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King Alfred and His Family in Mercia

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KING ALFRED AND HIS FAMILY IN MERCIA.

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THE present seems a suitable time for gathering together what is known concerning the connection of King Alfred and his family with Mercia. It is true that not much is known, but even a little about so great a man is worth much. And the first point to be considered is the way in which King Alfred, the West Saxon descendant of Woden through Bældæg and Cerdic, came to rule the realm of the Mercian kings, whose line came down through Wihltæg and Penda.

On looking over the list of the Mercian sovereigns, the instability of their race is very striking. Penda, who died in 655, founded the line: his two sons, Wulphere and Ethelred, reigned in turn next after him; but never again, except in the case of Ecgfrid, son of Offa, who reigned for 141 days in 796, and possibly of St. Kenelm, who may have reigned for a short time after the death of Cenwulf in 819, did the crown descend from father to son. Penda was the son of Pybba: his son Wulphere succeeded him; he died in 675, and was followed by his brother Ethelred, who resigned in 704, and, becoming Abbot of Bardney, died there in 716.

Coenred, son of Wulphere, became king of the Mercians in 704, but in 709 he also resigned and went to Rome, where he remained as a monk to the end of his life. Ceolred, son of Ethelred, succeeded; but by this time the enthusiasm of the Conversion had died out, and St. Boniface, writing to King Ethelbald about 745, traced the beginning of the evil days to the reigns of Ceolred in Mercia, and Osred in Northumbria. With Ceolred the race of Penda apparently became extinct, and henceforward the Mercian crown became the prey of the

strongest: Ethelbald, Offa, and Cenwulf were great kings, and in their time Mercia was without doubt the strongest of the English kingdoms, but they could not transmit their power. On the death of Ceolred the succession passed to the line of Eawa, a brother of Penda, who had died in 642, in the person of his grandson Ethelbald, son of Alweo. Ethelbald had been persecuted by Ceolred in his youth.¹ The entry in the *Continuation of Bede* which narrates his end marks the spirit of the reigning house of Mercia: "Anno DCCCLVII. Aedilbaldus rex Merciorum a suis tutoribus nocte morte fraudulenta miserabiliter peremptus occubuit: Beornredus regnare cæpit: Eodem etiam anno Offa, fugato Beornredo, Merciorum regnum sanguinolento quæsitiv gladio." The grey-haired warrior was treacherously slain in his bed by his own guards, and the throne of the youthful Offa was founded on blood. That Offa was very young at the time is shown by the form of his witness to a grant by Eanberht, Regulus of the Huiccians, and his brothers Uhtred and Aldred, of land at Tredinctun—"Ego Offa nondum regno Merciorum a domino accepto puer indolis in provincia Huicciorum constitutus." The document is found in Heming and in *MS.*, Nero E. i., and is therefore of excellent authority. It must be placed before 764, as it is witnessed by Totta, Bishop of Leicester, who died in that year.² Offa seems to have died in peace on July 29th, 796, and his only son Ecgfrid died also before the end of the year, we are not told in what way. Offa was, like Ethelbald, descended from Eawa, and with the death of Ecgfrid that line also became extinct.

Cenwulf, who succeeded, was descended in the sixth generation from Cenwealh, another brother of Penda; he died apparently in peace about 821; his son Kenelm is said to have been murdered at the instigation of his sister, Kynethritha, Abbess of Winchcombe, on July 17th, 822, and Ceolwulf, a brother of Cenwulf, was hallowed by Archbishop

¹ H. and S., iii. 356.

² K. C. D., cii.; C. S., 183.

Wulfred on September 17th of that year.¹ He did not, however, retain his power long, for two years later we are told he was deprived of his kingdom. The word used, *besciered*, should be noticed; in an 11th century glossary (Cleopatra, A. iii.) *Ice eom bescyred* is glossed *Fraudor*, and there are other glosses with a similar meaning.² The meaning, therefore, would seem to be that Ceolwulf was defrauded of his kingdom. Ethelbald went out by violence, and Ceolwulf by fraud, and with him ended, so far as we can see, the male line of the House of Pybba.

Little, if anything, was gained by the change. Beornwulf who succeeded does not seem to have been a member of the Royal house. His name occurs among the witnesses to an original document of the reign of Ceolwulf,³ where he appears as last of ten "duces." We should gather from this that he owed his promotion to Ceolwulf, and that he was not highly distinguished among his brethren. An incident of his reign was the slaughter of two ealdormen, Burghelm and Muca; of these Muca is found as a witness to two documents of the reign of Ceolwulf.⁴ Beornwulf's career was short and inglorious; a war with Egbert, King of the West Saxons, ensued, in which, as we should gather from the fact that the decisive battle was fought at Ellandun⁵, Beornwulf was the aggressor, with the result that Kent, Surrey, Sussex, and Essex were brought under the power of the West Saxons, and the East Angles asked for their protection. Shortly afterwards Beornwulf was slain by the East Angles. Ludeca, a "propinquus"⁶ of Beornwulf, followed; he appears among the witnesses to two documents of 824 as ninth among thirteen, and last among five, "duces."⁷ About two years later he fell in battle and his five ealdormen with him, and Wiglaf who succeeded, and

¹ K. C. D., ccxvi.; C. S., 370.

² Wülcker, i. 408, 7. ³ C. S., 373. ⁴ 370, 373.

⁵ Wroughton, near Swindon. ⁶ M. H. B., 548.

⁷ C. S., 378, 379; K. C. D., ccxviii.

about whom nothing has been heard before, was soon driven into exile by Egbert.

The realm of the Mercians had sunk down in a welter of blood: as the members of the Royal house evidently had no love for each other, so it is not likely that their subjects wasted much affection on them; and the two men of the people who followed either lacked the personal qualities or failed to secure the general support which could alone avail to save the kingdom. Henceforward Mercia was dependent either in fact or name on Wessex. But it was not possible to govern the Mercians simply as a subject race, so in 830 Wiglaf was restored as an under-king. Berthwulf followed in 838, and before long the Northmen began to cut him short. Under 838, most likely 841, it is recorded that Herebryht, the ealdorman, was slain and with him many of the Marshmen; it has been supposed that he ruled in Mercia, but as all his signatures are affixed to Kentish documents¹ it is more probable that the entry refers to the Kentish marsh land. In that year, however, it is distinctly said that many men were slain by the enemy in Lindsey, in the following year that there was great slaughter in London, while in 851 Berthwulf was defeated and London was taken by storm. In 852 Burhred was king, and in the next year Ethelwulf, King of the West Saxons, gave him his only daughter, Ethelswith, as his wife; he thus linked Wessex and Mercia together, but the former kingdom would have been the predominant partner. The *Chronicle* relates no inroads into Mercia on the part of the Northmen during the first fourteen years of the reign of Burhred; but that such inroads took place is clear from the fact that a grant of land at Ablington and other places from Burhred to Alhun, Bishop of Worcester, is dated in 855 "quando fuerunt pagani in Wreocensetun."² And if the Northmen could penetrate as far as the Wrekin, they could

¹ K. C. D., ccxxxix., ccxli.; C. S., 418, 419, 426.

² K. C. D., cclxxvii.; C. S., 487.

reach almost any part of central England. In the same year and Indiction, however, Burhred made a grant at Tamworth;¹ he was at Tamworth also in 857,² and on July 25th, 864, he made a grant at Bath³; but with the exception of a very doubtful Gloucester charter, purporting to have been granted in 862 at Wellesburne,⁴ no other of his later charters show where they were granted. In 867, however, the Northmen went from East Anglia over Humber and took possession of York. This implies a march through Lindsey, and no doubt the reduction of that province. In 868 the army took up winter quarters at Nottingham, and an appeal to the West Saxons brought their forces to the siege of that fortress. When this proved to be unsuccessful, and the West Saxons went home, the Mercians made peace with the army, no doubt by the payment of tribute, and the beginning of the end had come. In 872 the army wintered at London, in 873 at Torksey on Trent; on each occasion peace was purchased, and in 874, when the army settled for the winter at Repton, Burhred fled to Rome.

Æthelred, who was afterwards son-in-law of King Alfred, first appears as a witness to a grant made by Burhred to his thegn, Wulflaf, of land at Upthorp, in 869; his name is written in the margin opposite to the names of three other "duces."⁵ The document is a 10th century copy of the original charter, *MS. Cotton*, Augustus A, II. 76, which Kemble describes as "an invaluable collection of autograph and original charters." Soon afterwards he seems to have been exercising a quasi-independent jurisdiction under Burhred, for we find him as "Athelred Deo adjurante Merciorum dux" granting land to Cuthulf at Marnanclive, no doubt Marcliff, in Bidford, near Stratford-on-Avon.⁶ Since the names of Wrefrith, Bishop of Worcester, and King Burhred are found among the witnesses, the grant must have been made between the consecration of Were-

¹ K. C. D., cclxviii.; C. S., 488, 489. ² K. C. D., cclxxx.; C. S., 492.

³ K. C. D., ccxc.; C. S., 509. ⁴ C. S., 503.

⁵ K. C. D., ccxcix.; C. S., 524.

⁶ K. C. D., ccciv.; C. S., 537.

frith at Pentecost, June 7th, 873, and the flight of Burhred in 874. It is remarkable that although Ethelred grants the charter in his own name, the names of King Burhred and his Queen, Ethelswyth, appear among the witnesses. Since Marcliff was in the diocese of Worcester, and therefore no doubt in the province of the Huiccians, Ethelred must have been ealdorman of that province; and as the Danes had never penetrated in force into that part of Mercia, it is quite possible that, owing to the weakness of the position of Burhred elsewhere, Ethelred had attained to a quasi-independent position within his own province. At any rate, it is clear that Ethelred asserted the same position for himself in this charter under Burhred as that which he occupied afterwards under King Alfred.

On Burhred's flight the Danes committed the care of Mercia to Ceolwulf, whom the Chronicler calls an unwise king's thegn, and William of Malmesbury styles a *semivir*; but the days of Mercian independence had really ended more than half a century before, and it is difficult to see in what way the position of Ceolwulf differed from that of Ethelred except that he served another overlord. Two grants of land by Ceolwulf, King of the Mercians, to Bishop Werefrith are extant, both dated in 875 and witnessed by bishops and duces in the usual way; but the name of Ethelred does not appear in either of them.¹ At any rate, Ceolwulf held the whole of the Mercian realm till 877, when the Danes divided out a portion for settlement among themselves and left the rest to him. Unfortunately we have no evidence at all to show on what lines this division was made. In the winter of 877 they captured Gloucester after a stern resistance, which it is quite possible was inspired by Ethelred, and at Pentecost, 878, they met with a crushing defeat at Ethandun.

This must have made it clear to the Northmen that they had reached the limit of their conquests. They could not settle even the whole of Mercia, and the West Saxons had

¹ K. C. D., cccvi., cccviii.; C. S., 540, 541.

defeated them; therefore, as the *Chronicle* records, in 879 they went from Wessex to Cirencester, and in the following year they retired to East Anglia and settled there.

So, quite in accordance with these entries in the *Chronicle*, we find Ethelred back again as ealdorman of the Mercians in 880, for in that year he granted land at Brightwell and Watlington, in Oxfordshire, to the Church of Worcester.¹ It is to be noted that although Thorpe² assigns this document to 887, and has even inserted the date DCCCLXXXVII. in the body of the charter, Mr. W. de Gray Birch, in a letter dated February 19th, 1902, assured me that the date in both copies of the charter is really 880. The Indiction is given as V., and Thorpe may have altered the date to suit the Indiction. Among the witnesses are King Alfred, Ealdorman Ethelred, and "Æthelflæd conjux." This is the King's daughter who was afterwards known as the Lady of the Mercians. Asser tells us³ that in 868 Alfred married a daughter of Ethelred, "Gainorum comitis," who was called "Mucil." The Gaini were no doubt inhabitants of the district of Lindsey, near Gainsborough. It is likely that Alfred met his bride, whose name was Ealhswith, at Nottingham in that year, and that the ealdorman and his family had been driven from their province by the march of the Northmen through Lindsey in the preceding year. The fact that some forty years later the Lady of the Mercians brought the relics of St. Oswald from Bardney to Gloucester may very probably have been a consequence of a family connection with Lindsey.

The name Mucel dux is found attached to Mercian documents from about 840⁴ to 866⁵; and in 868 it is found attached to two West Saxon documents—a Winchester charter and one belonging to Abingdon Abbey.⁶ The latter

¹ K. C. D., cccxi.; C. S., 547.

² *Diplomatorium*, p. 133.

³ M. H. B., 475.

⁴ C. S. 429. ⁵ K. C. D., ccxcii.; C. S., 513.

⁶ K. C. D., mlxi., ccxcviii.; C. S., 520, 522.

document possesses a pathetic interest; for it records a sale by Æthelswith, Queen of the Mercians and sister of Alfred, of land at Laking, probably Locking, in Berkshire—a Princess of the West Saxons and Queen of the Mercians selling what was doubtless a portion of her inheritance, no doubt in order to provide part of the price of the peace which the Northmen made with the Mercians in 868. It would seem that Mucel, who had been driven from his province by the Northmen, found a home in Wessex after the marriage of his daughter.

As Alfred married Ealhswith in 868, Æthelflæd might have been about twelve years old in 880, and that was the nubile age for women then as now. The words of Asser also—"Æthelflæd, adveniente matrimonii tempore, Eadredo Merciorum comiti matrimonio copulata est"—would seem to imply that she was married to Ethelred at as early an age as possible.¹ But though charters are extant witnessed both by King Alfred and Ethelred in 883, and by Ethelred in 884, her name does not appear again as a witness until 888, when she would have been about twenty years of age. From that time she signs regularly with Ethelred, as a queen would sign with a king. It is evident that she was married to Ethelred, as Ethelswith had been married to Burhred fourteen years before, as a link between Wessex and Mercia; marking also the subordination, though not the subjection, of the latter realm.

We can best form an idea of the extent of the dominion of Ethelred and Æthelflæd by noting the places at which their charters were granted and the localities of the estates with which they dealt:—

¹ M. H. B., 485.

DATE.	PLACE OF GRANT.	LOCALITY OF ESTATES.
880	...	Brightwell, Watlington, and Benson, in Oxfordshire.
883	...	Berkeley and Stoke Bishop, near Bristol.
884	Princes Risborough, in Bucks	Himbleton, in Worcestershire.
888	Droitwich	St. Paul's Walden, Herts.
...	...	Old Sodbury.
889	...	London.
896	Gloucester	Woodchester.
897	...	Estates of Winchcombe Abbey, Upton-on-Severn.
880 to 901	...	Privileges to the Church of Worcester.
898	Celchyld	Ætheredes Hyd, or Retheres Hide, Rotherhithe.
800 for 900 Indiction of 900	...	Stanton, between Derby and Burton (?). A grant of Æthelflæd.
901	...	Estates of Wenlock Abbey. Stanton, in Derbyshire (?), Easthope and Patton, near Much Wenlock, Shropshire.
903	...	Princes Risborough, Bucks.
904	...	Wrington, Somerset.
904	...	Worcester.
916	...	Farnborough, Berks.

It will be seen that the estates lie in an area extending from London to Bristol and north nearly as far as Shrewsbury, being bounded, roughly speaking, by the Thames, Severn, and Watling Street. A few of the estates demand special notice. St. Paul's Walden lies between St. Alban's and Hitchin, to the east both of the Lea and Watling Street, and in the ancient diocese of London. There can be no doubt, however, that this identification is correct. The charter granting the land of xv manentes at Waledene to Wulfgar is a St. Alban's document, which was accepted as

genuine by Kemble.¹ The St. Alban's list of benefactors attributes the gift to Wulfgar, a Minister of King Ethelred,² and it appears in *Domesday* as Waldene, a possession of the abbey rated at ten hides. Both the manor and rectory belonged to the abbey at the Dissolution, though the rectory afterwards passed into the possession of the Chapter of St. Paul's. The document of 889, purporting to be a grant by King Alfred and Ethelred of land at London to Bishop Werefrith, was doubted by Kemble, and seems to contain later matter; but the document of 898 was passed by him. There is no clue by which the estate of Stanton can be certainly identified, and the grants of Wrington and Farnborough can best be dealt with later on.

The question arises whether Ethelred received the whole of this territory in 880, or whether Ceolwulf retained possession of London. There is certainly something to be said for the latter view. In his charter of 883 relating to Berkeley Minster, Ethelred describes himself as "gewelegod & gewlenced mid sume dæle Mercna rices," "enriched and exalted with a part of the Mercians' realm." One is reminded of the passage of the *Chronicle* for 871 relating to the division of Mercia by the Northmen: "Hit gedældon sum, & sum Ceolwulfe saldōn." "Some part of it they portioned out, and some they gave to Ceolwulf."³ There are also passages of Florence of Worcester which certainly seem to imply that when King Alfred, in 886, obtained possession of London, its conquest had followed on the death of Ceolwulf: "Post cujus mortem, West Saxonum rex Alfredus, ut exercitum paganorum Danorum suo de regno penitus expelleret, strenuitate sua Lundoniam cum circumjacentibus terris recuperavit, et partem regni Merciorum, quam, Ceolulfus habuit, acquisivit."⁴ DCCCLXXXVI.—"Eodem anno Alfred Angulsaxonum rex, post incendia urbium, stragesque populorum, Lundoniam civitatem honorifice

¹ K. C. D., mlxviii.; C. S., 557.

² *Monasticon*, ii. 219.

³ Freeman, *N. C.*, i. 573.

⁴ M. H. B., 639.

restauravit et habitabilem fecit; quam etiam Ætheredo Merciorum comiti servandam commendavit."¹ The *Chronicle* tells us that in 886 King Alfred occupied London, that all the English people submitted to him except those who were under the power of the Danes, and that then he committed the borough to Ealdorman Ethelred to hold. Taking the three passages together, they would well bear the interpretation that after the death of Ceolwulf, and probably in consequence of it, King Alfred took possession of London, but only after a sharp resistance; and then, because it pertained to Mercia, he committed it to Ethelred. It certainly seems likely that though Ethelred, in 880, obtained possession of some part (some dæle) of Mercia, he did not obtain the whole, but that Ceolwulf, whether under the overlordship of Alfred or of the Danes is not clear, kept possession of London; that on his death, about 886, Alfred could only win the town after sharp fighting. The pact known as "Alfred and Guthrum's peace"² does not help us in this matter, because it is not possible to fix its date definitely. It might have been made at any time before Godrum's death in 890; and, in any case, Walden granted by Ethelred in 888, "ministro meo fideli Wulfgaro," lies in the territory assigned to Godrum.

We now have to consider the political position of Ethelred, both to the Mercian people and to King Alfred, and this we can best do by noting the exact terms in which these relations are stated in the charters.³

It is remarkable that in the two charters relating to land at Marnanclive and Stoke Bishop Ethelred describes himself as "Deo adjuvante Merciorum dux," and "through the inspiring grace of God enriched and exalted with a part of the Mercians' realm," without any mention of the overlord in the body of the charter, though the names of Kings Burhred and Alfred appear among the witnesses.

¹ M. H. B., 561.

² Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, 66; Schmid, *Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 106; C. S., 856, 857.

³ See pp. 342, 343.

But generally there is mention both of the leave of King Alfred and of the consent of the prelates, nobles, and people of the Mercian realm. It is clear that the Mercian people was still a self-governing community under their Ealdorman Ethelred; and though the knowledge or leave of King Alfred was usually recited in the charter, his presence was not necessary, for while the gatherings at Risborough in 884 and Droitwich in 888 were clearly formal gemots of the Mercians, the name of the King is not found among the witnesses. Again, during the reign of Alfred there is no word implying the subjection of the Mercians; the formula found in the charter of 903, "Prædictus dux rogavit Eadwardum regem Æthelredum quoque et Æthelflædam qui tunc principatum et potestatem gentis Merciorum *sub prædicto rege* tenuerunt," is an innovation. The word *tunc* might, indeed, be thought to be a mark of a later date; but the charter is an original one which was passed by Kemble. The fact that no charter of King Edward granting land in Mercia exists of a later date than 904 would be important were it not that his reign is singularly barren of charters of any kind except Winchester ones.

We can now try to estimate the right by which King Alfred ruled in Mercia. He had no natural right to rule there, but it is clear that after the victory at Ethandun had broken the power of the Danes Mercia was derelict. The late king had left the country, and even if he were alive it is not likely that anyone desired his return, while Ceolwulf was discredited as a puppet of the Danes. Ethelred, who had acted as "dux" of the Mercians under Burhred, and who had not acted under Ceolwulf, was a natural leader of the Mercians; but there is nothing to show that he had any claim to kingship, and in any case the triangle of territory between the Thames, Severn, and Watling Street was too small to form an independent kingdom. The Mercian Royal house seems to have become extinct; the last member who can be traced is Wistan, a son of Wigmund, who had married Ælfleda, daughter of

K. C. D.	CART. SAX.	DATE.	GRANTOR.	GRANTEE.	ESTATE.
CCXCIX.	524	869	Burhred	Wulfaf	v man. Upthrope. Ethered written by side of 3 "duces," Æthelhun, Beornheard, Wulfstan.—10th century copy of original charter. Cotton., <i>Aug.</i> , ii. 76, "An invaluable collection of autograph or original charters."
*CCCIV.	537	873 or 874	Athelred	Cuthulf	x man. Marnanclive: "Deo adjuvante Merciorum dux." The name of King Burhred appears among the witnesses with that of Æthelred dux and others.
*CCCVI. *CCCVIII.	540 541	875 875	Ceolwulf Ceolwulf	} Church of } Worcester	The name of Æthelred dux is absent from the two Worcester charters granted by King Ceolwulf in 875.
*CCCXI.	547	880	Æthelred	See of Worcester	Berhtanwellan vi man. Wæclintune viii man. "dux et patricius gentis Merciorum cum licentia et impositione manus Ælfredi Regis una cum testimonio et consensu seniorum ejusdem gentis episcoporum vel principum." Among the witnesses are Ælfred rex and Æthelflæd conjux.
*CCCXIII.	551	883	Æthelred	Berkeley Minster	xii hides at Stoke. "Eldorman, through the inspiring grace of God, enriched and exalted with a part of the Mercians' realm." The name of Ælfred rex is among the witnesses.
MLXVI.	552	884	Æthelred	Æthelwulf	v man. Hymeltun. "divina largiente gratia principatu & dominio gentis Merciorum subfultus."
MLXVIII.	557	888	Æthelredus	Wulfgar	xv man. Waledene. "gratia Dei disponente procurator in domino regni Merciorum." Among the witnesses,—Ego Æthelflæd consensi. A S. Alban's charter passed by Kemble.
*CCCXVI.	561	889	Ælfred and Æthelred	See of Worcester	Land in London. "Ælfred rex Anglorum et Saxonum et Æthelred subregulus et patricius Merciorum cum testimonio et licentia seu consensu senatorum episcoporum seu ducum utriusque gentis." Doubted by Kemble.

MLXXIII.	574	896	...	...	Settlement of dispute concerning Woodchester. "Athelred aldorman summoned all the 'Witan' of the Mercians together at Gloucester, bishops and aldormen, and all his chief men; and did that with the knowledge and leave of King Ælfred."
*CCCXXIII.	575	897	...	...	Settlement of dispute concerning "Uptune." "cum testimonio Ælfredi regis et Æthelredi ducis Merciorum atque omnium senatorum ipsorum." But neither name appears among the witnesses.
MLXXV.	579	880-901	Æthelrod and Æthelflæd	See of Worcester	Privileges. "Æthelred and Æthelflæd have done this with the witness of King Ælfred and of the 'Witan' of the Mercians." No names of witnesses.
	583	800 for 900	Æthelflæd	Alchelm	ii man. Stantun.
CCCXL.	607	900 for 904	...	...	v man. Eatun (Water Eaton) "Eadweard rex, et Æthelred dux et dominator Merciorum, necnon quoque et Æthelflæd."
CCCXXX.	587	901	{ Æthelred { Æ—	Wimnicensis Eccl.	Exchange. "opitulante gratuita Dei gratia monarchiam Merceorum tenentes." Both names among witnesses.
MLXXXI.	603	903	...	...	Dux Æthelfrid asked—"Eadwardum regem, Æthelredum quoque et Æthelfledam qui tunc principatum et potestatem gentis Merciorum sub prædicto rege tenuerunt"—that new land charters might be given to him in place of some that had been burned.
CCCXXXVIII.	606	904	...	...	A similar request couched in similar words, only relating to xx cassates at Wrington, in Somerset.
*CCCXXXIX.	608	904	The Bishop and Convent of Worcester	Æthelred and Æthelflæd	Land near Worcester. A lease for their two lives and that of Ælfw' "that it be uncontroverted while she liveth."
CCCXLIII.	632	878 for 916	Æthelflæd	Eadric	x man. Fernbeorngen.

* Worcester documents.

King Ceolwulf. Wigmund was a son of Wiglaf, King of the Mercians. Wistan was slain "injuste" by Berhtferth, son of King Berhtulf, on June 1st, 850. Florence of Worcester speaks of him as "sanctus," and of his death as a martyrdom.¹ The Northumbrians had chosen a king not of the Royal line in 867. The only possible king for the Mercians was the West Saxon ruler. It is remarkable, however, that the only witnesses to the charter of 880 granting land at Brightwell and Watlington, besides King Alfred, Ethelred, and Æthelflæd, are the Bishops of Hereford and Worcester, and a Mercian Bishop Wulfred whose See is unknown, as though the secular potentates were holding aloof. The charter, nevertheless, recites that it was given with the consent of the "principes" as well as the Bishops of the Mercian people. The ealdormen, however, appear as usual in 883. It would seem, moreover, that the old ealdormen retained their authority under the different rulers; for of those who signed under Ceolwulf—Beornoth or Beorhtnoth, Æthelhun, Athelwold, and Alhfert—Beornoth signed in 866 under Burlired and in 884 under Alfred; Æthelhun in 869; Athelwold, as Athelwald, in 883 and 884; and Alhferht, as Æthelferth, in 833 and 884. There seems to have been no break in the government of the realm. No doubt there must have been some formal acceptance of King Alfred by the Mercian Witan, but it is singular that no writer definitely mentions it.

It seems clear that Gloucester was the seat of government under Ethelred and Æthelflæd; there they gathered the Mercian Witan in 896, there they founded St. Oswald's Minster, and there they both were buried. The Abingdon edition of the *Chronicle* places the bringing of St. Oswald's body from Bardney to Gloucester in the year 909, but Manuscript D, belonging probably to Worcester or Evesham, in 906. Both copies must have taken the date from a register of Mercian events, and it is not easy

¹ M. H. B., 550.

to reconcile the discrepancy. When St. Oswald was slain at Maserfelth in 642, Penda commanded that the head and the hands, with the arms, should be cut off from his body and fixed on stakes. King Oswy took them away in the following year, and buried the head at Lindisfarne and the hands at Bamburgh.¹ His body was removed by Osthryd, a daughter of Oswy, and so a niece of St. Oswald, to Bardney between 679 and 697, where it rested beneath the Royal banner of the saint till the minster was destroyed, no doubt when the Northmen marched through Lindsey in 867. It is worth noting that Ealhswith, wife of King Alfred and daughter of Mucel, *Comes* of the Gainas, died in 905, and it is quite possible that the Lady of the Mercians brought the relics of the saint from Lindsey, where her grandfather had ruled, to her home at Gloucester at her mother's request. Oswald was the first Englishman through whom miracles were wrought.² Bede relates a number which were worked soon after his death,³ and Ælfric, writing early in the 11th century, says that "St. Oswald's bones were again brought, after many years, into Mercia to Gloucester; and God often shews many wonders there through the holy man."⁴ Two of the manuscripts of William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum* give a curious account of the death of Thomas, Archbishop of York, on account of his inquisitive meddling with the relics of the saint, in July, 1100. The same authority relates that St. Oswald's shrine was renewed by Archbishop Thurstan about a quarter of a century later.⁵

The death of Ethelred is placed by the Parker Manuscript of the *Chronicle* in 912, by the Abingdon Copy (C) in 911, and by the Worcester Copy (D) both in 910 and 912. Ethelwerd, who places his death in 910, stated that he was buried at Gloucester.⁶ King Edward then took

¹ Bede, H. E., iii. 12.

² William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum, R.S.*, i. 54.

³ H. E. iii., cap. 9-13.

⁴ "Life of St. Oswald," Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*, p. 105.

⁵ Rolls Series, 263, 295. ⁶ M. H. B., 519.

possession of London and Oxford and the territories dependent upon them. The territory dependent on London would no doubt have been the ancient diocese of London, consisting of Middlesex, so much of Essex as was then in English hands, and the deaneries of St. Alban's and Braughing in Hertfordshire. The deaneries of Baldock, Berkhamstead, Hertford, and Hitchin lay in the ancient diocese of Lincoln, and had therefore, no doubt, formed part of the original diocese of Leicester. In 913 King Edward went out to secure this territory. About Martinmas (May 12th)¹ he built the northern fort on the Lea between the rivers Maran, Beane, and Lea, represented now, possibly, by Hertingfordbury. Then, in the summer between the Rogation Days (May 23-25) and Midsummer, he went to Maldon to prevent the Danes passing up the river, and encamped there while the fortress at Witham was built and set in order; as a result, we are told that a good part of the people who were under the power of the Danes submitted to him. Meanwhile part of his force had built the fort at Hertford, on the south side of the Lea.

In the same way the territory dependent on Oxford would no doubt be what was left of the diocese of the South Angles, whose See had been at Leicester, but whose bishop, after the flight of Burhred in 874, had set his throne at Dorchester on the very border of his diocese, much as St. David had retired before the heathen Saxons from Caerleon to St. David's three centuries before. The Parker *Chronicle* for 897 records the death of Ealheard, Bishop *at* Dorchester, not *on*; he was simply the Bishop *at* Dorchester, because that was not his proper See.² And so perhaps it was that

¹ There can be little doubt that here, as in 919, the festival intended was that of the "Subventio" of St. Martin, or the restoration of his relics after they had been hidden on account of the invasions of the Northmen. (Ducange, *s.v.*) This festival, which falls on May 12th, was appointed at the Council of Tours in 841. But the Martines mæssa mentioned towards the end of the *Annals* of 918 and 921 must mean November 11th, as also in 1006, 1009, 1089, 1097, and 1099.

² Plummer, *Two Saxon Chronicles*, ii 111.

the remnant of territory was called after the most important place in it. It would have been bounded on the south by the Thames, on the west by Gloucestershire and South-West Warwickshire, on the east by Essex and East Anglia, and in 912 the northern boundary cannot have extended beyond the present shires of Oxford and Buckingham. Certainly it was in the territory of the ancient diocese of Leicester that most of King Edward's fighting took place.

In 917 the Northmen from Northampton and Leicester, after Easter (April 13th), raided the country about Hocneratun (Hook Norton, in Oxfordshire), and took much spoil; but a second expedition against Leighton (Buzzard) was defeated with heavy loss.

In 918 a great fleet came from Brittany and plundered all the shores of the Bristol Channel. After they had been driven away, about Martinmas, King Edward fortified Buckingham, and almost all the chief men who were subject to Bedford submitted to him, and many who were subject to Northampton.

In 919 he captured Bedford and fortified it, and in 920 he fortified Maldon.

The decisive year of the struggle was 921. Before Easter (April 1st) the King fortified Towcester, on the Watling Street, eight miles from the Danish fortress at Northampton, and during the Rogation Days (May 7th-9th) he raised a fortress at Wigingamere. This is generally said to be Wigmore, in Herefordshire, an impossible identification, for Wigmore lay in Ethelflæd's district; and, moreover, if the King had gone thither the Northmen in Northampton and Leicester would have plundered busily till he returned. No doubt the fortress was set near Wing and Wingrave, by Leighton Buzzard.

Between Midsummer and Lammas the Northmen from Leicester and Northampton made a fierce but unsuccessful attack on Towcester, and a more successful raid near Aylesbury. Moreover, as a counter-stroke to the fort at Towcester, they left Huntingdon and advanced up the

Ouse to Tempsford, only seven miles from Bedford, where they made a fortress and pressed on to attack Bedford, but were defeated. The same fate befell those who attacked the King's fortress at Wing.

Then, in the same summer, a host was gathered from the King's portion of Mercia and took the fortress at Tempsford by storm, slaying the King, Toglos the Earl, and his son Manna the Earl, and many more; while during harvest another host was gathered from Kent, Surrey, and Essex, which captured Colchester. The Northmen retaliated by an unsuccessful attack on Maldon. Lastly, but still during harvest, King Edward came with the West Saxon army to Passanham, near Stony Stratford, and strengthened the fortress at Towcester with a stone wall. This was an evident preliminary to an attack in force on Northampton, and as a result the Northmen there surrendered, as did also the rest of the Northmen as far north as Welland. It only remained for the King to secure what he had won, and the campaign closed with the fortification of Huntingdon and Colchester and the submission of the Northmen in East Anglia and round Cambridge.

In 922, between Rogationtide (May 27th-29th) and Midsummer, the King captured Stamford, and while he was there Æthelflæd died at Tamworth on June 12th. He then went to Tamworth and received the submission of Æthelflæd's portion of Mercia and its dependencies, and finally he took possession of Nottingham. As Derby and Leicester had already been captured by Æthelflæd, the conquest of central England was complete. In 923 he went to the north-west and fortified Thelwall and Manchester; in 924 he went from Nottingham to Bakewell, in the Peak, and fortified it; and after receiving the submission of all the peoples in Britain, he died in 925.

I have followed the West Saxon chronology of the Parker *Chronicle* with regard to Edward's wars, and as an account of the campaigns of Æthelflæd is already given in the paper on the "Danes in Gloucestershire,"¹ it is

¹ *Transactions*, xvii. 89-92.

unnecessary to repeat it, especially as the uncertainty of the dates renders it impossible to compare the progress of the campaigns of the two children of Alfred.

We can now see the meaning of the statement that after the death of Ethelred, King Edward took possession of London and Oxford and the lands pertaining to them. It was evidently an amicable division between the brother and sister of the task of pushing the Northmen till they had subdued them. True the brother had the larger share, but he also had the harder task, and no doubt the harder task was allotted to him because he alone of the two had the right to call on the forces of Wessex, Surrey, and Kent, as he did do in 921. Æthelflæd worked north from Gloucester, and Edward from Oxford. He was King, but she did not cease to be "domina" Lady of the Mercians. It is evident that they were not divided in mind, for Athelstan, who was born in 895, was brought up in the Court of Æthelflæd,¹ a circumstance which may have made the Mercians more ready to accept his rule in later days.

When Æthelflæd died, the *Abingdon Chronicle* relates that she was buried in the east "portice" of St. Peter's Church at Gloucester. William of Malmesbury, in the *Gesta Regum*, also says she was buried in St. Peter's; but in the *Gesta Pontificum* he says that in the time of Thurstan, Archbishop of York (1119—1139), when St. Oswald's Minster was enlarged, the bodies of Ethelred and Æthelflæda were found in the south porch.² The *Abingdon and Worcester Chronicles* relate that King Edward died among the Mercians at Farndune. There is a Farndon on the Fosse near Newark, where he is very likely to have been, for the Danes were strong in Lindsey; but there is another place of the same name near Chester, and there are two more in Northamptonshire. The place of his death, therefore, is uncertain; but he was certainly buried with his father in the New Minster at Winchester.

¹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, R. S., i. 145.

² Rolls Series, 293.

Ethelred and Æthelflæd certainly had one daughter, Ælfwyn, whose name seems to occur first as one of the beneficiaries in a three-life lease granted by the Bishop and Convent of Worcester to Ethelred and Æthelflæd in 904.¹ She also appears as Ælfwyn *episcopus* in an Abingdon document purporting to be a grant to Eadric of land at Feornbeorgan.² The title is an impossibility, because Ælfwyn is a female name. It was no doubt transferred from Ælfwine *episcopus*, who comes next in order; he was Bishop of Lichfield about this time. But the charter is a very doubtful one.

Ælfwyn seems to have enjoyed a short period of sovereignty over the Mercians, for the Abingdon *Chronicle*, which sets her mother's death on June 12th, 918, relates that she was deprived of all dominion over the Mercians and carried away into Wessex three weeks before Christmas in 919. The entry, by speaking of her as Ethelred's daughter, seems to derive her claim to rule from her father rather than from her mother. Henry of Huntingdon says that in this the King acted "magis curans an utiliter vel inutiliter ageret, quam an juste vel injuste."³ The action of Edward appears to us harsh, but if we might believe a late Welsh authority—the so-called *Chronicle of Caradoc*, a monk of Lancarvan—that she was sought in marriage by a son of the Danish King of Northumbria, he had reason enough; for a Lady of the Mercians married to a Danish King might have been a difficult neighbour for the King of the West Saxons.⁴ Though the matter is not mentioned by any English historian, it is probable enough. The last recorded action of Æthelflæd was an agreement with the Yorkshiremen, confirmed by pledges and oaths, that they would be under her rule. It is likely enough that Æthelflæd intended to confirm the agreement by the marriage of her daughter to the Northmen's prince, precisely as she had been married

¹ K. C. D., cccxxxix; C. S., 608.

² K. C. D., cccxlili; C. S. 632. ³ M. H. B., 745.

⁴ Lappenburg, *England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings*, ii. 116, 126.

to Ethelred some forty years before, and as Athelstan gave his sister in marriage to Sihtric, King of Northumbria, a few years later. The result would have been that Northumbria and Western Mercia would have been under one rule and the rest of England under another, and Edward was certainly right in preventing this. Nothing more is heard of Ælfwyn, for the time at any rate; but the fact that she did rule for a year and a half would seem to imply that there must have been some definite reason for her deposition.

In conclusion, it is right to notice a grant of Wrington, in Somerset, to Glastonbury Abbey, which is identical as far as the name of the estate granted with an original Mercian charter of 903, by which new land charters were granted by King Edward, Ethelred, and Æthelflæd to the "dux" Æthelfrith in place of some which had been burned with regard to land at Prince's Risborough.¹ The same petition is made by the same person to the same authorities with regard to twenty cassates at Wrington, in Somerset, and granted by them. Then follows this sentence,—*"Et hanc præfatam largitionem ego Edred² rex et totus senatus Anglorum devoto animo Ethelfritho duci in perpetuam hereditatem persolvimus,"* &c., and the two signatures: *Ego Athelret consensi et confirmari. Ego Edward rex consensi et subscripsi.* Then come the land boundaries, and last of all: *"Hanc præfatam hereditatem Athelstan dux filius Etheredi conversus et factus monachus optulit secum ad monasterium Glastingensis illamque sibi largitus est Athelstan Rex."* Assuming the authenticity of the document, it would certainly follow that the Athelstan dux who gave Wrington to Glastonbury was a son of the Ethelred who granted the charter, and therefore of the Ealdorman of the Mercians. If this were so, the West Saxon King would probably not have been sorry when he became a monk of Glastonbury. An Æthelstan "dux"

¹ K. C. D., mlxxxi., cccxxxviii.; C. S., 603, 606.

² Probably written for Eadward.

begins to sign among the witnesses to charters in 930,¹ but the name is found so frequently on to the very end of the reign of Edgar, in 975, that it is evident that it represents more than one person. The editors of the *Crawford Charters* have a long note on these signatures (pp. 82-84), which does not, however, lead to any very definite result. Since Æthelstan, Ealdorman of East Anglia, known as the "Half-King" on account of his great influence, certainly became a monk of Glastonbury, we might be inclined to identify him with the Æthelstan of the charter. "The *Vita S. Oswaldi* says that his son was *progenitus ex regali prosapia*, and the *Ramsey History*, p. 11, describes him as *ab atavis regibus præclara ingenuæ successionis linea transfusus*. King Edgar's charter to Ramsey² speaks of Æthelwine, Æthelstan's son, as *Michi . . . propinquitatis consanguinitate connexus*, which may refer to kinship on the maternal side. The charter cannot, however, be trusted implicitly, as it has been much tampered with, even if it be not, indeed, a forgery entirely."³ Still, even supposing the document to be a fiction, the statement concerning relationship may very likely be true. A forger would be careful enough not to insert anything he knew to be doubtful or false; and what is said about Æthelstan here would certainly fit in very well with the idea that he was a son of the Lady of the Mercians. Again, the fact of the peculiar form of the Wrington charter is strong evidence for its authenticity; a forger in the interests of Glastonbury would not be likely to go out of his way to take a Mercian grant as a model for his fiction. Since King Æthelstan gave Wrington to Æthelstan "dux," it is clear that the land, and no doubt the land charters, had come in some way into his possession; and what would be more natural than to endorse on the old Mercian title-deed the fact that the Æthelstan who gave the estate to Glastonbury was a son of the Ealdorman of the Mercians? There certainly seems to be a strong

¹ K. C. D., cccxvi.; C. S., 667; found in the Bath and Abingdon books.

² K. C. D., dlxxxii.; C. S., 1310.

³ *Crawford Charters*, 82.

probability that this was the case; but there is also certainly not sufficient evidence to prove it, and we might have thought that if it were so there would be some record of the fact. The Ealdorman Æthelfrith of the Wrington charter is evidently the one who, as we have seen, had signed in 875, 883, and 884. He also appears in a Winchester charter of 901;¹ but the suggestion² that the *Etheredi* of the Glastonbury charter represents *Eihelfredi*—Æthelfrith seems to be of very doubtful value. Athelret appears as signing the charter, and this must be meant for the name of the Ealdorman of the Mercians, since his name appears in the body of the document as one of the grantors. We are nowhere told by any contemporary authority that Æthelred and Æthelflæd had only one child, and if Æthelstan had been a mere boy at the time of his mother's death the chroniclers might naturally pass him over without notice.

With regard to Ælfwyn, an original document of the year 948 is extant by which King Eadred granted six sulungs of land at Wicham, in Kent, to the "religiosa fæmina" Ælfwyn.³ This may very probably have been the daughter of the Lady of the Mercians, and, if so, we should suppose that when she was taken into Wessex she became an inmate of some religious house, and that is, of course, very likely indeed to have been the case. But nothing is really known about her after she was carried into Wessex. It is evident from the occurrence of the place-names Ellbridge and River Stour in the land-boundaries that the place intended is Wickham, about four miles east of Canterbury.

¹ K. C. D., mlxxxviii.; C. S., 595.

² *Crawford Charters*, 83.

³ C. S., 869.