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Osric of Gloucester

by C. S. Taylor
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OSRIC OF GLOUCESTER.

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THE visit of our Society to Gloucester last year revived to some extent the interest in the question whether Osric of the Huiccians, to whom traditionally the foundation of the minster at Gloucester is assigned, was identical with Osric who half a century later was king of the Northumbrians, and who is said to have been buried in Gloucester Abbey. The matter has never been thoroughly discussed in our *Transactions*, and there seems to be room for a paper upon it, more especially as neither in the *Dictionary of National Biography* nor elsewhere has it been adequately treated. It will be best to consider first what we can learn about Osric of the Huiccians, then to take the history of the king of the Northumbrians, then to consider what reasons there may be for thinking that the two are identical, and finally to see what real reasons there may be for connecting either or both of them with St. Peter's Abbey at Gloucester.

Apart from late monastic traditions, which we may set aside for the moment, there are only two sources of information about the earlier Osric—the Foundation Charter of the minster at Bath and a passage in Bede, *H. E.*, iv. 23. The authenticity of the Bath charter has been discussed quite recently in our *Transactions*,¹ and it is only needful to add to what is there said that just as the names of two bishops of the West Saxons—Leutherius and Hedda—appear among the witnesses to Osric's Bath charter, so also do the names of two successive bishops of Sherborne—

¹ Vol. xxiii. 135.

Forthere and Herewald—appear among the witnesses to the Synodical Act of Archbishop Nothelm concerning Withington in 736 or 737; and Bishop Stubbs, who objected to the earlier charter on this account,¹ makes no such objection to the later document. We shall be safe, therefore, in considering Osric's charter as it stands in the Bath Chartulary to be a trustworthy copy of a genuine document. It bears date November 6th, 676, and Osric tells us that he had already founded a bishop's See, and in accordance with his purpose to found monasteries—some of men and some of women—in different parts of his realm, he is proceeding to found a house of women at Bath. We should gather from this that he had ruled the Huiccians for some time—not perhaps for very long, for as yet there was no bishop at Worcester, though the See was ready for him. No doubt the delay was owing to the fact that Tatfrid, the first bishop-designate, had died unexpectedly,² and his successor was not yet appointed. Florence of Worcester, writing about 1118, places the appointment of Bosel, the first actual bishop, in 680, and connects it with Oshere rather than with Osric.

Bede mentions Osric in connection with Oftfor, the third Bishop of Worcester.³ He is speaking of five inmates of St. Hilda's House at Whitby who became bishops—Bosa at York, Ætla at Dorchester, Oftfor at Worcester, John at Hexham, and Wilfrid II., who was consecrated to York in 718. Concerning Oftfor, he says that after studying at Whitby he went on to Canterbury, and then to Rome; and that on his return to England he turned aside to the Huiccians, over whom King Osric then reigned, and remained there (*multo tempore*) a long while: that then, on account of the physical weakness of Bishop Bosel, he was consecrated bishop in his room during the vacancy in the See of Canterbury after Theodore's death by Wilfrid, who was acting as bishop in the Midlands. The See of Canter-

¹ *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, iii. 129, 338.

² Bede, *H. E.*, iv. 23. ³ *H. E.*, iv. 23.

bury was vacant from September 19th, 690, when Archbishop Theodore died, till June 29th, 693, when Berctuald was consecrated in his room by Godwin, Archbishop of Lyons; but unfortunately this gives only a slight clue to the period of Osric's reign, because there is nothing to show the duration of the *long while* of Bede. A charter of Oshere, who styles himself king of the Huiccians, granting land at Penitanham to the Abbess Cutsuida, is passed by Kemble, and must be dated about 693. We may say, therefore, that Osric of the Huiccians was well settled in his realm by November, 676, and that he had probably ceased to reign by 693. Whence and how he came, and whither and why he went, we do not know, any more than we know for certain anything about his parentage, for the conjecture of Bishop Stubbs¹ that he was son or kinsman of Eanfrid, a former king of the Huiccians, is quite unsupported by evidence. There is nothing but late monastic tradition to connect him with Oswald, Oshere, and the Abbesses of Gloucester.

Osric, king of the Northumbrians, however, stands out clearly in the light. He succeeded to Cenred in 718, and died on May 9th, 729. The Chronicle says that he was slain, but Bede only mentions his death, saying moreover that he had determined (*decrevisset*) that Ceolwulf, who followed him, should be his successor.² None of the contemporary records tell us anything about his parentage; but Symeon of Durham, writing between 1104 and 1109, speaks of him as a son of King Alfrid: *Historia Dunelmensis Ecclesiæ*, cap. xiii. "Anno Dominicæ Incarnationis DCCXXIX. pontificatus Ethelwoldi quinto Osricus rex Northanhymbrorum filius Alfridi regis vita decessit."³ The editor of the Rolls Series edition of *Symeon of Durham* points out⁴ that this *Historia* must have been written between 1104, when the writer witnessed the translation of the relics of St. Cuthbert, and 1109, when Prior Turgot became Bishop

¹ *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, ii. 16.

² *H. E.*, v. 23. ³ *Rolls Series*, i. 39. ⁴ *Introduction*, xix.

of St. Andrews. This was four centuries after the time of Osric, as long an interval as that which separates us from Henry VII.; but Mr. Plummer points out that as the passage of the *Historia* quoted above, except the words referring to Ethelwold and Alfrid, is taken from the chapter of Bede just referred to, Symeon must have had some authority which we have not for the addition.¹

And now we begin to enter on our difficulties, for who is meant by "Rex Alfridus"? It is right to refer in this connection to a "Series Regum Northymbrensiū" printed in *Symeon of Durham*, ii. 390, part of which runs thus: "Aldfrid frater Egfridi, 19; Osred filius Aldfridi, 11; Coenred consanguineus, 2; Osric filius Aldfridi, 11." With regard to this the editor writes thus: "There is reason to think that the whole passage proceeds from a Hexham hand, writing in the second half of the twelfth century."² The reference in the latter passage is clearly to the son of King Oswy, who reigned over the Northumbrians from 685 to 705, and who is called by Bede Aldfrid. It must not, however, be assumed that the King Alfrid of the former passage is identical with the Aldfrid of the latter one, and it should be mentioned that Bishop Stubbs considered it not impossible that Osric of the Huiccians and Osric of the Northumbrians were the same person, who was a son of the eldest son of Oswy, called by Bede Alchfrid;³ and any clearly-stated opinion of one whose knowledge of old English history was unrivalled deserves careful consideration. With regard to the assertion of Symeon of Durham that Osric of the Northumbrians was a son of Alfrid, we must notice that Bede mentions no such relationship, and we find no notice of it in the Chronicle or in the early historians, Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon, or William of Malmesbury. Still, Bede excepted, these are all southern authorities, and it is quite possible that evidence might have survived in the north that

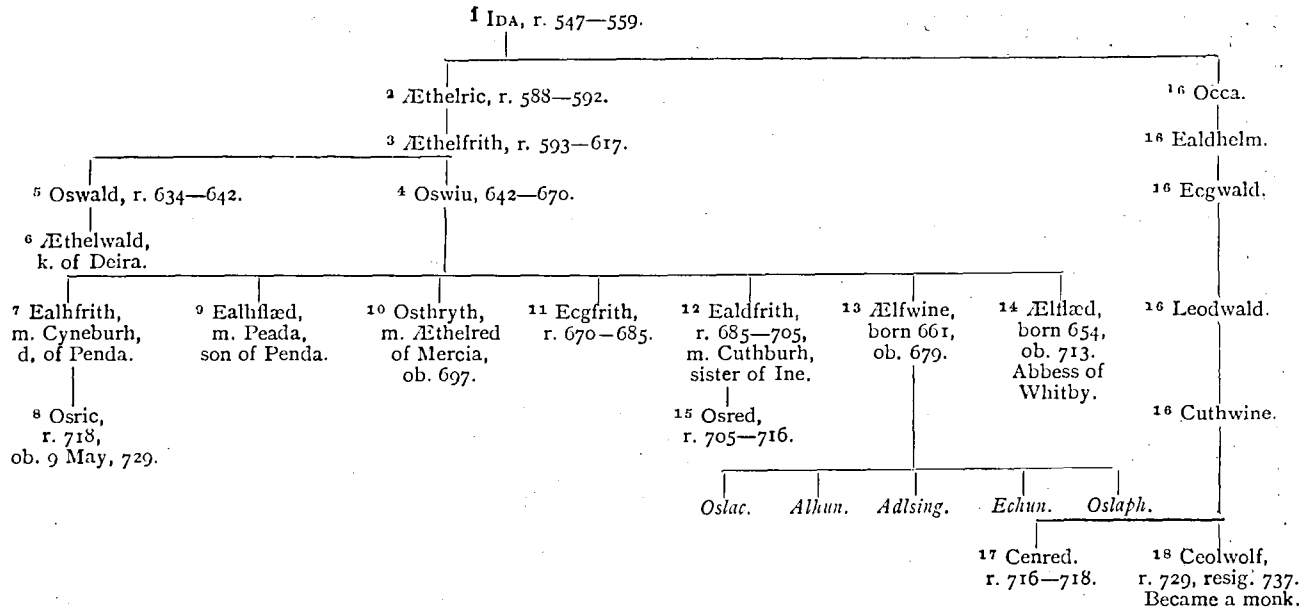
¹ Bede, ii. 337. ² Vol. ii. 389.

³ *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, iv. 161.

was not open to them. The following table, taken from that given in Lappenberg's *England under Anglo-Saxon Kings*, ed. 1881, will illustrate the royal succession in Bernicia. Lappenberg's spelling is retained:

It will be seen that the crown passed during two centuries in direct succession from Ida to Oswy, except when the dynasty of Deira intervened; but no question that concerns us arises till we come to the children of Oswy. It must be remembered that among the old English the strict law of Primogeniture did not hold; the crown was, as a rule, confined to the royal stock, but any member of the royal stock was eligible for choice by the Witan. Alchfrid, the eldest son of Oswy, married Cyniburga, daughter of Penda, king of the Mercians, during her father's lifetime, and persuaded her brother Peada to become a Christian. At the battle of the Winwaed, on November 15, 655, when Penda was slain, Alchfrid fought under his father, and was made under-king of Deira in the place of Ethelwald, son of St. Oswald, who had passed over to the side of Penda. He gave to St. Wilfrid the minster at Ripon, which he had before bestowed on Scottish clergy, and, with the consent of King Oswy, sent him to Gaul to be consecrated; also he was present at the Synod of Whitby in the early part of 664. When Benedict Biscop visited Rome for the second time in 665, Alchfrid wished to go with him, but King Oswy forbade the visit;¹ after this he disappears from history. In Bewcastle churchyard, Cumberland, there is the tall shaft of a memorial cross which bears the date "the first year of the king of this realm, Ecgfrith." It also bears the names of Cyniburga, wife of Alchfrith; of Cyneswitha, widow or daughter of Penda, and so mother or sister of the wife of Alchfrith; and of Wulthere, king of the Mercians, 656 to 675, brother-in-law of Alchfrith. The date is 670. The main inscription on the cross runs thus: "This thin token of victory Hwætred, Wothgar, Olfwolthu set up after (in memory of) Alchfrith, once king and son of Oswy." Then: "Pray for the high sin of his

¹ Bede, *Historia Abbatum*, §2.



OSRIC OF GLOUCESTER.

LAPPENBERG'S NOTES.

- 1 Sax. Chron., a. 547, Fl.W. Sim. Dunelm., who assigns a reign of eleven years only to Ida, Nennii App. and the Chronol. ap. Wanley and Petrie. 2 The names of the sons of Ida are from Simeon 3 Sax. Chron., Fl.W. Nennius; Beda, iii. 6. 4 Beda, iii. 14, 15; iv. 5, Nennii App. 5 Beda, iii. 7, 9. 6 Beda, iii. 14. 7 Beda, iii. 14, 21. 8 Beda, v. 23, and Smith, *ib.* Sax. Chron., a. 729. The descent of Osric seems uncertain. 9 Beda, iii. 21. 10 Beda, iv. 21; Sax. Chron., a. 697. 11 Beda, iv. 19, 26; Eddius, c. xxxix. 12 Beda, v. 18; Sax. Chron., a. 705; W. Malm. 13 Beda, iv. 21. 14 Beda, iii. 24; Acta Sanct., t. ii. p. 178. 15 Sim. Dunelm. 16 Sax. Chron., a.a. 729, 738, Fl. Geneal. 17 Chron., a. 716. 18 Sax. Chron., a.a. 729, 737; a 731 makes him son of Cutha, and grandson of Cuthwine, C.S.T.

soul.”¹ What it means we know not exactly, for we do not know what happened between 665 and 670; but Bede² tells us that among the difficulties of Oswy’s troubled reign was the fact that his own son Alchfrid fought against him. This can hardly have happened before 664, and Oswy’s refusal to allow Alchfrid to go to Rome in 665 may suggest that the relations between him and his son were at that time somewhat strained. For us the interest of Alchfrid’s history lies in the fact that, supposing Osric of the Northumbrians to have been a son of Alchfrid born not long after his marriage, about 653, with Cyneburga, daughter of Penda, he might have been rather more than twenty years of age in 675 when his uncle Ethelred became king of the Mercians; and if Ethelred desired at the moment to appoint a viceroy of the Huiccians, he might very naturally appoint his nephew, the son of Alchfrid, for the presence of the names of his Mercian kinsmen on the Bewcastle cross shows that the memory of Alchfrid was tenderly cherished among them. There was indeed a cause for this: the family of the heathen Penda became a family of saints, and the Mercian royalties whose names stand on the Bewcastle cross owed their Christianity to Alchfrith, who persuaded Peada, the eldest son of Penda, to become a Christian; and so it is that the memorial cross of the man to whom Bristol and Gloucestershire, with the rest of Mercia in the first instance, owed their Christianity is still standing in Bewcastle churchyard.

It will be noticed that Bede speaks of the son of Oswy as Alchfrith, while the form of the name of the father of Osric found in the twelfth-century *Symeon of Durham* is Alfrid, but too much stress ought not to be laid on this difference; for Florence of Worcester, writing about 1118, calls the son of Oswy in four places Alhfrid,³ and in one place Alfrid, with a variant Allfrith,⁴ thus giving us in one place for this son of Oswy the exact form given by his contemporary, Symeon of

¹ An excellent description of this beautiful cross is given in *The Conversion of the Heptarchy*, by the Bishop of Bristol [S.P.C.K.].

² *H. E.*, iii. 14. ³ *M. II. B.*, 531, 532. ⁴ *M. II. B.*, 638.

Durham, for the father of Osric. We may therefore for the present take Symeon's Alfrid to refer to either of the two sons of Oswy—the one whom Bede calls Alchfrith, or the one called by him Aldfrid—noting, however, that it would be more likely that the *ch* in Alchfrith would first be softened into *h* and then disappear than it would be that the *d* in Aldfrid should drop out altogether.

When Oswy died on February 15th, 670, if Osric was the son of Alchfrith, he would, according to our ideas, be heir; but he cannot have been more than six years old, his father's reputation was probably under a cloud, and it is not probable that anyone thought of him as a possible king. Ecgrith, son of Oswy, who was thirty-five years of age, was chosen, and reigned till he was slain in battle, on May 20th, 685, and as he left no children it was natural that his brother Aldfrid should succeed him. Aldfrid died on December 14th, 705. Eadwulf, about whom nothing seems to be known, held the sovereignty for two months, when Osred, an eight-year-old son of Aldfrid, was placed on the throne by the Ealdoman Berhtfrith, who maintained him there. He proved to be an unworthy ruler, and was slain near the border of his kingdom in 716, William of Malmesbury, who wrote about 1128, implying that Cenred and Osric, his two successors, had a share in his death.

Cenred, who obtained the throne on the death of Osred, was but remotely connected with the sons of Oswy, as Ida, who died in 559, was the last common ancestor. Whether Osric was the son of Alchfrith or of Aldfrid, it seems likely that he was the last surviving male heir of the family of Oswy, for Ecgrith died childless, we hear of no other children of Aldfrid, and the other son of Oswy, Ælfwin, was slain in 679 at the battle of the Trent, aged about 18.¹ It is true that the genealogies at the end of Nennius state that Alguin, meaning apparently Ælfwin, begat Oslach, Alhun, Adlsing, Echun, and Oslaph,² but the authority is a very poor one, and the statement is exceedingly improbable. If

¹ Bede, *H. E.*, iv. 21. ² *M. H. B.*, 75.

Osrice was the last male person of the house of Oswy he was deliberately passed over in 716 by the Witan, and a very remote connection of Osred was chosen in his stead. With regard to this we may note that it would be more likely that they would pass over a son of Alchfrid, who had never reigned as an independent sovereign, and who had apparently rebelled against his father Oswy, than a brother of Osred and a son of Aldfrid, who had reigned long and wisely. Cenred reigned only two years, and according to William of Malmesbury¹ met with a violent death, as did also Osrice, who succeeded after a reign of eleven years. Bede, as we have seen, states that Osrice had designated Ceolwulf, a brother of Cenred, as his successor. This looks very much as if the house of Oswy and of Æthelric, son of Ida, from whom Oswy was descended, had been set aside in the person of Osrice in favour of Cenred, who was descended from Occa, another son of Ida; that in Osrice the house of Æthelric was restored, and that finally Osrice, before a violent end, had decreed that Ceolwulf, a brother of Cenred, should succeed him.

With regard to the question whether Osrice, king of the Huiccians from about 676 to 690, was identical with Osrice of the Northumbrians, 718 to 729, there is not much real evidence one way or the other. There is, in fact, little to set against the theory, except the difficulty of accounting for Osrice's position from 690 to 716, and the fact that the name *Osrice* was not an uncommon one, especially among the Northumbrians. A stronger antagonistic point is no doubt the fact that a man who began to reign about 677 must have been at least seventy-four years of age in 729, and this was no doubt a great age for a king when kings so often came to an untimely end. But St. Hilda was sixty-six when she died in 680, and Ethelbald, who reigned over the Mercians for forty-one years, and Offa, who governed them for thirty-nine years, must have been probably well over sixty when they died, while if the Chronicle is to be trusted Cynric, who

¹ Rolls Series, *G. R.*, i. 58.

invaded Britain with his father Cerdic in 495, survived in full activity till 560.

A very strong point in favour of the identification is the way in which Bede speaks of Osric of the Huiccians in *H. E.*, iv. 23, when he is describing Otffor's work on his return from Rome. The passage runs thus: "*Et inde cum rediens Britanniam adisset, divertit ad provinciam Huicciorum, cui tunc rex Osric præfuit*: And when on his return from thence he had reached Britain, he turned aside to the province of the Huiccians over which King Osric at that time ruled." We may notice first of all that if this Osric were a son of Alchfrith, the friend of St. Wilfrid, it was very natural that Otffor, the monk of Whitby, should turn aside to visit him on his return from Rome; but the point lies in the way in which Bede speaks of Osric's rule: "The province of the Huiccians over which King Osric at that time ruled." Bede tells us¹ that his history was completed in 731, and, as we have seen, Osric ruled over the Northumbrians from 718 to 729; certainly then the most natural meaning of the sentence would be that Otffor turned aside into the province of the Huiccians over which King Osric—that King Osric whom we in Northumbria have known so well—then ruled. Of course, the words may mean *a King Osric*, but under the circumstances that would not be their natural meaning, and we should have expected that Bede would have added some description to differentiate such an one from the well-known Osric of Northumbria. The translation in the old English paraphrase of Bede's *History*—"ferde tha in Hwicca mægthe thær wæs tha Osric cyning"—does not help us, even if a Mercian or West Saxon translation made 150 years after Bede's death could be regarded as having much authority on the point. Assuming the identity of the two Osrics, we might well imagine that Ethelred had set his nephew over the Huiccians on his accession to the throne of the Mercians in 675, and it is possible that Aldfrid summoned him to Northumbria on his accession in 685. For since

¹ *H. E.*, v. 23.

Ecgfrid had left no children, and Osred, the son of Aldfrid, who succeeded in 705 on his father's death, was not born till 697, it is probable that in 685 Aldfrid and Osric were the only living male descendants of Oswy, and if that were so it would be very necessary that Osric should be resident in Northumbria. We can thus see why Oshere was reigning over the Huiccians about 693. Aldfrid married Cuthburl, sister of Ine, king of the West Saxons; the Chronicle simply says that they separated during his lifetime, but Florence of Worcester writes: "Ante finem suæ vitæ connubio carnalis copulæ ambo pro Dei amore renunciavere." They seem to have lived as did Ecgfrid and St. Etheldreda, or the Confessor and the Lady Edith, and it is likely that Osred was the child of another mother, born after the separation. That Osred succeeded his father after a short period of tumult in 709 can hardly have been considered a slight to Osric, though his supersession by so remote a connection as Cenred in 716 without doubt was so; but it was atoned for when Cenred disappeared in 718, and Osric became king in his room. Of course this is imaginary, but it fits in very well with the known facts of history without in any way straining them.

Now, assuming that we are dealing with but a single Osric, and he the son of Alchfrid, we have to consider what real reason there is for thinking that he had anything to do, whether in life or death, with the Abbey of St. Peter at Gloucester. The evidence for this connection depends to a great extent on documents belonging to St. Peter's Abbey itself, and unfortunately these writings are very late. The editor of the Rolls Series edition of the *History and Chartulary of St. Peter's* states that the short history which precedes the chartulary closes during the abbacy of Walter Froucester, 1381-1412, and that the text of the history is founded on two fifteenth-century documents;¹ so that these authorities are some seven centuries later than the time of Osric, or about as far removed from him as we are from King John.

¹ Introduction, x.

There is also a document in the *Gloucester Cathedral Register* which professes to be a grant by Burgred, king of the Mercians, which also confirms an earlier grant, which it recites, of Ethelred, king of the Mercians.¹ Kemble does not notice the charter; Mr. Birch prints it in two portions, but it is not at all likely that either portion represents a genuine charter.

The first portion recites that King Ethelred granted to Osric the land of 300 tributarii at Gloucester, and to Oswald 300 cassates at Pershore, and that he afterwards granted leave to Osric to found a monastery at Gloucester. But the final clause presents considerable difficulties. It states that the charter was granted in 671 (written in full, not in figures), being the fifth year of the reign of King Ethelred, in the presence of Archbishop Deusdedit, Bishop Saxulph, and the people of Mercia, when a synod was gathered at the well-known spot, Ethcealchy. As Ethelred began to reign in 675, the date is wrong; Archbishop Deusdedit ruled at Canterbury from 655 to 664, and there seems to be a confusion with the name of Archbishop Theodore, who had held his See for seven years when Ethelred came to the throne; Sexwulph held the See of Lichfield from 675 to 691. Ethcealchy is evidently intended for *at Celchyth*; but though many synods were held there in later days, the oldest extant document which purports to have been granted there bears the date of 788,² a century later than the date claimed for the foundation of St. Peter's Minster. The notes of time and place are hopelessly incompatible with each other, and it is evident that the document is the creation of a period far later than the time of King Ethelred. Nor is the document which purports to be a confirmation by King Burhred in 872 in much better case. Instead of beginning, as old English charters almost invariably did, with a preamble, it passes at once into a narrative form, telling how Osric appointed his sister Kyneburg abbess, and how she was succeeded by

¹ *Gloucester Cathedral Register*, "A. Cartularium Saxonicum," i. 60, ii. 535.

² K.C.D. cliii.; C.S. 254.

Eafe; it then includes a list of donations, beginning with Eafe and ending with Burgred himself, and finally it closes with a confirmation in the ordinary form. The date is written in full, "anno dominicæ incarnationis octingentesimo septuagesimo secundo." Archbishop Ceolnoth is mentioned as being present at the gemot, and his name appears among the witnesses. The indiction is correct, and all the five bishops mentioned might have been present at a gathering in 872; a suspicious point is the appearance of the Archbishop, for it seems clear that he died on February 4th, 870. It seems certain that the document attributed to Burhred must also be set aside as a fiction.

It is not at all unlikely, however, that the list of donations incorporated in the grant may be of the time of Burhred, with whom, as we have seen, it ends; at any rate, it is clear (if the printed copies accurately represent the manuscript) that the fifteenth-century scribe did not understand his text. In the sentence, "Similiter etiam postea *Æelmund in Geldinge* xxx. tributariorum in *Æoport* dedit," the italicised words should run, "*Æelmund Ingelding*, *Æelmund* son of Ingeld"; just as the Chronicle gives the pedigree of King Ethelwulf, thus: ¹ "Æthelwulf wæs Ecgbrehting, Ecgbryht Ealhmunding, Ealhmund Eafing, Eafa Eopping, Eoppa Ingilding,—Ethelwulf was son of Egbert, he of Ealhmund, he of Eafa, he of Eoppa, and he of Ingild," who was, however, not the same person with the father of *Æelmund*. The Gloucester *Æelmund* was clearly Ethelmund, Ealdorman of the Huiccians, who was slain in battle at Kempford on the accession-day of King Egbert. That Ingeld was the father of Ethelmund is clear from an original Worcester document, dated 770, by which Uhtred, Regulus of the Huiccians, granted to his faithful thegn *Æthelmund*, son of Ingeld, who had been "dux et præfectus" of Ethelbald, king of the Mercians, the land of five "tributarii," at Easton on the Salwarpe.² The sense of the passage is therefore this:

¹ Anno 855.

² C.S. 203. Compare K.C.D. cxvii.; C.S. 202.

“Æthelmund, son of Ingeld, gave (the land) of thirty *tributarii* at Æoport,” and we are able to identify this land. Ethelric, son of Ethelmund, made a disposition of his property in 804,¹ in which the following passage occurs: “Verum etiam do xxx. manentium under Ofre ad Gleawecestre”; Æoport, therefore, is the same place with Over beyond the Severn, and it would seem that Ethelric had retained the land for his lifetime; indeed, it is more than likely that both father and son were merely restoring church property which had been alienated. This list of donations also contains the following passage: “et Bibladene, Otintone et Beganworthan Adelbadui rex dedisset et pro eo quod percussit Adelmund filium Oswaldi cognatum ejus.” I can find nothing about this Adelmund, son of Oswald, but the sentence is more likely to be an ancient record of a forgotten fact than a fabrication of a late writer, and it would seem very likely that the whole of the charter attributed to Burhred is a fiction founded on this ancient list of donations.

It is clear, then, that the Gloucester documents cannot be relied on to carry the tradition of Osric further back than the beginning of the fifteenth century, and it is needful to go further afield. In the early part of the twelfth century there was a long quarrel between the Archbishop of York and St. Peter's Minster concerning the manors of Standish, Leach and Oddington, and the abbot and monks of Gloucester strove to strengthen their claim by sending to Pope Eugenius III. (1145—1153) a series of letters from the heads of religious houses in the neighbourhood testifying to their right. Among these is a letter from Thomas, Abbot of Pershore, in which the following passage occurs:² “Nam sub rege Merciorum Adelredo, emensis inde jam quadringentis, et eo amplius a subregulo Hunctorum [Osrico]³ qui regnum postea Nordanhymbrorum obtinuit, in quibusdam earum fundata, quibusdam vero a quodam Æelmundo

¹ K.C.D. clxxxvi. C.S. 313, 314.

² *Hist. et. Men. Glouc.*, Rolls Series, ii. 111.

³ A blank is left in the Cartulary for this name.

ingeldinc,¹ et rege itidem Merciorum Bernulfo postmodum ampliata, omni etiam ætate nostra sic easdem continue possedit, quod nunquam eis ad momentum destituta fuit.” The fact that Ingelding is given in its correct form, and that the name Osric is omitted in the text, testify both to the antiquity of the tradition recorded, and to the absence of any immediate promptings on the part of the monks of Gloucester; for if they had sent to the Pershore monks something which they wished to have placed on record they would surely have set down the name of their reputed founder. Thus we have the tradition of the identity of the two Osrics, and of the foundation of St. Peter’s Minster by Osric of Northumbria carried back to a period within four hundred and twenty years of his death. It is to be noted also that, granting the truth of the tradition, Pershore was a natural place for its survival, for the foundation of Pershore by Oswald formed a part of it as much as did the foundation of Gloucester by Osric.

The Rev. C. Plummer, C.C.C., Oxford, kindly drew my attention to a passage in a composite manuscript in the Cottonian Library, Vitellius, C. viii., which is assigned by Liebermann² to the third or fourth decennium of the twelfth century; the passage runs thus: “Anno dñi dclxxxi rex Merciorum Adelredus ministro suo Osrico qui provincie Wictiorum tunc præfuit, dedit terram trecentorum tributariorum in urbe Glaorna, ubi constructa et dedicata est ecclesia in honore Sc̄i Petri.” With regard to this extract Dr. G. F. Warner, Assistant Keeper of Manuscripts in the British Museum, who was good enough to refer to the passage, writes thus: “Cottonian Vitellius, C. viii., is a good twelfth-century hand, or rather that portion of it which includes the entry referring to Osric’s foundation (f. 8); this may be earlier than your letter of 1145—1153.” It will be seen that the words relating to Osric’s governorship of the Huiccians

¹ The editor of the Rolls Series Edition calls this “evidently a corrupt reading”; it is, of course, as we have seen, the true one.

² *Ungedruckte Geschichtsquellen*, p. 18.

closely resemble those of Bede in *H. E.*, iv. 23; and the words describing the extent of his endowment are identical with those of the Gloucester Charter. Mr. Plummer in his edition of Bede¹ mentions an eleventh-century manuscript of the *Historia* which belonged to St. Peter's, Gloucester, and in which at the mention of Osric in iv. 23 is written in a later hand: "Fundator mon. Glouernis sub Ethelredo rege." With regard to this Dr. Warner writes: "The addition in Royal MS. 13, C. v., p. 159, is in a hand of the latter part of the fifteenth century," and it does not therefore carry us as far back even as the History and Chartulary.

We are able, therefore, to carry back the tradition which unites the two Osrics, and connects the foundation of St. Peter's Minster with Osric of Northumbria to the first half of the twelfth century, or to within about four centuries of his death; and seeing that we do not possess any records at St. Peter's itself older than the beginning of the fifteenth century, this is probably as much as we can expect. We are therefore in a position to bring to a point what has been said.

Bede tells us that an Osric was king of the Huiccians in the reign of Ethelred, the Bath Charter shows us that he was a founder of churches, he had set up a bishop's See at Worcester, and established a nunnery at Bath, and as he expressed an intention of founding minsters in various parts of his dominion it would be more than likely that he would set up one at Gloucester. He had ceased to rule in 693, and he or another Osric ruled the Northumbrians from 718 to 729. With regard to the years between 693 and 718, if, as seems likely, Osric of the Huiccians was the son of Alchfrid, eldest son of Oswy, owing to the childlessness of Ecgfrid and apparently of Aldfrid until quite late in his reign, he would have been after the death of Oswy in 685 very near to the throne, and so most likely resident in Northumbria. That he was set aside in favour of Cenred in 716, that he supplanted Cenred in 718, and that finally before

¹ Vol. i. cxiv.

a violent end he decreed the throne to a brother of Cenred, would seem to represent the struggles of two rival families for the throne. The theory that the two rules of Osric represent different phases of a single life certainly accords well with the recorded facts of history.

Concerning the tradition that St. Peter's Minster was founded by Osric, King of Northumbria, we find it in the oldest documents of the house that remain to us, and we find it in other documents which carry us back to within four centuries of his death; as far back, that is to say, as under the circumstances we could expect to trace it. The least certain part of the tradition is the burial of Osric in St. Peter's, for, of course, the late tomb now called by his name proves nothing; the monks might be relied upon to take care that their founder should not lack a tomb, and that if anyone, greatly daring, should desire to behold the remains of the founder he should not be disappointed in his hope.¹ But here again the facts of history so far as they can be ascertained are in accordance with the tradition. Osric died in 729, at that time Eadburga is said to have been Abbess, who is also said to have survived till 735, when she was buried by Bishop Wilfrid, of Worcester. A lady named Egburga appears among the correspondents of St. Boniface, 716-722 as deploring the death of her brother Oshere;² if, as is likely enough, from the similarity of name, we may identify her with the Abbess of Gloucester, the letters to St. Boniface would show that there really was a lady Egburga, a sister of Oshere, living about the time of the burial of Osric. But the Abbess of Gloucester is represented to have been a sister of Kyniburg and of Osric, and if this

¹ Violators of sepulchres would do well to have in mind the evil fate which it is said befell Thomas II., Archbishop of York, in consequence of his curious gazing on the relics of St. Oswald at Gloucester: "Summo igitur diluculo jam pransus, scrinio effracto, extraxit ossa, firmavit oculis animi credulitatem. Continuoque templum egressus, valetudinem letalem incidit. Qua invalescente per dies, post iii^{or} menses animam dereliquit." *William of Malmesbury*, G. P. Rolls Series, 263¹².

² *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, Egburga, Oshere.

were so the burial of Osric in St. Peter's would be a most natural thing. As we have seen, Osric succeeded Cenred in 718, not without suspicion of bloodshed, and Osric himself was slain in 729. Under the circumstances Ceolwulf, the brother of Cenred, who succeeded Osric, would hardly have felt any great desire that the remains of Osric should rest in Northumbria, while the Abbess Eadburga, his sister, and the people of Gloucester might well have wished that the body of their founder should rest in his own minster. If all the circumstances of the case are taken into consideration, the burial of Osric at Gloucester, so far from being improbable, seems to be the very thing which would be most likely to happen.

On the whole we may conclude with regard to the Osric tradition that it agrees well with the history of the period so far as this can be ascertained, certainly there is nothing which tells directly against it; and that we shall be justified in considering that, in its main outline at any rate, it is true.
