

HENGEST

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1. UNWRITTEN HISTORY

WHEN Hengest was alive, in what some people call the Heroic Age and others the Dark Ages, there was no thought of committing history to writing. It is true that a form of writing existed. A few wise men knew the Runic alphabet, but to most people it was a form of magic and in any case it was quite unsuitable for the common folk. The chieftains lived in great wooden halls, rather like the barns of to-day, and their retainers and servants lived around them. In these halls history was handed down by word of mouth. All the most important people were expected to be able to play the harp and to improvise alliterative poetry in honour of the giver of the feast, or in order to record their adventures. There were also minstrels particularly skilled in this form of entertainment, and these learnt all the famous deeds of their master and his house, and sang them to his guests as occasion required.

In such a manner was the history of Hengest handed down for five hundred years or more before it was committed to writing or, at least, before it assumed the form that we find in the only manuscript we have left. Although we have also two small saga fragments, which we must presently notice, only one saga of the Heroic Age has come down to us complete. It is called "Beowulf".

We must now consider our manuscript sources in more detail, beginning with one of the fragments.

2. THE FINNSBURH FRAGMENT

There was once a small sheet of parchment upon which was recorded our very earliest information about Hengest and this is the story of what happened to it. In the year 1705 a scholar named George Hickes published in London what he called a *Treasury of the Old Northern Tongues*. He was not a very great scholar, but he was extremely enthusiastic and he searched far and wide for his materials, making copies of them to the best of his ability. It is most unfortunate, but it is no use hiding the fact, that he made on an average at least one little mistake in every four or five lines of poetry. One day George Hickes visited the great library of the Archbishops of Canterbury in their Palace at Lambeth in London. There he was shown a fragment of parchment covered with ancient writing. Hickes copied it as well as he was able and from his copy the printer produced the version which we find in the printed *Treasury of the Old Northern Tongues*. Since

that book was published both the copy and the original manuscript have vanished so that we have nothing with which the printed account can be compared.

This record has obtained its distinctive name because it tells us of a place called Finnsburh and of the fighting which took place there. There are only fifty lines of poetry but they give us the names of Hengest and some of his companions and a vivid picture of the opening of the battle, of which the later stages are described in the next manuscript we have to consider.

3. THE MANUSCRIPT OF BEOWULF

This manuscript has already been mentioned as that containing the only complete surviving story of the Heroic Age. This story does not deal with Hengest but with the adventures of a Gothic warrior named Beowulf who came to the Court of the ancient Danish Kings at Heorot (which is probably Leire, near Roskild) and there rid the country of two very unpleasant trolls who had been making nightly raids on the Great Hall. In the course of this history there is much description of the countryside and of life as it was lived amongst the kings and nobility. This description includes an account of the festivities which were held when Beowulf returned from his adventures. After his story had been told the company sat down to eat and drink and were entertained by a minstrel, part of whose song is set down. It is this song which dealt with Hengest. It extends to nearly two hundred lines of poetry and it is extremely fortunate for us that it takes up the story where the Finnsburh Fragment left off.

We must examine this story presently but must first deal with the curious history of this Beowulf manuscript which has an important bearing on its exact interpretation. It was written on the basis of an heroic legend about the time that Cnut the Great was born, say, about A.D. 1000. The manuscript came into the possession of the British Museum together with a great number of other manuscripts known as the Cotton Collection. Their proper worth was not fully appreciated and after some time several of them were destroyed and many damaged by fire. The Beowulf manuscript was one of those which was damaged, the edges of many pages being burnt away. Presently an Icelander, named Thorkelin, who lived in Copenhagen came to see the manuscript. He made a careful copy of it and later on had a second copy made by someone else. After Thorkelin's time many of the dried and fragile edges of the parchment broke away, for the manuscript was still not looked after as it ought to have been. When next a student came to study the history of Beowulf in the original he found many words missing which were plain enough in Thorkelin's day. These transcripts at Copenhagen, which are in the Royal Library,

are therefore of very great importance and together with the original tell us all that we know about Beowulf.

Thorkelin made a careful study of his material but his notes were all destroyed in the bombardment of Copenhagen and he had to start all over again. His book was eventually published at Copenhagen in 1815 with the title *De Danorum rebus gestis seculorum iii et iv. Poema Danicum dialecto Anglo-Saxonica*. He was quickly attacked by another student named Grundtvig and an extensive literature grew up. The best list of publications about Beowulf is to be found in the notes published by R. W. Chambers at Cambridge, 1921, under the title *Beowulf, an Introduction, etc.*

The story of Hengest as it was told by the minstrel, and as it is reported in the longer story of Beowulf, is usually known as the Episode in Beowulf. This term will be used hereafter in this essay. Perhaps it may be as well to emphasize once more that Hengest was dead before the time of Beowulf and had become the subject of an heroic saga, and that he never knew Beowulf or any of the kings and leaders of that day.

4. THE GLEEMAN'S TALE

This is the second small fragment and is very often known by the alternative title of Widsith, the "wide Wanderer." It sets out the names of the kings and rulers whose Courts had been visited by a wandering minstrel. The list seems to have been enlarged far beyond the possibilities of any one minstrel and then to have been corrupted by the inclusion of various biblical names such as the Medes, the Persians and the Egyptians. The document is not of great use to us but it does mention some of those whose names come into the story of Hengest. The following four lines include all the names of importance to us—

Oswine weold Eowum	ond Ytum Gefwulf,
Fin Folcwalding	Fresna cynne.
Sigehere lengest	Sæ-Denum weold
Hnaef Hocingum	Helm Wulfingum,

In modern language this means—

Oswine ruled the Eows : and Gefwulf the Jutes.
 Fin son of Folcwald the Frisian race.
 Sigehere longest ruled the sea-Danes.
 Hnaef the Hocings : Helm the Wulfings.

This occasion may be taken for pointing out that Hnaef, of whom we shall hear again, was the son of Hoc and that the Hocingum are really the family or tribe to which Hnaef belonged. They were related to the Royal house of Denmark. Sigehere is another name which we shall meet with again. He is elsewhere described as the lord of the Siegas and it

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would seem that these were his paternal relatives and that they were Danes living on the seaboard, possibly on that side of Denmark which faces towards Great Britain or in the north Frisian Islands.

Fin son of Folwald was a famous name in northern story. He was king of the Frisians who, in the Dark Ages, monopolized the sea borne trade along the western side of Europe as far down as the modern France. Their chief town was Duurstadt not far from Utrecht, but this was later almost entirely destroyed and the importance of the Frisians was never recovered.

5. THE STUDENT'S DIFFICULTIES

It will be apparent from what has been said above that both of these records contain many words of which the precise form and meaning are in doubt. Beowulf was written down many years after it was first composed and may well have varied from mouth to mouth, and perhaps from copy to copy, before it reached the form in which we have it to-day. Many lines have one or more words missing, and even in the time of Thorkelin the fire had already done much damage. Similar difficulties arise in the case of the Finnsburh Fragment and they are even more serious here because it contains a number of personal names the exact form of which we should be very pleased to know. In one way or another there is plenty of room for students to disagree, and they have in fact disagreed, in the many books written with the title "Beowulf," in which books the Finnsburh Fragment is commonly published as a supplement. In the reconstruction of the Hengest story which follows the writer has expressed his own views of what really happened and of the relationship between the various persons named. He is inevitably in conflict with various other writers, both continental and British, and they are equally in conflict with each other, but it is quite impossible to deal with these conflicts in any detail within the limits of anything but a rather lengthy book. It is enough if the reader will kindly note that these other authorities have been carefully studied and that the writer neither condemns their scholarship nor fails to accept their views without what seems to him adequate reasons.

6. THE STORY OF HENGEST—THE FIRST PART

This is the writer's reconstruction of the story set out in the Finnsburh Fragment and the saga of Beowulf.

The story begins before Hengest comes upon the scene and has its origin in a dispute between Hnaef and King Finn of Frisia about a lady named Hildeburh, who was sister to Hnaef and wife to Finn. We do not know what the dispute was about nor have we any material for reasonable conjecture. We can only introduce the characters and describe in due course what parts their fates assigned to them.

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Hnaef is described as a king and also as "young in battle". In Widsith he is said to be ruler of the Hocings, and we know also that he was of the great house of the Scyldings, the royal house of Denmark. These statements are not difficult to harmonize. It was quite usual to accord the title "king" to a representative of the ruling overlord. Hnaef is best understood as a viceroy for the ruling king of Denmark, a post often given to members of the royal family. His headquarters would be in one of the provinces of the kingdom, and there he was king over his own small family or tribe of the Hockings. Who were these and where did they live? We cannot say for certain, but when Hnaef goes to battle he counts amongst his thanes, his sworn companions, Hengest the Jute and Sigehere the ruler of Danes living upon the seaboard. This would suggest that Hnaef was king in some part of Jutland including the North Frisian Islands. He was probably a younger brother of Hildeburh and he had perhaps only recently attained an age which warranted him taking up the quarrel with Finn.

Hildeburh had been Queen to King Finn for some years, for they had a grown-up son who was slain in the fight at Finnsburh. There is nothing to suggest that she was any party to the attack upon Finnsburh, or that she did not live happily with her husband. On the contrary, we are told that she had little reason to be thankful to the "treachery" of the Jutes whereby she had lost both son and brother.

King Finn of Frisia became a very famous figure in legend and his name and that of his father Folwald have been interpolated in various royal genealogies, without the least apparent warrant. He was presumably famous for some feats of which no record has come down to us. All we now know of him is to his credit, but scarcely definite or picturesque enough to form the foundation of a great reputation. Those actions in which he had his part not very long before the year A.D. 449 must now be discussed.

There was in the land of Frisia a town called Finnsburh. It was not the capital of Frisia and was probably of no great importance. Its chief feature was a great wooden hall in which some local magnate lived. Around this were the cattle sheds and the humble dwellings of his dependents. Since it was apparently a sea-side town, there would also be the huts and boat-sheds of the fishermen. Although Frisia attained great fame as a trading country, its basic industry was always fishing and most of its settlements were on the coast.

One day the fishermen of Finnsburh saw a strange ship coming in to land, and they presently discovered that it carried King Hnaef, his foremost followers Hengest and Sigehere, and a band of Jutes, who had come on no peaceful mission. Perhaps there was some fighting. We only know that King Hnaef was soon in possession of the great hall of

Finnsburh and that he and his men were celebrating their success therein. No doubt a messenger sped off to tell King Finn.

At this point begins the story of the Finnsburh Fragment.

The warriors had laid them down to sleep, for night had fallen, when they were roused by King Hnaef who had seen strange lights outside and detected the approach of foes. His thanes spring up and take their places at the doors. At one door is "Hengest sylf"—Hengest himself, an expression showing that he was greater than other men. At another was Sigferth, at others Ordlaf and Guthlaf. Hnaef seems to have been persuaded to remain within the hall. The battle commenced by a Frisian warrior demanding who held the door at which Sigferth was stationed. He obtained the proud reply which was to be expected, and no doubt answered with taunts which soon gave place to blows. The same sort of thing was happening at other doors and the Frisians must have broken in somewhere for King Hnaef was slain, and many of his followers, who are stated to have numbered sixty, fell with him. Many Frisians also fell, including a son of King Finn and Hildeburh, but the fight continued for five long days, the hall being always defended against every assault that the Frisians could stage.

At the end of the five days King Finn proposed a truce, as he properly might, and this proposal was considered by Hengest, who had taken over the command, and discussed with his remaining followers. The Finnsburh Fragment concludes before the question of a truce is raised, and we pass on now to the story as told by the minstrel in Beowulf's saga.

7. THE TRUCE

In proposing a truce King Finn admitted that he had not enough men left to defend himself against Hengest and it seems likely, and is just hinted, that Hengest also was finding himself in difficulties. King Finn offered to treat Hengest's Jutes as if they were his own Frisian retainers, to look after them and to give them such rewards as he gave to his own people. He promised that a new and fine hall should be placed at their disposal, and that they should depart in peace when spring weather made it safe to launch their ship, or ships. He added one further promise, but before we discuss its significance we must turn to the truce as Hengest saw it.

Hengest had been a thane of King Hnaef, that is, he had promised him faithful service. In those days service to a Lord involved a well understood obligation to die by that Lord in battle rather than to make peace with his attacker. There was no doubt about this. It was the one obligation which could not be denied without loss of all personal honour. It was quite true that men had failed to fulfil this obligation and had nevertheless been forgiven and their action approved by public opinion, that is, the opinion of those who knew the facts, but they were

still liable to be condemned by the world at large. Hengest had to consider whether he had good reason to incur such shame.

His Jutish followers were not bound to do more than follow Hengest and they may well have urged that they should be allowed to live to fight another day. Another powerful consideration may well have been the fact that King Finn had no one left who could slay Hengest in fair fight, and was in no way anxious to kill him. There was no law which obliged Hengest to sacrifice himself by refusing to defend his life. It had also to be remembered that King Finn's Queen was the sister of Hengest's dead Lord and that she also wanted no more slaughter. In fact, the common sense and decency of the situation demanded a truce, and only the very strictest interpretation of his obligation to a dead Lord, an obligation now almost impossible to carry out, required a renewal of useless slaughter.

King Finn, of course, knew all about the codes of honour and the last clause which he proposed in the truce was—

That no man by words or deeds should break the truce, nor with calculated remorse bewail it, although they had followed the slayer of their lord, as they could scarcely avoid doing ; and if any of the Frisians should dare to call to mind this deadly feud then the edge of the sword might avenge his words.¹

After due deliberation Hengest and his Jutes accepted this truce. Oaths were sworn on either side and King Finn drew up gold ornaments from his treasure vault and bestowed them upon the warriors who survived, Jutes and Frisians alike, as he had promised. In those days little, if any, money was coined and gifts were usually made and debts paid in valuable ornaments or by breaking off portions of golden torques and arm-rings.

There remained one last rite needful to seal the truce. The permission of Hildeburh was obtained for the burning of her son on the same funeral pyre that consumed her brother. This was done. Afterwards the Jutes seem to have been dispersed through Frisia. Hengest stayed with King Finn in his capital and the others were apparently billeted with persons of appropriate rank. This would tend to make it easier to feed them and more difficult for them to renew hostilities. In such manner the truce reigned throughout Frisia while winter was upon the land.

8. THE BREAKING OF THE TRUCE

So far as Hengest himself was concerned the truce was honourably maintained until spring returned to the land. At this time of the year it

¹ This is a very free translation.

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was customary for sea-rovers to take out their long boats from winter quarters and to put them in order for going overseas. So far as we can judge Hengest had only one boat with him for he is said to have had sixty warriors and these would be about the right complement for a single war boat. It is likely that Hengest went back to Finnsburh to look at his craft for these ships were the great pride of those who sailed in them. There he would remember those who had sailed with him but now would sail no more. As far as he personally was concerned there would be no blood-feuds in respect of any of them, because we do not know that he had any relatives aboard, but it would be almost certain that some of the crew had lost near relatives because the family element was a feature of these raiding bands. The obligation upon these to follow up the blood-feud would be extremely strong and Hengest would be well aware of this. It is not surprising therefore that when spring came, with its opportunity to get back to Denmark, he began to regret that their hands were tied by the conditions of the truce.

It was at this moment that something happened which led to the breaking of Hengest's oath. There came to him Guthlaf and Oslaf. These two warriors are probably the same as the Ordlaf and Guthlaf named in the Finnsburh Fragment as having been in the hall with him in the first of the fighting. The Episode in Beowulf is not very clear as to precisely what happened. It seems that a warrior named Hunlafing came with Oslaf and Guthlaf and that perhaps all three of them, and certainly Hunlafing himself, had spent the winter in their own country of Jutland. They were probably related, Hunlafing being the nephew of the other two. He is only prominent in this story because he has brought with him from Jutland a certain very renowned sword. There is first a scene when all three of them upbraid Hengest and say that he cannot escape responsibility for avenging the deaths of the sons of the Jutes, that is, for those of his band who fell at Finnsburh. They strongly urge him to break the truce and try to prove to him that he was never in a position to make so great a promise to King Finn. Then they offer Hengest the ancient Jutish sword.

Hengest knew well that if he refused the sword it would be the end of him as a man of renown and a leader in war. He also knew that to take the sword meant that he must not only break his oath to King Finn but also attack him forthwith and do him all the harm possible. Then Hengest took the sword. Once more he assumed the position of leader of the Jutes, although his name is not in fact mentioned anymore in the minstrel's song and we may, if we wish, suppose that he hung back as far as honour would permit in attacking his host of the winter months. However that may be, there was a short sharp fight and King Finn was slain amongst his warriors and his palace looted. At this

point a further quotation may be allowed to illustrate this gloomy tragedy—

Then was his hall beset
 with hostile force
 Finn himself was slain
 the king amongst his people
 and his Queen taken.
 The Scylding warriors
 carried to their ships
 all the household goods
 of the king of the land,
 such as they at Finns' home
 might find
 both jewels and curious gems.
 They then on the sea-way
 the Queenly woman
 carried to the Danes
 to their own people led her.

At this point finishes all that we know of this episode in the life of Hengest. He had carried out the original intention to bring away Queen Hildeburh from Frisia and he had undoubtedly defeated the Frisians and done them all possible harm. Nevertheless, he was a marked man. No argument could hide the fact that he had made peace with the slayer of his lord. It might well be difficult for him to take so high a place, if any place at all, under any other lord within the boundaries of Denmark or Frisia. It is quite possible that his voyage to England was determined by this very fact, that he was a marked man and even a disgraced man in his own country. What precisely that country was we must now consider.

9. WAS HENGEST A DANE ?

This question is not quite easy to answer. There is no reasonable doubt that he came from what is to-day a part of Denmark, namely Jutland, but it is not quite so clear that a Jutlander of those days would have called himself a Dane. This is the question which needs examination. It must be remembered that the Danes of those days were Teutons, and that the Scandinavians had not yet arrived there.

In the Heroic Age there were a great number of tribes whose ancestors had come in from central and eastern parts of Europe and had settled in the Scandinavian countries. Some of these tribes were so small as to be little more than family groups : e.g. the Hocingas, the Sea-Danes perhaps, etc. : others had migrated and held together in larger units. Where such tribes settled their name often became attached to the land. Thus England is the land of the Angles and Jutland the land of the

Jutes. But just as England contains several races, some of which do not much like to be called English, so also the land which is now Jutland may well have included more than one race when Hengest was alive. This land and the races it contained were certainly very closely connected with Denmark. The forces under Hengest are sometimes called Jutes (Eotena, Ytum, Iutis) and sometimes Scyldings, the latter name meaning that they were of the race of the Royal House of Denmark, although in fact it would seem that only King Hnaef had this distinction. Included in the band under Hengest and so included under one or other, or both of these terms we meet with Sigehere, who is evidently a very famous man and is sometimes described as Lord of the Siggas (which would be a tribal name) and sometimes as King of the Sea-Danes. In the Widsith poem we find that Oswin ruled the Eows, and no one knows who they may have been, while Gefwulf ruled the Yts who were presumably the Jutes. Some people think that these two may be the Oslaf and Guthlaf of the Finnsburh fight. This is too difficult a point for full discussion here but enough has been said to show that the boundaries between family, tribal and territorial allegiance were very carelessly drawn. Hengest was certainly a Jute and he was certainly in the employment of a Dane of the Royal House. The conclusion which may reasonably be drawn from a study of all the evidence available is that Hengest was indeed a Jute from Jutland and that the Royal family of Denmark, the Scyldings, had undoubtedly established their suzerainty over his country. Whatever the southern boundary may have been, there is little doubt that the Denmark of the Heroic Age had its other boundaries almost precisely similar to those of to-day.

10. WAS IT THE SAME HENGEST ?

It has sometimes been argued that the Hengest who fought at Finnsburh is not necessarily the Hengest who conquered Kent and we must therefore give consideration to this question. It may well be wondered why students have been so slow to regard the two Hengests as one and the same man, since the resemblances are so obvious. The answer is not difficult. For almost the whole of the nineteenth century those who studied the history of the Dark Ages were influenced by an attitude, then popular, of extreme scepticism. It was commonly denied that Hengest and his brother Horsa were anything more than chance figures in a romantic legend, and there was at least the excuse that a highly romantic legend had in fact been written round these two heroes. Some said that the brothers did not exist at all and added that, if they existed, they were not Jutes and that in any case the Jutes did not come from Jutland. This wave of scepticism has now almost spent itself and it is the modern fashion to make a much more realistic approach in our interpretation of the sagas of the Heroic Age.

The first Hengest, of the Finnsburh fight, was quite clearly the leader of a band of Jutes, a sea-rover at need, and in the service of King Hnaef. On the death of the latter this Hengest had the prestige and ability to assume command and the duty of reaching decisions in circumstances of the greatest difficulty. The Hengest who conquered Kent was also the leader of a band of Jutes, also a sea-rover, and also in the service of a king. It was not until some years later that he became a king but his ability to seize this position and the statesmanship which consolidated it are such as we should expect to find if the two Hengests were one and the same person.

In addition, it may be added that there is no reason to believe that the two series of events with which the Hengests are associated were separated by any length of time which would make it necessary to suppose the existence of two different persons.

Since there is identity of (1) name, and that not a common name, and (2) of race, and that not a widespread race, and (3) of military prestige and status, it must be accepted as beyond all doubt that the Hengest of Finnsburh is also the Hengest who conquered Kent.

There is one further point which may be considered. Why should it happen that Hengest was the hero of the minstrel's song in Denmark's royal hall? The incident with which the song deals just mentioned a Danish king but there was little or nothing about his deeds. Hengest was the really outstanding figure, with which the emotional core of the tale was associated. Why did it happen that Hengest was also celebrated in the Finnsburh Fragment? Two of our very slender relics of heroic song happen to be associated with this same person. May we not assume that he was indeed a man whose history bulked very large in early days and even that the minstrel, if he had continued his song, would have carried on the adventures of Hengest until they brought him to even greater eminence as King of Kent?

11. THOSE CURIOUS NAMES

When Hengest came to Britain he had with him a brother named Horsa. These two names—Hengest and Horsa—have done much to discredit the tale of the invasion of Kent, because those acquainted with nothing but our modern methods of giving names have found it impossible to believe that such names, said to mean the Stallion and the Mare, could possibly have been given by any devoted parent, even fifteen hundred years ago. It is quite true that Hengest, or some similar word, means a horse in most northern tongues and, in particular, a Stallion. Horsa has the same general meaning but is used for any sort of horse, for example, in the phrase "wild horses" etc. It is quite true that no mother would be likely to give her children such

grotesque names but this does not alter the fact that they were likely enough names for chieftains of the Heroic Age to bear, having supplanted in adult life whatever pet names their mothers used when they were young.

We do not know why these particular warriors were so called but it is at least possible to make a suggestion. The horse was always a popular figure, especially in Scandinavian art and to a less extent in pagan belief and practice elsewhere. It was therefore the figure a man might choose for his helmet or the prow of his boat. Such carvings were often very elaborate, and of so fierce an aspect, with long curving necks, that the long boats were called snakes or serpents. If Hengest had any figure at all upon the sail of his boat, and we do not know how far this was customary at this date, it might have been that of a prancing horse such as is seen to-day upon the crest of what was once his kingdom of Kent. In one way or another the horse emblem may have been sufficiently identified with Hengest to give rise to the nickname by which alone we know him. When his brother was old enough to join him in oversea adventures it would be almost inevitable that men should widen the nickname to include the two brothers, using Hengest and the alternative and very similar word Horsa. It is very possible that this is what happened although we can scarcely hope to have any final proof.

It has often been argued that the emblem of the white horse, now used very widely in Kent, and the badge of the West Kent regiment, must derive from the days of Hengest and Horsa. This may be so, although we have no record of the fact. There is no white horse carved on the chalk hills of the county, and those to be found in other counties are probably older than the time of Hengest. Nor is it easy to see any other form in which the emblem of a white horse might have been handed down to us in a durable shape. The Saxon coinage of Kent has no white horse and we have no such things as ancient standards which might be expected to bear it. It is true that a very ancient standard buried about the year 670 was recently dug up in Suffolk and it was surmounted by the figure of a deer. It may chance that we shall one day find such a standard in Kent but, until that happens, we can scarcely expect records of the white horse of Kent older than one or two hundred years. Whether Hengest did indeed leave the emblem of the white horse behind him, or use it as an emblem of his sovereignty, must remain an unsettled point.

12. HENGEST GOES TO BRITAIN

We have several records of the arrival of Hengest and his followers, first of all in the Island of Thanet and then over a wider area of

south-eastern England. Some of the manuscripts speak from the point of view of the conquered, others from that of the conquerors. It is perhaps natural that the best records are those of the conquerors.

Of these our earliest is the ecclesiastical history written by Beda, a monk of Jarrow, in the kingdom of Northumberland. He was a good historian and his works have often been edited, the most reliable edition being that of Charles Plummer published at Oxford in 1896, in two volumes which can now only be obtained second-hand. The title is *Baedae Opera Historica*. For information as to Kent Beda relied upon a Kentish churchman who was Archbishop of Canterbury after Beda's death. The churchman in question, named Nothelm, relied in turn upon Abbot Alban who had been educated under Archbishop Theodore, who came to Kent in the year 668 as Archbishop. It is thus reasonably certain that Beda's account reflects the opinions of cultivated circles in his time. He died about A.D. 731. His history, however, was mostly concerned with church questions and the story of Hengest is only incidental.

For a more detailed account of the conquests of Hengest we have to make use of our next authority, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Our earliest copy of this dates from the end of the ninth century. These ancient chronicles were not written as histories and must not be compared with the histories of to-day. The writer took a sheet of parchment and on one side he wrote down a succession of dates, putting the years quite close together. All this can be seen in an excellent facsimile of the chronicle published by the Early English Text Society in 1941 with the title *The Parker Chronicle and Laws*. The clerk who was writing the Chronicle next proceeded to set down opposite each year a very short note of any important event which happened in that year. If no suitable event was known he left a blank. If the event warranted a lengthy entry, this entry would often occupy the space opposite two or more years. The first entry concerning Hengest commences opposite the date 449 and is completed opposite 452. What the Chronicle has to say about him will be discussed more fully later.

The first evidence for the defence is also our oldest account of the coming of Hengest and may have been written about 100 years after that event. It is a lengthy complaint and tirade against the ruling powers of his day written by a churchman named Gildas. He does not mention Hengest by name and the following extract, in translation, will give some idea of his style. I take this translation from Chambers' *England before the Norman Conquest*. Here is the promised extract :—

“Then all the Councillors, together with their haughty king are so blinded that (devising a help, say rather a destruction for the country)

they introduced those ferocious Saxons of unspeakable name, hateful to God and men, bringing as it were wolves into the fold in order to beat back the nations of the north . . . a flock of cubs burst forth from the lair of the barbaric lioness in three keels as they call them in their language, that is, in three warships . . . they landed first in the eastern part of the Island, and there fixed their horrible claws, pretending that they were going to fight for our country but really to fight against it. Their motherland, learning the success of her first band, sends forth a larger body of these mercenary dogs . . . they deliberately make plausible occasions for quarrel and say that unless more liberality is shown them they will break their agreement and depopulate the whole of the Island. And without delay they execute their threat."

From this it will be seen that Gildas is a good authority for the outline of events but he does not distinguish between the invasion of Kent by Hengest and the fate which befell other parts of the kingdom at a later date. His evidence is particularly important where it tells us that the first invaders, that is, Hengest and his followers, came as allies and not at first as conquerors. The survival of pre-Saxon custom in Kent largely resulted from this fact. Our second authority from the side of the conquered is the book associated with a man named Nennius; but it is not decided whether he wrote it or merely edited some older works. In any case it cannot well be dated earlier than the ninth century. The best edition is that of Mommsen (*Gesellsch. für altere Deutsche Gesch. Neues Archiv.*, XIX, 283-93, Hanover, 1894). This compilation of Nennius obviously confuses various sources but adds an account of the opposition to Hengest by Vortimer, son of Vortigern, which has the merit of probability.

Nennius says, among other things :—

"After the above said war . . . the Britons . . . were in alarm for forty years. Vortigern then reigned in Britain. In his time, the natives had cause to be afraid, not only because of the attacks of the Picts and Scots, but also of the Romans and their fear of Ambrosius. In the meantime, three vessels, exiled from Germany, arrived in Britain. They were commanded by Hors and Hengest . . . after the Saxons had continued sometime in the Island of Tanet, Vortigern promised to supply them with clothing and provision, on condition they would engage to fight against the enemies of his race."

There then follows a statement about Vortigern and a beautiful daughter of Hengest, combined with a highly improbable tale about the magician Merlin. Nennius then continues :—

"At length Guorthemer, the son of Vortimer (i.e. Vortigern) valiantly fought against Hengist, Horsa and his people; drove them to the Isle of Tanet, and thrice enclosed them within it, and beset them on the western side. . . . Four times did Guorthemer valorously encounter the enemy; the first has been mentioned, the second was upon the river Derwent, the third at the Ford, in their language called Episford, though in ours Set thirgabail. There Horsa fell, and Catigern, the son of Vortigern. The fourth battle he fought, was near the stone on the shore of the Gallic

Sea, where the Saxons being defeated, fled to their ships. After a short interval Guorthemer died."

13. THE ARRIVAL

It is usually assumed that Hengest and his three ships arrived in the Isle of Thanet but our earliest authorities do not actually say this. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has an entry opposite the year 449 which reads as follows :—

" Here (meaning, in this year) Mauricius and Valentines began to reign and reigned seven years and in their day Hengest and Horsa, called in by Wyrhtgeorne, King of the Britains, landed in Britain at the landing place which is called Ypwines fleet, at first to aid the Britains but afterwards they fought against them."

The ecclesiastical history of Beda says very much the same thing, giving the same year, mentioning three long ships and saying that they were given a place to reside in in the eastern part of the island. He neither states where they landed nor specifies their place of residence.

It is usual to say that Ypwines-fleet is an alternative name for Ebbsfleet, a place still existing in the Isle of Thanet, although now in no way suitable for landing. However this may be, we have the authority of Nennius for saying that they were given the Isle of Thanet for their camping place, and this, according well with what we might otherwise expect, may well be accepted.

Since Hengest had with him three warships he would probably have about two hundred men altogether. There are indications that some of these, under the son of Hengest, were sent off to deal with the raiding Picts in the north of England. The remainder, under Hengest, presumably stayed in Thanet awaiting useful employment and, as Vortigern hoped, so situated that they could do no great mischief in the meantime. It seems likely that in the years intervening between 449, when they arrived, and 455, when they are first recorded as fighting against Vortigern, they received enough reinforcements to bring the original fighting force up to a more formidable total. According to the evidence of Nennius it would seem that they made more than one attempt to break out from the island but were successfully resisted by Guorthemer, the warlike son of a somewhat degenerate father. This account would certainly help to explain why Hengest was kept unemployed for so long. It is perhaps worth mentioning that the common field system of strip cultivation characteristic of continental methods in the early days is prevalent all over Thanet but is much less often met with elsewhere in Kent, and then almost entirely in its eastern part. This may have been introduced by Hengest's followers.

It is impossible to be really precise about what happened when Hengest arrived. The year 449 is generally accepted as a convenient

date for the arrival of the three ships although our authorities do not say this. They state that Martianus and Valentinianus, who were Roman Emperors, succeeded to the Empire and reigned seven years, and that Hengest arrived at sometime during those seven years. The duration of his stay in Thanet is therefore uncertain, and we can only deduce that it was fairly lengthy from the account in Nennius that he made several unsuccessful attempts to break out. Moreover, there are not wanting those who would question almost all the dates in this early part of the chronicle ; but that is going too far. We must take the evidence as it is, and do the best we can with it, only refusing to accept it where there are overwhelming grounds for so doing or in the case of evident copyist's errors and the like.

14. THE CAMPAIGNS OF HENGEST

There has been no detailed study of what Hengest did after he broke out from the Isle of Thanet, most writers having been content to fill up their available space with such matter as criticism of the place-names supplied in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, etc. It must be admitted that these names do not fail to provide scope for discussion but it is also necessary to view his campaigns as a whole.

Why did he come to Britain ? We are told by the authorities on both sides that he was invited by King Vortigern and this we must accept. Perhaps we ought to recast our question and ask " Why did he accept the invitation and stay so long ? " We have already seen that it may well have been difficult for him to take his old place in Jutland, or at the Danish Court, after he had made his peace with King Finn. Nennius actually tells us that he was " exiled " although he specifies no reason. On this evidence it is fair to assume that Hengest was looking for something more than the temporary work of a paid mercenary. He wanted land to settle on. So he answered Vortigern's invitation with some eagerness. No doubt he found the Island of Thanet, certainly more wooded than it is to-day, a pleasant enough spot and he may well have found out that there was other land of the same sort, or better perhaps, lying to the west. He could easily see this land across the narrow waterway which separated him from it. It was certainly more kindly and fruitful than Jutland.

Hengest's followers would be equally aware of these good prospects, and it is very certain that they sent home for their friends and relatives, for on this again the authorities are agreed. In those days these same relatives may well have been in danger from folk migrations, which in part at least occasioned the invasion of Northumbria and other parts of Britain. They would therefore be very glad to escape into this pleasant land, and, before many years, Hengest may have found that he had to deal with a problem of overpopulation to which there was only one

answer, and that answer was expansion beyond the confines of the Isle of Thanet. Nor is it necessary to suppose that before he started out he had planned a campaign which would take him to the Isle of Wight. This extension of his original conquest may well have been occasioned by an increasing need for land as much as by any sheer joy in fighting, or necessity for reaching decisions with unfriendly neighbours.

As already noted, it has often been overlooked that Hengest did in fact advance far beyond the boundaries of Kent. After his second battle we are told, by the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, that the Britons left Kent and with great fear fled to London. This was in the year 457. It is reasonable to suppose that the conquest of Kent, as we now know it was completed in that year. Indeed, since Hengest had got as far as Crayford there was little left to conquer. Nevertheless, there was another great battle eight years after that, at Wippedes-fleet, and still another after another eight years. These must have taken place well to the west of Kent and since we know from the words of Beda, that the Jutes did occupy Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, it is only reasonable to suppose that they came overland to the north of the great forest of the Weald and so down to the Hampshire coast and across to the Isle of Wight. There is no evidence whatever to suggest that they came by sea.

We must thus look upon the campaigns of Hengest as parts of a great drama which led him from his landing as a mercenary somewhere in east Kent to his final capture of a kingdom, very much more extensive than any with which he has yet been credited.

15. BATTLES

Of the first battle we have only the account of the British side as given by Nennius. According to him the result was to keep Hengest and his men from breaking out of the Isle of Thanet. Such victories may well have taken place but there can be no doubt that Hengest did eventually cross on to the mainland and the second battle of which we have any note took place at what is now called Aylesford. This is a crossing of the River Medway, a stream which cuts Kent into two parts. Hengest can hardly have fought there until he had occupied Canterbury, a walled Roman town and the ports, also defended by Roman walls, at Richborough, Dover, Lympne and Reculver. Moving westward from the conquered parts of east Kent he would continually have in mind the problem of defending his flanks. On the east flank he would have the Roman road from Canterbury to Rochester, with the estuaries of the Thames and Medway beyond it. We are bound to assume that he had secured this flank and it seems quite likely that he had done so by seizing Rochester. If the Roman bridge was still standing it is to be

assumed that he would have endeavoured to cross it. It is likely that it had come to grief. On his left flank there lay a range of well wooded sandstone hills and beyond these the Weald of Kent, a district which was too much wooded to be at all suitable for campaigning by either party. This woodland Hengest could well accept as sufficient protection. Since Hengest could not, or, at least, did not cross the River Medway at Rochester, he was obliged to move southward until he found a suitable crossing. For reasons which seemed good to him he chose to cross at Aylesford, and here he met and defeated the forces of Vortigern. Both the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Nennius tell us that Horsa was slain and the latter adds that Vortigern also lost a son, by name Catigern. The Chronicle adds that after this battle Hengest took the kingdom, i.e., he allowed himself to be called King, and had presumably occupied the whole of Kent east of the Medway, and such land on the left bank of that stream as he had recently conquered.

Beda tells us that in his day there was a monument of Horsa in the east part of Kent, and this is stated by later writers to have been at a place called Horsted, which is only a short distance from Aylesford. No monument now remains but there is no good reason for rejecting this tradition, or for refusing to believe that it was Horsa the brother of Hengest, and no other man, whose name is commemorated in that of the village of Horsted.

It was two years later, if we accept the dates in the Chronicle, that Hengest advanced to the next river crossing. The distance is quite small and we ought perhaps to be surprised that he took so long. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that he had quickly occupied the area between the rivers Medway and Darent, and that he was engaged in peaceful development there until the enemy brought a great force against him and either sought to cross the river Darent at Crayford or actually achieved this feat and forced him to fight. However that may have been, Hengest and his son gained a great victory and according to the Chronicle "the Britons then left Kent and with great fear fled to London." It has actually been supposed that these fugitives were the last remnants of the Men of Kent, and that this county was thus denuded of native inhabitants. All the evidence forbids this supposition and there is no doubt at all that Hengest's opponents who fled to London were the forces which Vortigern, or his son, had collected in other parts of their kingdom. We are told that 4,000 men of the Britons were slain at the battle of Crayford but such numbers can only be regarded, at that date, as vague generalizations. The expression "one thousand" would probably convey to those who heard it nothing more exact than a very large number, and four thousand would mean an even larger number, but not anything in the way of an accurate total. This battle of Crayford must have completed the conquest of the

present county of Kent, always excepting the Wealden Forest which may have been and, in fact, could only have been very slowly penetrated and occupied in the course of a considerable number of years.

After the battle of Crayford, Hengest continued to advance and to fight more battles. He would again be concerned about his flanks. On his right was the river crossing and considerable fortress of London. We have no certain information as to what he did to contain this threat to his further advance. Nennius, however gives us a hint of great interest and this may well be relevant. He describes how Vortigern was captured by Hengest after a piece of treachery which has been told of many peoples in many climes, and he adds that by way of ransom Vortigern gave to Hengest "the three provinces of the East, South, and Middle Saxons, besides other districts at the choice of his jailers." There could not have been any provinces so named at this early date but it is quite possible that Hengest obtained London and Essex by means of a treaty, following the battle of Crayford. It is certainly worth remembering that his successor upon the throne a hundred years later, Aethelbeorht by name, was so far in possession of London that he was able to appoint a Bishop there, as he was also able to make a grant of lands at Tillingham in Essex (Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, VIII). In one way or another Hengest must have secured his right flank, his left still resting on the sandstone hills and the wealden forest. Then he moved westward through the country south of the Thames. Aethelbeorht, already mentioned, had at a later date to defend his kingdom at a battle fought at Wibbandun. This is likely to have been at the place whose name has now been corrupted to Wimbledon and we may therefore assume that Hengest conquered that part of Surrey in which Wimbledon lies.

Somewhere in the course of his westward march, eight years after the battle of Crayford, Hengest fought another great battle at a place subsequently called Wippedes fleet after the name of one of the thanes who was slain there. This was a very great victory, for no less than twelve leaders of the British levies, in addition to Wipped, were slain there. We have no certain knowledge as to the location of Wippedes-fleete, but there are some grounds for suggestions. Of the two or three places at which a fleet of any size existed there is only one which has kept a name incorporating this word. This is the township called Fleet, in Hampshire, and it is placed very much where we should expect Hengest to have passed by, although there are no particular features which mark it out as a battlefield, except that it is just north of the chalk hills. It may well be Wippedes-fleet.

There is at this point a curious change of phrase in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which cannot be without significance. The earlier battles of Hengest, up to and including Crayford, are said to have been

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fought against "the Britons" and Vortigern is described as King of the Britons. From then onwards his opponents are described as "the Welsh" that is "the foreigners," without any particular distinction of race. This must mean that Hengest was moving into an area occupied by some race which he had not hitherto encountered and which was recognizably different from the Britons in Kent. Neither Vortigern, nor any of his sons, are now named as taking part in these battles, nor should they have done so if Surrey and Middlesex had already been peacefully ceded to Hengest. The "Welsh" were a new enemy.

However one interprets the significance of the changed description of his opponents there can be no doubt that the position of Hengest's forces was changing. He now had on his left a wide expanse of upland country, probably more wooded than it is to-day, but not so secure a protection as the wealds of Kent and Sussex. He was also approaching an area of great Roman centres to which all roads would lead him, at Salisbury or Winchester. It may also have been that the resistance of the Welsh in part determined his movements. In any case, he fought a battle with the Welsh at some place which is not named and again achieved a great victory. It is said, by the Saxons, that the Welsh fled as if they fled from fire. Nevertheless Hengest must have stopped his due westward march, and began to move to the south.

Of Hengest's further movements we have no written information. Beda tells us that the men of Kent and those of the Isle of Wight were Jutish in origin and says also that opposite the Isle of Wight, on the mainland, in the land of the West Saxons, there was in his day a people known as the nation of the Jutes. Beda died in the year 731. A very much later authority, Florence of Worcester, localizes this nation in the New Forest and says that in his own time, i.e. in the twelfth century, this forest was still known in the English tongue as "Ytene". This word is a west Saxon dialect form of some such early form as the "Eotena" of Beowulf and means "Jute". The combination of place names and recorded history therefore tell us that the Jutes occupied part of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. The investigations of the field archaeologists with their spades confirm this distribution. It is a fair deduction that Hengest, or his son, moved southward soon after his last recorded battle, and reached the sea opposite the Isle of Wight, crossing that sea to occupy the island.

This, as far as we know, marked the end of the campaigns of Hengest, and we now see the full extent of the kingdom which Hengest carved out for himself in southern Britain.

16. CONCLUSION

Of the end of Hengest, certainly a great man by all standards, we have no information. Not long after his death, perhaps even during

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his last years, Aelle and his successors arrived upon the coast of Hampshire and, advancing north-west, cut off the Jutish dependencies of the New Forest and the Isle of Wight from the main block of conquered country in Kent and Surrey with, perhaps, London and Essex.

It is likely that many of his original Jutish followers had died or had been disabled, but it is certain that they did together implant in Britain a name and a culture which endured for hundreds of years. Such a culture, enduring so long, makes marks which can never be entirely obliterated. There are something more than Jutish names in Kent to this day.

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