

CHAPTER IV.

CHRISTIANIZATION OF THE INVADERS AND CONSOLIDATION OF THEIR KINGDOMS.—600 to 827 A.D.

1. The names of certain Kings, eight in all, who gained distinction either by conquest or by wise rule, are recorded in the Saxon Chronicles as *Bretwaldas*, "ruling chiefs," or, as some hold, "Wielders of Britain." Nothing of importance is known concerning the first two Kings who bore this title; but the third Bretwalda, Ethelbert of Kent, is celebrated as the first Christian King in Britain.

2. We have seen that the fierce paganism of the conquering Germans had remained unmodified by the Christianity of the subject race. But Ethelbert had married on the Continent a Christian Princess, Bertha, daughter of the King of Paris. At her instance Pope Gregory the Great despatched a band of forty missionaries in 597 to labor for the conversion of her husband and his subjects. At the head of the mission was Augustine, a learned and zealous monk, afterwards canonized as St. Austin. Augustine and his co-laborers met with a friendly reception. Ethelbert listened favorably to the new doctrines, and his conversion and baptism were followed by a rapid spread of Christianity among his people. Canterbury, the chief town of Kent, became naturally the central seat of Christianity in Britain, and Augustine was the first of its long line of archbishops.

3. Ethelbert's nephew, Sebert, King of Essex, embraced the new religion, and London, his capital, was soon adorned with Christian churches. More important still, Ethelbert's son-in-law, Edwin of Northumbria, a ruler of great capacity, who figures in history as the fifth Bretwalda, also gave in his adhesion to Christianity; and Paulinus, one of the missionaries who landed with Augustine, became the first Archbishop of York. Edwin lives in history as the founder of Edinburg (Edwinesburgh), which perpetuates his name, and as promulgator of the first code of English laws.

4. The spread of Christianity was for a time checked by the exploits of Penda, King of Mercia, a bitter pagan. He defeated and slew the great Edwin of Northumbria in 633; and nine years later Edwin's successor, Oswald, the sixth Bretwalda, experienced a similar fate at the hands of this fierce chieftain. Penda himself was ultimately overthrown by Oswald's brother Oswy, the seventh Bretwalda, in 655.

5. Northumbria, Mercia, and Wessex were now the chief kingdoms, and for more than a century their Kings waged a ceaseless struggle for the supremacy. A King