

THE GREAT COMMENDATION TO KING EDGAR IN 973.

Few events in Old-English history are more generally known than the tale of the rowing of king Edgar on the river Dee by eight tributary kings. As the king of the Scots is said to have been one of the rowers, this event has become involved in the dreary controversies as to the relationship of the Scotch kings to the English crown. Mr. E. W. Robertson¹ has boldly maintained that the English claims rest upon post-conquest forgeries or insertions in the chronicle, and he makes much capital out of the alleged impossibilities in the account of the Commendation of 973. Mr. Freeman² has shown how baseless are some of Mr. Robertson's arguments, and concluded that he 'would never have satisfied himself with such futile arguments except under the influence of strong national partiality.'³

The Worcester (D), Peterborough (E), and Canterbury (F) MSS. of the chronicle record under 972, an error for 973,⁴ that Edgar led his fleet to Chester, and that there six kings met him and pledged themselves to be his fellow-workers (*efen-wyrhtan*) by sea and by land. The authority for the episode of the rowing is Florence of Worcester,⁵ who gives the names of eight kings, Kenneth, king of the Scots,⁶ Malcolm, king of the Cumbrians, and six others. Mr. Robertson makes much of the increase in the number of the tributary kings, maintains that the king of the Scots could not have been present, that 'there could have been no "king of the Cumbrians" at this time,' and that 'Malcolm, king of the Cumbrians, is undoubtedly a myth.' From his language an inexperienced reader would conclude that the conscientious Florence was on the same plane of credibility as the *Liber Landavensis*, a work that comes from the district of, and is probably influenced by the brain of, Geoffrey of Monmouth. On a question involving so much national feeling the conclusions of a disinterested foreigner will carry more weight than those of Englishmen or Scotchmen. The distinguished Danish historian, Professor Steenstrup, after

¹ *Scotland under her Early Kings*, Edinburgh, 1862, ii. 384 sqq. To the two spurious charters quoted by him (pp. 388-9) may be added the Ely charter of 970 (*Cart. Saxon.* iii. 557).

² *Norman Conquest*, i. 575, note G.

³ *Ibid.* i. 579.

⁴ Steenstrup, *Normannerne*, ii. 200.

⁵ *Sub ann.* 973. It is also found in William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, § 148 (*Rolls Series*, i. 165). The bishop of Oxford, in his preface, ii. cxxix, leaves the question undecided whether William borrowed from Florence or from a common original. If this common original existed, it would throw backwards the date of the composition of the work known to us under Florence's name, for Malmesbury occasionally agrees in wording with Florence.

⁶ Kenneth, it may be noted, is clearly treated as acknowledging Edgar's supremacy in the tradition recorded by Malmesbury, § 156 (i. 177), of Edgar's summoning him to give counsel, and of Kenneth's apology to Edgar for speaking slightly of him.

critically examining Mr. Robertson's arguments, comes to the conclusion that there is nothing to prove that the eight kings could not have met Edgar at Chester, and that, despite a few possible mistakes, we cannot deny the existence of these princes or Edgar's supremacy over them.⁷

It is possible that some of Florence's statements may have been influenced by the numerous tales of Edgar's glories still current among the people in his time,⁸ but that he had authority for giving the number of tributary kings as eight, and for including the king of the Scots and of the Cumbrians, can be proved by the evidence of a contemporary. This is no less a person than Ælfric, the great prose writer. As the pupil and friend of bishop Æthelwold, who shared with Dunstan the direction of Edgar's policy, Ælfric had good opportunities of knowing what really happened. He lived to contrast the sad days of Æthelred's reign with the peace and glory of Edgar's time, and in his 'Life of St. Swithin,' written in or about 996,⁹ he thus plaintively recalls the greatness of the latter king:¹⁰

And we secgað to soðan þæt se tīma wæs gesælig
 And wynsum on Angelcynne þa ða Eadgar cynīngc
 Ðone Cristendom gefyrðrode and fela munuclifa arærde.
 And his cynerice wæs wunigende on sibbe
 Swa þæt man ne gehyrde gif ænig scyphere wære
 Buton agenre leode þe ðis land heoldon
 And ealle ða cynīngas þe on þysum iglande wæron,
 Cumerla and Scotta, comon to Eadgare
 Hwilon anes dægcs eahta cynīngas,
 And hi ealle gebugon to Eadgares wissunge.

Translation: And we may truly say that the time was happy and joyful in England when king Edgar advanced religion and founded many monasteries, and his realm remained in peace, so that one never heard of any fleet except of one's own folk then dwelling in this land; and all the kings of this island, of Cumbrians and of Scots, eight kings, came to Edgar once upon a time on one day, and they all bowed to Edgar's government.

That this submission was brought about by peaceable means may be concluded from Ælfric's words quoted above. In the epilogue to his paraphrase of the book of Judges, he states more

⁷ *Normannerne* ('Danske og Norske Riger paa de Britiske Øer i Danevældens Tidsalder'), iii. 208, Copenhagen, 1882.

⁸ Cf. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum*, § 148.

⁹ Professor Dietrich, in his admirable article on Ælfric in the *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie*, xxvi. 231 (1856), ascribes this work to 996. He concludes that Ælfric was born about 955, and that he was a monk at Winchester under Æthelwold, who died in 984 (p. 217 &c.). The life of St. Swithin was written after Æthelwold's death and after that of Dunstan in 988; J. H. Ott, *Ueber die Quellen des Heiligenlebens in Ælfrics 'Lives of Saints, I.'* inaugural dissertation, Halle, 1892, p. 53.

¹⁰ *Lives of Saints*, ed. Skeat, 1885, part ii. p. 468 (Early English Text Society).

clearly that God subdued Eadgar's opponents, kings and earls, so that they submitted to him without any fighting.¹¹

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AN UNPUBLISHED 'REVOCATIO' BY HENRY II.

The text of the following letter from Henry II, revoking all his encroachments on the ancient liberties of the English Church, is taken from a late 15th century copy in a MS. recently acquired by the British Museum.¹ The original is not extant, and no mention is made of it by the chroniclers. On the face of it, however, it seems likely enough to be genuine. In substance it is merely a formal declaration to the same effect as the seventh article of the oath which Henry took at Avranches, in order to purge himself from the murder of Becket;² but it contains, in addition or expansion, an express renunciation of claim to the revenues of ecclesiastical benefices during vacancies. As it purports to have been written in the presence of the legates Albert and Theodwin, and in fulfilment of the penance enjoined by them, it may presumably be assigned to the same date as the oath of purgation, viz. 21 May or 27 September, 1172.³ It is addressed to the prior and convent of the church of Canterbury, and to many other persons of the realm of England assembled in the conventual church of Holy Trinity (*i.e.* the cathedral church) at Canterbury—an assembly of whose composition and proceedings no record appears to exist. The first part of the volume which contains this copy consists of theological tracts, written about the middle of the 15th century. The last of these, 'Tractatus parvus de excusationibus in peccatis,' ends on f. 95, leaving a blank space; the Revocatio has been inserted here, and on the margin of the opposite page. It is immediately followed (ff. 95b-99) by copies of other documents relating to the ecclesiastical disturbances of Henry's reign, viz. (1) the mandate and *praecipe* issued in 1164 for the seizure of the revenues and goods of Becket's clerks;⁴ (2) the edict of Michaelmas, 1169;⁵ (3) the constitutions of Clarendon. The rest of the volume is filled with theological miscellanea in various hands of the late 15th and early 16th centt., including the 'Bulla in Coena

¹¹ *Liber Iudicum*, ed. Grein, *Bibliothek der aeg. Prosa*, i. 265: 'Eadgar se eðela and se anræda cyning arærde Godes lof on his leode gehwær, ealra cininga switost ofer Engla þeode, and him God gewilde his wiðerwinnan a, cyningas and eorlas, þæt hi comon him to buton ælcum gefeohte friðes wilniende, him underþeodde to þam þe he wolde, and he wæs gewurðod wide geond land.'

¹ Additional MSS. 34807.

² Gerv. Cant. i. 289.

³ *Materials for History of T. Becket*, vii. 521 (J. C. Robertson puts the date 28 May, having mistakenly interpreted 'Vocam jocunditatis' Sunday as the Sunday after Ascension day, instead of the fifth Sunday after Easter); Gerv. Cant. i. 238-9.

⁴ *Materials*, v. 151, 152.

⁵ *Ibid.* vii. 147.