

SCANDINAVIAN BRITAIN

I. THE EARLIEST RAIDS

“WHILST the pious King Bertric was reigning over the western parts of the English, and the innocent people, spread through their plains, were enjoying themselves in tranquillity and yoking their oxen to the plough, suddenly there arrived on the coast a fleet of Danes, not large, but of three ships only : this was their first arrival. When this became known, the king’s officer, who was already dwelling in the town of Dorchester, leaped on his horse and rode with a few men to the port, thinking that they were merchants and not enemies. Giving his commands as one that had authority, he ordered them to be sent to the king’s town ; but they slew him on the spot, and all who were with him. The name of this officer was Beaduheard. A.D. 787. And the number of years was above 344 from the time when Hengist and Horsa arrived in Britain.”

Such was the tradition, a century and a half later, of the beginning of Scandinavian Britain. Æthelwerd, ealdorman and historian, who wrote the notice, had access to special sources of information, such as the royal family to which he belonged must have preserved ; and his story tallies with the shorter entry of the