Among the mountains of Lusatia, in the south of the Saxon province of Bautzen, there exist to this day about 50,000 Wends, possessing characteristics and speaking a language of their own. These curious people are the relics of a vast Slavonic horde which, appearing on the borders of the kingdom of the Hermunduri or Thuringians about the 4th century, pressed into their territories on the downfall of that kingdom in the 6th century, and settled themselves between the Spree and the Saale. They were known as the Sorbs or Sorabi, and the country, which included the whole of the modern kingdom of Saxony, was called Sorabia. Warlike and persistent, their influence has never been obliterated, and, though conquered, their stock has neither been exterminated nor absorbed. They were skilled in agriculture and cattle-breeding, and soon improved the fertile soil of their new settlements. Some writers are disposed to recognize their influence in the strong bent to agricultural and industrial pursuits which has ever since characterized the inhabitants of this part of Germany ; and less doubtful traces have been left in the popular superstitions and legends, and in the local names. For more than a hundred years after their first collision with the German kingdom the Sorbs repulsed all attacks, but in 928 Henry the Fowler, the first Saxon emperor, crossing the Elbe, devastated the land of the Daleminzians, and built the strong castle of Misnia or Meissen, which thenceforward formed the centre of a gradually increasing mark against the heathen. For two hundred years the office of margrave of Meissen was not hereditary, but in 1123 Count Conrad of Wettin obtained the succession for his house, and founded a line of princes whose descendants still occupy the throne. It is said, though on very doubtful grounds, that Conrad was a scion of the family of the old Saxon hero Wittekind. In 1156, when Conrad abdicated and set the pernicious example of dividing his lands among his sons, his possessions extended from the Neisse and the Erzgebirge to the Harz and the Saale. During these two centuries the state of the country had but slowly improved. The Sorbs had been reduced to a condition of miserable serfdom, and the best land was in the hands of Frankish peasants who had been attracted by its fertility. Agriculture was encouraged by the ecclesiastics, especially by Bishop Benno, who occupied the see of Meissen (founded in 961) about the time of the conquest of England by the Normans. In the reign of otto the Rich (1157-1190) the first silver mines were discovered, and the famous mining town of Freiberg founded. Trade also received its first encouragement; the great fairs of Leipsic were protected ; and roads were made and towns fortified with the produce of the mines, Otto’s grandson, Henry the Illustrious (1221-1288), whose mother Jutta was a Thuringian princess, reunited most of Conrad’s lands by inheriting part of Thuringia (the rest went to the duke of Brabant) and the Pleissnerland, as the district on both banks of the upper course of the Pleisse was called. He too lost the chance of founding a magnificent kingdom in the heart of Germany, by sub- dividing his territories, which stretched in a compact mass from the Werra to the oder and from the mountains of Bohemia to the Harz. The consequences of this policy of subdivision, which was followed by his successors, were bitter family feuds and petty wars, seriously hampering the development of the country. Frederick the Grave (1324-1347) was the last prince of the house of Wettin who was sole ruler of all the ancestral lands of his house. The next powerful figure is Frederick the Warlike, who became margrave in 1381. Besides the Mark he possessed the Osterland, the territory to the north-west of the present kingdom, stretching from the Saale at Weissenfels to the Elbe at Torgau, and embracing the plain of Leipsic. Frederick, in whose reign the university of Leipsic was founded, had acquired his surname by his energetic support of Sigismund, especially in the Hussite wars. As we have seen, that emperor’s desire to attach to himself so powerful an ally led him to bestow the vacant electoral duchy of Saxe-Wittenberg upon the margrave in 1423. Despite the troublous state of public affairs, the internal prosperity of the land had steadily advanced. Most of the chief towns had by this time been founded,—Leipsic, Erfurt, Zwickau, and Freiberg being the most conspicuous. Chemnitz had begun its textile industry. The condition of the peasants was still far below that of the burghers of the towns ; many of them were mere serfs. The church retained the high pitch of power which it had early attained in Meissen, and religious institutions were numerous all over the most fertile districts. In spite of fresh discoveries of silver, the pecuniary wants of the princes had to be occasionally supplied by contributions called “ bedes ” from the nobles and ecclesiastics, who were summoned from time to time to meet in a kind of diet.

Frederick’s new dignities as elector, combined with his personal qualities, now made him one of the most powerful princes in Germany ·, had the principle of primogeniture been established in the country as he left it, Saxony and not Brandenburg might have been the leading power in the empire to-day. He died in 1428, just in time to escape the grief of seeing his lands cruelly ravaged by

the Hussites in 1429 and 1430. The division of territory between his two sons, Frederick the Mild (1428-1464) and William, once more called forth destructive internecine wars (the “ Bruderkrieg ”), in which the former for a time forgot his surname. It was in 1455, during this war, that the knight Kunz von Kaufungen carried into execu­tion his bold, though only momentarily successful, plan of stealing the two young sons of the elector Frederick. Ernest and Albert, the two princes in question, succeeded to their father’s possessions in 1464, and for twenty years ruled peacefully in common. The land rapidly prospered during this respite from war. Trade made great advances, encouraged by an improved coinage, which was one of the consequences of the silver discoveries on the Schneeberg. Several of the powerful ecclesiastical principalities were at this time held by members of the Saxon electoral house, so that the external influence of the electorate corresponded to its internal prosperity. Matters were not suffered to continue thus. The childless death of their uncle William in 1482 bequeathed Thuringia to the two princes, and the younger Albert insisted upon a division of the common possessions. In August 1485 the Partition of Leipsic took place, which resulted in the foundation of two Saxon lines, the Ernestine and the Albertine. The lands were never again united. Ernest divided the lands into two portions, and Albert chose. Apart from the electoral duchy of Wittenberg, which necessarily went to Ernest as the elder brother, the lands were divided into Thuringia, half of the Osterland, and Naumburg and the Voigtland on the one hand, and Meissen and the remaining parts of eastern Saxony on the other. To Ernest’s deep chagrin, Albert chose Meissen, the old ancestral lands of the Wettins. The former only survived his vexation a year.

The electorate remained at first with the Ernestine line. Ernest was succeeded by his son Frederick the Wise (1486-1525), one of the most illustrious princes in German history. Under his rule Saxony was perhaps the most influential member of the German empire ; and on the death of Maximilian the imperial crown itself was offered to him, but he vindicated his character by refus­ing it. In this reign Saxony became the cradle of the Reformation. The elector’s wise tolerance and subsequent protection and hearty support of Luther are well known to every reader. He is said to have remained unmarried out of love to his brother John, who succeeded him. He died during the horrors of the Peasants’ War. John (1525-1532) was an even more enthusiastic favourer of the Reformed doctrines, and shared the leadership of the Schmalkald League with Philip of Hesse. His son, John Frederick the Magnanimous (1532-1547), might with equal propriety have been surnamed the Unfortunate. He took part in the Schmalkald War, but in 1547 was captured at Mühlberg by the emperor Charles V., and forced to sign the capitulation of Wittenberg. This deed transferred the electorate and nearly all the Saxon lands to the Albertine line, whose astute representative had taken the imperial side. Only a few scattered territories in Thuringia were reserved for John Frederick’s sons, and on these were afterwards founded the Ernestine duchies of Weimar, Gotha, Ac. For the second time in the history of the Saxon electorate, the younger line on a division ultimately secured the highest dignity, for the Wittenberg line had been junior to the Lauenberg line. The Albert­ine line is now the royal line of Saxony.

The Albertine Maurice became elector after the capitula­tion of Wittenberg. He was the grandson of the founder of his house, and had been preceded on the throne of Meissen by his uncle George (1500-1539) and by his father Henry (1539-1541). George was a zealous Roman Catholic, and had vainly endeavoured to stem the Reformation in