SECTION IV

"The happy ages of history are never the productive ones."
HEGEL.

THE COMING OF THE SAXONS, OR ENGLISH, 449 A.D.

BATTLES OF THE TRIBES — BRITAIN BECOMES ENGLAND

66. Condition of the Britons after the Romans left the Island. — Three hundred and fifty years of Roman law and order had completely tamed the fiery aborigines of the island. After the legions abandoned it, Gildas,[1] "the British Jeremiah," as Gibbon calls him, declared that the Britons were no longer brave in war or faithful in peace.

Certainly their condition was both precarious and perilous. On the north they were assailed by the Picts, on the northwest by the Scots,[2] on the south and east by the Saxons. What was perhaps worst and most dangerous of all, they quarrelled among themselves over points of theological doctrine.

They had, indeed, the love of liberty, but not the spirit of unity. The consequence was, that their enemies, bursting in on all sides, cut them down, says Bede, as "reapers cut down ripe grain."

67. Letter to Aetius (443). — At length the chief men of the country joined in a piteous and pusillanimous letter begging help from Rome. It was addressed as follows: "To Aëtius,

[1] Gildas: a British monk, 516(?)–570(?). He wrote an account of the Saxon conquest of Britain.

[2] Picts: ancient tribes of the north and northeast of Scotland; Scots: originally inhabitants of Ireland, some of whom settled in the west of Scotland and gave their name to the whole country.

Consul[1] for the third time, the groans of the Britons." The letter summed up their calamities in these words: "The barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us back to the barbarians; between them we are either slain or drowned." Aëtius, however, was fighting the enemies of Rome at home, and left the Britons to shift for themselves.

68. Vortigern's Advice. — Finally, in their desperation, they adopted the advice of Vortigern, a chief of Kent. He urged them to fight fire with fire, by inviting a band of Saxons to form an alliance with them against the Picts and Scots. The proposal was very readily accepted by a tribe of Jutes.

They, with the Angles and Saxons, occupied the peninsula of Jutland, or Denmark, and the seacoast to the south of it. All of them were known to the Britons under the general name of Saxons.

69. Coming of the Jutes (449). — Gildas records their arrival in characteristic terms, saying that "in 449 a multitude of whelps came from the lair of the barbaric lioness, in three *keels*, as they call them."[2]

We get a good picture of what they were like from the exultant song of their countryman, Beowulf.[3] He describes with pride "the dragon-prowed ships," filled with sea-robbers, armed with "rough-handled spears and swords of bronze," which under their leaders sailed for the shining coasts of Britain.

These three *keels*, or war-ships, under the command of the chieftains Hengist and Horsa, were destined to grow into a kingdom. Settling at first, according to agreement, in the island of Thanet, near the mouth of the Thames,[4] the Jutes soon fulfilled their contract to free the country from the ravages of the Picts. Afterward they easily found a pretext for seizing the fairest

[1] Consul: originally one of two chief magistrates governing Rome; later the consuls ruled over the chief provinces, and sometimes commanded armies. Still later they became wholly subject to the emperors, and had little, if any, real power of their own.

[2] See Map No. 3, facing page 34.

[3] Beowulf: the hero of the earliest Anglo-Saxon or English epic poem. It is uncertain whether it was written on the continent or in England. Some authorities refer it to the ninth century, others to the fifth.

[4] See Map No. 5, facing page 40.

portion of Kent for themselves and their kinsmen, who came, vulture-like, in ever-increasing multitudes.

70. Invasion by the Saxons (477). — The success of the Jutes incited their neighbors, the Saxons, who came under the leadership of Ella, and Cissa, his son, for their share of the spoils. They conquered a part of the country bordering on the Channel, and, settling there, gave it the name of Sussex, or the country of the South Saxons.[1]

We learn from two sources how the land was wrested from the native inhabitants. On the one side is the account given by the British monk Gildas; on the other, that of the Saxon or English Chronicle (§ 135).

Both agree that it was gained by the edge of the sword, with burning, pillaging, massacre, and captivity. "Some," says Gildas, "were caught in the hills and slaughtered; others, worn out with hunger, gave themselves up to lifelong slavery. Some fled across the sea; others trusted themselves to the clefts of the mountains, to the forests, and to the rocks along the coast." By the Saxons we are told that the Britons fled before them "as from fire."

71. Siege of Anderida (490). — Again, the Chronicle tersely says: "In 490 Ella and Cissa besieged Anderida (the modern Pevensey)[2] and put to death all who dwelt there, so that not a single Briton remained alive in it."

When, however, they took a fortified town like Anderida, they did not occupy, but abandoned it. So the place stands to-day, with the exception of a Norman castle built there in the eleventh century, just as the invaders left it.

Accustomed as they were to a wild life, they hated the restraint and scorned the protection of stone walls. It was not until after many generations had passed that they became reconciled to live within them.

In the same spirit they refused to appropriate anything which Rome had left. They burned the villas, killed or enslaved the serfs who tilled the soil, and seized the land to form rough settlements of their own.

[1] See Map facing page 40. [2] Pevensey: coast of Sussex, Map No. 6, facing page 42

72. Settlement of Wessex, Essex, and Middlesex (495). — After Sussex was established (§ 70), bands came over under Cerdic. They conquered a territory to which they gave the name of Wessex, or the country of the West Saxons.

About the same time other invaders settled in the country north of the Thames, which became known as Essex and Middlesex, or the land of the East and the Middle Saxons.[1]

73. Invasion by the Angles (547). — Finally there came from a little corner south of the peninsula of Denmark (a region which still bears the name of Angeln) a tribe of Angles, who took possession of all of Eastern Britain not already appropriated.

Eventually they came to have control over the greater part of the land, and from them all the other tribes took the name of Angles, or English.

74. Bravery of the Britons. — Long before this last settlement was complete, the Britons had plucked up courage, and had, to some extent, joined forces to save themselves from utter extermination. They were naturally a brave people. The fact that it took the Saxons or English more than a hundred years to get a firm hold on the island shows that the Britons, though weakened by Roman tyranny, fell back on what pugilists call their "second strength." They fought valiantly and gave up the country inch by inch only.

75. King Arthur checks the Invaders (520). — If we may trust tradition, the English or Saxons received their first decided check at Badbury, in Dorsetshire.[2] Here they were met by that famous Arthur, the legend of whose deeds has come down to us, retold in Tennyson's "Idylls of the King." He stopped them in their march of insolent triumph. With his irresistible sword "Excalibur" and his stanch Welsh spearsmen, he seems to have proved to them, at least, that he was not a myth, but a man[3] able "to break the heathen and uphold the Christ."

[1] See Map No. 3, facing page 34, and Map No. 5, facing page 38.

[2] See Map No. 5, facing page 40 (Mt. Badon, Wessex, in south of England).

[3] On Arthur, see the Dictionary of (English) National Biography, II; and compare Freeman's Old English History.

76. The Britons driven into the West. — But though temporarily brought to a stand, the heathen were neither to be expelled nor driven back. They had come to stay.

At last the Britons were forced to take refuge among the hills of Wales. There they continued to abide unconquered and unconquerable by force alone. That ancient stock never lost its love of liberty, and more than eleven centuries later Thomas Jefferson and several of the other fifty-five signers of the Declaration of American Independence were either of Welsh birth or of direct Welsh descent.

77. Gregory and the English Slaves. — The next period, of nearly eighty years, until the coming of Augustine, is a dreary record of constant bloodshed. Out of their very barbarism, however, a regenerating influence was to arise.

In their greed for gain, some of the English tribes did not hesitate to sell their own children into bondage. A number of these slaves, exposed in the Roman forum, attracted the attention, as he was passing, of a monk named Gregory.

Struck with the beauty of their clear, ruddy complexions and fair hair, he inquired from what country they came. "They are Angles," was the dealer's answer. "No, not Angles, but angels," answered the monk, and he resolved that, should he ever have the power, he would send missionaries to convert a race of so much promise.[1]

78. Coming of Augustine, 597. — When Gregory became the head of the Roman Church he fulfilled his resolution, and sent Augustine with a band of forty monks to Britain. In 597 they landed on the very spot where Hengist and Horsa (§ 69) had disembarked nearly one hundred and fifty years before. Like Cæsar and his legions, they brought with them the power of Rome. But this time that power came not as a force from without to crush men in the iron mould of submission and uniformity, but as a persuasive voice to arouse and cheer them with new hope.

Providence had already prepared the way. Ethelbert, King of Kent, had married Bertha, a French princess, who in her own

[1] Bede's Ecclesiastical History.

country had become a convert to Christianity. The Saxons, or English, at that time were wholly pagan, and had, in all probability, destroyed every vestige of the faith for which the British martyrs gave their lives.

79. Augustine converts the King of Kent and his People (597). — Through the Queen's influence, Ethelbert was induced to receive Augustine. He was afraid, however, of some magical practice, so he insisted that their meeting should take place in the open air and on the island of Thanet.[1]

The historian Bede represents the monks as advancing to salute the King, holding a tall silver cross in their hands and a picture of Christ painted on an upright board.

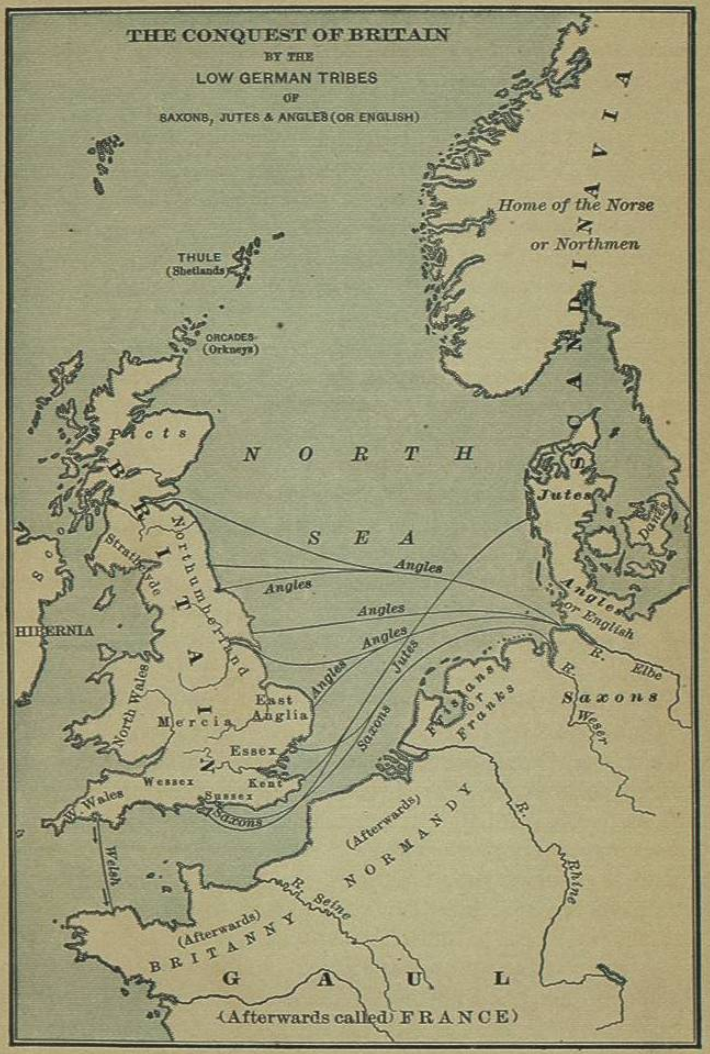
Augustine delivered his message, was well received, and invited to Canterbury, the capital of Kent. There the King became a convert to his preaching, and before the year had passed ten thousand of his subjects had received baptism; for to gain the King was to gain his tribe as well.

80. Augustine builds the First Monastery. — At Canterbury Augustine became the first archbishop over the first cathedral. There, too, he erected the first monastery in which to train missionaries to carry on the work which he had begun. A building is still in use for that purpose, and it continues to bear the name of the man who brought Christianity to that part of Britain. The example of the ruler of Kent was not without its effect on others.

81. Conversion of the North. — The North of England, however, owed its conversion chiefly to the Irish monks of an earlier age. They had planted monasteries in Ireland and Scotland from which colonies went forth, one of which settled at Lindisfarne, in Durham. Cuthbert, a Saxon monk of that monastery in the seventh century, travelled as a missionary throughout Northumbria, and was afterward recognized as the saint of the North. Through his influence that kingdom was induced to accept Christianity. Others, too, went to other districts.

In one case an aged chief arose in an assembly of warriors and said: "O king, as a bird flies through this hall in the winter night,

[1] See Map No. 5, facing page 40.



coming out of the darkness and vanishing into it again, even such is our life. If these strangers can tell us aught of what is beyond, let us give heed to them."

But Bede informs us that, notwithstanding their success, some of the new converts were too cautious to commit themselves entirely to the strange religion. One king, who had set up a large altar devoted to the worship of Christ, very prudently set up a smaller one at the other end of the hall to the old heathen deities, in order that he might make sure of the favor of both.

82. **Christianity organized; Labors of the Monks.** — Gradually, however, the pagan faith was dropped. Christianity was largely organized by bands of monks and nuns. Monasteries existed or were now established at Lindisfarne,[1] Wearmouth, Whitby, and Jarrow in the north, and at Peterborough and St. Albans in the east.

These monasteries were educational as well as industrial centres. Part of each day was spent by the monks in manual toil, for they held that "to labor is to pray." They cleared the land, drained the bogs, ploughed, sowed, and reaped.

Another part of the day they spent in religious exercises, and a third in writing, translating, and teaching.

A school was attached to each monastery, and each had, besides its library of manuscript books, its room for the entertainment of travellers and pilgrims. In these libraries important charters and laws relating to the kingdom were preserved.

83. **Literary Work of the Monks.** — It was at Jarrow that Bede wrote in rude Latin the church history of England. It was at Whitby that the poet Cædmon[2] composed his poem on the Creation, in which, a thousand years before Milton, he dealt with Milton's theme in Milton's spirit.

It was at Peterborough and Canterbury that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was probably begun (§ 135). It was not only the first English history, but the first English book, and the one from which

[1] Lindisfarne, or Holy Island, off the coast of Northumberland (Map No. 4, facing page 38). See Scott's Marmion, Canto II, 9–10. Wearmouth and Jarrow are in Durham, Whitby in Yorkshire, and Peterborough in Northamptonshire.

[2] Cædmon (Kădmon).

we derive much of our knowledge of the time from the Roman conquest down to a period after the coming of the Normans. Later, that history was taken up in the abbeys of Malmesbury and St. Alban's[1] and continued by William of Malmesbury and Matthew Paris. From these monasteries, too, an influence went out which eventually revived learning throughout Europe.

84. Influence of Christianity on Society. — But the work of Christianity for good did not stop with these things. The Church had an important social influence. It took the side of the weak, the suffering, and the oppressed. Although the Church itself held slaves, yet it shielded the slave from ill-usage. It secured for him Sunday as a day of rest, and it often labored effectually for his emancipation.

85. Political Influence of Christianity (664). — More than this, Christianity had a powerful political influence. A synod, or council, was held at Whitby (664) to decide when Easter should be observed.

To that meeting, which was presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, delegates were sent from all parts of the country. After a protracted debate the synod decided in favor of the Roman custom, and thus all the churches were brought into agreement.

In this way, at a period when the country was divided into hostile kingdoms of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, each struggling fiercely for the mastery, there was a spirit of true religious unity growing up.

The bishops, monks, and priests, gathered at Whitby, were from tribes at open war with each other. But in that, and other conferences which followed,[2] they felt that they had a common interest, that they were fellow-countrymen, that they were all members of the same Church and were laboring for the same end.

86. Egbert (787). — But during the next hundred and fifty years the chief indication outside the Church of any progress

[1] Malmesbury, Wiltshire; St. Alban's, near London.
[2] See Constitutional Summary (Appendix), § 4.

toward consolidation was in the growing power of the kingdom of Wessex.

Egbert, a direct descendant of Cerdic, the first chief and King of the country, laid claim to the throne (787). Another claimant arose, who gained the day, and Egbert, finding that his life was in danger, fled the country.

87. Egbert at the Court of Charlemagne (787–800). — He escaped to France, and there took refuge at the court of King Charlemagne, where he remained thirteen years. Charlemagne had conceived the gigantic project of resuscitating the Roman Empire. To accomplish that, he had engaged in a series of wars, and so far conquered his enemies that he was crowned (800) Emperor of the Romans by the Pope.

88. Egbert becomes "King of the English," 828. — That very year the King of Wessex died, and Egbert was summoned to take his place. He went back impressed with the success of the French King and ambitious to imitate him. Twenty-three years after that, we hear of him fighting the tribes in Mercia, or Central Britain.

His army is described as "lean, pale, and long-breathed"; but with those cadaverous troops he conquered and reduced the Mercians to subjection. Other victories followed, and in 828 he brought all the sovereignties of England into vassalage. He now ventured to assume the title, which he had fairly won, of "King of the English."[1] That title marks the beginning of a new period in the history of the island.

89. Britain becomes England. — The Celts had called the land Albion; the Romans, Britain[2]; the country now called itself Angle-Land, or ENGLAND.

Three causes had brought about this consolidation, to which each people had contributed part. The Jutes of Kent encouraged the foundation of the national Church; the Angles gave the national name, the West Saxons furnished the national king.

[1] In a single charter, dated 828, he calls himself "Egbert, by the grace of God, King of the English."
[2] Britain: nothing definite is known of the origin or meaning of this word.

From Egbert as a royal source, every subsequent English sovereign (except the four Danish kings, Harold II, and William the Conqueror) has directly or indirectly descended down to the present time. (See Table of Royal Descent in Appendix.)

90. Alfred the Great (871–901). — Of these the most conspicuous during the period of which we are writing was Alfred, of whose accession we shall presently speak. He was a grandson of Egbert. He was rightly called Alfred the Great, since he was the embodiment of whatever was best and bravest in the English character. The keynote of his life may be found in the words which he spoke at the close of it, "So long as I have lived, I have striven to live worthily."

91. Invasion by the Danes, or Northmen (871). — When Alfred came to the throne (871), through the death of his brother Ethelred, the Danes, or Northmen,[1] were sweeping down on the country. A few months before that event Alfred had aided his brother in a desperate struggle with them.

In the beginning the object of the Danes was to plunder, later to possess, and finally to rule over the country. In the year Alfred came to the throne they had already overrun a large portion and invaded Wessex. Wherever their raven-flag appeared, there destruction and slaughter followed.

92. The Danes, or Northmen, destroy the Monasteries. — The monasteries were the especial objects of their attacks. Since their establishment many of them had accumulated wealth and had sunk into habits of idleness and luxury. The Danes, without intending it, came to scourge these vices.

From the thorough way in which they robbed, burned, and murdered, there can be no doubt that they enjoyed what some might think was their providential mission.

In their helplessness and terror, the panic-stricken monks added to their usual prayers this fervent petition: "From the fury of the Northmen, good Lord, deliver us!" The power raised up to answer that supplication was Alfred.

[1] The Danes, Swedes, and Norwegians went under the common name of Northmen.

Christianity was introduced into North Humberland at this period (see § 81); and for a short time Edwin, King of North Humberland, became, says the Chronicle, "lord over all Britain, save Kent alone."

93. Alfred's Victories over the Danes; the White Horse. — After repeated defeats he, with his brother, finally drove back these savage hordes, who thought it a shame to earn by sweat what they could win by blood. They boasted that they would fight in paradise even as they had fought on earth, and would celebrate their victories with foaming draughts of ale drunk from the skulls of their enemies.

In these attacks Alfred led one-half the army, Ethelred the other. They met the Danes at Ashdown Ridge in Berkshire.[1] While Ethelred stopped to pray for success, Alfred, under the banner of the "White Horse," — the common standard of the Anglo-Saxons at that time, — began the attack and won the day.

Tradition declares that after the victory he ordered his army to commemorate their triumph by carving that colossal figure of a horse on the side of a neighboring chalk-hill, which still remains so conspicuous an object in the landscape. It was shortly after this that Alfred became king; but the war, far from being ended, had in fact but just begun.

94. The Danes compel Alfred to retreat. — The Danes, reinforced by other invaders, overcame Alfred's forces and compelled him to retreat. He fled to the wilds of Somersetshire, and was glad to take up his abode for a time, so the story runs, in a peasant's hut. Subsequently he succeeded in rallying part of his people, and built a stronghold on a piece of rising ground, in the midst of an almost impassable morass. There he remained during the winter.

95. Great Victory by Alfred; Treaty of Wedmore (878). — In the spring he marched forth and again attacked the Danes. They were entrenched in a camp at Edington, Wiltshire. Alfred surrounded them, and starved them into complete submission. Guthrum, the Danish leader, swore a peace, called the Peace or Treaty of Wedmore.[2] He sealed the oath with his baptism, — an admission that Alfred had not only beaten, but converted him as well.

[1] See Map No. 5, facing page 40. Ashdown is west of London.

[2] See Map No. 6, facing page 42. Wedmore (the Wet Moor) is in Wessex (Somersetshire), in the southwest of England.

early English sovereigns. It was marked throughout by intelligence and progress.

His life speaks for itself. The best commentary on it is the fact that, in 1849, the people of Wantage,[1] his native place, celebrated the thousandth anniversary of his birth, — another proof that "what is excellent, as God lives, is permanent."[2]

100. Dunstan's Reforms. — Two generations after Alfred's death Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, came forward to take up and push onward the work begun by the great King. He was the ablest man in an age when all statesmen were ecclesiastics. He labored for higher education, for strict monastic rule, and for the celibacy of the monks.

101. Regular and Secular Clergy. — At that time the clergy of England were divided into two classes, — the "regulars," or monks, and the "seculars," or parish priests and other clergy not bound by monastic vows.

The former lived in the monasteries apart from the world; the latter lived in it. By their monastic vows[3] the "regulars" were bound to remain unmarried, while the "seculars" were not.

Notwithstanding Alfred's efforts at reform, many monasteries had relaxed their rules and were again filled with drones. In violation of their vows of celibacy, large numbers of the monks were married. Furthermore, many new churches had been endowed and put into the hands of the "seculars."

102. Danger to the State from Each Class of Clergy. — The danger was that this laxity would go on increasing, so that in time the married clergy would monopolize the clerical influence and clerical wealth of the kingdom for themselves and their families.

They would thus become an hereditary body, a close corporation, transmitting their power and possessions from father to son through generations.

On the other hand, the tendency of the unmarried clergy

[1] Wantage (west of London), Berkshire. See Map No. 6, facing page 42.

[2] R. W. Emerson's Poems.

[3] The monastic vows required poverty, chastity, and obedience to the rules of their order.

would be to become wholly subservient to the Church and the Pope, though they must necessarily recruit their ranks from the people.

In this last respect they would be more democratic than the opposite class. They would also be more directly connected with national interests and the national life, while at the same time they would be able to devote themselves more exclusively to study and to intellectual culture than the "seculars."

103. Dunstan as a Statesman and Artisan. — In addition to these reforms, Dunstan (§ 100) proved himself to be as clever a statesman as theologian. He undertook, with temporary success, to reconcile the conflicting interests of the Danes and the English. He was also noted as a mechanic and worker in metals. The common people regarded his accomplishments in this direction with superstitious awe.

Many stories of his skill were circulated, and it was even whispered that in a personal contest with Beelzebub, it was the devil and not the monk who got the worst of it and fled from the saint's workshop, howling with dismay.

104. New Invasions; Danegeld (992). — With the close of Dunstan's career, the period of decline sets in. Fresh inroads began on the part of the Northmen (§ 91). The resistance to them became feeble and faint-hearted. At last a royal tax, called Danegeld, or Dane-money (992), was levied on all landed property in order to raise means to buy off the invaders. For a brief period this cowardly concession answered the purpose. But a time came when the Danes would no longer be bribed to keep away.

105. The Northmen invade France. — The Danish invasion was really a part of a great European movement. The same Northmen who had obtained so large a part of England had also, in the tenth century, under the leadership of Rollo, established themselves in France.

There they were known as Normans, a softened form of the word "Northmen," and the district where they settled came to be called from them Normandy. They founded a line of dukes,

or princes, who were destined, in the course of the next century, to give a new aspect to the events of English history.

106. Sweyn conquers England; Canute[1] (1017-1035). — Sweyn, the Dane, conquered England (1013), and "all the people," says the Chronicle, "held him for full king." He was succeeded by his son Canute (1017). He was from beyond the sea, but could hardly be called a foreigner, since he spoke a language and set up a government differing but little from that of the English.

After his first harsh measures were over he sought the friendship of both Church and people. He gave the country peace. He rebuked the flattery of courtiers by showing them that the in-rolling tide is no respecter of persons; he endeavored to rule justly, and his liking for the monks found expression in his song: —

"Merrily sang the monks of Ely
As Cnut the King was passing by."

107. Canute's Plan; the Four Earldoms. — Canute's plan was to establish a great northern empire embracing Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and England. To facilitate the government of so large a realm, he divided England into four districts, Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia, and Northumbria, which, with their dependencies, embraced the entire country.

Each of these districts was ruled by an earl[2] invested with almost royal power. For a time the arrangement worked well, but eventually discord sprang up between the rulers. Their individual ambition and their efforts to obtain supreme authority imperilled the unity of the country.

108. Prince Edward. — On the accession of the Danish conqueror Sweyn (§ 106), Ethelred II, the Saxon King, sent his French wife Emma back to Normandy for safety. She took with her her son, Prince Edward, then a lad of nine. He remained at the French court nearly thirty years, and among other friends to whom

[1] Also spelled Cnut and Knut.

[2] Earl ("chief" or "leader"): a title of honor and of office. The four earldoms established by Canute remained nearly unchanged until the Norman Conquest, 1066. See Map No. 6, facing page 42.