By the end of the 8th century it had become evident that the Arabs had committed a great error in not reduc­ing the whole Peninsula, and that the contemptuous indifference with which they had left the northern mountains to a handful of refugees was destined to bring its own punishment. The early history of the Christian states of Spain is wrapped in a mist of fable and legend, but it is not hard to discern the main outlines. A scanty band of warriors, headed by Pelayo, probably a member of the Visigothic royal family, found refuge in the cave of Covadonga, among the inaccessible mountains of Asturias. Their own bravery and the difficulties of the country enabled them to hold their own, and they became the rallying point for all who preferred a life of hardship to slavish submission. The formation of a Christian kingdom was the work of Pelayo’s grandson, Alfonso I., who seized the opportunity when the Arabs were occupied in the disputes attending the accession of 'Abd al-Raḥmán I. After driving the Berbers from Galicia, Alfonso advanced with his victorious troops as far as the Douro. But he had not followers enough to colonize the conquered territory, and contented himself with the northern districts, leaving a desert to form a natural boundary between himself and the Moors. Alfonso’s son and successor, Fruela I. (765-775). fixed his capital at Oviedo, but the greater part of his reign was occupied with the suppression of internal disorders, and he ultimately fell a victim to assassination. His throne was successfully usurped by his cousin Aurelia and his nephew Silo, both of whom sought security against domestic enemies in an alliance with 'Abd al-Raḥmán. On the death of Silo (784) a party among the nobles elected Fruela’s son, Alfonso II., but for six years the western half of the kingdom obeyed a bastard son of Alfonso I. by a Moorish captive, nicknamed from his origin El Maurecato. Under Alfonso the Chaste, whose long reign lasted till 842, the Christian kingdom of Oviedo was firmly established. It is impossible to find any accurate account of his achieve­ments. The monkish chroniclers are hardly trustworthy authorities for military history, and they prefer to confine themselves to the more congenial subject of the found­ing and endowment of churches. The discovery of the pretended tomb of St James at Compostella is in their eyes the greatest event of the reign, and it undoubtedly aided to give a religious character to the war which was destined to be the great crusade of the west.

Alfonso II.’s reign witnessed the establishment of another Christian state in Spain. Charles the Great had been too much occupied elsewhere to avenge the great disaster at Roncesvalles, but he was only waiting for his opportunity. This was offered in 800 by the treachery of another governor of Saragossa, who had revolted against Al-Ḥakam and sought assistance from the Franks. Charles himself was on his way to Italy to assume the imperial crown, but he sent his son Louis across the Pyrenees. In his first campaign Louis reached the Ebro, but he had to return in 801 to vanquish the obstinate resistance of Barcelona. The administration of the “ Spanish mark ” was entrusted to Bera, a man of Gothic descent, who proved fully capable of the task imposed upon him. The attacks of the Arabs were repulsed, and their last possessions beyond the Ebro were lost in 811, when Tortosa, after a siege of two years, succumbed to the forces which Louis the Pious had again led over the mountains. Henceforth the province was ruled by the counts of Barcelona, as representatives of the Frankish kings.

To avoid the difficulty of frequent transitions, it will be best to sketch in advance the main outlines of the history of the Christian states down to the formation of the three

kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, and Navarre, leaving their relations with the Moors to be narrated in connexion with the caliphate of Cordova. It is impossible to do much more than trace the dynastic and geographical changes, as their mutual quarrels are intricate and wearisome, and of little importance except as prolonging the rule of the Arabs in the Peninsula. The county of Barcelona may be dismissed with a few words. It continued for some time to be subject to Frankish suzerainty, and it suffered from the disorders that followed the break-up of Charles the Great’s empire. Bera, its first count, was exiled, and his successor, Bernhard, played a prominent part in the intrigues of that troubled period. At one moment he added Septimania to the Spanish mark, at another he was disgraced and exiled ; and finally he was treacherously murdered. In the later part of the 9th century all connexion with Septimania was cut off, and Wilfrid the Hairy (d. 907) was able to make the county hereditary in his family. With its mixed population and its long line of coast the county of Barcelona, or Catalonia as it came to be called, was more involved in the affairs of Gaul than of Spain. Berengar I. annexed the county of Carcassonne and other districts north of the Pyrenees (about 1050-1076), and Berengar III. (1092-1131) obtained Provence by marriage. On the latter’s death Catalonia and the transmontane territories were divided between his two sons, and in 1150 Berengar IV., by marriage with Queen Petronilla, obtained the kingdom of Aragon, with which Catalonia was henceforth united.

The history of Oviedo is more important and more complicated. Alfonso II.’s successors, Ramiro I. (842- 850) and Ordoño I. (850-866), had to contend both with the great nobles, who aimed at independence, and with the Basques, who had never learnt to submit to orderly rule. Alfonso III., in a long reign of nearly fifty years (866-910), won the title of “The Great’’from the suc­cess which attended his arms. While his plundering raids extended as far as Coimbra and Lisbon, he really advanced his frontiers to the Douro, and in order to defend these more exposed territories he transferred his capital from Oviedo to Leon, on the further side of the mountains. In accordance with the universal custom of the Germans, Alfonso divided his territories among his three sons, Garcia receiving the southern districts with Leon as a capital, Ordoño II. western Galicia, and Fruela II. the original district round Oviedo. In 931, however, the kingdom was again united under Ramiro II., a son of Ordoño II., and henceforth called after the new capital, Leon. Under Ramiro, a great warrior against the Arabs, we first hear of a district that was destined to become the most important in Spain. The border territory, a march to the south-east of Leon, previously Bardulia, was now known as Castile, from the number of castles that had been raised to hold it against the infidels. Its count, Fernan Gonzales, was the most powerful noble in the kingdom of Leon, and sought to make himself inde­pendent. Ramiro reduced him to submission and then bound him to his side by marrying his eldest son to the count’s daughter. Ordoño III. (950-957) sought to emulate his father’s achievements against the Arabs, but was hampered by the revolt of his brother Sancho and his father-in-law Fernan Gonzales. Sancho I. (957-966) found an enemy in his recent ally, who attempted to place a rival king upon the throne, and he could only procure restoration to his kingdom by an alliance with the caliph of Cordova. This alliance lasted during the minority of his son, Ramiro III. (966-982), who was deposed by the malcontent nobles in favour of his uncle, Bermudo II. (982-999). The latter, too mild a ruler for such troubled times, had a hard struggle against domestic