

6. Kingdom of East Saxons, founded by Rrethew in 527; ended in 823. 7. Kingdom of Mercia, founded by Cridda about 584; absorbed by Wessex in 827. Each state was, in its turn, annexed to more powerful neighbors; and at length, in 827, Egbert, king of the West Saxon kingdom (Wessex), by his valor and superior capacity, united in his own person the sovereignty of what had formerly been seven kingdoms, and the whole came to be called England, that is Angle-land.

While this work of conquest and of intertribal strife had been in progress towards the establishment of a united kingdom, certain important changes had occurred. The conquest had been the slow expulsion of a Christian race by a purely heathen race, and the country had returned to something of its old isolation with regard to the rest of Europe. But before the close of the sixth century Christianity had secured a footing in the southeast of the island. Ethelbert, king of Kent and suzerain over the kingdoms south of the Humber, married a Christian wife, Bertha, daughter of Charibert of Soissons, and this event indirectly led to the coming of St. Augustine. The conversion of Kent, Essex and East Anglia was followed by that of Northumberland and then by that of Mercia, of Wessex, of Sussex, and lastly of Wight, the contest between the two religions being at its height in the seventh century. The legal and political changes immediately consequent upon the adoption of Christianity were not great, but there resulted a more intimate relation with Europe and the older civilizations, the introduction of new learning and culture, the formation of a written literature, and the fusion of the tribes and petty kingdoms into a closer and more lasting unity than that which could have been otherwise secured.

The kingdom, however, was still kept in a state of anarchy by the attacks of the Danes, who had made repeated incursions during the whole of the Saxon period, and about half a century after the unification of the kingdom became, for a brief time, masters of nearly the whole of England. But the genius of Alfred the Great, who had ascended the throne in 871, speedily reversed matters by the defeat of the Danes at Ethandune (878). Guthrum, their king, embraced Christianity, became the vassal of the Saxon king, and retired to a strip of land on the east coast, including Northumbria and called the Danelagh. The two immediate successors of Alfred, Edward (901-925) and Athelstan (925-940), the

son and the grandson of Alfred, both vigorous and able rulers, had each in turn to direct his arms against these settlers of the Danelagh. The reigns of the next five kings, Edmund, Edred, Edwy, Edgar and Edward the Martyr are chiefly remarkable on account of the conspicuous place occupied in them by Dunstan, who was counselor to Edmund, minister of Edred, treasurer under Edwy, and supreme during the reign of Edgar and his successor. It was possibly due to his policy that from the time of Athelstan till after the death of Edward the Martyr (978 or 979) the country had comparative rest from the Danes. During the tenth century many changes had taken place in the Teutonic constitutions. Feudalism was already taking root: the king's authority had increased; the folkland was being taken over as the king's personal property; the nobles by birth, or ealdormen, were becoming of less importance in administration than the nobility of thegn, the officers of the king's court. Ethelred (978-1016), who succeeded Edward, was a minor, the government was feeble, conducted, and no united action being taken against the Danes their incursions became more frequent and destructive. Animosity between the English and the Danes who had settled among them became daily more violent, and a general massacre of the latter took place in 1002. The following year Sweyn invaded the kingdom with a powerful army and assumed the crown of England. Ethelred was compelled to take refuge in Normandy; and though he afterwards returned, he found in Canute an adversary no less formidable than Sweyn. Ethelred left his kingdom in 1016 to his son Edmund, who displayed great valor, but was compelled to divide his kingdom with Canute; and when he was assassinated in 1017 the Danes succeeded to the sovereignty of the whole.

Canute (Knut) who espoused the widow of Ethelred, that he might reconcile his new subjects, obtained the name of Great, not only on account of his personal qualities, but from the extent of his dominions, being master of Denmark and Norway as well as England. In 1035 he died, and in England was followed by other two Danish kings, Harold and Hardicanute, whose joint reigns lasted till 1042, after which the English line was again restored in the person of Edward the Confessor. Edward was a weak prince, and in the latter years of his reign had far less real power than his brother-in-law Harold, son of the great earl Godwin. On