
THE
 HISTORY
 OF THE
 ANGLO-SAXONS

BOOK VI.
 CHAP. I.

The Reign of EDWARD the Elder.

ALFRED was succeeded by his son Edward, who ascended a throne so solidly established by his great father's exertions, that the efforts of his enemies were unable to overturn it. The first attack was of a menacing nature, as it assumed the appearance of a civil dissention.

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Alfred had been called to the crown in preference to the children of his elder brother. Their pretensions were equally neglected at his death, and Edward was chosen by the nobles as their king .

* A primatis electus. Ethelwerd, 847. He was crowned at the Whitfuntide after his father's death. Ib.

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Ethelwold,

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Ethelwold, one of the disregarded princes, revolted from the decision of the Anglo-Saxon Wittena, and attempted to seize the crown for himself*. He rode with his partizans to Wimburn, and possessed himself of Christchurch; but the merits of Alfred had created a gratitude in the nation which protected his son. Edward marched an army to Badbury, near Wimburn, and encamped. His ambitious cousin vaunted, that he would never quit his position alive³. His heroism sunk into prudence as his adherents diminished; he escaped from Wimburn at night; he outtripped the party which the king dispatched to overtake him, and reaching the Northumbrian Danes, he excited their sympathy, and was appointed their sovereign at York⁴.

The Northumbrian sovereignty was, however, but a glaring title generally connected with speedy deposition. Ethelwold seems to have been but a nominal king, for he was afterwards

² Matt. West. 351. At Wimburn, he possessed himself of a nun by force, and married her. Ib. Matthew says, he thought himself not inferior to Edward, either in birth or power. In what his power consisted is not stated. The Saxon Chronicle, Florence, and the MS. Chronicle. Tib. B. 1. declare, that the movements were contrary to the will of the king, and his witena.

³ Sax. Chron. 100.


⁴ Matt. West. 351. Sax. Ch. 100. Flor. 337. The king replaced the nun in her retreat.

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on the seas a pirate⁵, and sailed to France in quest of partizans to distress the king⁶; in 904, he came with his fleet to Essex⁷. His activity gave to his hostilities an importance that endangered Edward's permanency. He persuaded the East Anglian Danes to join him; and with them, in 905, he ravaged Mercia as far as Cricklade. He even passed the Thames, and plundered in Wiltshire. But in coming to the Anglo-Saxons, invested with the robes of Danish royalty, he excited their hostile prejudices, not their attachment; disappointed of their support, he returned. The army of Edward followed him, and ravaged, in retaliation, to the fens of Lincolnshire. When the king withdrew, he directed his army not to separate. The Kentish troops neglected his orders, and remained after the others had retired. Ethelwold eagerly attacked them with superior forces. The Kentish men were overpowered, but their defence was desperate. Their chiefs fell; and the author of the quarrel also perished in his victory⁸. His fate released

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⁵ In exilium trusus pirates adduxerat. Malm. 46.

⁶ Matt. West. 351.

⁷ Hunt. 352.

⁸ Sax. Chr. 101. Hunt. 352. Eohric, the Anglo Danish king, fell in the struggle. Ethelwerd places this battle at Holme,

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released the island from the destructive competition, and a peace, two years afterwards, restored amity between the Anglo-Saxons, and Anglo-Danes⁹.

But the durability of any peace between Edward and the Danes must have been always problematical. Every augmentation of his power must have increased his desire of subjecting those whom the Anglo-Saxons eyed with jealousy as intruders, and every success of Edward must have alarmed the Anglo-Danes. It is not therefore surprising, that in 910, war was renewed between the rival powers. With his Mercians and West-Saxons, Edward, in a five weeks depredation of Northumbria, destroyed and plundered extensively. In the next year, the northerns returned to Mercia the visit of devastation¹⁰. A misconception of the Danes

⁸⁴⁸. Holme in Saxon means a river island. In Lincolnshire there is one called Axeholme. *Camd.* 474. The printed Saxon Chronicle makes a battle at Holme in 902, besides the battle wherein Ethelweld fell; but the MS. Chron. Tib. B. 4. omits the battle in 902. So the MS. Tib. B. 1. With these Florence agrees, and therefore the passage of 902, in the printed Chronicle, may be deemed a mistake.

⁹ Sax. Chron. *Matt. West.* adds, that the king immediately afterwards reduced those who had rebelled against him: *Et maxime cives Londonienses et Oconienfes*, p. 352. In 905, Ealhswitha, the widow of Alfred, died; and her brother, Athulf, an ealdorman, in 903. Sax. Ch. 361. She had founded a monastery of nuns at Winchester *Mailros*, 146.

¹⁰ Sax. Chron. 102. *Hunt.* 352. The MS. Saxon Chronicle

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Danes brought them within the reach of Edward's sword. While he was tarrying in Kent, he collected 100 ships, which he sent to guard the south eastern coast¹¹, probably to prevent new invasions. The Danes fancying the great body of his forces to be on the seas, advanced into the country to the Avon, and plundered without apprehension. Edward immediately sent a powerful army to attack them; his orders were obeyed. The Northerns were surprized into a fixed battle at Wodensfield, and were defeated, with the slaughter of many thousands. Two of their kings fell, Healfden and Eowils, the brothers of the celebrated Inguar, and many earls and officers¹². The Anglo-Saxons sung hymns on their great victory¹³:

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The event of this battle established the superiority of Edward over his dangerous neighbours. He pursued the plans which Alfred had devised for the protection of his throne. The possession of the north of England, from the Humber to

cles mention, that the English defeated at this time the Danes at Totanheale. Florence and Hoveden place this conflict and place in Staffordshire.

¹¹ Sax. Ch. 102.

¹² Flor. 340. Ethelw. 848. Sax. Ch. 1103.

¹³ Hunt. 353. Many expressions of Ethelwerd have a poetical air in this part, as if he had translated some fragments of these songs.

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the Tweed, and of the eastern districts, from the
 Ouse to the sea, occasioned Edward to have ex-
 tensive frontiers to defend, on which invasion was
 easy. Armed with hostility, the king found
 safety in a line of fortresses. In the places where
 irruptions into Mercia and Wessex were most
 impracticable, and therefore where a prepared de-
 fence was more needed, he built fortifications.
 He filled these with appointed soldiers, who,
 when invaders approached, marched out in junc-
 tion with the provincials to chastise them. No
 time was lost in awaiting the presence of the
 king, or of the earls of the county. They were
 empowered to act of themselves on every emer-
 gency, and by this plan of vigilance, energy, and
 co-operation, the invaders were so easily defeated,
 that they became a derision to the English sol-
 diery¹⁴. In thus fortifying the country, Ethel-
 fieda vigorously joined. She was a widow in
 912, but she continued in the sovereignty of
 Mercia¹⁵.

The position of these fortresses demonstrates
 their utility. Wigmore, in Herefordshire;
 Bridgnorth and Cherbury, in Shropshire; Edef-

¹⁴ Malmfb. 46.

¹⁵ Sax. Ch. 103. Ethelred, her husband, had been long infirm
 before his death. Hunt. 353.


bury,

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bury, in Cheshire; and Stafford and Wedefborough, in Staffordshire, were well chosen to coerce the Welsh upon the western limits. Run-corne and Thelwall, in Cheshire, and Bakewell, in Derbyshire, answered the double purpose of awing Wales, and of protecting that part of the north frontier of Mercia from the incursions of the Northumbrian Danes. Manchester, Tamworth in Staffordshire, Leicester, Nottingham, and Warwick, assisted to strengthen Mercia on this northern frontier, and Stamford, Tocester, Bedford, Hartford, Colchester, Witham, and Malden, presented a strong boundary of defence against the hostilities of the East Anglian Danes. The three last cities, placed in a country which Edward's power had extorted, watched three rivers important for their affording an easy debarkation from foreign parts:

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The strength of Edward was tried by an invasion of Northmen from Armorica, and his military policy was evidenced by its issue. Two earls led the hostile fleet round Cornwall into the Severn, and devastated North Wales. They debarked and plundered in Herefordshire. The men of Hereford, Gloucester, and the nearest burghs or fortified places, defeated them with the loss of one of their chiefs, and the brother of the other, and drove the rest into a wood, which they

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besieged.

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befieged. Edward directed armed bodies to warch the Severn, from Cornwall to the Avon. The enemy endeavoured one night to escape in two divisions, but the English overtook them in Somersetsshire. One was destroyed in Watchet; the other in Porlock-bay. The miserable remnant sheltered themselves in a neighbouring island, till tormented by famine; they fled to South-Wales, whence in the autumn they sailed to Ireland ¹⁶.

The Anglo-Saxon monarchy received new security from the final incorporation of Mercia and Weffex, in 920.

While Mercia continued under a regency distinct from that of Weffex, its submission depended too much on the comparative abilities of the rulers of the two states to be absolutely permanent.

Ethelfleda died in 920, and the subordinate sovereignty descended to her daughter. But Edward was then in the fulness of his power, and resolved to abolish the separate government of Mercia. Twelve days before midsummer Ethelfleda died; within six months afterwards he entered Mercia with irresistible power, and brought away Elfwina the young regent into

¹⁶ Sax. Chron. 105, Flor. 343.


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Weffex ¹⁷. All trace of independent government disappeared from Mercia, and the West Saxon king advanced one step nearer to the monarchy of England.

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Both Edward and Ethelfleda had many struggles with the Northmen in England; but their triumphs were easy, for they attacked enemies, not in their compact strength, but in their scattered positions. Thus Ethelfleda warred with them in Derby. In assaulting the castle, four of her bravest and most esteemed generals fell, but she still urged the combat, and at last mastered the place: thus she conquered Leiceſter ¹⁸, and other places.

Edward endured, and perhaps provoked ſimilar conflicts. The Danes attacked his fortrefs at Towceſter, but the gariſon and the provincials repulſed them. In Buckinghamſhire, the invaſion was formidable, and many diſtricts were

¹⁷ Sax. Chron. 107. Hunt. 354. The Saxon Chronicles, both printed and MS. and the Latin Annaliſts, which ſeem to be tranſlations of Saxon Chronicles, vary ſometimes in the years of the events which they mention. Thus Ethelfleda's death is placed in 920 and 922, by the printed Saxon Chronicle; in 918, by the MS. Chronicle, Tib. B. 4. In 919, by Florence and Mat. Weſt. In 915, by Hoveden.

¹⁸ Hunt. 353, 354. Sax. Chron. 106. Ingulf ſays of her: "Ipſam etiam urbibus extruendis, caſtellis muniendis, ac exercitiſus ducendis deditam, ſexum mutaffe putaris," p. 28.

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over-run, till Edward rescued his people by new victories. In some parts they seemed to copy his policy. They built hostile fortresses at Huntingdon, and at Temesford in Bedfordshire; and, proud with the hope of success, they assailed Bedford; but the garrison and its supporters defeating them with slaughter, the dreams of their ambition were dispersed¹⁹.

A peculiar spirit of hostility seemed in the latter years of his reign to have excited the Anglo-Danes; for scarcely had they experienced the defeats already noticed, before another aggression was attempted, and was punished²⁰.

If they discerned, that, by the incorporation of Mercia, the power of the English was accumulating into a mass that threatened to crush their countrymen by its future action, and if they attempted to counteract it in the infancy of the union, they may have intended an effort of policy; but in rushing against the strong holds of Edward with divided forces, in detached and successive expeditions, they executed their schemes unwisely. The government of Wessex, organized by the foresight of Alfred, now headed a compacted and formidable force: an energy as

¹⁹ Matt. West. 358. Sax. Chron. 107.

²⁰ See Sax. Chron. 108, 109.

active,