the rich spoil of the great abbeys of the Fen. Peterborough, Crowland, Ely, went up in flames, and their monks fled or were slain among the ruins. From thence they struck suddenly for East Anglia itself, whose king, Eadmund, brought prisoner before the Danish leaders, was bound to a tree and shot to death with arrows. His martyrdom by the heathen made him the St. Sebastian of English legend; in later days his

SEC. V
WESSEX
AND THE
DANES
802
TO
880
—

866



COIN OF EADMOND OF EAST
ANGLIA.

870

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —

figure gleamed from the pictured windows of church after church along the eastern coast, and the stately abbey of St. Edmundsbury rose over his relics. With Eadmund ended the line of East-Anglian under-kings, for his kingdom was not only conquered, but ten years later it was divided among the soldiers of a Danish host, whose leader, Guthrum, assumed its crown. How great was the terror stirred by these successive victories was shown in the action of Mercia, which, though it was as yet still spared from actual conquest, crouched in terror before the Danes, acknowledged them in 870 as its overlords, and paid them tribute.

Danes
 and
 Wessex

In four years the work of Ecgeberht had been undone, and England north of the Thames had been torn from the overlordship of Wessex. So rapid a conquest as the Danish conquests of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia, had only been made possible by the temper of these kingdoms themselves. To them the conquest was simply their transfer from one overlord to another, and it would seem as if they preferred the lordship of the Dane to the overlordship of the West-Saxon. It was another sign of the enormous difficulty of welding these kingdoms together into a single people. The time had now come for Wessex to fight, not for supremacy, but for life. As yet it seemed paralyzed by terror. With the exception of his one march on Nottingham, King Æthelred had done nothing to save his under-kingdoms from the wreck. But the Danes no sooner pushed up Thames to Reading than the West-Saxons, attacked on their own soil, turned fiercely at bay. The enemy penetrated indeed into the heart of Wessex as far as the heights that overlook the Vale of White Horse. A desperate battle drove them back from Ashdown; but their camp in the tongue of land between the Kennet and Thames proved impregnable, and fresh forces pushed up the Thames to join their fellows. In the midst of the struggle Æthelred died, and left his youngest brother Ælfred to meet a fresh advance of the foe. They had already encamped at Wilton before the young king could meet them, and a series of defeats forced him to buy the withdrawal of the pirates and win a few years' breathing-space for his realm. It was easy for the quick eye of Ælfred to see that the Danes had withdrawn simply with the view of gaining firmer footing for a new attack; indeed, three years had hardly passed before Mercia was

invaded, and its under-king driven over sea to make place for a tributary of the Danes. From Repton half their host marched northwards to the Tyne, dividing a land where there was little left to plunder, colonizing and tilling it, while Guthrum led the rest into East Anglia to prepare for their next year's attack on Wessex. The greatness of the contest had now drawn to Britain the whole strength of the northmen; and it was with a host swollen by reinforcements from every quarter that Guthrum at last set sail for the south. In 876 the Danish fleet appeared before Wareham, and when a treaty with Ælfred won their withdrawal, they threw themselves into Exeter and allied themselves with the Welsh. Through the winter Ælfred girded himself for this new peril. At break of spring his army closed round the town, while a hired fleet cruised off the coast to guard against rescue. The peril of their brethren in Exeter forced a part of the Danish host which had remained at Wareham to put to sea with the view of aiding them, but they were driven by a storm on the rocks of Swanage, and Exeter was at last starved into surrender, while the Danes again swore to leave Wessex.

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —
 875

They withdrew in fact to Gloucester, but Ælfred had hardly disbanded his troops when his enemies, roused by the arrival of fresh hordes eager for plunder, reappeared at Chippenham, and at the opening of 878 marched ravaging over the land. The surprise was complete, and for a month or two the general panic left no hope of resistance. Ælfred, with his small band of followers, could only throw himself into a fort raised hastily in the isle of Athelney, among the marshes of the Parret. It was a position from which he could watch closely the movements of his foes, and with the first burst of spring he called the thegns of Somerset to his standard, and still gathering his troops as he moved, marched through Wiltshire on the Danes. He found their host at Edington, defeated it in a great battle, and after a siege of fourteen days forced them to surrender. Their leader, Guthrum, was baptized as a Christian and bound by a solemn peace or "frith" at Wedmore in Somerset. In form the Peace of Wedmore seemed indeed a surrender of the bulk of Britain to its invaders. All Northumbria, all East Anglia, the half of Central England was left subject to the northmen. Throughout this Dane-law, as it was called, the con

Peace of
 Wedmore

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —

querors settled down among the conquered population as lords of the soil, thickly in the north and east, more thinly in the central districts, but everywhere guarding jealously their old isolation, and gathering in separate "heres" or armies round towns which were only linked in loose confederacies. The peace had in fact saved little more than Wessex itself. But in saving Wessex it saved England. The spell of terror was broken. The tide of invasion was turned. Only one short struggle broke a peace of fifteen years.

Ælfred
 871-901

With the Peace of Wedmore in 878 began a work even more noble than this deliverance of Wessex from the Dane. "So long

as I have lived," wrote Ælfred in later days, "I have striven to live worthily." He longed when death overtook him "to leave to the men that come after a remembrance of him in good works." The aim has been more than fulfilled. The memory of the life and doings of the noblest of English rulers has come down to us living and distinct through the mist of exaggeration and legend that gathered round it. Politically or intellectually, the sphere of Ælfred's action may seem too small to justify a comparison of him with the few whom the world claims as its greatest men. What really lifts him to their level is the moral grandeur of his life. He lived solely for the good of his people. He is the first



ÆLFRED'S JEWEL.

Found at Athelney; now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

instance in the history of Christendom of a ruler who put aside every personal aim or ambition to devote himself wholly to the welfare of those whom he ruled. In his mouth "to live worthily" meant a life of justice, temperance, self-sacrifice. The Peace of Wedmore at once marked the temper of the man. Warrior and conqueror as he was, with a disorganized England before him, he



set aside at thirty the dream of conquest to leave behind him the memory not of victories but of "good works," of daily toils by

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —

which he secured peace, good government, education for his people. His policy was one of peace. He abandoned all thought of the recovery of the West-Saxon overlordship. With England across the Watling Street, a Roman road which ran from Chester to London, in other words with Northumbria, East Anglia, and the half of Mercia, Ælfred had nothing to do. All that he retained was his own Wessex, with the upper part of the valley of the Thames, the whole valley of the Severn, and the rich plains of the Mersey and the Dee. Over these latter districts, to which the name of Mercia was now confined, while the rest of the Mercian kingdom became known as the Five Boroughs of the Danes, Ælfred set the ealdorman Æthelred, the husband of his daughter Æthelflæd, a ruler well fitted by his courage and activity to guard Wessex against inroads from the north. Against invasion from the sea, he provided by the better organization of military service, and by the creation of a fleet. The country was divided into military districts, each five hides sending an armed man at the king's summons and providing him with food and pay. The duty of every freeman to join the host remained binding as before; but the host or fyrd was divided into two halves, each of which took by turns its service in the field, while the other half guarded its own burhs and townships. To win the sea was a harder task than to win the land, and Ælfred had not to organize, but to create a fleet. He steadily developed however his new naval force, and in the reign of his son a fleet of a hundred English ships held the mastery of the Channel.

Ælfred's
 Rule

The defence of his realm thus provided for, he devoted himself to its good government. In Wessex itself, spent by years of deadly struggle, with law, order, the machinery of justice and government weakened by the pirate storm, material and moral civilization had alike to be revived. His work was of a simple and practical order. In politics as in war, or in his after dealings with letters, he took what was closest at hand and made the best of it. In the re-organization of public justice his main work was to enforce submission to the justice of hundred-moot and shire-moot alike on noble and ceorl, "who were constantly at obstinate variance with one another in the folk-moots, so that hardly any one of them would grant that to be true doom that had been judged for doom by the

ealdorman and reeves." "All the law dooms of his land that were given in his absence he used to keenly question, of what sort they were, just or unjust; and if he found any wrongdoing in them he would call the judges themselves before him." "Day and night," says his biographer, he was busied in the correction of local injustice: "for in that whole kingdom the poor had no helpers, or few, save the king himself." Of a new legislation the king had no thought. "Those things which I met with," he tells us, "either of the days of Ine, my kinsman, or of Offa, king of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht, who first among the English race received baptism, those which seemed to me rightest, those I have gathered, and rejected the others." But unpretending as the work might seem, its importance was great. With it began the conception of a national law. The notion of separate systems of tribal customs for the separate peoples passed away; and the codes of Wessex, Mercia, and Kent, blended in the doom-book of a common England.



COIN OF ÆLFRED.

The new strength which had been won for Ælfred's kingdom in six years of peace was shown when the next pirate onset fell on the land. A host from Gaul pushed up the Thames and thence to Rochester, while the Danes of Guthrum's kingdom set aside the Peace of Wedmore and gave help to their brethren. The war however was short, and ended in victory so complete on Ælfred's side that in 886 a new peace was made which pushed the West-Saxon frontier forward into the realm of Guthrum, and tore from the Danish hold London and half of the old East-Saxon kingdom. From this moment the Danes were thrown on an attitude of defence, and the change made itself at once felt among the English. The foundation of a new national monarchy was laid. "All the Angelcyn turned to Ælfred," says the chronicle, "save those that were under bondage to Danish men." Hardly had this second breathing-space been won than the king turned again to his work of restoration. The spirit of adventure that made him to the last a mighty hunter, the reckless daring of his early manhood, took graver form in an activity that found time amidst the cares of state for the daily

SEC. V
—
WESSEX
AND THE
DANES
802
TO
880
—

Ælfred's
Character

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —

duties of religion, for converse with strangers, for study and translation, for learning poems by heart, for planning buildings and instructing craftsmen in gold-work, for teaching even falconers and dog-keepers their business. But his mind was far from being prisoned within his own island. He listened with keen attention to tales of far-off lands, to the Norwegian Othere's account of his journey round the North Cape to explore the White Sea, and Wulfstan's cruise along the coast of Esthonia; envoys bore his presents to the churches of India and Jerusalem, and an annual mission carried Peter's-pence to Rome. Restless as he was, his



TOMBSTONE OF SUIBINE MAC MAELÆHUMAI, IRISH SCRIBE COMMEMORATED IN THE ENGLISH CHRONICLE, A.D. 891.

Petrie and Stokes, "Christian Inscriptions in Ireland."

activity was the activity of a mind strictly practical. Ælfred was pre-eminently a man of business, careful of detail, laborious, and methodical. He carried in his bosom a little hand-book, in which he jotted down things as they struck him, now a bit of family genealogy, now a prayer, now a story such as that of Bishop Ealdhelm singing sacred songs on the bridge. Each hour of the king's day had its peculiar task; there was the same order in the division of his revenue and in the arrangement of his court. But active and busy as he was, his temper remained simple and kindly. We have few stories of his life that are more than mere legends, but even legend itself never ventured to depart from the outlines of a

character which men knew so well. During his months of waiting at Athelney, while the country was overrun by the Danes, he was said to have entered a peasant's hut, and to have been bidden by the housewife, who did not recognize him, to turn the cakes which were baking on the hearth. The young king did as he was bidden, but in the sad thoughts which came over him he forgot his task, and bore in amused silence the scolding of the good wife, who found her cakes spoilt on her return. This tale, if nothing more than a tale, could never have been told of a man without humour. Tradition told of his genial good-nature, of his chattiness over the adventures of his life, and above all of his love for song. In his busiest days Ælfred found time to learn the old songs of his race by heart, and bade them be taught in the palace-school. As he translated the tales of the heathen mythology he lingered fondly over and expanded them, and in moments of gloom he found comfort in the music of the Psalms.

Neither the wars nor the legislation of Ælfred were destined to leave such lasting traces upon England as the impulse he gave to its literature. His end indeed even in this was practical rather than literary. What he aimed at was simply the education of his people. Letters and civilization had almost vanished in Great Britain. In Wessex itself learning had disappeared. "When I began to reign," said Ælfred, "I cannot remember one priest south of Thames who could render his service-book into English." The ruin the Danes had wrought had been no mere material ruin. In Northumbria the Danish sword had left but few survivors of the school of Ecgberht or Bæda. To remedy this ignorance Ælfred desired that at least every free-born youth who possessed the means should "abide at his book till he can well understand English writing." He himself superintended a school which he had established for the young nobles of his court. At home he found none to help him in his educational efforts but a few prelates and priests who remained in the fragment of Mercia which had been saved from the invaders, and a Welsh bishop, Asser. "Formerly," the king writes bitterly, "men came hither from foreign lands to seek for instruction, and now when we desire it we can only obtain it from abroad." He sought it among the West-Franks and the East-Franks. A scholar named Grimbold came from St. Omer to preside over the abbey he

SEC. V

 WESSEX
AND THE
DANES
802
TO
880
—

 Ælfred
and
Litera-
ture

SEC. V
 —
 WESSEX
 AND THE
 DANES
 802
 TO
 880
 —

founded at Winchester; and John the Old-Saxon was fetched, it may be from the Westphalian abbey of Corbey, to rule a monastery



S. MATTHEW.
 Ninth Century.

Gospel-book of Mac Durnan, Lambeth Palace Library.

that Ælfred's gratitude for his deliverance from the Danes raised in the marshes of Athelney.

The work, however, which most told on English culture was done

not by these scholars, but by the king himself. Ælfred resolved to throw open to his people in their own tongue the knowledge which had till then been limited to the clergy. He took his books as he found them; they were the popular manuals of his age; the compilation of Orosius, then the one accessible book of universal history, the history of his own people by Bæda, the Consolation of Boethius, the Pastoral of Pope Gregory. He translated these works into English, but he was far more than a translator, he was an editor for the people. Here he omitted, there he expanded. He enriched Orosius by a sketch of the new geographical discoveries in the north. He gave a West-Saxon form to his selections from Bæda. In one place he stops to explain his theory of government, his wish for a thicker population, his conception of national welfare as consisting in a due balance of the priest, the soldier, and the churl. The mention of Nero spurs him to an outbreak on the abuses of power. The cold Providence of Boethius gives way to an enthusiastic acknowledgment of the goodness of God. As Ælfred writes, his large-hearted nature flings off its royal mantle, and he talks as a man to men. "Do not blame me," he prays with a charming simplicity, "if any know Latin better than I, for every man must say what he says and do what he does according to his ability." But simple as was his aim, Ælfred created English literature. Before him, England possessed noble poems in the work of Cædmon and his fellow-singers, and a train of ballads and battle-songs. Prose she had none. The mighty roll of the books that fill her libraries begins with the translations of Ælfred, and above all with the chronicle of his reign. It seems likely that the king's rendering of Bæda's history gave the first impulse towards the compilation of what is known as the English or Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which was certainly thrown into its present form during his reign. The meagre lists of the kings of Wessex and of the bishops of Winchester, which had been preserved from older times, were roughly expanded into a national history by insertions from Bæda; but it is when it reaches the reign of Ælfred that the Chronicle suddenly widens into the vigorous narrative, full of life and originality, that marks the gift of a new power to the English tongue. Varying as it does from age to age in historic value, it remains the first vernacular history of any Teutonic people, the earliest and most venerable

SEC. V
—
WESSEX
AND THE
DANES
802
TO
880
—

Ælfred's
Translations

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

monument of Teutonic prose. The writer of English history may be pardoned if he lingers too fondly over the figure of the king in whose court, at whose impulse, it may be in whose very words, English history begins.

Section VI.—The West-Saxon Realm, 893—1013

[*Authorities.*—Mainly the English Chronicle, which varies much during this period. Through the reign of Eadward it is copious, and a Mercian chronicle is embedded in it; its entries then become scanty, and are broken with grand English songs till the reign of Æthelred, when its fulness returns. "Florence of Worcester" is probably a translation of a copy of the Chronicle now lost. The "Laws" form the basis of our constitutional knowledge of the time, and fall into two classes. Those of Eadward, Æthelstan, Eadmund, and Eadgar are, like the earlier laws of Æthelberht and Ine, "mainly of the nature of amendments of custom." Those of Ælfred, Æthelred, Cnut, with those that bear the name of Eadward the Confessor, "aspire to the character of codes" All are printed in Mr. Thorpe's "Ancient Laws and Institutes of the Anglo-Saxons;" but the extracts given by Dr. Stubbs ("Select Charters," pp. 59—74) contain all that directly bears on our constitution. Mr. Kemble's "Codex Diplomaticus Ævi Saxonici" contains a vast mass of charters, &c., belonging to this period. The lives of Dunstan are collected by Dr. Stubbs in one of the Rolls volumes. For this period see also Mr. Green's "Conquest of England."]

Mercia
and the
Danes

Ælfred's work of peace was however to be once more interrupted by a new invasion which in 893 broke under the Danish leader Hasting upon England. After a year's fruitless struggle to force the strong position in which Ælfred covered Wessex, the Danish forces left their fastnesses in the Andredsweald and crossed the Thames, while a rising of the Danelaw in their aid revealed the secret of this movement. Followed by the Londoners, the king's son Eadward and the Mercian Ealdorman Æthelred stormed the Danish camp in Essex, followed the host as it rode along Thames to rouse new revolts in Wales, caught it on the Severn, and defeating it with a great slaughter, drove it back to its old quarters in Essex. Ælfred himself held Exeter against attack from a pirate fleet and their West-Welsh allies; and when Hasting once more repeated his dash upon the west and occupied Chester, Æthelred drove him from his hold and forced him to fall back to his camp on the Lea. Here Ælfred came to his lieutenant's aid, and the capture

of the Danish ships by the two forts with which the king barred the river virtually ended the war. The Danes streamed back from Wales, whither they had retreated, to their old quarters in Frankland, and the new English fleet drove the freebooters from the Channel.

The last years of Ælfred's life seem to have been busied in providing a new defence for his realm by the formation of alliances

with states whom a common interest drew together against the pirates. But four years had hardly passed since the victory over Hasting when his death left the kingdom to his son Eadward. Eadward, though a vigorous and active ruler, clung to his father's policy of rest.



COIN OF EADWARD THE ELDER.

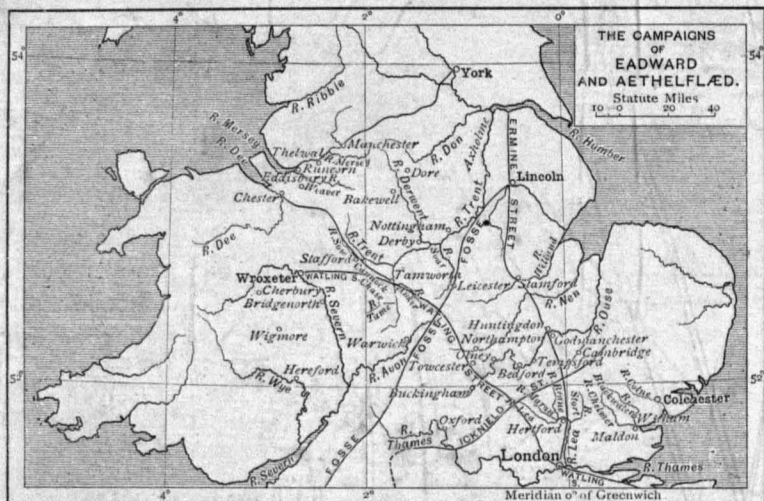
It was not till 910 that a rising of the Danes on his northern frontier, and an attack of a pirate fleet on the southern coast, forced him to re-open the war. With his sister Æthelflæd, who was in 912 left sole ruler of Mercia by the death of the Ealdorman Æthelred, he undertook the systematic reduction of the Danelaw. While he bridled East Anglia by the seizure of southern Essex, and the erection of the forts of Hertford and Witham, the fame of Mercia was safe in the hands of its "Lady." Æthelflæd girded her strength for the conquest of the "Five Boroughs," the rude Danish confederacy which had taken the place of the eastern half of the older Mercian kingdom. Derby represented the original Mercia on the upper Trent, Lincoln the Lindiswaras, Leicester the Middle-English, Stamford the province of the Gyrwas—the marshmen of the Fens—Nottingham probably that of the Southumbrians. Each of the "Five Boroughs" seems to have been ruled by its earl with his separate "host"; within each twelve "lawmen" administered Danish law, while a common justice-court existed for the whole confederacy. In her attack upon this powerful league, Æthelflæd abandoned the older strategy of battle and raid for that of siege and fortress-building. Advancing along the line of Trent, she fortified Tamworth and Stafford on its head-waters, then turning southward secured the valley of the Avon by a fort at Warwick.

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
897
*Ælfred's
Death*
901

*Æthel-
flæd, the
lady of
Mercia*
913-918

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

With the lines of the great rivers alike secure, and the approaches to Wales on either side of Arden in her hands, she in 917 closed on



Derby. The raids of the Danes of Middle-England failed to draw the Lady of Mercia from her prey; and Derby was hardly her own when, turning southward, she forced the surrender of Leicester.

Wessex
and the
Dane-
law

Æthelflæd died in the midst of her triumphs, and Eadward at once annexed Mercia to Wessex. The brilliancy of her exploits had already been matched by his own successes as he closed in on the district of the Five Boroughs from the south. South of the Middle-English and the Fens lay a tract watered by the Ouse and the Nen—originally the district of a tribe known as the South-English, and now, like the Five Boroughs of the North, grouped round the towns of Bedford, Huntingdon, and North-

Eadward
the Elder
901-925



ARCHER.
Tenth Century.
MS. Cott. Galba A. viii.

ampton. The reduction of these was followed by that of East Anglia; the Danes of the Fens submitted with Stamford, the Southumbrians with Nottingham. Lincoln, the last of the Five

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
922



FIGURE OF CHRIST WITH HEATHEN
SYMBOLS.

From Barrow of Gorm and Thyra, Jutland.
Worsaae, "Industrial Arts of Denmark."



SILVER CUP.

Boroughs as yet unconquered, no doubt submitted at the same time. From Mid-Britain the king advanced cautiously to an attack on Northumbria. He had already seized Manchester, and was preparing to complete his conquests, when the whole of the North suddenly laid itself at his feet. Not merely Northumbria



COIN OF ÆTHELSTAN.

but the Scots and the Britons of Strathclyde "chose him to father and lord." The submission had probably been brought about, like that of the North-Welsh to Ælfred, by the pressure of mutual feuds, and it was as valueless as theirs. Within a year

after Eadward's death the north was again on fire. Æthelstan,

924
Æthelstan
925-940

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

Ælfred's golden-haired grandson whom the king had girded as a child with a sword set in a golden scabbard and a gem-studded belt, incorporated Northumbria with his dominions; then turning westward broke a league which had been formed between the



S. JOHN THE EVANGELIST.
Gospel-book given by Otto I. to Æthelstan.
MS. Cott. Tib. A. ii.

North-Welsh and the Scots, forced them to pay annual tribute, to march in his armies, and to attend his councils. The West-Welsh of Cornwall were reduced to a like vassalage, and the Britons driven from Exeter, which they had shared till then with

its English inhabitants. A league of the Scot King Constantine with the Irish Ostmen was punished by an army which wasted his kingdom, while a fleet ravaged its coasts. But the revolt only heralded the formidable confederacy in which Scotland, Cumberland, and the British and Danish chiefs of the west and east rose at the appearance of the fleet of Olaf in the Humber. The king's victory at Brunanburh, sung in noblest war-song, seemed the wreck of Danish hopes, but the work of conquest was still to be done. On Æthelstan's death, and the accession of his young brother Eadmund, the Danelaw rose again in revolt; the men of the Five Boroughs joined their kinsmen in Northumbria, and a peace which was negotiated by the two archbishops, Odo and Wulfstan, practically restored the old balance of Ælfred's day, and re-established Watling Street as the boundary between Wessex and the Danes. Eadmund however possessed the political and military ability of his house. The Danelaw was once more reduced to submission; he seized on an alliance with the Scots as a balance to the Danes, and secured the aid of their king by investing him with the fief of Cumberland. But his triumphs were suddenly cut short by his death. As the king feasted at Pucklechurch a robber, Leofa, whom he had banished, seated himself at the royal board, and drew his sword on the cupbearer who bade him retire. Eadmund, springing to his thegn's aid, seized the robber by his hair and flung him to the ground, but Leofa had stabbed the king ere rescue could arrive.

The completion of the West-Saxon realm was in fact reserved for the hands, not of a king or warrior, but of a priest. With the death of Eadmund, a new figure comes to the front in English affairs. Dunstan stands first in the line of ecclesiastical statesmen who counted among them Lanfranc and Wolsey, and ended in Laud. He is still more remarkable in himself, in his own vivid personality after nine centuries of revolution and change. He was born in the little hamlet of Glastonbury, beside Ine's church; his father, Heorstan, was a man of wealth, and kinsman of three bishops of the time and of many thegns of the court. It must have been in his father's hall that the fair diminutive boy, with his scant but beautiful hair, caught his love for "the vain songs of ancient

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
—

*Brunan-
burh*
937

Eadmund
940-946

Dunstan

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

c. 940

heathendom, the trifling legends, the funeral chants," which afterwards roused against him the charge of sorcery. Thence, too, he may have derived his passionate love of music, and his custom of carrying his harp in hand on journey or visit. The wandering scholars of Ireland left their books in the monastery of Glastonbury, as they left them along the Rhine and the Danube; and Dunstan plunged into the study of sacred and profane letters till his brain broke down in delirium. His knowledge became famous in the neighbourhood and reached the court of Æthelstan, but his appearance there was the signal for a burst of ill-will among the courtiers, though many of them were kinsmen of his own, and he was forced to withdraw. Even when Eadmund recalled him to the court, his rivals drove him from the king's train, threw him from his horse as he passed through the marshes, and with the wild passion of their age, trampled him underfoot in the mire. The outrage ended in fever, and in the bitterness of his disappointment and shame Dunstan rose from his sick-bed a monk. But in England at this time the monastic profession seems to have been little more than a vow of celibacy, and his devotion took no ascetic turn. His nature was sunny, versatile, artistic, full of strong affections, and capable of inspiring others with affections as strong. Quick-witted, of tenacious memory, a ready and fluent speaker, gay and genial in address, an artist, a musician, he was at the same time an indefatigable worker, busy at books, at building, at handicraft. Throughout his life he won the love of women; he now became the spiritual guide of a woman of high rank, who lived only for charity and the entertainment of pilgrims. "He ever clave to her, and loved her in wondrous fashion." His sphere of activity widened as the wealth of his devotee was placed unreservedly at his command; we see him followed by a train of pupils, busy with literature, writing, harping, painting, designing. One morning a lady summons him to her house to design a robe which she is embroidering. As he bends with her maidens over their toil, his harp hung upon the wall sounds without mortal touch tones which the startled ears around frame into a joyous antiphon. The tie which bound him to this scholar-life was broken by the death of his patroness; and towards the close of Eadmund's reign Dunstan was again called to the court. But the old jealousies revived, and counting the game lost

Pictura et scriptura huius pagine sub
 uisa: est de propria manu s^ci dunstani.



S. DUNSTAN AT THE FEET OF CHRIST.

From a drawing by Dunstan's own hand, in the Bodleian Library.

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
—

he prepared again to withdraw. The king had spent the day in the chase; the red deer which he was pursuing dashed over Cheddar cliffs, and his horse only checked itself on the brink of the ravine, while Eadmund in the bitterness of death was repenting of his injustice to Dunstan. He was at once summoned on the king's return. "Saddle your horse," said Eadmund, "and ride with me!" The royal train swept over the marshes to Dunstan's home; and greeting him with the kiss of peace, the king seated him in the priestly chair as Abbot of Glastonbury.

Dunstan's
adminis-
tration

Eadred
946-955

From that moment Dunstan may have exercised influence on public affairs; but it was not till the accession of Eadred, Eadmund's brother, that his influence became supreme as leading counsellor of the crown. We may trace his hand in the solemn proclamation of the king's crowning. Eadred's election was the first national election where Briton, Dane, and Englishman were alike represented; his coronation was the first national coronation, the first union of the primate of the north and the primate of the south in setting the crown on the head of one who was to rule from the Forth to the Channel. A revolt of the north two years later was subdued; at the outbreak of a fresh rising the Archbishop of York, Wulfstan, was thrown into prison; and with the submission of the Danelaw in 954 the long work of Ælfred's house was done. Dogged as his fight had been, the Dane at last owned himself beaten. From the moment of Eadred's final triumph all resistance came to an end. The north was finally brought into the general organization of the English realm, and the Northumbrian under-kingdom sank into an earldom under Oswulf. The new might of the royal power was expressed in the lofty titles assumed by Eadred; he was not only "King of the Anglo-Saxons," but "Cæsar of the whole of Britain."

Dunstan
the
Primate

Eadwig
956-959

The death of Eadred however was a signal for the outbreak of political strife. The boy-king Eadwig was swayed by a woman of high lineage, Æthelgifu; and the quarrel between her and the older counsellors of Eadred broke into open strife at the coronation feast. On the young king's insolent withdrawal to her chamber Dunstan, at the bidding of the Witan, drew him roughly back to the hall. But before the year was over the wrath of the boy-king drove the abbot over sea, and his whole system went with him. The triumph

of Æthelgifu was crowned in 957 by the marriage of her daughter to the king. The marriage was uncanonical, and at the opening of 958 Archbishop Odo parted the king from his wife by solemn sentence; while the Mercians and Northumbrians rose in revolt, proclaimed Eadwig's brother Eadgar their king, and recalled Dunstan, who received successively the sees of Worcester and of London. The death of Eadwig restored the unity of the realm. Wessex submitted to the king who had been already accepted by



COIN OF EADGAR.

the north, and Dunstan, now raised to the see of Canterbury, wielded for sixteen years as the minister of Eadgar the secular and ecclesiastical powers of the realm. Never had England seemed so strong or so peaceful.

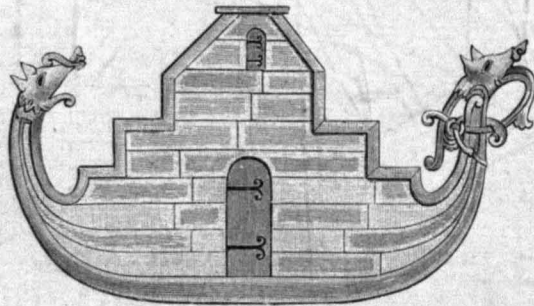
SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

Eadgar
959-975

Without, a fleet cruising round the coast swept the sea of pirates; the Danes of Ireland had changed from foes to friends; eight vassal kings rowed Eadgar (so ran the legend) in his boat on the Dee. The settlement of the north indicated the large and statesmanlike course which Dunstan was to pursue in the general administration of the realm. He seems to have adopted from the beginning a national rather than a West-Saxon policy. The later charge against his rule, that he gave too much power to the Dane and too much love to strangers, is the best proof of the unprovincial temper of his administration. He employed Danes in the royal service and promoted them to high posts in Church and State. In the code which he promulgated he expressly reserved to the north its old Danish rights, "with as good laws as they best might choose." His stern hand restored justice and order, while his care for commerce was shown in the laws which regulated the coinage and the enactments of common weights and measures for the realm. Thanet was ravaged when the wreckers of its coast plundered a trading ship from York. Commerce sprang into a wider life. "Men of the Empire," traders of Lower Lorraine and the Rhineland, "men of Rouen," were seen in the streets of London, and it was by the foreign trade which sprang up in Dunstan's time that London rose to the commercial greatness it has held ever since.

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

But the aims of the primate-minister reached beyond this outer revival of prosperity and good government. The Danish wars had dealt rudely with Ælfred's hopes: his educational movement had ceased with his death, the clergy had sunk back into worldliness and ignorance, not a single book or translation had been added to those which the king had left. Dunstan resumed the task, if not in the larger spirit of Ælfred, at least in the spirit of a great administrator. The reform of monasticism which had begun in the abbey of Cluny was stirring the zeal of English churchmen, and Eadgar showed himself zealous in the cause of introducing it into England.



NOAH'S ARK.

MS. Bodl. Junius 11, c. A.D. 1000.

With his support Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, carried the new Benedictinism into his diocese, and a few years later Oswald, Bishop of Worcester, brought monks into his own cathedral city. Tradition ascribed to Eadgar the formation of forty monasteries, and it was to his time that English monasticism looked back in later days as the beginning of its continuous life. But after all his efforts, monasteries were in fact only firmly planted in Wessex and East Anglia, and the system took no hold in Northumbria or in the bulk of Mercia. Dunstan himself took little part in it, though his influence was strongly felt in the literary revival which accompanied the revival of religious activity. He himself while abbot was famous as a teacher. His great assistant Æthelwold raised Abingdon into a school second only to Glastonbury. His other great helper, Oswald, laid the first foundations of the historic



EADGAR OFFERING UP HIS CHARTER FOR THE NEW MINSTER, WINCHESTER, A.D. 966.
MS. Cott. Vesp. A. viii.

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
Decline
of
Slavery

school of Worcester. Abbo, the most notable scholar in Gaul, came from Fleury at the primate's invitation.

After times looked back fondly to "Eadgar's Law," as it was called, in other words to the English Constitution as it shaped itself in the hands of Eadgar's minister. A number of influences had greatly modified the older order which had followed on the English conquest. Slavery was gradually disappearing before the efforts of the Church. Theodore had denied Christian burial to the kidnapper, and prohibited the sale of children by their parents, after the age of seven. Ecgberht of York punished any sale of child or kinsfolk with excommunication. The murder of a slave by lord or mistress, though no crime in the eye of the State, became a sin for which penance was due to the Church. The slave was exempted from toil on Sundays and holydays; here and there he became attached to the soil and could only be sold with it; sometimes he acquired a plot of ground, and was suffered to purchase his own release. Æthelstan gave the slave-class a new rank in the realm by extending to it the same principles of mutual responsibility for crime which were the basis of order among the free. The Church was far from contenting herself with this gradual elevation; Wilfrid led the way in the work of emancipation by freeing two hundred and fifty serfs whom he found attached to his estate at Selsey. Manumission became frequent in wills, as the clergy taught that such a gift was a boon to the soul of the dead. At the Synod of Chelsea the bishops bound themselves to free at their decease all serfs on their estates who had been reduced to serfdom by want or crime. Usually the slave was set free before the altar or in the church-porch, and the Gospel-book bore written on its margins the record of his emancipation. Sometimes his lord placed him at the spot where four roads met, and bade him go whither he would. In the more solemn form of the law his master took him by the hand in full shire-meeting, showed him open road and door, and gave him the lance and sword of the freeman. The slave-trade from English ports was prohibited by law, but the prohibition long remained ineffective. A hundred years later than Dunstan the wealth of English nobles was said sometimes to spring from breeding slaves for the market. It was not till the reign of the first Norman king that the preaching of Wulfstan and the

influence of Lanfranc suppressed the trade in its last stronghold, the port of Bristol.

But the decrease of slavery went on side by side with an increasing degradation of the bulk of the people. Political and social changes had long been modifying the whole structure of society; and the very foundations of the old order were broken up in the degradation of the freeman, and the upgrowth of the lord with his dependent villeins. The political changes which were annihilating the older English liberty were in great measure due to a change in

SEC. VI

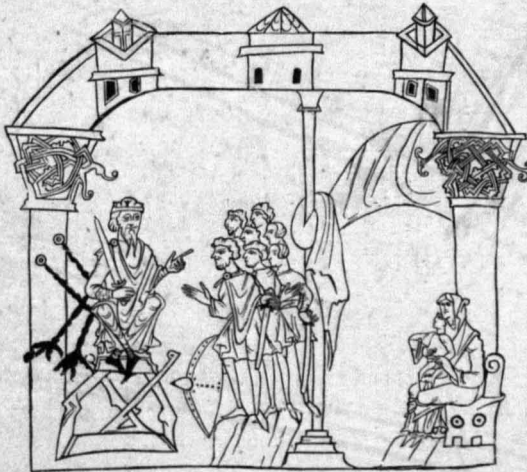
THE WEST-SAXON REALM

893

TO

1013

The later English Kingdom



KING AND COURT.

MS. Bodl. Junius 11, C. A.D. 1000.

the character of English kingship. As the lesser English kingdoms had drawn together, the wider dominion of the king had removed him further and further from his people, and clothed him with a mysterious dignity. Every reign raised him higher in the social scale. The bishop, once ranked his equal in value of life, sank to the level of the ealdorman. The ealdorman himself, once the hereditary ruler of a smaller state, became a mere delegate of the king, with an authority curtailed in every shire by that of the royal reeves—officers despatched to levy the royal revenues and administer the royal justice. Religion deepened the sense of awe. The king, if he was no longer sacred as the son of Woden, was yet more

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
—

sacred as "the Lord's Anointed" ; and treason against him became the worst of crimes. The older nobility of blood died out before the new nobility of the court. From the oldest times of Germanic history each chief or king had his war-band, his comrades, warriors bound personally to him by their free choice, sworn to fight for him to the death, and avenge his cause as their own. When Cynewulf of Wessex was foully slain at Merton his comrades "ran at once to the spot, each as he was ready and as fast as he could," and despoiling all offers of life, fell fighting over the corpse of their lord. The fidelity of the war-band was rewarded with grants from the royal domain ; the king became their lord or hlaforð, "the dispenser of gifts ;" the comrade became his "servant" or thegn. Personal service at his court was held not to degrade but to ennoble. "Cup-thegn," and "horse-thegn," and "hordere," or treasurer, became great officers of state. The thegn advanced with the advance of the king. He absorbed every post of honour ; he became ealdorman, reeve, bishop, judge ; while his wealth increased as the common folkland passed into the hands of the king, and was carved out by him into estates for his dependents.

Decline
of the
English
Freeman

The principle of personal allegiance embodied in the new nobility tended to widen into a theory of general dependence. From Ælfred's day it was assumed that no man could exist without a lord. The ravages and the long insecurity of the Danish wars aided to drive the free farmer to seek protection from the thegn. His freehold was surrendered to be received back as a fief, laden with service to its lord. Gradually the "lordless man" became a sort of outlaw in the realm. The free churl sank into the villein, and changed from the freeholder who knew no superior but God and the law, to the tenant bound to do service to his lord, to follow him to the field, to look to his court for justice, and render days of service in his demesne. While he lost his older freedom he gradually lost, too, his share in the government of the state. The life of the earlier English state was gathered up in its folk-moot. There, through its representatives chosen in every hundred-moot, the folk had exercised its own sovereignty in matters of justice as of peace and war ; while beside the folk-moot, and acting with it, had stood the Witenagemot, the group of "wise men" gathered to give rede to the king and through him to propose a course of action

to the folk. The preliminary discussion rested with the nobler sort, the final decision with all. The clash of arms, the "Yea" or "Nay" of the crowd, were its vote. But when by the union of the lesser realms the folk sank into a portion of a wider state, the folk-moot sank with it; political supremacy passed to the court of the far-off lord, and the influence of the people on government came to an end. Nobles indeed could still gather round the king; and while the folk-moot passes out of political notice, the Witenagemot is heard of more and more as a royal council. It shared in the higher justice, the imposition of taxes, the making of laws, the conclusion of treaties, the control of war, the disposal of public lands, the appointment of great officers of state. There were times when it even claimed to elect or depose the king. But with these powers the bulk of the nobles had really less and less to do. The larger the kingdom the greater grew the distance from their homes; and their share in the general deliberations of the realm dwindled to nothing. Practically the national council shrank into a gathering of the great officers of Church and State with the royal thegns, and the old English democracy passed into an oligarchy of the closest kind. The only relic of the popular character of English government lay at last in the ring of citizens who at London or Winchester gathered round the wise men and shouted their "Ay" or "Nay" at the election of a king.

It is in the degradation of the class in which its true strength lay that we must look for the cause of the ruin which already hung over the West-Saxon realm. Eadgar was but thirty-two when he died in 975; and the children he left were mere boys. His death opened the way for bitter political strife among the nobles of his court, whose quarrel took the form of a dispute over the succession. Civil war was, in fact, only averted by the energy of the primate; seizing his cross, he settled the question of Eadgar's successor by the coronation of his son Eadward, and confronted his enemies successfully in two assemblies of the Wise Men. In that of Calne the floor of the room gave way, and according to monkish tradition Dunstan and his friends alone remained unhurt. But not even the fame of a miracle sufficed to turn the tide. The assassination of Eadward was followed by the triumph of Dunstan's opponents, who broke out in "great joy" at the coronation of Eadward's brother

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

Fall of
the West-
Saxon
Kingdom

Eadward
the
Martyr
975-978

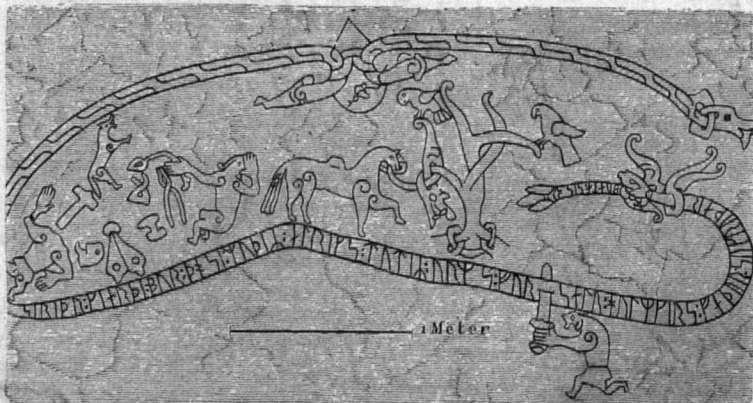
SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013
—
*Æthelred
the
Unready*
979-1016

Æthelred, a child of ten years old. The government of the realm passed into the hands of the great nobles who upheld Æthelred, and Dunstan withdrew powerless to Canterbury, where he died nine years later.

During the eleven years from 979 to 990, when the young king reached manhood, there is scarcely any internal history to record. New danger however threatened from abroad. The North was girding itself for a fresh onset on England. The Scandinavian peoples had drawn together into their kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway; and it was no longer in isolated bands but in national hosts that they were about to seek conquests in the South. The seas were again thronged with northern freebooters, and pirate fleets, as of old, appeared on the English coast. In 991 came the first burst of the storm, when a body of Norwegian Vikings landed, and



SILVER PENDANT.
Figure of woman carrying
drinking horn.
*Montelius, "Civilisation
of Sweden."*

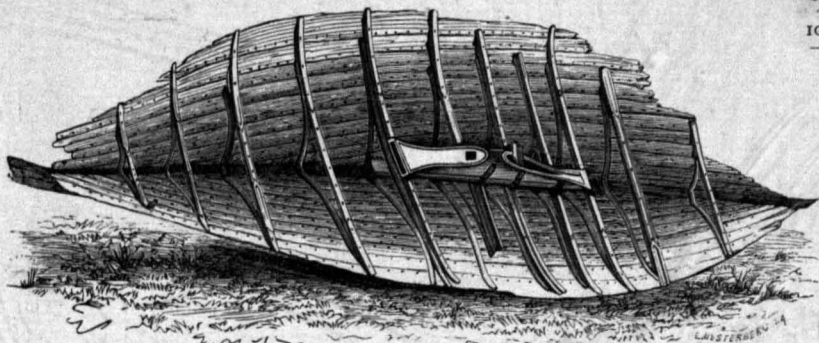


THE RAMSUNDSBERG, WEST SÖDERMANLAND, CARVED WITH SCENES FROM
SIGURD FAFNISBANE'S SAGA.
Montelius, "Civilisation of Sweden."

utterly defeated the host of East Anglia on the field of Maldon. In the next year Æthelred was forced to buy a truce from the invaders and to suffer them to settle in the land; while

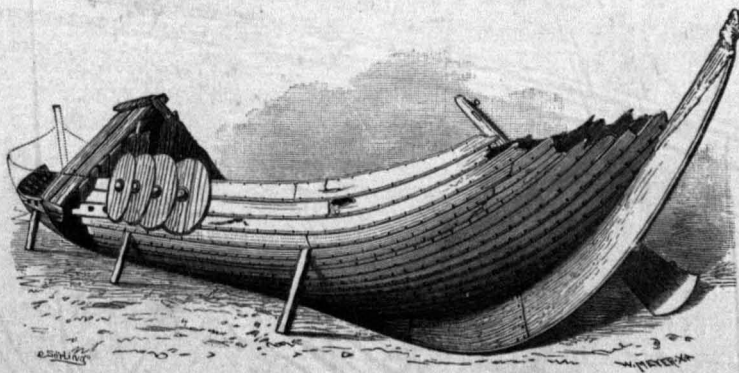
he strengthened himself by a treaty of alliance with Normandy, which was now growing into a great power over sea. A fresh

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013



OAK SHIP FROM TUNE, SOUTH NORWAY.
Montelius, "Civilization of Sweden."

attempt to expel the invaders only proved the signal for the gathering of pirate-hosts such as England had never seen before, under Swein and Olaf, claimants to the Danish and Norwegian



SHIP FROM GOKSTAD.
Montelius, "Civilization of Sweden."

thrones. Their withdrawal in 995 was followed by fresh attacks in 997; danger threatened from Normans and from Ost-men, with wikinges from Man, and northmen from Cumberland; while the

SEC. VI
THE WEST-
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

utter weakness of the realm was shown by Æthelred's taking into his service Danish mercenaries, who seem to have been quartered through Wessex as a defence against their brethren. Threatened with a new attack by Swein, who was now king, not only of Denmark, but by the defeat and death of Olaf, of Norway itself, Æthelred bound Normandy to his side by a marriage with its



NOAH'S ARK, REPRESENTED AS A DANISH SHIP.

MS. Bedl. Junius 11, c. A.D. 1000.

*Massacre
of Danes
1002*

duke's sister Emma. But a sudden panic betrayed him into an act of basest treachery which ruined his plans of defence at home. Urged by secret orders from the king, the West-Saxons rose on St. Brice's day and pitilessly massacred the Danes scattered among them. Gunhild, the sister of their king Swein, a Christian convert, and one of the hostages for the peace, saw husband and child butchered before her eyes ere she fell threatening vengeance on her murderers. Swein swore at the news to wrest England from Æthelred. For four years he marched through the length and

1003-1007

breadth of southern and eastern England, "lighting his war-beacons as he went" in blazing homestead and town. Then for a heavy bribe he withdrew, to prepare for a later and more terrible onset. But there was no rest for the realm. The fiercest of the Norwegian jarls took his place, and from Wessex the war extended over East Anglia and Mercia. Canterbury was taken and sacked, Ælfheah the Archbishop dragged to Greenwich, and there in default of ransom brutally slain. The Danes set him in the midst of their husting, pelting him with stones and ox-horns, till one more pitiful than the rest clave his skull with an axe.

But a yet more terrible attack was preparing under Swein in the North, and in 1013 his fleet entered the Humber, and called on the Danelaw to rise in his aid. Northumbria, East Anglia, the Five Boroughs, all England north of Watling Street, submitted to him at Gainsborough. Æthelred shrank into a King of Wessex, and of a Wessex helpless before the foe. Resistance was impossible. The war was terrible but short. Everywhere the country was pitilessly harried, churches plundered, men slaughtered. But with the one exception of London, there was no attempt at defence. Oxford and Winchester flung open their gates. The thegns of Wessex submitted to the northmen at Bath. Even London was forced at last to give way, and Æthelred fled over sea to a refuge in Normandy. With the flight of the king ended the long struggle of Wessex for supremacy over Britain. The task which had baffled the energies of Eadwine and Offa, and had proved too hard for the valour of Eadward and the statesmanship of Dunstan, the task of uniting England finally into a single nation, was now to pass to other hands.

SEC. VI
THE WEST
SAXON
REALM
893
TO
1013

CHAPTER II

ENGLAND UNDER FOREIGN KINGS

1013—1204

Section I.—The Danish Kings

[*Authorities.*—We are still aided by the collections of royal laws and charters. The English Chronicle is here of great importance; its various copies differ much in tone, &c., from one another, and may to some extent be regarded as distinct works. Florence of Worcester is probably the translator of a valuable copy of the Chronicle which has disappeared. For the reign of Cnut see Green's "Conquest of England." The authority of the contemporary biographer of Eadward (in Luard's "Lives of Eadward the Confessor," published by the Master of the Rolls) is "primary," says Mr. Freeman, "for all matters strictly personal to the King and the whole family of Godwine. He is, however, very distinctly not an historian, but a biographer, sometimes a laureate." All modern accounts of this reign have been superseded by the elaborate history of Mr. Freeman ("Norman Conquest," vol. ii.). For the Danish kings and the House of Godwine, see the "Conquest of England," by Mr. Green.]

The
Foreign
Rule

BRITAIN had become England in the five hundred years that followed the landing of Hengest, and its conquest had ended in the settlement of its conquerors, in their conversion to Christianity, in the birth of a national literature, of an imperfect civilization, of a rough political order. But through the whole of this earlier age every attempt to fuse the various tribes of conquerors into a single nation had failed. The effort of Northumbria to extend her rule over all England had been foiled by the resistance of Mercia; that of Mercia by the resistance of Wessex. Wessex herself, even under the guidance of great kings and statesmen, had no sooner reduced the country to a seeming unity than local independence rose again at the call of the Danes. The tide of supremacy rolled in fact backwards and forwards; now the South won lordship over

the North, now the North won lordship over the South. But whatever titles kings might assume, or however imposing their rule might appear, Northumbrian remained apart from West-Saxon, Dane from Englishman. A common national sympathy held the country roughly together, but a real national union had yet to come.

Through the two hundred years that lie between the flight of Æthelred from England to Normandy and that of John from Normandy to England our story is a story of foreign rule. Kings from Denmark were succeeded by kings from Normandy, and these by kings from Anjou. Under Dane, Norman, or Angevin, Englishmen were a subject race, conquered and ruled by foreign masters; and yet it was in these years of subjection that England first became really England. Provincial differences were crushed into national unity by the pressure of the stranger. The same pressure redressed the wrong which had been done to the fabric of national society by the degradation of the free landowner at the close of the preceding age into a feudal dependent on his lord. The English lords themselves sank into a middle class as they were pushed from their place by the foreign baronage who settled on English soil; and this change was accompanied by a gradual elevation of the class of servile and semi-servile cultivators which gradually lifted them into almost complete freedom. The middle-class which was thus created was reinforced by the upgrowth of a corresponding class in our towns. Commerce and trade were promoted by the justice and policy of the foreign kings; and with their advance rose the political importance of the trader. The boroughs of

SEC. I
—
THE
DANISH
KINGS
1013
TO
1042
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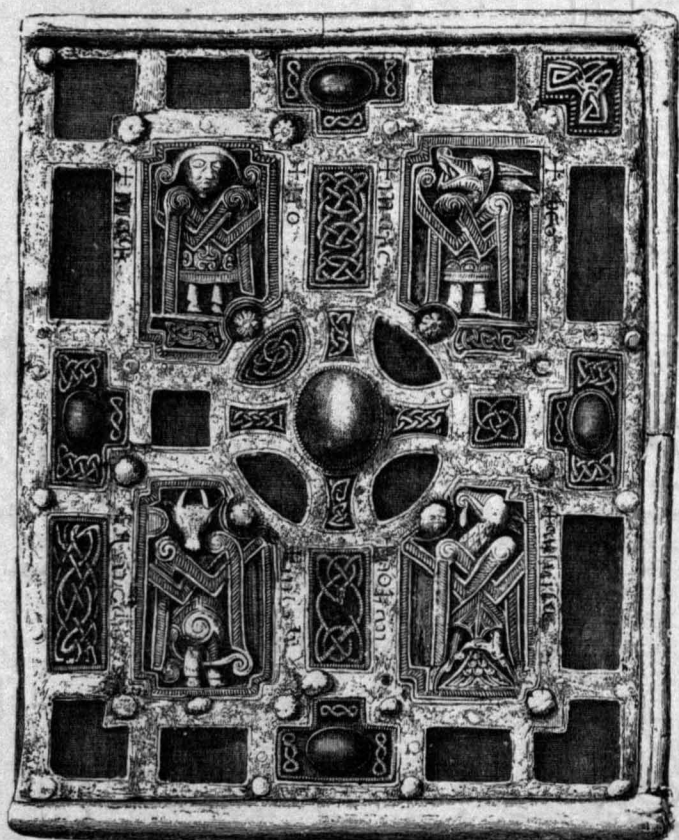
FIGURE OF CHRIST.

Eleventh Century.

MS. Cott. Claud. B. iv.

SEC. I
THE
DANISH
KINGS
1013
TO
1042

England, which at the opening of this period were for the most part mere villages, were rich enough at its close to buy liberty from the Crown. Rights of self-government, of free speech, of common deliberation, which had passed from the people at large into the

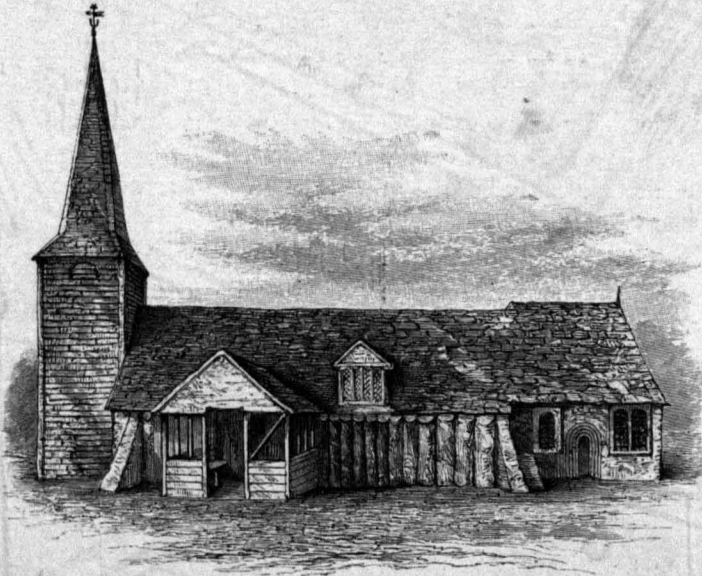


BOOK-SHRINE OR CUMDACH OF MOLAISE, A.D. 1001—1025.
Stokes, "Early Christian Art in Ireland."

hands of its nobles, revived in the charters and councils of the towns. A moral revival followed hard on this political development. The occupation of every see and abbacy by strangers who could only speak to their flocks in an unknown tongue had severed the higher clergy from the lower priesthood and the people; but

religion became a living thing as it passed to the people themselves, and hermit and friar carried spiritual life home to the heart of the nation at large. At the same time the close connexion with the Continent which foreign conquest brought about secured for England a new communion with the artistic and intellectual life of the world without her. The old mental stagnation was broken up, and art and literature covered England with great buildings and busy schools. Time for this varied progress was gained by the long peace which England owed to the firm government of her

SEC. I
—
THE
DANISH
KINGS
1013
TO
1042
—



WOODEN CHURCH, GREENSTEAD, ESSEX, A.D. 1013 (AS IT WAS IN 1748).
"Vetusta Monumenta."

kings, while their political ability gave her administrative order, and their judicial reforms built up the fabric of her law. In a word, it is to the stern discipline of these two hundred years that we owe not merely English wealth and English freedom, but England itself.

The first of our foreign masters was the Dane. The countries of Scandinavia which had so long been the mere starting-points of the pirate-bands who had ravaged England and Ireland had now

Our
Danish
Kings

SEC. I
THE
DANISH
KINGS
1013
TO
1042

settled down into comparative order. It was the aim of Swein to unite them in a great Scandinavian Empire, of which England should be the head ; and this project, interrupted for a time by his death, was resumed with yet greater vigour by his son Cnut, Fear of the Dane was still great in the land, and Cnut had no sooner appeared off the English coast than Wessex, Mercia, and



COIN OF CNUT.

Northumberland joined in owning him for their lord, and in discarding again the rule of Æthelred, who had returned on the death of Swein. When Æthelred's death in 1016 raised his son Eadmund Ironside to the throne, the loyalty of London

Cnut

enabled him to struggle bravely for a few months against the Danes ; but a decisive victory at Assandun and the death of his rival left Cnut master of the realm. Conqueror as he was, the Dane was no foreigner in the sense that the Norman was a foreigner after him. His language differed little from the English tongue. He brought in no new system of tenure or government. Cnut ruled, in fact, not as a foreign conqueror but as a native king. The goodwill and tranquillity of England were necessary for the success of his larger schemes in the north, where the arms of his English subjects aided him in later years in uniting Denmark and Norway beneath his sway. Dismissing therefore his Danish "host," and retaining only a trained body of household troops or hus-carls to serve in sudden emergencies, Cnut boldly relied for support within his realm on the justice and good government he secured it. His aim

1016-1035

during twenty years seems to have been to obliterate from men's minds the foreign character of his rule, and the bloodshed in which it had begun. The change in himself was as startling as the change in his policy. When he first appears in England, it is as the mere northman, passionate, revengeful, uniting the guile of the savage with his thirst for blood. His first acts of government were a series of murders. Eadric of Mercia, whose aid had given him the crown, was felled by an axe-blow at the King's signal ; a murder removed Eadwig, the brother of Eadmund Ironside, while the children of Eadmund were hunted even into Hungary by his ruthless hate. But from a savage such as this Cnut rose suddenly