THE KINGDOM OF KENT

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It ill beseems one who has but a general knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, to venture on a discourse concerning the particular history of the kingdom of Kent, in the face of local specialists, who may have made a detailed study of its rise and its disappearance. My only excuse is that I have been prayed to do so by more than one member of our Society, and that the notes which I have prepared may perhaps be useful to the tribe of visitors, even if they contain nothing new for Kentishmen—or men of Kent.

To begin then—we have, I think, got beyond the age of scepticism, which threw doubts alike on Gildas, the Venerable Bede, and the early annals of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It is no longer fashionable to declare that we can say nothing certain about Old English origins, and that all before the coming of Augustine is nebulous and untrustworthy. On the other hand we have also outlived the period when too ingenious reconstructions, mainly resting on supposed topographical necessities, and strategical possibilities, were in vogue. Green's 'Making of England' and Major Godsal's 'Conquest of the Thames Valley' are as out of date as many preceding books, which hovered between negation and hypothesis.

I think that it is now agreed that we may accept in a general way the outline of the first permanent settlement of the English invaders in Britain, as it is given us by Gildas, the only original authority who wrote within a century of the lurid events which he describes—or perhaps one should rather say on which he preaches and comments in his own special bombastic style.

Saxon raids on Britain had been known as long as a century and a half before the era of conquest begun. As early as 285, in the time of Diocletian and Maximian, the Saxons and Franks in conjunction had been making the North Sea

and the Channel so unsafe, that the emperors had to appoint a special commander to deal with their piratical fleets. This was that Carausius, who, after sweeping Frank and Saxon from the water, lapsed into open rebellion, declared himself emperor and ruled successfully as a sea-king for seven years—apparently with the full approval both of the British provincials and of the fleet and army. His work may have been complete for a time, but the Saxon nuisance became recrudescent in the middle of the fourth century, when we find that an officer had been appointed with the title of *Comes Littoris Saxonici*, who had charge of a string of coast-garrisons on each side of the Channel, and of a fleet based thereon. On the English side the string of forts stretched from Norfolk to Sussex—perhaps to Hampshire, and Richborough was its central place of strength and arsenal,where was garrisoned the only legion under command of the Count. There was a corresponding but shorter line on the Gallic side of the water. The garrisons are fully set out in the precious *Notitia Dignitatum*, which gives us the organisation of the Empire in the time of the dynasty of Theodosius.

It was not till the fourth century had passed its central year that we get once more a definite notice of the recommencement of Saxon raids : the earlier enemies of the Britons were the Picts and Scots, and it is not till 364 that we read of a new Saxon raid, in which Nectarides, the 'Count of the Saxon Shore' was slain.[1] Once more there was a rally of the Roman forces, and Count Theodosius, father of the emperor of the same name, swept the seas, and inflicted such loss on the raiders, that, as Claudian sings, ' the Orkneys dripped with the blood of the routed Saxon.'[2] But the respite was temporary, and by the end of the century the Saxons were again to the fore, and ' pale Britannia was watching all her line of shore for the pirates who might arrive at any shift of the wind.'[3] Raiding on the east coast indeed never ceased for decade after decade. It is surprising to find that the epoch of settlement did not begin till thirty years after the last Roman officials had been withdrawn or displaced in 410, and the British province had been

[1] Ammianus Marcellinus, XXVII, viii.
[2] Claudian, In Quartum Consulatum Honorii, 31 etc.
[3] Claudian, In primum Consulatum Stilichonis ii, 247.

enjoying the doubtful privilege of self-government under its own magistrates and kings.

Of the woes of Britain, as told by the querulous Gildas, Pictish and Scottish raids were for some time the most pressing affliction; the Saxons, though often mentioned, seem to take the secondary place—though they are stated to have been assisting the Picts when invasion was stayed for a moment by St. Germanus's 'Hallelujah Victory' in 429. And therefore, I suppose, it was not unnatural that Vortigern —whose existence and name we may fully accept—thought it a feasible expedient to hire the famous war-band of Hengist—to make terms with the lesser evil of the two—when a specially dangerous Pictish invasion was threatening in or about the year 447. Hengist, I think, we may reasonably accept as a real personage, no less than Vortigern —he is not only to be found in Bede and 'Nennius' and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle—all latish authorities for events of the fifth century—but also in the 'Ravenna Geographer,' who is a century nearer to the time of the invasion, and says that 'the race of the Saxons, coming from Old Saxony under their prince Anschis, settled in the isle of Britain some time back.' As to his brother and colleague Horsa, I must confess that I still feel qualms of disbelief: the juxtaposition of 'Stallion' and 'Horse,' for the names of these two kinsmen is odd. It has been pointed out that we can quote from the old poem of Beowulf two other brothers whose names were Boar and Wolf, and it has been suggested by Mr. Chadwick (a great specialist) that Hengist and Horsa may conceivably have been popular nicknames bestowed on two great chiefs by their admiring followers—like Ironsides, the Lion of the North, or Coeur de Lion, in later generations.[1] But still the juxtaposition is rather hard to swallow.

The most curious thing however about Hengist, is that, although Gildas and all the Celtic authorities speak of him as a Saxon, he was not really a Saxon at all. The Britons called all their Teutonic enemies by that name, not distinguishing one tribe from another, just as the Saracens called all crusaders 'Franks,' six hundred years later. But undoubtedly Hengist was no Saxon, but a Jute, as Bede very clearly explains to us[2]: and that not only he but his

[1] Chadwick's *Origin of the English Nation*, p 45.

[2] Bede *E.H.* I, 16.

war-band were not Saxons of the same race as those who settled on the Thames or the Sussex coast, is sufficiently proved to us by the fact that our archaeological excavations have proved that the weapons, jewellery, ornaments, pottery, etc., found in the early Teutonic graves of Kent are decidedly different in character from those that are dug up in the Saxon burial grounds of the Thames valley, Essex, or the South Midlands. There is only one other small region in England where similar stuff is to be found—viz. the Isle of Wight and the narrow slip of Hampshire coast facing it, and this is exactly what we should expect from the written authorities: for Bede explains to us that Wight was settled by an outlying small band of Jutes, who were not subdued by the West Saxons till the seventh century.[1] Undoubtedly, then, the ground-stock of the Kentish race was not the same as that of their neighbours in Essex or Sussex, and their only close kinsmen were the settlers in Wight and South Hampshire.

Who were the Jutes? The problem has led to much controversy. Probably they were identical with the small tribe of the 'Eudoses,' whom Tacitus, writing in about A D. 100, names, along with six other tribes, as dwelling somewhere in the Danish peninsula or the adjacent isles, along with the Angles (destined to a much greater fame!) the Varni and others. As the Varni and the Angles were certainly settled below the neck of the Danish Peninsula, we need not doubt that the Jutes were in Jutland also as early as the time of Tacitus. And they were still there in the fifth century, when King Vortigern hired Hengist. The chronicler Ethelweard was undoubtedly right when he said that the Kentish men and Wight folk drew their origin from the 'Gioti,' and that the Angles dwelt between the Saxons and these Gioti.[2] Unfortunately Gioti or Juti occasionally got muddled with the name of the 'Geatas', the much more famous Goths, who dwelt across the Sound in the south of Sweden. But this was a pure blunder—Kent had nothing to do with the Goths. Its people came from those Jutes whose remnant, which did not emigrate, was afterwards conquered by and amalgamated with the Danes.

[1] Bede *E.H.* IV, xvi.

[2] Ethelweard, I, § i.

Hengist was originally an exiled prince with a following of no more than three ships-crews of his fellow tribesmen. But when he had served his first successful campaign against the Picts, in the service of Vortigern, and had got his grant of land in Thanet, he invited many others of his race to join him. That the blood of the original settlers in Kent was predominantly Jutish, is (as I said before) sufficiently proved by the contents of their grave-yards. But there is no reason to doubt that there must have been a certain percentage of Saxons, and perhaps of other Teutonic neighbours also, among the war-bands of Hengist. Pirate adventurers cannot be particular as to genealogies when filling their ranks. And all these original invaders of England were neighbours on the other side of the North Sea, and had kingly houses which traced back their origin to the same heroic ancestor, the god Woden.

We have both in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and in 'Nennius' very full accounts of the conquest of Kent by Hengist, after he had broken with his employer King Vortigern, and had called in all manner of adventurers from his native land to strengthen his ranks. The battles, more or less accurately recorded, are all in the borders of Kent itself, and the furthest indicated limit of his conquests is that, in 457, we are told that the defeated Britons 'forsook Kent and fled in fear to London.' But there is no mention of a capture of London—though the chronicler a few years later makes special mention of the sack of Pevensey (Anderida), a much less important place. And as London, when first we hear its name again, is found to be in the kingdom of the East Saxons, and Surrey 'the southern region' must evidently have got its name from conquerors coming from the *North*—i.e. Essex Saxons no doubt—we must conclude that the conquests of Hengist did not reach beyond the modern boundaries of Kent.

Hengist set the example of conquest and settlement, but in the next generation it was Saxon and not Jutish adventurers who extended the limits of invasion. We have no surviving legend of any exploits of his immediate successors, of Oisc[1] or Eormenric, and the confused narratives in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of the extension of the Teutonic

[1] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle makes Oisc the son of Hengist; Bede and 'Nennius' inserts a generation between them and a king called Octha.

raids centre round the names of Ella, the founder of the Kingdom of Sussex, and the very shadowy Cerdic, the ancestor of the West Saxon kings. It is improbable that the advance was made by isolated bands each impinging on one small point of British territory, as Green and his followers taught, and much more likely that the invasion was made by many bands co-operating together for a single end. As we should gather from Gildas, the first continuous wave of conquest swept up far into central Britain, to be finally checked for fifty years at that mysterious battle of Mount Badon, in or about 516.[1] That fight is connected not with the name of the real Roman-British hero Aurelius Ambrosius, but with the dim and half-mythical Arthur, whom Welsh legend honoured so much more than the prince who, as the almost contemporary Gildas tells the tale, was the true saviour of West Britain. That all the Teutonic invaders were for some generations working together in a general way, is shown by the fact that kings whose war-bands must have been but a small part of the combined host, are named by Bede (and the A.S.C.) as ' Bretwaldas ' supreme chiefs over all the confederates. Ellas' own war-band only sufficed to settle the small and narrow realm of Sussex, and Ceawlin, the second Bretwalda, must have been leader of a very moderate following of settlers in Berkshire and the central Thames valley, before he made those conquests which overran the lands about Chiltern, from Eynsham to the Aylesbury region on one side, and the Gloucestershire vales and wolds on the other.

We have no record of anything that happened in Kent between the days of Hengist and those of his great-grandson Ethelbert, the son of Eormenric. Nor can we tell how far the Jutes of the Kentish settlement were co-operating with the Saxons in the great western advance which was checked for a time at Mount Badon. One thing is certain, however, that in the obscure first hundred years after the landing of Hengist the Kentish folk coalesced into an ordered state, wholly distinct from their Saxon neighbours in Essex, Middlesex, and Sussex, and so far civilised that they required a formal code of laws suited for their social organization, which King Ethelbert in his later years drew up for them,

[1] Though Bede (*L.H.* I, xvi) gets it as early as 500.

and which has fortunately survived, to give us a glimpse of the condition of the little kingdom about the year 610.

Ethelbert himself was evidently a man of mark, to be remembered by us not only as the first Christian English king, but as the only really dominant personality produced by the long-lived and much ramified house of Hengist. Third among the supreme-chiefs to whom later ages gave the name of Bretwalda, he appears as a man of war from his youth up. His first recorded act was opposition to the rising power of the West-Saxon Ceawlin, with whom he fought at Wibbandun, apparently our modern suburban Wimbledon, in 568, and was well beaten by him, and thrust back into his own kingdom. This was before Ceawlin's great conquests in the Midlands and the West, when he was still a comparatively unimportant personage. It is certain that as a consequence of the battle of Wimbledon Ethelbert must have become a subject ally of Ceawlin, as did the other Teutonic kings of Essex, Sussex, and East-Anglia—otherwise Bede would never have styled the West Saxon a Bretwalda, ' Emperor over all the southern realms that are divided from the northern by the river Humber.' And so Kentish bands may have acted as auxiliaries in all Ceawlin's later wide-spreading conquests.

Ceawlin's career came to a sudden, and to us a most puzzling end in 590, when after thirty years of successful rule, and only one recorded disaster at the battle of Fethanleah, he fled before a rising of his own subjects, who had set up his nephew Ceolric as a pretender, probably aided by a general defection of his allies and vassals. Whoever was the victor at the ' great slaughter at Woddesbeorg ' (probably Wanborough in Wilts) Ethelbert was the prince who profited by it. For the West-Saxon realm lapsed into endemic civil strife, and the king of Kent emerged as the predominant figure in South Britain. Almost immediately after Ceawlin's fall we find Ethelbert acknowledged as the supreme king in South Britain, and not only the West Saxons, but the kings of Sussex, Essex, and East Anglia, are found as his vassals. Probably this predominance must have been the result of several forgotten campaigns—for when a tyrant falls, and his empire breaks up, it is not by peaceful methods that a successor for him is found.

But undoubtedly when St. Augustine landed in Thanet

in 597, Ethelbert was supreme all over South Britain, so that it was not merely the good graces of a local king that were conferred on the Apostle of England, but those of one holding imperial power over many regions. Into the details of Ethelbert's conversion and the consequences I do not wish to go—they are recorded in every manual of English church history. What is interesting to us, as students of the 'Kingdom of Kent' is the material that we can discover not only in Bede's history, but in Ethelbert's laws, as to the existing state of the realm. The document dates from a few years after the king's conversion to Christianity—perhaps the idea of drawing it up was suggested by the missionaries, for Bede quaintly puts it that 'he introduced judicial decrees after the Roman model, which being written down in English are still kept and observed in Kent.'[1] But certainly the form and contents of this little law-book would have surprised a Roman lawyer. It was supplemented at a distance of two and three generations respectively by other Kentish laws issued by Ethelbert's descendants, Eadric, Lothere, and Wihtraed.

Like other early Teutonic codes the Kentish laws deal mainly with the fines to be imposed for the various degrees of breach of the peace, from homicide downwards, and are largely devoted to setting forth the precise compensation due for injury to members of every social stratum in the kingdom. Class-consciousness, to use the modern phrase, is their most prominent feature. And it is owing to this fact that we can arrive at an accurate idea of the state of the people of Kent a hundred and fifty years after Hengist's day. The fundamental point about Ethelbert's laws is that they divide the inhabitants of the kingdom into three classes, *eorls*, *ceorls*, and *laets*—nobles, freemen, and tributary dependents—with below them slaves, who stand apart in the reckoning. The partition resembles closely that found in Continental early codes, such as those of the Frisians, the Old Saxons, and the Thoringians. But it differs widely from that of old Frankish law, which shows much greater importance for the royal dependents as distinct from other persons of free status. There is less trace of birth-nobility as opposed to privilege conferred by

[1] Bede *E.H.* II, v.

service to the king in Frankish than in Old English, Frisian or Old Saxon legislation. The king's favour rather than ancestral descent was the all important thing across the Straits of Dover.

Who were the eorls, the *nobiles*, in early Kent ? A suggestion has sometimes been made that all the nobles of a primitive English kingdom may have derived from the royal stock, of which they might represent younger branches. But though it may be granted that some of the royal houses, especially in Wessex and Northumbria, had countless ramifications, it is difficult to believe that in 600 they were the only ' eorl kin '. Bede, our best authority, is careful to distinguish between mere ' nobiles ' and ' viri de regio genere ' —both are freely mentioned. The undoubted explanation is that many adventurers of noble blood had formed part of the war-bands of the original leaders of the invasion-time, and that more had come in with the approval of the king during the wars of conquest. When the state settled down, they retained their pride and privilege of birth.

The other notable feature in early English law is that the family group, the kin, appears as an important feature in all legislation. The individual, eorl or ceorl, is not a mere subject of the king, he is a member of a kindred, organised in a joint association for mutual protection, and liable also to take responsibility for the acts of any of its component personages. The kin was a real thing, very jealously guarded by those who, by reason of their birth, had a right to belong to it.

How did these important family-groups come into existence in a state which must have been founded originally by a pirate chief and his war-band ? We should have supposed that such a body would naturally have been comprised of broken men of many families, only connected by common allegiance to their leader. The only explanation would seem to be that the original war-bands must have been composed, to a greater extent than might have been expected, of members of certain kindreds and families, and that when a new settlement was being filled up, the king finding his war-band but a slender number, invited over whole groups of kinsmen from across the North Sea. This seems to be quite probable both for the Jutes and for the Angles, for (unlike the Saxons) they were but small tribes

in their native land, and they emigrated on such a scale that their old homes were left almost desolate—it is said that Angeln in Schleswig was left absolutely waste,[1] and the Jutes of Jutland were entirely absorbed by the Danes, who occupied their land after the great emigration.

An early English kingdom then represented a whole section of an old overseas tribe, eorl and ceorl, and royal house too. And this probably is how the third class of freemen comes to exist, who are neither noble born, nor land-holding yeomen, the *laets*, who were not slaves by any means, but the tributary dependants of the landholding class. Here a problem at once crops up—are these people the descendants of the old British-Roman peasantry, taken over, along with the lands which they cultivated, by the Teutonic conqueror? This looks an easy explanation, and Gildas in his lurid description of the conquest of Britain speaks of a remnant who surrendered on condition that they should not be slain, but should serve for ever.[2] It is tempting to recognise in the *laets* of Ethelbert's laws the descendants of the old provincials. But it must be remembered that *laets*, or *lazzi*, are to be found in the laws of the Frisians and the Old Saxons, who inhabited countries which had never been Roman provinces, and if the surviving British population in Kent or Essex had been large, it is hard to explain how the Latin language perished, and did not, as in the neighbouring Gaul, survive and ultimately conquer its conquerors. It is also difficult to believe that, if there had been a large survival of the Roman-British peasantry, Christianity should have perished out entirely. Yet the narrative of Augustine's mission to Kent implies that he found no pre-existing Christian population, and that Bertha the Frankish queen of Ethelbert and her household were the only baptised persons in Kent. It is true that Augustine got leave from the king not only to build new places of worship, but to repair old Christian churches where he found them. Also that Bertha and her retinue were wont to use the old Roman church of St. Martin on the east side of the city, which was still standing.[3]

But the whole tenour of Bede's story implies that the other churches which Augustine was authorised to rebuild

[1] Bede, *E.H.* I, xv and Ethelweard, I, 1.
[2] Gildas, I, § 25.
[3] Bede *E.H.* I, xxvi.

were ruins, not live churches with congregations composed of British *laets* and served by surviving provincial clergy. There is no hint whatever of such a Christian population. Are we then to conclude that the remnant of the Romano-Britons had relapsed into paganism ? or must we go still further, and doubt whether the Kentish *laet* was a Briton at all, and account for him as an immigrant from overseas, where his class certainly existed, along with the eorls and ceorls of the same tribe ? The problem presents difficulties whichever way we lean. Certainly Kent was not in Ethelbert's day like the Wessex of 90 years later, when the laws of Ine, the next great code, speak freely of the *Wealhs* (Welsh) who were the king's tributary subjects.

What was the political organisation under which the king of Kent administered his subjects, eorl and ceorl, laet and slave ? The only definite body of which we get frequent mention is the council of wise men, the Witan. Ethelbert is distinctly said to have revised his laws with their aid, and the legislation of his descendant Wihtraed is prefaced by a statement about the advisory assembly of great men which met at Bersted, ' wherein spoke every rank of churchman in unison with the loyal folk.' The great men enacted the code ' with the assent of all.' But whether the ' loyal folk ' meant a gathering of all freemen, and whether the laws were formally submitted to them is more than doubtful, I fear.

Of what personages did a Kentish Witan consist ? Naturally the king presided—his son or nephew (sometimes already crowned as his colleague and designated successor) was present—always the Archbishop of Canterbury and the bishop of Rochester—with an important abbot or two on occasion. In the larger kingdoms there were considerable numbers of these provincial governors whom early centuries called *ealdormen*, and later centuries *earls*. But in Kent there never seem to have been more than two, and sometimes possibly none: for some charters show a single *dux* or *princeps* signing after the ecclesiastics and others none. Probably these *aldermen* were administrators respectively of Kent east and west of Medway. A rather celebrated earl Oswulf in 798 describes himself as ' dux atque princeps provinciae orientalis Cantiae '.[1] When Ethelred was defeated

[1] Birch, *Cartularium Saxonium*, 322.

by Ceawlin at Wimbledon in 568 we hear that both his aldermen Oslaf and Cnebba were slain—the same chance happened to the two aldermen of Kent in 902, the days of Edward the Elder, Siwulf and Sighere, who perished together at the battle of the Holm. But so many charters are destitute of any name of an alderman, that we are constrained to believe that they were not always in existence. This must specially have been likely when Kent, as happened several times in the seventh and eighth century, was divided between two kings. Such sectional monarchs would not have need of a deputy such as the alderman would have been.

In addition to the royal family, the ecclesiastics, and the occasional aldermen, the Witan consisted of a number of persons of minor rank, mainly royal officials. Sometimes they sign a charter with no affix stating their condition appended to their names: sometimes many of them call themselves *comites*, or *ministri*, occasionally *praefecti* or *praepositi*. All those with such designation would be members of the royal household in its largest sense: the *comites* and *ministri* seem to differ from each other in importance, the former being regular members of the household already endowed with an estate, and the latter younger men admitted to the retinue, employed as officials, but not yet landholders by their master's bounty. In the latest Kentish code, that of Wihtraed, the term 'King's Thegn,' so familiar in later centuries, has come in; but it does not occur in Ethelred's laws. The *praefectus* or *praepositus* was undoubtedly a *reeve*, as we should gather from many passages in Bede, i.e. a royal official put in charge of a local sector of the king's estate, either a town such as Canterbury or Rochester, or a large unit containing many villages. From phrases in Kentish charters it seems likely that these reeves ultimately came to be in charge of the whole kingdom in its six districts, which in Domesday book appear as the six *Lests* of Kent, Sturry, Eastry, Aylesford, Sutton, Lynward and Wyward. The last two rather cryptic names are derived from Wye and Lymne, the royal manors which were their official centres. We have one mention of a *praepositus* of the *villa regalis*, which I suppose would be Canterbury.[1] But whether he would be subject to the reeve of the whole surrounding district, the *lest* of

[1] Birch, *Cart. Sax.*, 319.

Eastry I should doubt. Presumably the reeves of the six lests would have been under the charge of the two aldermen of East and West Kent, when those magnates were in existence.

Before the reeve of each section, the judicial work of the district would be carried on at regular fixed days—the session of his court was theoretically that of a royal judge—and there were fines prescribed for those who disturbed the *methel*, as the meeting was called in Kent. If we may judge from the laws of Ethelbert and his successors a very great part of the business consisted in estimating damages, or weregelds, for all possible offences of violence, from taking away a man's life to beating his slave, or stealing his sheep.

After the death of Ethelbert in 616—he had reigned no less than 53 years—Kent never again produced a monarch who asserted such a prominent position among the Teutonic kingdoms. The time had just arrived when greater states than Kent were being formed, by the union into one of the two Northumbrian kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, and the subjection of all the Midlands to the Mercian kings—once the rulers of a small state extending over no more than four modern counties. But any chance that the Kentish dynasty might have preserved a dominant position for some time after Ethelred's death, was certainly made impossible by the personality of his son and successor Eadbald, who seems to have been a man of unrestrained passions and subject to epileptic fits. He was 'racked with frequent accesses of madness', says Bede 'and possessed by an evil spirit'.[1] After his very tardy conversion to Christianity his behaviour is said to have improved, but he was never a commanding figure in inter-state politics, though we find him as the ally and supporter of Edwin of Northumbria, the most dominant personage during the period that was now come, and giving him his sister Ethelberga in marriage. After this Kent supplied many Christian wives to other newly converted kings, and was also famous for many royal nuns—the foundresses of monasteries.

But from 620 to 820 we have a period of two hundred years in which the rivalry of Northumbria and Mercia and Wessex was the main fact in English history. And when Northumbria (after producing the three great Bretwaldas,

[1] Bede *E.H.* II, v.

Edwin, Oswald, and Oswy) lapsed into decay, the great Mercian kingdom was normally dominant, Wessex putting up an intermittent opposition only. The only intervals in its predominance came when one great Mercian king died, and his vassals lapsed into insurrection and tried to prevent the restoration of the supremacy by his successor. Again and again we find kings of Kent throwing off the yoke, and trying to utilise the interregnum between one great Mercian lord and another by re-establishing their local independence. The result was always disastrous. When in 675 king Wulfhere died, the Kentish king Lothere leagued himself with the Northumbrians, only to see Ethelred (Wulfhere's successor) cruelly ravage his whole kingdom and burn many monasteries and the city of Rochester. Apparently this disaster drove the Kentishmen to submission to Mercia, for the moment. But very shortly after they were subjected to equally rough treatment from another neighbour. Ceadwalla, king of Wessex, a very bloodthirsty usurper, was Ethelred's most dangerous enemy. He fell upon Sussex and Kent, both of which were too weak to withstand him, and made dreadful havoc of them both—besides conquering and almost exterminating the small colony of Jutes which still inhabited the Isle of Wight. The internal condition of Kent at the moment was favourable for invasion. Lothere the king had quarrelled with his nephew and accepted colleague, Eadric, and drove him out of his section. The younger king raised a band of adventurers in Sussex, and came against his uncle, who was mortally wounded in battle. Eadric was therefore recognised as sole ruler in Kent, but endured for only a year (685–6), being overthrown by Ceadwalla of Wessex who swooped down on the smaller kingdom and overran it. Eadric died during the campaign—we are not told either by Bede or by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that he was killed in action—though we should have thought it highly probable. Bede, however, after mentioning that Lothere had been mortally wounded in battle only two lines back, does *not* give any detail as to Eadric's end.[1] Anyhow Kent was at Ceadwalla's mercy, and being as we judge a person of drastic and unbalanced disposition, he took the unwise step of forcing the Witan to elect his own brother king—an experiment that was always unsuccessful in the

[1] Bede *E.H.* IV, xxvi.

old English kingdoms, for intruders were always disliked. We shall see later examples of this. This brother's name is said to have been 'Mul'—and I saw the tomb of 'Rex Mulus' so marked in the ruins of St. Augustine's. But it seems more likely that this was a nickname — meaning the half and half-bred man—Ceadwalla's own name is pure Welsh, and it seems most probable that they both had a Welsh mother. Be this as it may—when Ceadwalla had gone home the Kentishmen rose in insurrection, and Mul with twelve of his thegus was burned alive—presumably in some palace or stronghold in which they tried to defend themselves. Ceadwalla was soon back in arms to avenge his brother—he ravaged Kent from end to end—and then his devastating career came to a sudden close. We read to our surprise that on some sudden impulse he threw down his sword and crown, after he had been reigning less than three years, went to Rome as a pilgrim, and died only a few weeks after his arrival there, just after Easter 688, aged only 30.

After the death of this spasmodic and inexplicable person, there seems to have been chaos in Kent for a short time—Bede says that the land had 'dubii vel externi reges'—the first of these had certainly been 'Mul'—the second was apparently one Swebheard son of a king of Essex—how he came to establish himself in Kent we have no notion—who contended with the rightful heir Wihtraed the brother of the late king Eadric. Apparently they came to some sort of an agreement in the end—perhaps by the compulsion of Ine the successor of Ceadwalla as King of Wessex. For in 694 we read that Ine made peace with the men of Kent, after they had agreed to pay 30,000 'shillings' of 16 pence each for the death of his kinsman King Mul.[1] This marks vassalage to Wessex undoubtedly for a time, Wihtraed and Swebheard sign charters together, so were obviously in concord. Probably Ine imposed a divided kingship in order to keep the kingdom weak. But after a time Wihtraed alone appears ruling—he reigned for more than twenty years, and was the author of the last addition to the Kentish legal code. With the reign of Wihtraed's successors (725–748) there begins for us a period of darkness in the

[1] Ethelweard I, x.

history of Kent which lasts for well-nigh two generations—when history has to be picked up piecemeal out of charters. For the great historian Bede died in 734, and the people who compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the time of King Alfred had much interest in the doings of Wessex, but very little in those of Kent. It has been truly said that we have two great lights for Anglo-Saxon history—the one from Bede's Ecclesiastical History, which ends in 728, a few years before his death in 734. The other comes from the activities of King Alfred, who had the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle compiled, among other and numerous literary activities. The memory of Alfred and his scribes went back for the better part of a century before their own time—roughly to about the year 800. But between 728 and 800 there is a very dark period—we have only the outlines of Wessex, Mercian and Northumbrian history. For the smaller kingdoms there is almost a blank—the annals of the kings of East Anglia are absolutely lost—those of Essex and Kent are most imperfectly known. We have kings signing charters, or occasionally striking coins, of whom written history has nothing to tell us.

One of the last entries in Bede's history is to record that on Wihtraed's death his kingdom went to his sons Ethelbert and Eadbert, but whether they parted the realm into two halves or reigned conjointly over both is not clear. The fact that a charter given by Eadbert required confirmation from Ethelbert looks as if the former was under-king, and could not give away land without his brother's consent.[1] But in the next generation there was an absolute division of territory, presumably into West Kent and East Kent. For when Eardwulf, son of Eadbert, reigned along with Sigered (probably son of Ethelbert) the latter described himself in charters as *rex dimidiae portionis provinciae Cantuariorum* king of one half of Kent. After 764 matters became hopelessly complicated: either the kingdom was still further divided, or else there was a very rapid succession of kings in two separate branches. Charters are signed by Eanmund and Heahbert, Ecgbert II and Ethelbert II, Eadmund, and Ealhmund, all calling themselves kings, and sometimes mentioning each other as colleagues, for example

[1] *Birch. Cart.* 159.

Heahbert confirms a grant of Ecgbert,[1] whom he calls a *subregulus* or underking.[2]

It is probable that all these ephemeral sovereigns were more or less vassals of the two great Mercian kings Ethelbald and Offa, whose long reigns extend from 716 to 796. The submission may have been intermittent and requiring to be enforced by rough means on occasion—we know for example that Offa had to put down the Kentishmen by a battle at Otford near Sevenoaks in 774, though Ecgbert of Kent had been signing his suzerain's charters as a vassal in 771. After this Kent seems to have made no attempt to stir again as long as Offa lived—probably he played off one half-king against another at pleasure. He confirms their charters as a matter of course, sometimes he makes grants of land in Kent without any reference to the right of the local king. It looks as if in the end of his reign he dispensed with them altogether—the name of none can be discovered after 790, and a mysterious entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that the Kentish men were unjustly forced from their royal kin—as were those of Essex and Sussex.[3]

At any rate there was immediately on the death of Offa in 796—he had reigned no less than 50 years—a fierce outbreak for independence in Kent—a certain Eadbert (nicknamed Praen) was elected king—he is said to have been an apostate monk—perhaps therefore some royal prince whom Offa had forced into a monastery.[4] Coenwulf, the new king of Mercia, was vexed with a Welsh war in his first two years, but in his third he turned to subdue Kent, beat Eadbert in battle, and wasted the whole land 'paene ad internecionen.' Eadbert after hiding for some time in Romney Marsh was captured. The victor put out his captive's eyes, and cut off his ears and hands—an atrocity for which there is hardly a parallel in the old English history. He then sent him to die in a monastery in Worcestershire. Coenwulf then proclaimed himself as king of Kent,

[1] *Birch. Cart.* 196.

[2] For an interesting excursus on these obscure Kings see Sir Henry Howorth's article in *Numismatic Chronicle* for 1908, which tries to sort out these kings on the evidence of coins. He holds that Ecgbert was the son of Ealhmund, and king after him in some part of Kent, before he went into exile, to return as King of Wessex. The great difficulty in this period is that some charters are spurious, and we have to be careful in accepting evidence till the charter containing it has been tested. On this see Sir Henry Howorth *passim*.

[3] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, *sub anno* 823.

[4] Pope Leo III in a letter to Coenwulf promises to excommunicate Eadbert as a *clericus apostata qui ascendit in regnum* Haddon and Stubbs, iii, p. 524.

but immediately handed over the title and crown to his brother Cuthred, who reigned as his obedient vassal from 798 till his death in 805. When Cuthred died Coenwulf replaced him by an obscure person named Baldred, who reigned from 705 to 723. He was apparently a Mercian also, and perhaps a member of the Mercian royal family. But of him, as of his predecessor Cuthred, we know practically nothing, save their interesting and rather well executed coins.

The Mercian oppression of Kent endured for all the reign of Coenwulf, the last capable man of the great Midland dynasty, but ended with his death in 821, and the accession of his unlucky brother Ceolwulf, under whom the supremacy of the Mercians came to a sudden end. He was elderly and apparently incapable—his own subjects revolted against him, and most of his vassals also—certainly Ecgbert of Wessex and the East Anglians. After two years of civil war he was defeated and banished, and an ambitious atheling named Beornwulf seized the throne. In Beornwulf's third year he was defeated at Ellandun in Wiltshire by Ecgbert of Wessex, and not many months later slain in battle by the revolted East Anglians.

Immediately after his victory at Ellandun, Ecgbert of Wessex sent an army into Kent, commanded by his eldest son Ethelwulf and by Ealhstan bishop of Sherborne—the first fighting bishop in English history. The expedition was completely successful: Baldred the intrusive Mercian king fled away from Canterbury, and Archbishop Wulfred, a consistent enemy of the Mercian supremacy, led the whole of the Kentish people to accept Ecgbert as overlord. How came this easy acceptance? Apparently its cause was that the king of Wessex had the Kentish royal blood in him: his father Ealhmund was apparently identical with the *subregulus* who had been reigning in part of Kent before 790. How this had come to pass we do not know—Ealhmund's wife or mother may have been a Kentish princess. At any rate the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that the Kentishmen submitted willingly to him 'because they had been unjustly forced from his kin.' To indulge provincial patriotism Ecgbert caused his son Ethelwulf to be elected king of Kent, where he ruled under his father, apparently with success, for fifteen years.

And it seemed likely that Kent might continue to be used as a sub-kingdom for the younger scions of the Wessex house, for when Ethelwulf succeeded his father in 839 he passed on the Kentish crown to his brother Aethelstan, who reigned till 850, and then apparently died childless. Aethelwulf resumed the direct lordship of Kent for a few years, till growing old and wearied with the insubordination of his eldest son Ethelbald, he took the curious step of handing over the kingdom of Wessex to the young man, and retiring to live in Kent himself—as a sort of old-age pensioner apparently: he also retained Sussex and Essex for himself. Two years later he died (856), leaving Kent and Essex to his second and more dutiful son Ethelbert, who reigned less than three years as sub-king, and then by the death of his elder brother without issue, succeeded to the kingdom of Wessex also in 859.

This was the end of Kent as a separate kingdom, or sub-kingdom: for Ethelbert did not continue his father's plan of keeping Kent as a separate inheritance, and did not pass it on to one of his younger brothers, Ethelred or the famous Alfred. The probable reason was that the Danish attacks on England were growing very fierce at this time—they culminated in Alfred's day a few years later—and Ethelbert saw safety in centralization of royalty rather than in multiplication of sub-kingdoms. The Kentishmen had been loyal and satisfied subjects of the house of Ecgbert for more than 30 years, and apparently had regarded its rule as rightful and legitimate, and representing their own old royal line. When Ethelbert moved on to Winchester, and appointed two aldermen to rule Kent for him, instead of a young kinsman with the title of king, no objection was made. And so the old state came to an end without friction, and became absorbed in that greater Wessex, which was two generations later to become the realm of All England.