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BEDE

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ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY
OF THE

ENGLISH PEOPLE

WITH

BEDE'S LETTER TO EGBERT

AND

CUTHBERT'S LETTER

ON THE DEATH OF BEDE



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*Translation of the minor works,
new Introduction and Notes*

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PENGUIN BOOKS

of falsehood. If anyone happened to be more kindly or truthful than his neighbours, he became a target for all weapons of malice as though he were an enemy of Britain. And not only the laity were guilty of these things, but even the lord's flock and their pastors. Giving themselves up to drunkenness, hatred, quarrels, and violence, they threw off the easy yoke of Christ. Suddenly a terrible plague struck this corrupt people, and in a short while destroyed so large a number that the living could not bury the dead. But not even the death of their friends or the fear of their own death was sufficient to recall the survivors from the spiritual death to which their crimes had doomed them. So it was that, not long afterwards, an even more terrible retribution overtook this wicked nation. For they consulted how they might obtain help to avoid or repel the frequent fierce attacks of their northern neighbours, and all agreed with the advice of their king, Vortigern, to call on the assistance of the Saxon peoples across the sea. This decision, as its results were to show, seems to have been ordained by God as a punishment on their wickedness.

CHAPTER 15: *The Angles are invited to Britain. At first they repel the enemy, but soon come to terms with them, and turn their weapons against their own allies*

IN the year of our Lord 449, Martian became Emperor with Valentinian, the forty-sixth in succession from Augustus, ruling for seven years.* In his time the Angles or Saxons came to Britain at the invitation of King Vortigern in three longships, and were granted lands in the eastern part of the island on condition that they protected the country: nevertheless, their real intention was to subdue it. They engaged the enemy advancing from the north, and having defeated them, sent back news of their success to their homeland, adding that the country was fertile and the Britons cowardly. Whereupon a larger fleet quickly came over with a great body of warriors, which, when joined to the original forces, constituted an invincible army.

These also received from the Britons grants of land where they could settle among them on condition that they maintained the peace and security of the island against all enemies in return for regular pay.

These new-comers were from the three most formidable races of Germany, the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes. From the Jutes are descended the people of Kent and the Isle of Wight and those in the province of the West Saxons opposite the Isle of Wight who are called Jutes to this day. From the Saxons — that is, the country now known as the land of the Old Saxons — came the East, South and West Saxons. And from the Angles — that is, the country known as Angulus, which lies between the provinces of the Jutes and Saxons and is said to remain unpopulated to this day — are descended the East and Middle Angles, the Mercians, all the Northumbrian stock (that is, those people living north of the river Humber), and the other English peoples. Their first chieftains are said to have been the brothers Hengist and Horsa. The latter was subsequently killed in battle against the Britons, and was buried in east Kent, where the monument bearing his name still stands. They were the sons of Wicgils, whose father was Witra, whose father was Wecta, son of Woden, from whose stock sprang the royal house of many provinces.

It was not long before such hordes of these alien peoples vied together to crowd into the island that the natives who had invited them began to live in terror. Then all of a sudden the Angles made an alliance with the Picts, whom by this time they had driven some distance away, and began to turn their arms against their allies. They began by demanding a greater supply of provisions; then, seeking to provoke a quarrel, threatened that unless larger supplies were forthcoming, they would terminate their treaty and ravage the whole island. Nor were they slow to carry out their threats. In short, the fires kindled by the pagans proved to be God's just punishment on the sins of the nation, just as the fires once kindled by the Chaldeans destroyed the walls and buildings of Jerusalem. For, as the just Judge ordained, these heathen conquerors devastated the surrounding