

XXII.—*Vortigern, not Hengest, the Invader of Kent.* By HENRY CHARLES COOTE, ESQ. F.S.A.

Read May 2nd, 1872.

The subjugation of Kent by the Jutes is perhaps the most interesting of all the barbarian conquests of South Britain, from its priority in date and the romance with which it has been invested.

Several stories of the invasion which led to this conquest have come down to us.

That told by Beda^a is as follows: "They, *i.e.* the Britons, took counsel together as to what should be done, and where assistance should be sought for, to avoid or repel the savage and incessant inroads of the northern nations, and it was determined by all, including their King Vurtigern, that they should call in the nation of the Saxons from the parts beyond the sea, which act must be regarded as intended by Providence, as it was in reality, a punishment for their wickedness. In the year of our Lord 449 Marcianus began to reign jointly with Valentinian, and was emperor for seven years. At that time the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, invited by the before-mentioned king, comes to Britain in three long ships, and settles itself in the eastern part of the island, at the bidding of the same king, as intending to fight for the country, but in fact to conquer it. The Saxons accordingly battle with the northern invaders and beat them. When the news of this had reached home, with information also of the fertility of the island and the backwardness of the Britons, there is immediately sent over a larger fleet carrying a stronger band of armed men, which, joining the cohort that first arrived, made the army invincible. Accordingly, those who now came over received a settlement in land, by the gift of the Britons, upon condition that they, the Saxons, should fight for the peace and safety of the country, the others paying them duly for their military service. There had come men from the three stronger peoples of Germany, that is to say,

^a In the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, lib. i. cc. 14 and 15. The history was written some time between A.D. 729 and 737, the years of the accession and resignation of King Ceolwulf.

Saxons, Angles, Jutes. * * * Their first leaders are said to have been two brothers, Hengist and Horsa. * * * Without delay, therefore, troops from the before-mentioned nations flocked emulously into the island, and this population of strangers began to increase so much that they became a terror to the natives who had called them in. Then having suddenly made peace with the Picts, whom they had by that time driven far back, they began to turn their arms against their allies. At first they compel them to supply them more abundantly with provisions, and seeking an occasion of quarrel they protest that unless a more profuse supply of provisions be granted they will break their agreement and devastate every part of the island, and they very soon put their threats into practice.”^a

This is not the only account given by Beda. We have another statement of his in the *Chronicon sive de sex ætatibus sæculi*, under the year 459. This slightly differs from the first. Herein he says: “The nation of the Angles or Saxons comes to Britain in three long ships. When report had announced at ohme that this expedition had prospered a stronger army is sent out, which, joining the former, first drove away the enemy, then, turning its arms against its allies, it subdued by fire and sword nearly the whole island from east to

^a “Initum namque est consilium, quid agendum, ubi quærendum esset præsidium ad evitandas vel repellendas tam feras tamque creberrimas gentium aquilonalium irruptiones, placuitque omnibus cum suo rege Vurtigerno, ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium vocarent; quod Domini nutu dispositum esse constat, ut veniret contra improbos malum, sicut evidentius rerum exitus probavit. Anno ab incarnatione Domini quadringentesimo nono Marcianus cum Valentiniano, quadragesimus sextus ab Augusto, regnum adeptus, septem annis tenuit. Tunc Anglorum sive Saxonum gens, invitata a rege præfato, in Britanniam tribus longis navibus advehitur, et in orientali parte insulæ, jubente eodem rege, locum manendi, quasi pro patria pugnatura, re autem vera hanc expugnatura, suscipit. Initio ergo certamine cum hostibus, qui ab aquilone ad aciem venerant, victoriam sumpserunt Saxones. Quod ubi domi nunciatum est, simul et insulæ fertilitas, ac segnitia Brittonum, mittitur confestim illo classis prolixior armatorum ferens manum fortiolem, quæ premissæ adjuncta cohorti invincibilem fecit exercitum. Susceperunt ergo qui advenerunt, donantibus Britannis, locum habitationis inter eos, ea conditione ut, hi pro patriæ pace et salute contra adversarios militarent, illi militantibus debita stipendia conferrent. Advenerant autem de tribus Germaniæ populis fortioribus, id est, Saxonibus, Anglis, Jutis. * * * * * Duces fuisse perhibentur eorum primi duo fratres Hengist et Horsa. * * * * * Non mora ergo, confluentibus certatim in insulam gentium memoratarum catervis, grandescere populus cœpit advenarum, ita ut ipsis quoque, qui eos advocaverant, indigenis essent terrori. Tum subito inito ad tempus fœdere cum Pictis, quos longius jam bellando pepulerant, in socios arma vertere incipiunt; et primum quidem annonas sibi eos affluentius ministrare cogunt, quærentesque occasionem divortii, protestantur, nisi profusior sibi alimentorum copia daretur, se cuncta insulæ loca, rupto fœdere, vastaturos; neque aliquanto segnius minas effectibus prosequuntur.”

west, upon the pretence that the Britons gave them insufficient pay for their services as soldiers.”^a

Here it is the pay that falls short, not the provisions, as in the first account, and no names are mentioned on either side.

Next in order I will take the story told by the writer of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.

In the five MSS. which Mr. Thorpe has edited there are discrepancies more or less *inter se*.

The account given in the Bodleian, Laud MS. 636, is in the following words: “In A.D. 449 Marcianus and Valentinianus began to rule, and reigned seven years. In their days Wyrtegeorn invited the nation of the Angles to this country, and they then came in three keels hither to Britain at the place called Heopwin’s Fleet. The King Wyrtegeorn gave them land in the south-eastern part of this country, on condition that they should fight against the Picts. They then fought against the Picts, and were victorious wherever they came. They then sent to the Angles and ordered them to dispatch more assistance, and ordered that the feebleness of the Britons and the riches of the country should be told them. They then soon sent hither a greater force to the assistance of the others. Then came the men from the three nations of Germany, &c.”^b

It is observable here that though we have a British King named Wyrtegeorn we have no Hengest.

The Cotton. MS. Domit. A. viii. (much later than the other) varies the story thus: “A.D. 448. In this year John the Baptist showed to two monks, who came from the East to pray at Jerusalem, his head in the place that formerly was Herod’s dwelling. At the same time Marcianus and Valentinianus reigned, and at that time came the race of the Angles to this country, invited by King

^a “Gens Anglorum sive Saxonum Britanniam tribus longis navibus advehitur, quibus dum iter prosperatum domi fama referret, mittitur exercitus fortior, qui junctus prioribus, primo hostes a quibus petebatur, abegit, deinde in socios arma vertens totam prope insulam ab orientali ejus plaga usque ad occidentalem igni vel ense subegit, conficta occasione, quod pro se militantibus Britones minus sufficienter stipendia darent.”

^b “An. ccccxlix. Her Martianus and Valentinus onfengon rice, and rixadan vii winter. And on heora dagum gelaðode Wyrtegeorn Angelcyn hider, and hi þa comon on þim ceolom hider to Brytene, on þam stede Heopwines fleot. Se cyning Wyrtegeorn gef heom land on suðan eastan þissum lande, wið þan þe hi sceoldon feohtan wið Pyhtas. Heo þa fuhton wið Pyhtas, and heofdon sige swa hwer swa heo comon. Hy þa sendon to Angle, heton sendon mara fultum, and heton heom secgan Brytwalana nahtsceipe, and þes landes cysta. Hy þa sona sendon hider mare weored þam oþrum to fultume. Ða comon þa men of þim megðum Germanie,” &c.

Wyrtegeorn to help him in overcoming his enemies. They came to this country with three long ships, and their leaders were Hengest and Horsa. First of all they killed and drove away the King's enemies, and afterwards they went against the King and against the Britons, and they devastated the country with fire and the sword's edge."^a

In this last version we have upon the stage, in addition to Wyrtegeorn the British King, Hengest and Horsa, the leaders of the Angles.

The three other MSS. (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, CLXXII., Cotton. Tiberius, A VI. and Cotton, Tiberius B I., are all in substance of the same tenor as the Cotton MS. first referred to).

There are two Celtic narratives also.

Gildas, writing late in the sixth century in the *Historia*, c. 23, says: "That proud tyrant Gurthrigern, leader of the Britons, and all his counsellors, are so blinded that they invite the ferocious Saxons to assist them in repelling the northern nations.^b * * * * They obtain provisions and pay as soldiers, but, pretending that the latter is insufficient, they break their agreement and depopulate the country."

Nennius, another Celtic writer (at the close of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century), in his *Historia Britonum* (cc. 28, *et seqq.*) says: "Guorthigern reigned in Britain, and whilst he reigned in Britain he was pressed by dread of the Picts and Scots, by a Roman invasion, and by fear of Ambrosius. In the meanwhile there came three keels exiled from Germany, in which were Horsa and Hengist, who were brothers. * * * Guorthigern received them benignly,

^a "An. CCCCLVIII. Her Johannes Baptista ætywede twam munecon, þa comon fram east-dæle to gebiddene hi on Jerusalem, his heaved on þare stowe þe hwilan was Herodes wunung. On þone ylcan timan Martianus and Valentinianus rixodan, and on þam timan com Angelcynn to ðisum lande, gelaðode fram Wyrtegeorne cinge, him to helpe, his fynd to overcumende. Hi comon on þis lande wid prim langan scipan, and heora heretogan wæron Hengest and Horsa. Ealra ærost hi þes cinges fynd ofslogon and aweg drivan, and syððan hi wenden agean þone cing, and agean þa Bryttas, and hi farðydon purh fyr and þurh swyrdes egge."

^b "Tum omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno Gurthrigerno Britannorum duce cæcantur, et adinvenientes tale præsidium, imo excidium patriæ, ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones, Deo hominibusque inveni, quasi in caulas lupi, in insulam at retrudendas aquilonales gentes intromitterentur * * * * . Igitur intromissis in insulam barbaris, veluti militibus, et magna, ut mentiebantur, pro bonis discrimina hospitibus subituris, impetrant sibi annonas dari, quæ multo tempore impertitæ clausurunt, ut dicitur, canis faucem. Item queruntur non affluenter sibi epimenia contribui, occasiones de industria colorantes, et nisi profusior eis munificentia cumularetur, testantur se cuncta insulæ, rupto fœdere, depopulatos. Nec mora minas effectibus prosequuntur."

and gave them the island, which in their language is called Tanet. This was in the year of our Lord 447.”^a

Nennius goes on afterwards (cc. 36, 37) to tell that the king promised the Saxons food and raiment, and they covenanted to do battle with his enemies. But the barbarians becoming multiplied in number the Britons could not feed them, and told them so. Hengist afterwards sends for more men from Germany, and the conquest of Britain is commenced.

I should say that Nennius in each of his two prologues says that he has compiled his history from histories and annals of the Saxons, *inter alia*.

The histories which I have quoted are the only authorities referred to by our historians in narrating the barbarian invasion of Kent, and they never allow us to suspect that there ever has been any other ancient account of these events. Even the German Lappenberg, though writing early English history more critically, as he asserts of himself, than all who went before him, quotes no other authorities.

Notwithstanding this there is another ancient account of the conquest of Kent, the more noticeable as it disagrees with the generally known narratives in, what I shall submit to be, a material point.

It is to this narrative, so unaccountably passed over, that I beg to be permitted to call the attention of the Society.

It is to be found in the work of an Italian historian, writing nearly as early as Beda. That that portion of his work which concerns England is entitled to credit, may be affirmed upon the general ground that in the other parts he shows himself a writer of accuracy and judgment.

As regards the chapter which refers to England, and which must be taken as an original narrative, there is special ground for assigning to it the only credit which I claim for it, viz., that it is a correct report of an old English tradition.

The special ground is this. Before the time of the writer—whose identity I will hereafter refer to—the English of all classes, noble and ignoble, high functionaries and leading men, flocked over to Rome whenever an excuse permitted it. We are told this by Paulus Diaconus, in his History of the

^a “Guorthigirinus regnavit in Britannia; et dum ipse regnabat in Britannia urgebatur a metu Pictorum, Scottorumque, et a Romano impetu, necnon et a timore Ambrosii. Interea venerunt tres chiliæ a Germania expulsæ in exilio, in quibus erant Hors et Hengist, qui et ipsi fratres erant * * * * Guorthigirinus suscepit eos benigne et tradidit eis insulam, quae in lingua eorum vocatur Tanet, Britannico sermone Ruoihin, Regnante Gratiano Secundo Equantio. Saxones a Guorthigerno suscepti sunt anno quadringentesimo quadragésimo septimo post Passionem Christi.”

Lombards (lib. 6, c. 37)—“His temporibus (*i.e.*, of the Emperor Anastasius, A.D. 700) multi Anglorum gentis, nobiles et ignobiles, viri et fœminæ, duces et primates, divini amoris instinctu, Romam venire consueverunt.”^a

Any Italian clerk therefore writing early English history after the date of this influx would have an opportunity of acquiring from these travelling English all the information which he might want upon this subject, and we may fairly assume that this Italian historian did so.

Under these circumstances, if we find him differing from our native historians, it will be only reasonable to conclude that he has not invented, but has truthfully recorded, another phase of English tradition, neglected or intentionally rejected after a time by our own countrymen.

The work to which I am about to refer is the *Historia Miscella*, edited by Muratori, in his great collection of the *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*. Down to the sixteenth book, the work, though anonymous, is most probably written by Paulus Diaconus, the Lombardic historian.^b

It is in the fourteenth book that we find the account of the subjugation of Kent, and of the events which preceded it. This I will extract, and we can then compare it with those which have been already quoted.

This writer says that, after Actius had declined to assist the Britons, some of them rally and expel the invading Picts and Scots, while others become subject to them, “quidam Britannorum strenue resistentes hostes abigunt, quidam vero coacti hostibus subjiciuntur.”

The latter words refer to the Picts taking possession of and settling in the province of Valentia, the extreme northern point of Roman Britain.

The writer then proceeds as follows: “The rest of the Britons (*i. e.* the whole of the present England and Wales) invited the nation of the Angles with their king Vortigern to the defence of their country. The Britons received them as friends and treated them as comrades; but after a time there came a change to the contrary, and instead of helpers and defenders they found them enemies and assailants. Subsequently (*i. e.* to the invitation) the nation of the Angles or Saxons comes to Britain in three long ships. When the news that this expedition had prospered reached home there was dispatched nevertheless a manifold army, which, joining the first men who had arrived, drives out the enemies on account

^a Beda in his *Chronicon* (Stevenson's edition, vol. ii. p. 203), has a similar passage:—“His temporibus (*i. e.* in the time of Theodosius, A.D. 720), multi Anglorum gentis, nobiles et ignobiles, viri et fœminæ, duces et privati, divini amoris instinctu, de Britannia Romam venire consueverunt.”

^b See Muratori's preface and Roth's preface to his edition of Suetonius, p. 111.

of whom its services were required, and then turns its arms against the Britons, upon the false pretence that they were not ready to pay them what was due to them for serving as soldiers, and it subdued by fire and sword nearly the whole island from east to west. (“At vero residui Britannorum Anglorum gentem cum suo rege Vertigerno ad defensionem suæ patriæ invitavere; quos cum amicali societate exceptos, versa in contrarium vice, hostes pro adjutoribus impugnatores que senserunt. Sequenti deinceps tempore gens Anglorum, sive Saxonum, Britanniam tribus longis navibus advehitur. Quorum dum iter prosperatum domi fama retulisset mittitur nihilominus exercitus multiplex, qui, sociatus prioribus, primum hostes propter quos petebatur, abigit; deinde in Britones arma convertit, conficta occasione, quasi pro se eis militantibus minus stipendia præparassent, totam prope insulam ab orientali ejus plaga usque in occidentalem, incendio vel gladio sibi subegit.”)

This account agrees with the commonly known narratives in the main point, that the Angles were invited over to Britain, and entered into the military service of the Britons, but afterwards on a pretext turned their arms against their hosts and subdued them.

It differs, however, conspicuously in one point, and that I think an interesting one, viz., in ignoring Hengest, and replacing him by Vortigern.

This version is the more interesting, because there is evidence that the other tradition, to which Hengest is attached, was also known in Italy at the same time the geographer of Ravenna was making mention of it (v. 31.) “In oceano vero occidentali est insula quæ dicitur Britannia, ubi olim gens Saxonum, veniens ab antiquâ Saxoniâ cum principe suo, nomine Anschis, in ea habitare videtur.”^a

That being so, our historian, knowing both traditions through English information, must have selected that to which his English informants gave most credence, and I think it can be shown that they were right.

An examination of the name itself will assist us in our conclusions.

Zeuss says^b that it is Cymric—Gortigern—and means great lord. At the same time its termination “gern” is undeniable Gothic and German. Of course it is not Latin.

But it is perectly clear that a King of the Britons, if there was one at this

^a J. L. C. Grimm (*Deutsche Mythologie*; *Schöpfung*, p. 537, edit. Göttingen, 1843) thinks that the geographer meant Æsc, the son of Hengest. “Das kann Hengist sein, oder noch lieber Oesc, dessen sohn, den ich mit Askr verglichen habe.” This is scarcely critical. In corruptions of names the reverse is the rule, viz. the change of a dissyllable into a monosyllable.

^b *Grammatica Celtica*

time,^a could only have come out of the paramount race of the country, viz. of the descendants of the Roman colonists, and would by necessity have had a Roman name, a name received from his ancestors and in consonance with the language which he spoke. That language was Latin, spoken in all the cities of Britain, and by the upper and middle classes, at and after the departure of the imperial authorities from this country.

Upon this point St. Patrick and his writings afford conclusive evidence.

That Saint was the son of a decurion of some Roman municipium in the north-western corner of Valentia, the town itself being more than probably Dumbarton.

He has left us his own life written in Latin, under the name of *Confessio*, doing so proveably because that was the only language known by him, besides Irish, an acquaintance with which he had made in Ireland.

Further, when he had occasion in A.D. 450 to excommunicate a British magnate of the cognomen of Coroticus, who had harried a part of Ireland where the Saint's new converts lived, he addressed to him a Latin epistle in order that he and his friends might fully understand their position before God.^b

That the Saint employed the Latin language in this epistle in order to be understood, his own words show. "I therefore (says he)^c earnestly request of every one, whosoever as a willing servant of God may become the bearer of this letter, that it be not withheld from any one, but rather that it be read before all people, and in the presence of Coroticus himself."

Upon this passage Dr. Todd observes, "As this letter is expressly said (viz., by St. Patrick) to have been originally written in Latin, we may infer that the people to whom it was to be read must have understood Latin. The followers of Coroticus were therefore Roman Christians of the provinces of Britannia, the colonists, or descendents of the colonists, who had settled there under the Roman rule."

Again, both in the same epistle and in the *Confessio*^d St. Patrick calls himself, though writing in Latin, "indoctus, rusticissimus."^e The ability to write in Latin

^a Constantius, in the genuine biography of S. Germanus, never mentions any king. I have observed upon this silence of Constantius in "A Neglected Fact in English History," p. 171 in note.

^b Dr. Todd's S. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland, a memoir of his life and mission, p. 385; and R. Rees's British Saints, p. 136.

^c Dr. Todd's S. Patrick, p. 385.

^d Ib. p. 353.

^e So Prudentius (Ruinart's Acta sincera Martyrum, p. 242, edit. Ratisbon 1859) says of himself in his hymn de Martyrio Sancti Laurentii (vv. 144, 145):

"Hos inter, o Christi decus,
Audi poetam rusticum,
Cordis fatentem crimina."

did not prove the saint to be a learned man, simply because that language was his own vernacular.

Though the use of the Latin language by persons whose race was derived from Rome would imply also the employment of Roman proper names, the latter can be shown more directly.

When St. Germanus was over here in the years of our Lord 429 and 448, the only name of a Briton, which his biographer Constantius gives us, is Latin or Graeco-Latin, a form of name very common under the empire, viz., Elafius.

In the same age St. Patrick (Patricius) was the son of Calpurnius, who was the son of Potitus, who was the son of Odissus.^a

At the time of Diocletian's great persecution we find, besides St. Albanus,^b a bishop named Angulus martyred "in Britanniis civitate Augusta," i.e., in London.^c

At the Synod of Arles, A.D. 314, were Eborius, Restitutus, and Adelfius, bishops; Sacerdos, a priest; and Arminius, a deacon, all from Britain.^d

In epigraphy we have Niger Marinianus, an "eques singularis castrorum praetoriorum, natione Britannicianus."^e We have also M. Secundus Silvanus, a "negotiator cretarius Britannicianus."^f The form of word "Britannicianus" places these names at a late period of the empire.^g

Ausonius (A.D. 380)^h satirizes a Briton named Silvius Bonus.

Gennadius (A.D. 458)ⁱ mentions "Fastidius Britanniarum episcopus," a contemporary of Pelagius, another and more famous Briton.

Taking it as a fact (if I may be so permitted) that Wyrtegeorn was the real leader of the Angles or Jutes, and that there was an old English tradition that asserted it, it only remains to inquire why this tradition after once flourishing was discarded, and the new one of Hengest adopted. I think that the reason for this is simple.

^a Dr. Todd, p. 353, quoting the *Confessio*.

^b Constantius, in his Life of S. Germanus, speaks of S. Albanus, the former saint visiting his tomb; we cannot therefore doubt the truth of the martyrdom.

Venantius Fortunatus, in later days, also commemorates him (lib. viii. carm. 4, quoted by Ruinart in his *Acta sincera Martyrum*, p. 333, edit. Ratisbon, 1859). "Egregium Albanum fecunda Britannia profert."

^c See the Martyrology of the pseudo-Hieronymus in Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. i. p. 28.

^d Petrie's Collect.

^e Zell, *Delectus inscriptionum Romanarum*, No. 1067.

^f Zell, No. 284.

^g See Notitia, "Invicti Juniores Britanniciani." "Exculcatores Juniores Britanniciani," (c. 19, in partibus occidentis.)

^h Epig. 109—114.

ⁱ Petrie's Collect.

As time went on, and when the Jutic invaders of Kent had become great men, the tradition, as the Italian historian has preserved it, was not enough for their national glory.

Wyrtegeorn was a leader whose exploits were confined to the conquest of Kent. He was unconnected with any mythus which the barbarians revered.

There was, however, an epic warrior as familiar to them as the real one, whose exploits were not confined to a mere county of England, but who had left his name upon Friseland and Holland, who had in popular estimation built the burg of Leyden (a *castellum* of Drusus), and who had stormed the Castle of Fin, a hero as shadowy as himself.

This was Hengest, the Angle, upon whom songs, which we still possess, had thrown all the charm of romance.^a

Between the fabulous Hengest and the real Wyrtegeorn there was the connection of race, and the scenes of their achievements were not far distant from each other.

For these reasons the true old warrior was deposed and the epic hero was put in his place.

^a Beowulf, cantos 16 and 17, and the fragment called the Battle of Finnesburh.