

named Offa, who died in 796, raised Mercia to a high pitch of power; but after his death that kingdom rapidly declined in influence. Ina, who ruled over Wessex from 688 to 725, did much to strengthen the position of that state.

6. In 800 the throne of Wessex, which had for some time been occupied by usurpers, was filled by the recall from exile of Egbert, the lineal descendant of the great Ina. In Egbert. 827 Egbert asserted his supremacy over Mercia, Kent, and Sussex; East Anglia and Northumbria acknowledged his sovereignty. Thus as King of Wessex and eighth Bretwalda, Egbert ruled over the whole land from the English Channel to the Firth of Forth—the first real King of England, though he was not called by that name. It should be noted that Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia were permitted to retain the privilege of electing Kings tributary to Egbert.

CHAPTER V.

FROM THE UNION OF THE KINGDOMS TO THE END OF THE REIGN OF ALFRED THE GREAT.—827 to 901 A.D.

1. Egbert had acquired great capacity for government and war during his early manhood, which as an exile he had spent at the imperial court of Charlemagne. The closing years of his reign were disturbed by attacks made upon the English coasts by the Northmen or Danes. They came from Scandinavia, a name applied to the modern kingdoms of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The Danes were essentially of the same race as the Saxons and the Angles; and, before the conversion of the latter to Christianity, were of the same religion. They were bold, fierce pirates, firmly attached to their national paganism, from which they regarded the English as apostates. Egbert gained a signal victory over a body of them that landed in Cornwall in 836, a short time before his death.

2. For Egbert's immediate successors generally it is sufficient to refer to the genealogical table given on page 27. Of most of them but little can be said beyond that they were born, and reigned, and died. The Danes continued to give serious trouble by repeated landings, particularly on the east coast, where, in 871, they gained a firm footing by the defeat of Edmund, the tributary King of East Anglia. That prince's steadfast refusal to accept life as the reward of abjuring Christianity has gained for him the honor of canonization as saint and martyr. *Bury St. Edmunds*—a corruption of St. Edmundsburh, that is, "St. Edmund's Town"—commemorates the place of his death and burial.