



Cornell University Library

The original of this book is in
the Cornell University Library.

There are no known copyright restrictions in
the United States on the use of the text.

DA
153
M14

Cornell University Library


BOUGHT WITH THE INCOME
FROM THE
SAGE ENDOWMENT FUND
THE GIFT OF
Henry W. Sage
1891

A. 147898

6/6/1901

DATE DUE

OCT 13 1972		
GAYLORD		PRINTED IN U.S.A.

Cornell University Library
DA 153.M14
 Alfred the West Saxon, king of English.

 3 1924 027 953 888

Saintly Lives

Edited by R. F. Horton, M.A.

Alfred the West Saxon
King of the English



ALFRED THE GREAT

Frontispiece.

THE TRADITIONAL PORTRAIT OF
ALFRED THE GREAT.

This conception of Alfred's features is probably at least 200 years old. It appears in one of the Bodlean prints with this legend: *Alfredus Saxonum Rex, Coll. Universitatis Oxon. Fundator. Circa A. Chr. 877. Hujus Summi Regis Effigiem a Tabula in Bibl. Bodleiana factam Reverendo viro Nathan Wetherell, S.T.P.* Nathan Wetherell was Master of University from 1764-1808, but the original to which he refers cannot be traced.

Alfred the West Saxon King of the English

BY

DUGALD MACFADYEN, M.A.

*(Sometime Exhibitioner in Modern History on the
Foundation of Merton College, Oxford)*

WITH
PORTRAIT AND OTHER
ILLUSTRATIONS



1901

LONDON: J. M. DENT & CO.

NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & CO.

The Author's Apology

THIS book was undertaken at the request of a friend who found himself prevented under doctor's orders from preparing a Life of King Alfred for this series in time for the millenary celebration of his reign. Though undertaken to oblige someone else, it has been finished to please myself, and to gratify my reverence and liking for the hero of the book. It has fallen to me, during the twelve months while the book was in preparation, to work much among squalid and sordid scenes and under anxieties unusually oppressive and depressing; and it has been a pleasure to me beyond my own expectation and power to explain, to find myself at the beginning or end of the day in Alfred's strenuous and inspiring company; to forget the burdens of a present warfare in watching Alfred wage his; to see him battling against enemies within and without, and compelled in the interests of order and truth to wrestle for mastery as much

viii The Author's Apology

with his own friends as with the untoward circumstances of his time ; and to recall how he gave

“to meanest issues fire of the Most High.”

If the reading of this story gives to anyone a tithe of the pleasure which the writing of it has given—a very improbable supposition,—or enables someone to discover or to find again the attraction of King Alfred's personality, the ambitious aim entertained by the Editor of the series will not be wholly missed.

Though the book has been confessedly a by-work, and has, no doubt, defects which would have been avoided had it come from a master hand, disciplined by previous work on this period, it aims at being faithful to the data accepted by the best informed and most recent students of King Alfred's time and work. It makes no pretension to expert Anglo-Saxon scholarship, but it is hoped that it may be found to be scholarly in the larger sense of discriminating between truth and legend, and of stating the facts of Alfred's life in an order and proportion which should make the whole narrative neither false nor unfair to the impression left by the great king on his own and subsequent generations.

The Author's Apology ix

It is impossible to write history without rethinking it, and in that process the introduction of a personal equation is inevitable. For this and other reasons it cannot be said too often that the best way to read Early English History is to read it in the English Chronicle and the earliest obtainable records. The language of a period is itself a part of the period, a crystallised expression of its spirit, so that through the very words and turns of expression used, we get a feeling for the men who used them. The further the author is from the time of which he writes, the more do we lose this particular clue to understanding an age. But to many the want of continuity and consecutive thought, and the absence of familiar categories and processes of thinking in early authors, will always be an insuperable difficulty. Short of the originals, the next best thing is a record which, while arranging the original materials in an orderly fashion, shall let as much of them be seen as possible. This, however inadequately, has been attempted in this book. Wherever possible, quotations have been given in preference to working over the originals and putting them into another dress.

It has been one of the pleasures of this work

x The Author's Apology

(or should it be play?) that I have received help from many sources which I now have the satisfaction of acknowledging. Mr F. York Powell, Regius Professor of History in the University of Oxford, has been unfailingly patient, suggestive, and prompt in the help he has given. The Rev. A. H. Johnson, M.A. of All Souls College, Oxford, has kindly read the proofs and made some suggestions. Mr Milward, the Librarian of the Hanley Public Library, has spared no pains in obtaining from other libraries books required to supplement the somewhat meagre historical equipment of our local library; and there are others who would not wish to be mentioned publicly to whom I am equally indebted.

DUGALD MACFADYEN.

HANLEY, *December* 1900.

Contents

Book I.—Origins.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE CHILD AND HIS FORBEARS	3
II. EDUCATION AND THE ORIGIN OF IDEAS	15
III. THE COURT OF THE POPE	29
IV. THE COURT OF THE EMPEROR	37
V. THE INWARD MAN	51

Book II.—Engle-land or Daneland?

I. THE COMING OF THE DANES	61
II. UNDER THE HAMMER OF THOR	89
III. ALFRED KING	112
IV. THE HOUR OF DARKNESS	129
V. THE TURN OF THE TIDE	146

Book III.—The Service of the People and the Service of God.

I. THE SOWER	169
II. MEN OF WAR	190
III. PEACEMAKERS	207
IV. MEN OF WORK	221
§ 1. THE WORK OF A KING	221
§ 2. ART	227
§ 3. BUILDERS	235
§ 4. SHIPS	246
V. MEN OF PRAYER	251
VI. LAWS	273
VII. STRANGERS	293
VIII. THE KING AS BOOKMAN	310

Book IV.—The Triumph and Passing of Alfred.

I. WAR AND PEACE	337
II. THE SHADOW OF A GREAT NAME	355
SUMMARY OF DATES AND EVENTS FOR REFERENCE	367
INDEX	371

List of Illustrations

TRADITIONAL PORTRAIT (Photogravure)	<i>Frontispiece</i>
OUTLINE MAP OF ENGLAND BEFORE THE COMING OF THE DANES	<i>page</i> 60
WHITE HORSE HILL (BERKS.)	<i>facing page</i> 101
COUNT GLEICHEN'S STATUE, WANTAGE (From a photograph by T. REVELY.)	„ 188
KING ALFRED'S JEWEL	„ 229
COINS OF ALFRED	„ 233
ST MICHAEL'S TOWER, OXFORD	„ 239
COIN WITH MONEVER'S NAME	<i>page</i> 250
RUINS OF HYDE ABBEY, WINCHESTER (From a photograph by W. T. GREEN.)	<i>facing page</i> 254
PAGE FROM THE SHEPHERD'S BOOK	„ 264
RUINS OF WOLVESEY ABBEY (From a photograph by W. T. GREEN.)	„ 338
HYDE ABBEY CHURCH (From a photograph by W. T. GREEN.)	„ 355
SUPPOSED RESTING-PLACE OF ALFRED'S BONES (From a photograph by W. T. GREEN.)	„ 366

Book 3

Origins

Chapter I

The Child and his Forbears

“The first duty of every man who would be great is to choose good parents.”—*The Note-Book*.

ALFRED¹ was the fifth son of Æthelwulf, King of Wessex, and Osburh his first wife. He was born in the royal vill of Wantage in Berkshire, in the year 849 A.D. The town has now, in its wide market-place, broad streets, and small houses, the aspect of a well-bred country town of the last century. It has commemorated its chief title to fame by a fine but imaginative statue of Alfred in the market-place. The only other mark which Alfred's association with the place has left is the name of a field at the top of the town, known to local tradition as King Alfred's meadow.

Of Alfred's father we know enough to see that some of the characteristics of the great king were hereditary. Æthelwulf had the reputation of leaning to the contemplative, rather than the active,

¹ The modern form of the name is so general, that it would be pedantic to return to the older and more correct spelling, Ælfred.

4 The Child and his Forbears

side of life. Roger de Hoveden asserts roundly that he had been Bishop of Winchester, until, being compelled by necessity,¹ he was made king. His father Ecgberht had thought him over-fond of churchmen as councillors. But there is no evidence of lack of vigour in his actual conduct of the kingship. He fought against the invading hosts of the Northmen when he was under-king in Kent, and after he had succeeded to Ecgberht's throne he helped to inflict on one pirate host at Aclea² a crushing defeat. It was said that more Danes fell there than had ever fallen on English ground before :

“ Men fell like corn in harvest-tide, in both these mighty hosts.”

There was a side of Æthelwulf's character with which his Witan [Wise Men] probably had little sympathy. Possibly through his tutor and later friend, Swithun, Bishop of Winchester, he came under the spell which the name of Rome exercised in the Middle Ages on all who did not come too near it. He put aside the many claims of his kingdom to make time for a pilgrimage to the city of St Peter and St Paul, which was to the mediæval Christian all that Mecca is to the Mahommedan. It is possible

¹ Roger de Hoveden, p. 36, Bohn's edition.

² Ockley in Surrey, “a few miles south of Dorking, under Leith Hill.”

The Child and his Forbears 5

that Æthelwulf's motive was to secure the intercession of the Pope, with a view to averting the threatened incursions of the Northmen. His kingdom would have been better served had he stayed at home and fortified his coasts, for the danger was imminent.

Before he left for his visit to the sacred city he granted a tenth part of the rents from his private dominions for ecclesiastical and charitable purposes. It was this grant which was afterwards represented as a grant of the tenth of the whole revenue of the kingdom, and as the legal origin of tithes.¹ It is recognised, even by those who would prefer to vindicate the antiquity of tithes, that the attempt to base their legal origin in England on Æthelwulf's testament must be regarded as a pious fraud.² Though the provisions of his will cannot be made into a national endowment of the clergy, they illustrate the direction which his religious instincts had taken. When he has provided for gifts to the poor and gifts to the Pope, he has, to his own mind, and to

¹ Kemble, "Saxons in England," vol. ii. pp. 488-490.

² "The bearing of this whole discussion on the subject of tithes appears to be merely that Æthelwulf used the tenth as a convenient measure for ecclesiastical and other benefactions, and that this testifies to an established, or at least a growing recognition of the tithe as the clerical portion. The measure, whatever its character, affected Wessex only."—Haddan and Stubbs' "Councils and Ecclesiastical Doct." vol. iii. p. 637. Tithe was originally a rent charge paid to monasteries or churches by those who farmed their lands. The attempt to identify the Christian and the Mosaic system was an afterthought.

6 The Child and his Forbears

the mind of his age, fulfilled the whole religious duty of man. The money he left behind him was to be divided between his sons and his nobles for the good of his soul. "Further, for the benefit of his soul, which, from the first flower of his youth, he had studied to promote, he directed that, through all his hereditary dominions, one poor man, either a native or a foreigner (*i.e.* not a Wessex man), for each ten hides of land should be provided by his successors with meat, drink, and clothing, even to the day of judgment, if the country should continue to be inhabited by men and cattle, and not become deserted." That was the dread shadow which hung over the future, and chilled heart and hope. The Northern hordes were threatening, and they were regarded as a force purely destructive and devastating. "Also for the good of his soul, three hundred mancuses were to go to Rome: one hundred mancuses¹ in honour of St Peter, specially to buy oil for filling all the lamps of the Apostolic Church on Easter Eve and at cock-crow [surely a word to be avoided in a testament in honour of St Peter!]; also one hundred mancuses in honour of St Paul, for the same purpose of providing oil for the Church of St Paul the Apostle, to fill the lamps on Easter Eve and at cock-crow: and one hundred mancuses for the universal Pontiff."

¹ A mancus was more than the third of a pound.

The Child and his Forbears 7

There is some evidence to show that Æthelwulf was a man of wider vision than most of his contemporaries, and that he entertained a far-reaching scheme for combined action between England and the successors of Charles the Great for defence against the Northmen. At the beginning of his reign he had entered into a hortatory correspondence with Lewis the Gentle [or Pious], with a view to common action. It has been suggested that it was the same motive which led to his visit to the court of Charles the Bald on his return from Rome, and to his marriage with Judith, Charles's child-daughter.¹ The marriage of the Saxon king, already on the further side of sixty, with a girl hardly more than twelve years of age, requires a political motive to explain it; and the suggestion that it was the seal of a defensive alliance between Æthelwulf and Charles is both probable and in keeping with the habit of the times.

It is worth while to keep in mind the few characteristic facts we know about Æthelwulf, because many of the qualities of the father are found also in the son. Æthelwulf's piety, his large views of policy, his touch with other lands, his generosity, and his magnanimity re-appear in more robust and chastened forms in Alfred's life.

Of Alfred's mother Osburh we do not know much.

¹ Green, "Conquest of England," pp. 81, 82.

8 The Child and his Forebears

She was the daughter of Oslac, the king's cup-bearer, who came of the royal house of the Jutes, settled in the Isle of Wight. She is described as a religious woman, noble both by birth and nature. As service about the person of the king was a mark of high rank, it is clear that Oslac held high rank among the West Saxon nobles. We may recall that in no country in the world of the ninth century did woman take a higher place than among the Saxon thegns. Even before Christianity had come to cast a halo round the head of womanhood, while the Saxons were still in the forests of Germany, the dignity of the position of their women had attracted the attention and captivated the imagination of the Roman historian Tacitus. "The Germans," he says, "believe that the sex has a certain sanctity and prescience, and they do not despise their counsels nor make light of their answers." They were admitted into that comradeship in council and in home which comes from sharing the perils of war. "Tradition says that armies, already wavering and giving way, have been rallied by women, who, with earnest entreaties and loud threats and bared bosoms, vividly represented the horrors of captivity, which the Germans fear with such extreme dread on behalf of their women, that the strongest tie by which a state can be bound is by being required to give among

The Child and his Forbears 9

the number of hostages maidens of noble birth.”¹ It impressed the historian of the days of Roman decadence that divorce among the Germans was very rare, because the occasion for it was almost unknown, and that neither beauty, youth, nor wealth could procure for a repudiated wife another husband.

“To limit the number of their children, or to destroy any of their subsequent offspring is accounted infamous.” We get a glimpse of the primitive happy family, where the “children, nine and ten” in every household, “naked and dirty, grow up with those stout frames and limbs which we so much admire”; and we can still catch the echo in the literature of the time of the sensation made among the dark-haired, dark-eyed Italian youths by the sight of the blue eyes, auburn tresses, and tall, developed figures of the English dames and damsels. Golden locks became so fashionable that they fetched a high price in the market. In Domitian’s time, ladies who could not afford to buy a Teutonic head-dress dyed their natural hair auburn or yellow. The impression made in Rome by the Anglo-Saxon boys and girls is happily focussed and preserved in Gregory’s famous pun—“Not Angles but angels.”

¹ Tacitus, “Germania.” It is of some interest to compare with this the report of the part taken by Boer women in the recent war. They seem to have preserved some primitive features of the race.

10 The Child and his Forebears

The English dames were skilful with the needle, and already their embroidery and tapestry had a reputation abroad. It may have been in watching the deft fingers of his mother that Alfred got the taste for artistic work of this kind which he afterwards communicated to others. It shortens the centuries between us and him to find that a piece of woman's work of this period, woven by some skilful fingers, is still to be seen in the Chapter Library at Durham. It is a beautiful stole, "woven in gold-wire, beaten flat like narrow tape; it is woven with selvedged openings for the insertion of figures in tapestry work."¹ It is also recorded, as an illustration of the reputation of English embroidery, that the most gorgeous cope seen by Anselm at the Council of Bari in 1098 had been a Canterbury vestment in the time of King Canute (1013-35).

The one recorded incident in which Alfred and his mother play distinct and individual parts, has been challenged by the critical zeal of both English and German historians. As told by Asser, the story

¹The stole was made by command of Queen Elflaed for Frithestan (consecrated in 908) according to the inscription worked into it. It was given to St Cuthbert (*i.e.* to St Cuthbert's tomb) by King Athelstan in 934. The remains of St Cuthbert were removed to Durham in 995. Pieces of the coffin are still shown in the Library at Durham with other relics taken from the tomb. A good deal of womanly piety for many generations went into decorating ecclesiastical garments which the Christian Church had inherited from Roman paganism. *See also* Bowker's "Alfred," p. 88.

The Child and his Forbears 11

is this: "He was loved by his father and mother, and even by all the people, above all his brothers, and was educated altogether at the court of the king. As he advanced through the years of infancy and youth, his form appeared more comely than that of his brothers; in looks, in speech, and in manners, he was more graceful than they. His noble nature implanted in him from the cradle a love of wisdom above all things; but, with shame be it spoken, by the unworthy neglect of his parents and nurses, he remained illiterate even till he was twelve years old or more; but he listened with serious attention to the Saxon poems, which he often heard recited, and easily retained them in his docile memory. He was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and hunted with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we also have often witnessed.

"On a certain day his mother was showing him and his brothers a beautiful book of songs, with rich pictures and fine painted initial letters, and she said to them, 'Whichever of you shall first learn this book shall have it for his own.' Then Alfred, moved by these words, or rather by a divine inspiration, and allured by the illuminated letters, spoke before his brothers—who, though his seniors in years, were not so in grace—and answered, 'Will you really give

12 The Child and his Forbears

that book to the one of us who can first understand and repeat it to you?' Upon which his mother smiled, and repeated what she had said. So Alfred took the book from her hand, and went to his master to get it read, and in due time brought it again to his mother and recited it; so it became his own."

The reasons for rejecting the story in this form are stated by the trenchant hand of Professor Freeman. Alfred was not twelve years old till 861. By that time his brothers were not children playing round their mother, but grown men and kings, and two of these, Æthelstan and Æthelbald, were dead; and his mother must have been dead also, as Æthelwulf married Judith (his second wife) when Alfred was only seven years old. But it is easy for a chronicler to make a mistake in the age of a child. Asser may have heard Alfred tell this story of his own childhood, and also may have heard him say that he loved hunting and field sports and little else till he was twelve, and then awoke to other tasks and interests. Associating the two, a biographer looking back over many years might easily misdate his story. Some probability is given to this conjectural explanation by the fact that Asser is very doubtful himself about dates and numbers in the story: he says "twelve years old or more," and he leaves it doubtful

how many sons were concerned in the mother's offer. It is certainly easier to explain a biographer's mistake than to give up the incident. The story, as it stands, has character and verisimilitude. It is not of any stock type; there is no particular reason why it should have been invented, if it had not happened. It shows us Osburh as a woman with the instinct and interest of a thoughtful mother, with her children about her, quick to encourage the effort of an awakening faculty, with some interest herself in books and skilled workmanship. Such a woman we can well believe she was, for such are the mothers of kings in all ranks of life. It shows us Alfred also as a child—we shall see that he cannot have been more than four years old,—but a bright, quick-eyed child, with a love for brightly-coloured books, a feeling for the songs of his people, and a ready, because an interested, memory. This corresponds very nearly to the impression which we form of the bright boy who is much loved by his father, and graciously noticed by the Pope a little later.

The sons of the house of Cerdic were evidently a royal race. In a time when vigour and robust manliness were indispensable for a leader of men, each in turn was chosen king by the deliberate vote of the Witan. Although the land was Christian in name, we can understand how, in dealing with a

14 The Child and his Forbears

race of kings, the popular mind still associated them with the old popular divinities, and traced back the descent of the house of Cerdic through Ina, the famous king of the West Saxons, who "went to Rome, and there ending his life, honourably entered the heavenly kingdom to reign there for ever with Christ,"¹ to Woden, "who was the son of Frithawald, who was the son of Frealaf, who was the son of Frithuwulf, who was the son of Finn, who was the son of Godwulf, who was the son of Geat, which Geat the pagans long worshipped as a God." And then, as if to make the popular genealogy orthodox, without challenging either the popular or the Biblical record, the Christian historian carries the line a little further back to Sceaf, "the son of Noah, who was born in the ark." With the ancestry of a royal race behind him as a background, we may think of the children of Æthelwulf and Osburh as a fair and kingly group; and the fairest, brightest, best-beloved of them all was the boy Alfred.

¹ English Chronicle, yr. 855.

Chapter II

Education and the Origin of Ideas

“No doubt a careful training in gymnastics, as well as in music, ought to begin with childhood and go on through all their life.”—*Socrates*.¹

THE question as to what is the best education for a “lad who is born to be king” is one which the generations have bequeathed to us unsettled, and it may still be held to be debatable. Experience seems to show that it is an advantage that the future king should at least appear to stand a somewhat remote chance of succession, and that his future destiny should not be too obviously in the foreground. To have the throne, at least, hidden from immediate view avoids premature developments, which are perilous.

This advantage Alfred, as the fifth son of Æthelwulf, certainly had. He was only ten years old when his second brother, Æthelbald, married Judith. The position in which he grew up was thus the somewhat trying one of a junior cadet of the royal house.

¹ Davis and Vaughan’s “Republic.”

16 Education and the Origin of Ideas

A royal education should at least include the main elements which enter into every balanced educational discipline. There should be some training of the body to secure a sufficient physical basis for the tasks of an onerous life-work, and to fit eye and hand and limb for swift and accurate service. There should be enough stimulus for the mind thoroughly to awaken the intelligence, and set it to work "to see life steadily and see it whole."¹ There should be a discipline of the moral faculties, and recognition of an authority both commanding and illuminating conscience; and there should be something to feed the imagination, to rouse it to realise things beyond the range of immediate vision, and to train it to conceive the possibilities of a great calling and a great destiny in life. There are few gifts which those who shape the destinies of a nation more require than a disciplined imagination, and there are few defects from which the destinies shaped by rulers and legislators suffer more disastrously than the want of it.

It was Alfred's good fortune to fall short in no one of these elements of a sound education, though they came to him in a form which would hardly have been recognised by an educational theorist.

As a king's son, and a favourite one, he moved

¹ Matthew Arnold.

Education and the Origin of Ideas 17

with the court from one royal estate to another. As all rents were paid in kind, the king was obliged to move from one domain to another to "eat up his rents," as well as to dispense justice. Wherever the king went, the sluggish tide of life was quickened. There were hunts in the deep forests, and over wild moors and marshes, sometimes dangerous, always calling for a quick eye and steady nerve. There were the ancient games and sports which seem to have found root in England with the Saxons themselves: wrestling and leaping, cudgel play and foot-racing,

"the cool silver shock in the pool's running water,"

and, in their season, May games, bonfires, and "guizings."¹

We can readily accept Asser's picture of the growing lad, with its quaint mingling of piety and pride in the boy's prowess. "Alfred was a zealous practiser of hunting in all its branches, and hunted with great assiduity and success; for skill and good fortune in this art, as in all others, are among the gifts of God, as we also have witnessed." After the long days in the forest would come the evenings

¹ "There be backword play, and climming the powl,
And a race for a peg and a cheese,
And us thenks as hisn's a dummell zowl
As dwont care for zich spwoorts as theze."

—Berkshire ballad, sung at the scouring of the White Horse, and possibly very ancient. "Dummell zowl" is "dull soul."

18 Education and the Origin of Ideas

in the hall, when the harp went round from hand to hand to accompany the songs and stories of brave deeds, and longer hunts of other days. Among the most eager listeners was Alfred. He "listened with serious attention to the Saxon poems, which he often heard recited, and easily retained them in his docile memory."

To know the songs of his people was in itself already a liberal education; for England was rich in popular poetry. This is in itself a real kind of wealth, and is even more important as an indication of abundant vitality and spirit, the fount of thought and feeling out of which poetry springs.

To know the songs of a people is to know the people who sing them. Alfred's sympathetic leadership of his people in later times may be, at least in part, set down to the fact that the feelings and ideals and virtues, described and praised in the national poetry, had become common both to him and to them.

There were religious poems, of which the best illustration is the Creation song of England's inspired herd Cædmon, who received his summons to the poetic calling in an ox-stable.

¹ "Now shall we glorify the guardian of heaven's kingdom,
The Creator's might and the thought of his mind,

¹ This and the following quotations are from vol. i. of ten Brink's "History of English Literature."

Education and the Origin of Ideas 19

The deeds of the Father of glory,—how he made the
beginning
Of all wonders, the everlasting Lord :
First he created for the children of men
The heavens as a roof, the holy Creator ;
Then the middle region, the guardian of mankind,
The everlasting Lord, afterwards established
The earth, for men, the almighty Ruler.”

There was also a poetic version of the early books of the Bible, possibly Cædmon's, from which the following lines may be quoted :—

“ Yet was the earth
Not green with grass ; the ocean was grim
In dreary darkness, the dusky waves,
In eternal night, the far and the near.
Then swift with speed the guardian spirit
Of heaven was borne, all glory-beaming,
Athwart the waters, the swarthy waste :
Then made command the maker of angels,
The Lord of life, to come forth light
Upon the boundless, the ocean broad.
The high king's behest with haste was fulfilled :
For him the light holy was over the waste,
As bade the Creator.”

When the poet reaches the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, the excitement of his narrative puts fire and movement into his lines.

“ They gathered together ;
Then loud were the lances ; the bands of slaughter

20 Education and the Origin of Ideas

Were wroth and raging. The rush expecting,
The swart fowl sang, amid the shaft-darts,
Bedewed of feathers. The fearless warriors,
The heroes hastened, in powerful hordes,
Till now the hosts of nations had come
From afar and near, from north and south,
The helmet decked ones. Then hard was the play,
The change and clangor of clashing death-spears,
A scream of warring, a cry loud of battle.
With hands they drew, the warriors dread,
From shining sheaths their swords ring-hilted,
Of edges doughty."

Most famous of all was the national epic which tells how the hero Beowulf sallies forth to slay Grendel, a monster which dwelt in the fens of Seeland and destroyed men. In the second part of the epic Beowulf is an old man; he has ruled over the Geats for many years; but not satisfied with the glories of the past, and the benefits he has wrought for his people, he undertakes to slay a fire-spewing dragon, which guards an immense treasure in a rocky cavern near the sea. The poem describes the fearful conflict between the hero and the dragon; how his retainers desert all but one; how Wiglaf, Weohstan's son, hastens to the help of his lord; how Beowulf is bitten with a mortal wound, and the beast slain by a stroke which divides its body. As Beowulf lay dying, Wiglaf gathered the treasure of the slaughtered dragon and brought it to him.

Education and the Origin of Ideas 21

“Bearing the hoard there found he the far-famed king,
His lord, all bloody, lying at life's end.
He began to sprinkle the prince again
With water, until the word's point from the coffer
Of the breast broke through ; Beowulf spake,
As he gazed with grief upon the gold :
' I thank with words the Ruler of all things,
The King of Light, the everlasting Lord,
For the hoard on which I here do look,
That it was granted me to gain such riches
For my dear people, ere my death-day came.
I have now bought this hoard of jewels
By laying down mine aged life ; so grant
Ye now the people's needs ; for I may be
Here no longer. Have the battle-heroes
Build a mould, gleaming after the burning,
On a cliff by the shore. It shall, a memorial
To my people, tower high on Hrones-næs—
So that sea-farers seeing call it Beowulf's mount,
Who drive afar their keels o'er the mists of the
floods.’
Then the dauntless king undid from his neck
The glittering golden ring ; he gave to his thegn,
The young spear-hero, the gold-hued helmet,
The collar and armour, and bade him use them well ;
'Thou art the last of our lineage, last
Of the Wægmondings. Death hath driven
All my kindred, the earls in their might,
To their fate. I must follow them.’”

Cynewulf had sung the story of the vision of the Holy Rood which appeared to him and changed him from a heedless worldly melancholy to the sober happiness of a temper inspired with spontaneous and fervid devotion to Christ. He tells

22 Education and the Origin of Ideas

how, in his vision, the Cross spoke to him and said :

“ Now I bid thee, O man, my dear one,
That this sight thou sayest to men, the sinful :
Reveal with words it is the glory-tree,
On which the great Almighty God,
For mankind's grievous and manifold guilt
Had suffered shame, for Adam's ancient sins
He did taste death ; there died the Lord.
But the King arose from the regions of night
With his might, the great, for the help of men.
He ascended to heaven, and will hither again
Come to judge mankind, in this mid-earth.
On the day of doom, the dreadful Lord,
The Almighty King, with angels will come,
Will doom and condemn, who has power of death,
Each and every one as he even here,
In this life on earth, this short one, has earned it ;
Nor shall fearless go forth, before the word
The ruler shall speak, one single sinner.”

There was a good deal of gnomic or proverbial poetry in which “the wisdom of the many had been crystallised by the wit of one.” The samples which have come down to us may stand for a great deal more which has been lost, through which, as in the Proverbs of Solomon, we might have got access to the common stock of ideas, the popular sayings, and the prevalent ideals of the time. Here is a specimen of early gnomic poetry :

“To the Frisian wife
Comes a dear welcome guest,

The keel is at rest,
 His vessel is come,
 Her husband is home,
 Her own cherished lord
 She leads to the board ;
 His wet weeds she wrings,
 Dry garments she brings.
 Ah! happy is he,
 Whom safe from the sea
 His true love awaits."¹

The poetry most characteristic of the period is, of course, the historical poem describing some battle, or strife of heroes, or wild adventure. It is in these that the figurative phrases which leaven Anglo - Saxon literature recur repeatedly. The ocean is the "whale-path," "swan-path," "battle of the waves." The ship is the "wave farer," "sea wood," "wave steed"; the warrior the "helmet bearer"; eagle and raven are the "host-birds"; the king is the "ring bestower," "treasure giver," "golf friend"; his house is a "gift hall," his seat the "gift stool"; the body is the "bone house," and the mind "the breast hoard."

The best illustration of this type of descriptive historic poetry is a poem which belongs to a later time than that of Alfred. It describes a battle in the year 991 at Malden, in Essex, between a band of Northmen under Justin and Authmund, and the East Saxon ealdorman Byrhtnoth. It has all the

¹ Gollancz's version of the Gnomie verses from the Exeter Codex.

24 Education and the Origin of Ideas

qualities of its type. It is simple, pithy, picturesque, dramatic, passionate. It illustrates the virtues, the conceptions of duty and valour, failure and cowardice, religion and patriotism of the time. Songs of this kind Alfred heard and sang, though not this one. As an illustration of the type, it is invaluable for its insight into the hearts of the men who met on England's battlefields.

“Byrhtnoth brought his force into battle array, and riding about, exhorted and encouraged his warriors. Then he dismounted from his horse, and took his place among his faithful thegns.

“On the other shore stood a herald of the Wikings, who, with a powerful voice and threatening tone, spoke the demand of the sea-rovers. ‘Active sea-men send me to thee; they bid me say to thee, that thou must quickly send rings for safety; and it is better for you that ye buy off this spear-rush with tribute, than that we share such hard fight. If thou who art the richest here, dost decide that thou wilt redeem thy people, wilt give the sea-men money at their own prizing, in exchange for peace, then we will enter our ships with the treasures, go afloat, and keep peace with you.’

“Byrhtnoth held fast his shield, swung his slender ash aloft, and answered with scorn and decision: ‘Hearest thou, seafarer, what this folk saith? They will give you spears for tribute, the poisonous lance-point, and the old sword, war-trappings that are not good for you in battle. Messenger of the water-men, announce again, say to thy people warlike words: A noble eorl stands here with his band, who will protect this inheritance, Æthelred's, my prince's country, folk, and lands. Heathen shall fall in the battle. To me it seems too shameful that ye should go to your ships with your treasures, unfought, now that ye have come hither thus far into our land. Ye shall not gain treasures so easily; rather shall the point

Education and the Origin of Ideas 25

and the edge become us, grim battle-play, before we give tribute.'

"He drew up his warriors upon the bank. The high tide that swelled the Panta stream prevented the forces from getting to each other. On its shores stood opposed the East-Saxons and the host of the ashen ships. Neither could injure the other; only by arrows were some struck down. The ebb came; the rovers stood ready, eager for battle.

"Then the protector of heroes commanded a hardened veteran, Wulfstan, son of Ceola, to guard the bridge. Near him stood the two fearless warriors, Ælfhere and Maccus. They defended themselves with vigour against the enemy as long as they could wield their weapons. Then the evil guests asked that passage over the ford be granted them. In his haughtiness the eorl gave them the shore free. The son of Byrthelm (Byrhtnoth) called out over the cold waters (the warriors lay in wait): 'Now that space is cleared for you, come to us at once, men, to the battle! God alone knows who shall rule the slaughter-place.'

"Then the war-wolves, the hosts of the Wikings, without shunning the water, waded westward across the Panta. Byrhtnoth stood there with his heroes in readiness; he ordered them to form the battle-hedge with their shields, and to maintain their ranks fast against the enemy.

"Then the time was come when those consecrated to death should fall; a cry was raised; ravens circled in the air, and eagles, craving for carrion; on the earth clamour prevailed. Spears flew from the hands; the bow was busy; the shield received the point; bitter was the rage of battle; warriors fell.

"On both sides lay the young fighters. Wulfmær, Byrhtnoth's kinsman, sank, struck down by swords. Eadweard avenged him, as with his sword he laid one of the Wikings low at his feet. The warriors stood fast. Byrhtnoth urged them on. Wounded by the spear of a sea-man, the eorl struck the shaft with his shield; it broke and sprang back. He fiercely thrust his own spear through his enemy's neck to his heart, so that

26 Education and the Origin of Ideas

his corselet burst. The hero rejoiced. He laughed and thanked God for the day's work which had been vouchsafed him.

"Then from the hand of another enemy there flew a spear which pierced him through. Wulfmær the youth, Wulfstan's son, who fought at his side, drew the bloody dart from the hero's body, and sent it back; the point penetrated, and stretched him upon the earth who had hit Wulfmær's master.

"Then a mailed man stepped up to the eorl to rob him of his weapons. Byrhtnoth drew his broad brown sword from its sheath, and smote him upon the corselet. But one of the shipmen crippled the hero's hand with a blow. The fallow-hilted sword fell to the ground; he could no longer hold it. But the gray battle-hero still cheered on the youths; his feet refused to serve him; he looked towards heaven and said: 'I thank thee, Ruler of Peoples, for all the joys that I have had in the world. Now, mild Creator, I have most need that thou grant my spirit good, that my soul may go to Thee, may pass with peace into thy power, King of Angels.' Then the heathen struck him down, and the two heroes who fought near him, Ælfnoth and Wulfmær, gave up their spirits at their lord's side.

"Cowards now turned to flight. First the sons of Adda; Godric forsook the noble one who had given him many a horse, and fled upon his lord's own steed; and with him his brothers, Godwine and Godwig, and more of the warriors than was at all becoming. Æthelred's eorl, the people's prince, had fallen; all of his kindred saw that their lord lay slain.

"The proud warriors rushed up, willed either to avenge the dear one or to yield their lives.

"Ælfric's son, the young warrior Ælfwine, exhorted them. He said: 'Think of the speeches which we often spoke at mead, when we raised up vaunting upon the bench, heroes in the hall, about hard battle. Now may be shown who is bold. I will show forth my lineage to all, that I was of high race in Mercia. My old father was called Ealhhelm, a wise ealdorman, worldly prosperous. Never shall the thegns reproach me among the people, that I would desert this host, and seek my coun-

Education and the Origin of Ideas 27

try, now that my prince lies slain in battle. That is my greatest grief; he was both my kinsman and my lord.' Then he strode forward, thinking of blood-vengeance.

"To the same effect spoke Offa and Leosunu. Dunhere, too, an aged eorl, took up the word. Swinging his lance, he bade all heroes avenge Byrhtnoth: 'Never may he hesitate who thinketh to avenge his lord in the people, nor care for his life.' They went forward, careless of life.

"The kinsmen began a hard fight; they prayed God it might be granted them to avenge their kin and chief, and to work slaughter among their enemies. Æscferth the Northumbrian, Ecglaf's son, helped them zealously; ceaseless flew his arrows and pierced the foe.

"Eadweard the Long swore he would not leave the field where his prince lay, a foot's-breadth. He broke through the shield-wall, and, before he lay with the corpses, fought until he had worthily avenged the treasure-giver among the sea-warriors. So also did Ætheric and many another. Offa, Gadde's kinsman, slew the sea-farer. But he himself was soon struck down. He had kept the vow he made to his lord: that they would ride safe homeward together, or fall in the fight, die of their wounds upon the slaughter-field. And, like a true thegn, he lay near his lord. There fought Wihstan, Thurstan's son, and the two brothers, Oswold and Eadwold, urged on the heroes.

"But Byrhtwold, the aged comrade, spoke as he grasped fast his shield and shook his ash: 'The spirit should be all the harder, the heart all the bolder, the courage should be the greater, the more our forces lessen; here lieth our prince cut down, the brave one, slain in the dust. May he ever mourn who thinketh to turn now from this battle-play. I am old in days; I will not go away, but I think to lie by my lord's side; I will lie by such a beloved warrior.'

"Godric, Æthelgar's son, also exhorted all to the struggle. He often sent his spear against the Wikings, struck and flung them down, until he sank in the fight. That was not the Godric who fled from the battle. . . ."

28 Education and the Origin of Ideas

At this point the fragment breaks off. There is enough of it remaining to enable us to imagine how the heart would beat faster, and the blood course quicker through the veins, as the young man sat and heard the gleemen sing their battle-songs. It is easy to understand how Alfred grew up with the instincts and qualities which make men ready to face death fearlessly on the battlefield.

Chapter III

The Court of the Pope

“In every work the beginning is the most important part, especially in dealing with anything young and tender; for that is the time when any impression which we may desire to communicate is most readily stamped and taken.”—*Socrates*.

THE chief part of the more formal education of Alfred may be associated with his visit to Rome. It is quite possible, according to one reading of the authorities, that this really lasted from the time of his arrival with Bishop Swithun,¹ to the time of his departure with his father—almost two years. In the year 853 King Æthelwulf, not being able to go to Rome himself, despatched Alfred, under the care of the Bishop of Winchester, with a worthy escort both of nobles and commoners to carry his gifts, and prepare the way for his own coming.

¹ This is the saint who gives his name to St Swithun's day. The story is, that he was buried, at his own request, where the feet of the passers-by might tread and the rain of heaven fall. The monks tried to remove the body inside the cathedral, but rain fell continuously for forty days; this they took as a sign of the saint's displeasure, and gave it up. About a century later the body was transferred to a shrine of gold and silver.

30 The Court of the Pope

Alfred won his way with the Pope, as he had done with others. Leo took him for "Bishop's son," and anointed him as the future king of the West Saxons. It seems that this must be regarded as a magnificent indiscretion, or an act of faith, on the part of Leo, rather than an exaggeration on the part of Asser, for Alfred was still several steps removed from the succession to the throne. The Popes, at this time, took every opportunity of anointing probable or possible successors to kingdoms. Leo III. had anointed Charles, the son of Charles the Great, along with his father in 800, although, in the paper division of the Empire in 806, Italy—which would have carried the Imperial title with it—was assigned to Pippin, not to Charles; but as both died before their father, it is difficult to be sure what exact significance was attached to the ceremony. It was probably intended as an act of consecration; it could at least do no harm, and it might afford some support to the plea that all crowns were in some way dependent on the sanction and benediction of the Pope. In Alfred's case it may have had some effect on his outlook into the future, in helping to awake in him the consciousness of a kingly destiny. It is certain that we hear no more of the Papal consecration, except from his ecclesiastical biographer, and we are not told that anyone in England based a claim that Alfred should succeed

his father, on the fact that the Pope had anointed him.¹

The other events of Alfred's stay in Rome were probably of greater importance than this one, of which his biographer evidently thought so much. There, we may assume, he learned to speak a little Latin, and so acquired the key to most of the learning which was to be had in his time. Ever since the days of Offa, the great Mercian king, who had had dealings with Charles the Great, there had been constant coming and going between England and Rome. Pilgrims on penitential journeys, adventurers in search of relics, books, golden work, and embroidery kept up such a constant supply of Englishmen and—unfortunately also for our good fame—of wandering English women, that one part of the city was set apart for their use. Just as to-day Calcutta has its English quarter, Rome then had its Saxon school. Alfred would find in Rome many of his countrymen who could tell him more than "travellers' tales" of the cities of Italy and of Europe.

"Youth," it is said, "is a nursery where the future is always growing." Alfred's stay in Rome is an event which could not fail to be a factor in shaping

¹ Sir John Spelman says: Some have been of opinion that this unction of Alfred by Leo IV. was not that ceremony of anointing kings as at their coronation, but rather the chrisme used in confirmation, and by mistake of the monks taken and related for Regal Unction.

32 The Court of the Pope

his life. His residence there, probably for two years,¹ may be taken into account in explaining that love of literature and sound learning, which led him afterwards to translate and edit for his own people what he regarded as the classics in science and literature and religion of that age. He could hardly fail to contrast what he remembered of Rome with what he found in England; and he was one of those who cannot see a great want without trying to remedy it.

When Alfred arrived in Rome, the papacy of Leo IV. was drawing to an end. He had been a strong and resolute ruler, in a time when Rome had reason to be thankful for every peaceful year which it enjoyed. The Saracen fleets were masters of the Mediterranean. Sicily, with the exception of Syracuse, was in Moslem hands. The infidels had conquered Calabria, and were rapidly advancing northwards towards Rome. The suburban churches of St Peter and St Paul had actually been plundered by the invaders, and the fearful began to wonder

¹ It is difficult to be sure about the exact order of events here. Asser, who makes Alfred set out for Rome twice in two years, cannot be trusted for this early part of the king's life. It seems more probable that Æthelwulf sent Alfred and Swithun to represent him, then changed his mind and decided to follow himself, bidding the boy wait to come home with him. A letter has been discovered written by Leo IV., the reigning Pope in the year 853, addressed to King Æthelwulf, announcing the safe arrival of the boy. So there is no doubt as to the fact or the date of the arrival in Rome.

whether the capital of Christendom was to become a Mahommedan city. Leo's work had been to provide for the safety of the Vatican and the churches of St Peter and St Paul. The Pope formed a new suburb, surrounded by strong fortifications, on the right bank of the Tiber; this secured a double protection for the Vatican, and immortalised the name of the Pope in the name which this part of Rome still bears—the Leonine City. It was, no doubt, the news of this pious work which led Æthelwulf to provide in his will for the lamps in the churches of St Peter and St Paul, which Leo was rebuilding. And the same reason accounts for some of the gifts he brought with him when, more than a year after Alfred had started with Bishop Swithun, he followed him to Rome. He brought for the Pope a "crown, four pounds in weight, two dishes, two figures, all of pure gold, urns, silver gilt, stoles and robes, of richest silk interwoven with gold."

It was significant for Alfred's future life that amongst his earliest recollections there must always have been the memory of a strenuous, determined ruler of Rome, bent on driving back a Saracen invasion from the territories of the Holy See, and throwing into that determination all the passion and exaltation of motive implied in a war of the Christian against the pagan and infidel. It is not probable that a boy of five or six years old would

34 The Court of the Pope

remember the details of such a sojourn, but there would certainly remain in his mind some recollections of anxious faces waiting for news of the war, stories of pagan cruelties, the horror of infidel sacrilege, solemn litanies for deliverance, and the steady raising of walls and fortresses, which were to give security against the invader.¹ All which recollections found a parallel in his own experience in due time.

Alfred also saw some things in Rome which prevented him from cherishing any illusions about its claims to special sanctity. We find nothing of Æthelwulf's hankering after the mysterious city in Alfred's later life. When the English king arrived,² Leo was already dying; within a few weeks he was dead. The Pope was no sooner out of the way than Alfred and his father witnessed the scandal of a contested election. Benedict III. had the support of the clergy and the people. Anastasius was the candidate of the Roman nobles, and declared that he had the Emperor's support. At the head of an armed faction he seized the Lateran, and stripped Benedict of his pontifical robes. The appointment of the chief Pontiff of

¹ Bishop Swithun is said to have walled Winchester; this may be another link between what the English Embassy saw in Rome and the work set on foot in England.

² The dates are not quite certain. The coincidence of these two events is accepted also by the Bishop of Bristol.

the Christian Church was settled by the investigation of Imperial legates, who decided in favour of Benedict III. Anastasius was disgraced and degraded to lay communion. This was in September 855, and it was not till after Easter of the next year, 856, when spring had opened the Alpine passes again, that Æthelwulf set out to return northwards, with Alfred in his train.

It was natural that reflection on these early recollections should aid in giving Alfred's character a somewhat different stamp from that of his father, and that, in comparing Æthelwulf with Alfred, we think of Æthelwulf as one of several royal ecclesiastics, and of Alfred as a more solitary and saintly character. Æthelwulf's religion leans on the conventional props, and his good intentions have to be taken as an excuse for some neglect of duty towards his kingdom. Alfred's is the more religious life, finding its religious duty in the service of his people, and working out his own salvation—and theirs—in fear and trembling indeed, but also with high motive and religious breadth of conception and aim. When all allowance has been made for a considerable Protestant bias which Sir John Spelman shares with seventeenth-century England, there is still some truth in his remark that "the life and ways of Alfred were not perfectly pleasing to the Fathers of Rome. All which I have the

36 The Court of the Pope

rather noted because that Baronius, Harpsfeld, and other Romish Catholicks do not a little boast of the obedience and captivity of this Glorious Prince as of one wholly pious, whereas indeed (all things considered) he manifested himself to be less theirs than one would think a Christian Prince of those times could have been." His original impressions must have been strengthened and confirmed when, ten years later, the Papacy sank into one of those periods of degradation which have recurred intermittently in its history.

¹ Sir John Spelman's "Life of Alfred," p. 221.

² The table of contents of a Papal history for the years 896 and 897 would give: "Death of Pope Formosus; Pope Boniface VII.; trial and condemnation of the body of Formosus by Pope Stephen VI.; Pope Stephen strangled; Pope Romanus; Pope Theodorus VI.; Pope John IX.; Pope Sergius IV. Marquisate of Tusculum. Theodora and Marozia." It would be difficult for a good man to remain attached to the Papacy at such a time. Cf. Bishop of Bristol in Bowker's "Alfred."

Chapter IV

The Court of the Emperor

“To live with a man who has lived with the immortals, who has advanced from youth to manhood in such converse with their spirits that intimacy and affection deepening year by year have turned the dead names into living friends, to catch from him the same ardour of admiration and passion of delight, is a rare felicity, a lifelong blessing.”
—*R. W. Dale.*

AT the age of six what a boy knows is not of much importance: but his interests are already prophetic. It was part of Alfred's singular good fortune, that on his way home from Rome his father visited the court of Charles the Bald with his son in his train, and spent several months with the king of the Western Franks. This gave him an early introduction to the ways of the greatest and most famous court in Europe. Anyone who has watched the effect of a long voyage, or even of a long journey, on an intelligent child, can appreciate how the sights and sounds of this busy court awakened Alfred's interest, and helped to determine his development afterwards. He could never again shut out from his view the great world beyond his own kingdom. When, in after days, news came to England of

38 The Court of the Emperor

battles and treaties and controversies in Europe, his memory would fill with faces and forms and voices which made what were mere names to others living men to him. His early recollections were kept alive by travellers and pilgrims, for whom he kept open house. Some of these associations and memories no doubt supplied him with material when he came to form his own conception of kingship.

It is important to realise how much was meant by a visit to Charles' court at this time. The vast empire of Charles the Great [Charlemagne] had only been held together by his titanic force of character. When he died, it fell naturally into sections which corresponded with the differences in race and history of the peoples he had ruled. His only surviving son was Lewis the Pious, who succeeded him in 814. Three years later he made the first division of the Empire between the three sons of his first marriage. He married for his second wife an ambitious and beautiful woman, whose son was Charles the Bald. The endeavour to carve a heritage for the late-born child out of the kingdoms promised to the elder brothers, and their consequent jealousy towards the young interloper, combined to bring about a series of disastrous dissensions and bloody battles. At last, in the year 843, at the Treaty of Verdun, a division of the Empire took place which later events ratified as

final. By this division the Empire broke up into three parts. What we should describe as the German section fell to Lewis the Bavarian: what we should call the French section went to Charles the Bald, and a long middle strip, including the two ancient capitals, Aachen and Rome, and the valleys of the Rhone and Rhine, went to the eldest of the sons, Lothair. The other son had meanwhile died, and his two children were recognised as the lords of Aquitaine. So far as this division was afterwards modified it was in favour of Charles the Bald, who, on Lothair's death, gained the lower half of the Rhine Valley, and was recognised as superior or over-lord in the territory of his two nephews.

Of the three courts, the only one which inherited the nobler traditions of the Great Charles' court, was that of Charles the Bald. Lothair was a passionate and selfish territory-hunter; and Lewis the Bavarian, an ambitious warrior living amongst a people whose civilisation was as yet rudimentary. Charles, though without the magnificent force of character of his great namesake, had inherited some of his grandfather's tastes. In a three months' stay at his court Alfred caught a glimpse of the best traditions of mediæval monarchy.

In the history of nations a kind of spiritual heredity counts for quite as much as physical heredity. Points of view, habits of mind, aims,

40 The Court of the Emperor

ideals, are transmitted by tradition and inherited as well as physical features, and sometimes bear fruit long after the men with whom they originated have passed away. If Alfred's views of the duties of a good king are to be understood, they should be traced back to their fountainhead through Charles the Bald and Lewis the Pious to Charles the Great. The kind of kingship which we find in Alfred had its first European type and representative in the great Emperor. In order to get some clear sight of the interests, as well as the external realities of the time, and to see the life of the century on its mental and spiritual side, it is worth while to spend a little time in realising the personalities of some of the men at Charles' court. They may help to create the right mental atmosphere in which to approach the narrative of Alfred's life.

It was Charles the Great who, in the Middle Ages, conceived the ideal of the king as the chief public servant of the kingdom. The king was to be not only Commander-in-Chief and Minister of War, but also supreme Minister of Education, authoritative theologian, Chairman of the nation's Board of Works, and legal commissioner entrusted with the duty of codifying the nation's laws and customs.

Besides waging many wars to safeguard and extend the boundaries of his kingdom, Charles the Great had brought masters from Rome to teach grammar

The Court of the Emperor 41

and arithmetic. From England he had taken Alcuin, that he might spread the best traditions of Northumbrian learning. He had aimed at making schools at least as plentiful as bishops. About his own court had grown up the "palace school," where learned men gathered, and the sons of noble families were taught. One of his regulations provides that "every nobleman shall send his son to learn letters, and the child shall remain at school with all diligence until he become well instructed in learning."

He had also been a keen and shrewd theologian. It was to enforce his own judgment that the Council of Frankfort was summoned, in 794, when the decrees of the Nicene Council permitting images, were condemned. In doing this he dared to differ from both Pope and Council, and left a tradition of independence which re-appears in his grandson's time. He took a part in the Adoptionist controversy, but on the orthodox side, and he inserted in the Nicene Creed, according to the Spanish use, the famous "Filioque" clause which was the occasion of finally separating the Eastern and Western Churches.

His architectural operations furthered the spread of Byzantine art and architecture into Western and Northern Europe. The cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle is an abiding monument of this side of his work. His genius for legislation and administration has a monument in his capitularies, which include 1150

42 The Court of the Emperor

separate capitula or laws dealing with the regulation of every part of the life of his great Empire.

It is when we see, hardly veiled within the shadow of the past, the court of Charlemagne, that the traditions and influences in the court of Charles the Bald can be best understood. Like his grandfather, he loved to have about him men of learning and distinction. At the very time of Alfred's visit the royal secretary and favourite adviser was Servatus Lupus, whose extant letters are said to contain quotations from almost every known classical writer, including Livy, Sallust, Cæsar, Suetonius, Cicero, Quintilian, Virgil, Horace, Terence, Martial, Macrobius, and Priscian.¹ Charles had an hereditary love for theological debate. It was to him that Paschasius Radbertus, Abbot of Corbie, sent the first formal statement of the doctrine of Transubstantiation in his treatise on the "Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ." It was at Charles' request that Ratramnus answered this treatise, and replied, in an argument which is still worth reading, that Christ's presence in the Sacrament should be understood as being not in substance but "spiritualiter et secundum potentiam," "in spirit and influence."

At this time (*circa* 856), Rabanus Maurus was still at Charles' court. Amongst his contemporaries he

¹ Nicholas, "Etude sur les lettres de Servat Lupus," quoted by Wells, p. 361.

was then eminent, and is still remarkable, for his determination to satisfy his intelligence in his theological thinking; and his Biblical expositions are very bold for a time when piety and learning were both understood to mean an exact preservation and reproduction of the traditions of the fathers. His explanation of the appearance of Samuel to Saul as being true not in fact but with respect to the perception and the mind of Saul, must have appeared startlingly rationalistic to men trained in the school of Alcuin, with whom it was a mark of piety to put down everything unusual to *immediate* supernatural agency. The usual character of the man is even better seen in the remark of one of his biographers that "wherever, whether in peace or war, in church or state, a prominent actor appears, we may predict almost certainly that he will prove to have been a scholar of this great teacher."¹

It was at this time that Alfred first saw a man whose name was to be permanently associated with his own by tradition, if not in fact. Amongst the clever men at the court of Charles, the most brilliant was the man whom Charles had placed at the head of the Schola Palatina, or Court School, the heretic known as Johannes Scotus Erigena (John, the Erin-born Scotsman). We may call him more simply, John the Scot, or, more correctly,

¹ Spengler, quoted by Mullinger, p. 153.

44 The Court of the Emperor

the Irishman. He stands alone for many reasons. He is the finest blossom of that early Irish springtime of culture, which was to be nipped in the bud and miss its summer, owing to fierce frosts from the north. He has the ready tongue, the "scintillations of steely cold wit"¹ of the Irishman at his best, combined with the Scotsman's passion for metaphysics. He is a Platonist among a rabble of scholastic pseudo-Aristotelians. He "deviates from the track of the Latins by keeping his eyes intently fixed on the Greeks."² A philosopher venturing to the verge of Pantheism in a time when philosophy was cumbered with a hopeless dualism; a theologian who dared to express "the larger hope" in a time when the Church and the world declared alike, "extra ecclesiam nulla salus"³; a rationalist before anyone had heard of rationalism; and a man of letters who could neither be persuaded by gold nor brow-beaten by ecclesiastical authority into expressing opinions or using arguments other than his own. "He was a man of shrewd intellect, great eloquence, and great facetiousness," says Malmesbury, "and shared with the king both his serious and his more merry moments, and was the

¹ G. Meredith, "Diana."

² William of Malmesbury, p. 55, Bohn's edition. Malmesbury writes about 200 years later than Alfred's time.

³ "Outside the church there is no salvation."

sole companion both of his table and his retirement.”¹ It is not difficult to feel the personality of the man wherever he is allowed to speak for himself through the mists of time and tradition, which hang heavily between us and him. There is the well-known story which shows the Irishman seated with his patron at a table where there has been more drinking than usual. “What separates a Scot from a sot?” the king asks, with heavy Frankish wit. Back comes the rapier thrust: “Only the breadth of the table.” That reveals the true detachment of humour which forgets, in the delight of the stroke, that a king’s complacency is easily hurt, and that a man who immortalises his wit at the expense of his patron is apt to want for patronage. Malmesbury expounds this joke at some length, but leaves the next to speak for itself. At another time, when ‘the servant had presented a dish to the king at ‘table, which contained two very large fishes, ‘besides one somewhat smaller, he gave it to the ‘Master (for by that name he was usually called) ‘that he might share it with two clerks who were ‘sitting near him. They were persons of gigantic ‘stature, while he himself was small in person. On ‘this, ever devising something merry, in order to ‘cause amusement to those at table, he kept the two

¹ William of Malmesbury, p. 53.

46 The Court of the Emperor

'large ones for himself, and divided the smaller one
'between the two clerks. On the king finding fault
'with the unfairness of the division, "Nay," said he,
'"I have acted right and fairly. For here is a small
'one," indicating himself, "and here are two large
'ones," touching the fishes; then turning to the clerks,
'"Here are two great ones," said he, pointing at them,
'"and here is a small one," touching the fish.'

We see him in a more attractive light in words written with sober premeditation, which are worth quoting both for themselves and as an illustration of the finer spirit of the time. "Hence," he writes in his great book, "De Divisione Naturæ," "it most clearly follows that nothing else is to be desired except the joy which comes from truth, which is direct, and nothing else is to be shunned except His absence, which is the one and sole cause of all eternal sorrow. Take from me Christ, no good will remain to me, and no torment affrights me. The loss and absence of Christ is the torment of the whole rational creation; nor do I think there is any other. . . .¹ But if anyone finds anything in this book that is useful, and tends to the building up of the Catholic faith,

¹ Cf. Myers' "S. Paul."

"Yea through life, death, through sorrow and through sinning,
Christ shall suffice me, for he hath sufficed :
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning ;
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ."

let him ascribe it to God alone, Who only brings to light the hidden things of darkness, and brings those who seek Him to Himself purged of their errors. . . . And so in peace with all, whether they kindly receive that which we have put together, and behold it with the pure eye of the mind, or whether they unkindly reject it before they know of what kind it is, I commit my work first to God, Who says, 'Ask, and it shall be given you, seek, and you shall find,' and next to you, dearest brother in Christ, my fellow-worker in the pursuit of wisdom, to be examined and corrected. Hereafter, when these words shall come into the hands of those who seek wisdom truly, seeing they will conspire with their previous questionings, they will not only receive them with a glad mind, but will kiss them as if they were their own kinsmen come back to them. But if they should fall among those who are quicker in blaming than in sympathising, I would not contend much with them. Let every one use the sense which he has till the light comes, which will make darkness out of the night of those who are philosophising falsely and unworthily, and will bring the darkness of those who welcome it into light."¹

While John the Erin-born is in mind, we may deal with the tradition which connected his name

¹ Quoted in full in F. D. Maurice's "Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy," vol. i. pp. 466-501.

48 The Court of the Emperor

with Alfred's in later life. The origin of the tradition has been traced with a good deal of probability to a confusion between this John and another John of Continental fame, whom Alfred in later days placed over the monastery which he built at Athelney¹ to commemorate his early difficulties. But the tradition itself is circumstantial, and assigns the date 882² as the date when John the Irishman came to England. Alfred's love of distinguished foreigners,³ and the troubles which John fell into at Charles' court through his original views on religious questions, lend some colour to the tradition.⁴ It may well rest on the fact of some intercourse of which we have no other record. William of Malmesbury, who confuses the two Johns, after telling of the difficulties of John the Irishman with the Pope about his translation of St Dionysius the Areopagite, says: "In consequence of this discredit he became tired of France and came to King Alfred, by whose munificence he was appointed a teacher, and settled at Malmesbury, as appears from the king's writings."

¹ Asser, p. 80.

² Cf. Dr Adamson's art. in *Encyc. Brit.* "Erigena."

³ Asser, p. 83.

⁴ Sir John Spelman says: "When Scotus Erigena was so persecuted by the Pope for having written something contrary to the relish of the See of Rome, as that the Emperor's countenance was no sufficient protection for him in France, the king [Alfred] did notwithstanding send for him and entertain him here."

The Court of the Emperor 49

The fact recorded may conceivably be correct, though the appeal to the king's writings is wrong. Whether the famous Irishman came to England or not, it is probable that Alfred gave hospitable entertainment to the teaching, the generous sympathies, and the ideas, so far as he understood them, of the first schoolmaster he had ever known. John's name may stand among the positive influences which made Alfred England's most literary king.

No account of Charles' court at this time would be complete without the figure of Archbishop Hincmar of Rheims, the statesman - ecclesiastic, who was ready to defend the nascent national Church, of which he was primate, from the encroachments and pretensions of the Pope. With the hand of a strong ruler he tried to suppress heresy as he would have suppressed rebellion. He was responsible for degrading and scourging the monk Gottschalk, who had defended the doctrine of predestination, then, as in later time, the creed of those who rebelled against ecclesiastical tyranny, and appealed from the Church to God. It was Hincmar who performed the wedding ceremony for Æthelwulf and Judith, and set the offending crown on Judith's head. So that Alfred had cause to remember the stately ecclesiastic who had helped to give him his youthful step-mother.

Amongst other new things which came to Alfred at

50 The Court of the Emperor

Verberie, would be his first stories of the brave work of Christian missionaries amongst the wild northern Wiking settlements. Æthelwulf's stay at the court of Charles very nearly coincided with one of the visits to Germany of Anskar, the Apostle of the North. The tales of his adventures and his conquests among the men whose name was a terror to Europe would often be told with breathless interest: and would perhaps suggest to Alfred the hope that the wild worshippers of Thor might become servants of the Christ.

With such commanding and interesting personalities surrounding the emperor, Alfred could not fail to notice the deference paid to men whose influence came neither from birth nor power, but from sheer ability and character. One of the ministers of Charles, writing about the practice of the king and his court, records that "He refers the matter, as is customary, to the bishops and priests, so that in whatever way the divine authority may please to settle it according to His will, they may assent with a free and ready mind." The account of the method may be accepted without insisting that the desired end was always secured. The existence and habitual use of such a consultative council of experts and administrators, rather than landowners and military leaders, is the significant fact. It is one of the evidences of the advance of civilisation and the repression of barbarism.

Chapter V

The Inward Man

“We find in him not merely noble actions, we find in him a life in the true meaning of the word, I mean we feel in him both development and struggle.”—*Sabatier*, “*St Francis of Assisi*,” p. xvi.

“Fasting is . . . a voluntary abstinence prescribed to the soul by itself, from all that it feels, though lawful otherwise, would impair its fitness for the service of God. Experience shows that it is the men who have been superior to the attractions which life at the common level has for the average sensual man, who alone have been able to do the world spiritual service.”—*James Denney*.

THERE is one thing more important for the understanding of a man's life than the external circumstances of his up-bringing, that is, whatever throws light on the formation of what the mystics call the “inward man.” The external features of destiny are made for us; the destiny of the inward man is determined by the man himself. To the majority of men, the formation of the inward man comes in the war of “sense and soul,” that conflict with the animal nature in us which is waged to determine whether the body is to be the servant or the master of the mind. The struggle with a lion and a bear, which brought to the shepherd of Bethlehem the

first test and countersign of royal qualities, has its counterpart in the struggle with the "ape and tiger," which every man finds thrust upon him with his manhood. The struggle is specially severe with men to whom nature has given great force of character and abundant vitality. Sometimes the endowment is so great that, as in the case of Charlemagne and Peter the Great, a man is still a great figure although he cannot always rule himself. More often it is manifest that an original force of character is made finer in fibre and nobler in quality by the conflict for and achievement of self-mastery. It is so in Alfred's case, when the discipline is accentuated by a long experience in that other school of character, the conflict with physical infirmity and disease.

Asser, who alone gives us any account of the growth of the inward man, inserts his interesting account, in a way that would only have occurred to a monk, in the midst of the account of Alfred's wedding feast in 868. It is a long digression, in what he calls himself "preposterous order," and others might describe as hopeless disorder. Leaving the account of the wedding to come in its proper place, this is what Asser records of the period of Alfred's youth: "If I may be allowed to speak briefly of his zealous piety to God in the flower of his youth, before he entered the marriage state, he

wished to strengthen his mind in the observance of God's commandments, for he perceived that he could with difficulty abstain from gratifying his carnal desires: and because he feared the anger of God if he should do anything contrary to His will, he used often to rise in the morning at the cock-crow, and go to pray in the churches and by the relics of the saints. There he prostrated himself on the ground, and prayed that God in His mercy would strengthen his mind still more in His service, by some infirmity such as he might bear, but not such as would render him imbecile and contemptible in his worldly duties; and when he had often prayed with much devotion to this effect, after an interval of some time Providence vouchsafed to afflict him with disease, which he bore long and painfully for many years, and even despaired of life, until he entirely got rid of it by his prayers.

“But once, divine Providence so ordered it that when he was on a visit to Cornwall for the sake of hunting, and had turned out of his road to pray in a certain chapel in which rests the body of St Guerir—and now also St Neot rests there—for King Alfred was always from his infancy a frequent visitor of holy places for the sake of prayer and almsgiving, he prostrated himself for private devotion, and after some time spent therein, he entreated of God's mercy that in His boundless

clemency He would exchange the torments of the malady which then afflicted him for some other lighter disease; but with this condition, that such disease should not show itself outwardly in his body, that he should be an object of contempt and less able to benefit mankind; for he had a great dread of leprosy, or blindness, or any such complaint as makes men to be useless or contemptible when it afflicts them. When he had finished his prayers, he proceeded on his journey, and not long after he felt within him that by the hand of the Almighty he was healed, according to his request, of his disorder, and that it was entirely eradicated, although he had first had this complaint in the flower of his youth by his devout and pious supplications to Almighty God."

The miraculous setting of these incidents need not affect their essential truth. The setting is the language of the time. For at least two hundred years after this time, it remains true that almost all personal histories have a framework of the supernatural. It is part of the art of the historian to enter into the feeling of the time sufficiently to see that the facts are valid, even when the explanations have to be rejected, and that the explanations and excursions into the supernatural are also in some sense true history; they give us the aspect of the facts as they looked to the men who took part in them. They are the materials

for subjective history, as the external facts are for the objective history of the time. Two hundred years later than this, the mental outlook of men on their environment in Europe is described in words which hold equally good of the tenth century. "In the breast of the men of that time we think, sometimes, that we feel the beating of a woman's heart; they have exquisite sentiments, delightful inspirations, with absurd terrors, fantastic angers. . . . Weakness and fear often make them insincere; they fast or feast." In the religion of the tenth century the miraculous is the normal; the orderly is hardly reckoned as belonging to the sphere of religion. The notion of the laws of nature, so deeply graven in our minds, is to them entirely strange; the words possible and impossible have for them no meaning. "Some give themselves to God, others sell themselves to the devil; but not one feels himself strong enough to walk alone, strong enough to have no need to hold on by someone's skirt. Peopled with spirits and demons, nature appeared to them singularly animated; in her presence they have all the emotions which a child experiences at night before the trees on the roadside, and the vague forms of the rocks."¹ This feeling in the men of the time must be reckoned with as one of the factors in their history.

¹ Sabatier, "St Francis of Assisi," Introduction.

Unfortunately, the supernatural machinery employed in this case evidently liberated Asser, in his own view of the matter, from giving anything like an accurate account of Alfred's illness. It seems clear that Alfred suffered from his childhood from some violent and troublesome disease. An account which is given of the return of this disease at the wedding feast makes it probable that it was epilepsy. But Asser appears to assert that for some years these epileptic attacks ceased, and their place was taken by some other ailment, which helped the young man in the struggle for self-mastery. A cessation of attacks for some years is quite consistent with the nature of the disease, but it is difficult to understand how it could be exchanged for something else.

More important than the disease was its effect on Alfred himself, and the response which he found in it to his prayers. He was satisfied that he had obtained what he had asked. That is enough ; for prayer and its answer are identified, and the prayer is rightly regarded as the beginning of the answer. The conflict for the victory of the spiritual over the animal takes a different form in every age ; but the essentials of the conflict are the same. The conventions of one age look unfamiliar in another. The arena and the setting of the struggle change ; but the struggle remains the same, and is everywhere a determining power in destiny.

“In the flesh grows the branch of our life ; in our soul
it bears fruit.”

It is always a question to be settled whether the branch will be pruned and trained so as to give the fruit a fair chance. The cock-crow visits to churches, the visitations to holy places for prayer, the agony of supplication which prostrated him on the ground, were the outward symbols of conflicts not less vital to the history of England than the battles with the Danes in later years. They point to the growth of a strenuous will and resolute spirit. We find in him “both struggle and the promise of development.”

There are few tasks more difficult than to take up any heavy burden while struggling with physical ill-health. It is only one invalid in a thousand who can turn his “necessity to glorious gain” ; and ill-health, the doctors tell us, is more often a demoralising than a moralising agent. Alfred was the one in a thousand able to battle against disorder within and without at the same time.

The issue at stake in this double conflict was the character of a king on whom England's fate would one day turn. It was struggling into shape as the character of a man sometimes defeated but never conquered, convinced that life has a spiritual aspect, and that the spiritual aspect is meant to crown and dignify every other ; a man who will

not endure the anarchy and disorder of undisciplined instincts; who will rule his kingdom by the laws and principles of the kingdom of God, because he has himself received a citizenship in that kingdom, and sees the beauty and authority of the divine order in life:

“The king will follow Christ.”

Book 33

Engle-land or Daneland ?

OUTLINE
MAP OF ENGLAND
BEFORE
THE COMING OF
THE DANES



Chapter I

The Coming of the Danes

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion,
sound an alarm in my holy mountain,
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble ;

For the day of the Lord cometh,
for it is nigh at hand ;
a day of darkness and gloominess,
a day of clouds and thick darkness,
as the dawn spread upon the mountains :
A great people and a strong,
there hath not been ever the like,
neither shall be any more after them
even to the years of many generations.

A fire devoureth before them ;
and behind them a flame burneth :
the land is as the garden of Eden before them,
and behind them a desolate wilderness ;
yea and none hath escaped them.

The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses :
and as horsemen so do they run.

Like the noise of chariots on the top of the mountains do
they leap,
like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble,
as a strong people set in battle array.

At their presence the peoples are in anguish ;
all faces are waxed pale.

They run like mighty men :
they climb the wall like men of war :
and they march everyone on his ways

62 The Coming of the Danes

and they break not their ranks.
Neither shall one thrust another,
They shall walk ever one in his path :
And when they fall upon the sword they shall not be wounded.
They leap upon the city ;
they run upon the wall ;
they climb up into the houses ;
they enter into the windows like a thief.
The earth quaketh before them :
the heavens tremble :
the sun and the moon are darkened,
the stars withdraw their shining :
the Lord uttereth his voice before his army ;
For his camp is very great :
for he is strong that executeth his word.
For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible :
and who can abide it?"

Book of Joel.

THE events of the fifteen years which intervene between Alfred's boyhood and accession to the throne are of great importance for England. But the important events have very little to do with the internal affairs of Wessex. Wherever there were eyes able to read the signs of the times they were fixed on the signs of a gathering tempest. At first there is "a cloud no bigger than a man's hand," but as one black cloud is piled upon another the horizon darkens on every side till the sky is pregnant with terrible possibilities of destruction. To the men of the time the coming of the Danes seemed like some terrible natural cataclysm, inevitable, swift, destructive, threatening to blast and

The Coming of the Danes 63

root up the rude achievements of Anglo-Saxon civilisation and overwhelm both the religion and the very existence of the nation in a deluge of heathenism.

Before examining the nature and extent of the threatened calamity, it may be well to retrace some chronological steps, and to pass in brief review the events which left Alfred to face the storm alone at the early age of twenty-two.

When Æthelwulf returned from the court of Charles the Bald with Judith as his bride, and Alfred in his train, he found his people unwilling to receive him. Whatever may have been the motive behind the marriage, political or not, his young wife had cost him his crown. When the news reached England that Judith had been crowned Queen by Archbishop Hincmar at the court of Charles, the men of Wessex discovered that they had no mind to have a queen at all, much less a queen crowned in a foreign court. Æthelwulf returned home only to find that the thegns of Wessex with Ealhstan, the warrior Bishop of Sherborne, and Eanwulf, the great ealdorman of Somerset, had sworn an oath in Selwood Forest to set his son Æthelbald on the throne. The magnanimous instinct characteristic of his house did not desert the king. He knew that

“The king who fights his people fights himself,”

64 The Coming of the Danes

and refused to aid the common foe—the Northmen —by becoming a party to a civil strife. He retired to the under-kingdom of Kent, where he ruled as under-king, leaving his son in undisputed possession of Wessex. He remained under-king of Kent until two years later, when death ended his humiliation. Most of those who tell this story are satisfied to put down the defection of the Witan to a West Saxon prejudice against queens, which dated from the misdeeds of Eadburg, the wife of Berhtric of Wessex. This notorious person, whose shadow falls repeatedly across the history of her successors, is thus described by Asser: “Having the king’s affection and the control of almost all the kingdom, she began to live tyrannically like her father [Offa], and to execrate every man whom Berhtric loved, and to do all things hateful to God and man, and to accuse all she could before the king, and to deprive them insidiously of their life or power; to take them off by poison; as is ascertained to have been the case with a certain young man loved by the king, whom she poisoned, finding that the king would not listen to any accusation against him. It is said, moreover, that King Berhtric inadvertently tasted of the poison, though the queen intended to give it to the young man only, and so both of them perished.”

Such an accumulation of misdeeds might reason-

The Coming of the Danes 65

ably justify the Wessex men in refusing to give to any other woman the opportunity of rivalling Eadburg. But, in fact, there is no need to go so far in search of a reason for their rejection of Æthelwulf. The question of the succession to the throne had to be considered by them in the light of the threatening Danish invasion; and the kind of considerations which would determine it are evident. The nation must have a leader in the battlefield, and Æthelwulf was already an old man. Age had probably increased a natural love for peace, and he was half suspected of being more monk than soldier at heart. Kings who married in their dotage had been known to grow indifferent to the interests of their elder children, and even to the interests of the kingdom. No doubt it was pointed out that the last conspicuous instance of this was the marriage of Lewis the Pious with another Judith, the grandmother of this very queen of the ill-omened name. Charles had insisted on his daughter being crowned and having the right to sit beside her consort: and if this foreign fashion were allowed to pass unchallenged, the superior rank of the mother might be held to give a superior claim to any children she might have. It might be called foresight rather than disloyalty which led the Witan [Wise Men] to shrink from risking at such a time as this that woe which falls on a land whose king is a child.

66 The Coming of the Danes

On the other hand (Æthelstan having died before his father's return from Rome), the son who was now the eldest, Æthelbald, had already shown that he had the making of a warrior in him. When, three years before (in 851), there came "three hundred and fifty ships to the mouth of the Thames, and the crews landed and took Canterbury and London by storm, and put to flight Berhtwulf, King of the Mercians, with his army, and then went south over the Thames into Surrey," Æthelbald, under the king, had led part of the army which met the Danish host and wrought the great slaughter at Ockley.¹ This seemed to promise an active and vigorous policy, and not only explains, but in part justifies, the action of Æthelwulf's leading ealdormen in deserting the old king for the new. But they soon found that the man who can usurp a throne is not necessarily the man who can lead a kingdom. When Æthelwulf died, the clergy of Wessex heard with a thrill of horror that Æthelbald had married his father's young wife. It seemed, at least to the ecclesiastical chroniclers of the events, as though the trees had chosen King Bramble to rule over them.

The mischiefs which might have followed from this alliance were happily averted. Judith had no

¹ Though the slaughter was great its significance was small, for in the same year the Wiking host wintered in Thanet, and secured its first settled lodgment on English ground.

The Coming of the Danes 67

children,—she was still hardly more than a girl,—and in 860 King Æthelbald died.¹ Whatever virtues he may have had as a leader he had no further opportunity of showing, nor of retrieving his position with his clergy, who had the important power of recording his virtues or marring his fame in the eyes of later generations.

The peculiar provisions of Æthelwulf's will might at this point have raised a serious difficulty for the kingdom. Æthelwulf had, for the first time in English history, assumed the right to bequeath the crown as a personal property. He had provided that the crown should go at Æthelstan's death to Æthelbald, from Æthelbald to Æthelred, and from Æthelred to Alfred—to the exclusion of the children of each. Æthelberht, who came between Æthelbald and Æthelred, in order of age, was to become under-king of Kent on his father's death and to remain there. The possibilities of disaster in such a disposition were infinite, not the least being the disruption of the eastern and western parts of the kingdom. The Witan [Wise Men], true to the traditions of the military chieftainship which was the root of the Anglo-Saxon kingship, and looking

¹ English Chronicle, yr. 851. The account of his divorce rests on very dubious testimony. Judith returned to her father, ran away with Baldwin I. of Flanders, and from her Matilda, daughter of Baldwin V. of Flanders, who married William the Conqueror, was descended. Alfred's daughter married Judith's son; this is the link which enables Queen Victoria to trace descent from Alfred the Great.

68 The Coming of the Danes

steadily at the need of having a united kingdom should the Danes attack Wessex, decided to ignore this testament and to choose their kings in succession from the royal sons. It is creditable to all the brothers that with so many possible occasions for jealousy and friction there seem to have been none. Each in turn abstained from interference or loyally seconded the work of the elder brother.

On the death of Æthelbald in 860, Æthelberht was brought from his under-kingdom of Kent and became king over both Wessex and Kent. In his days the storm-clouds threatened and drew nearer. The laconic chronicler reports a calm before the storm, broken by one sharp thunderclap. "And Æthelberht succeeded to all the realm of his brother, and he held it in goodly concord and in great tranquillity. And in his days a large fleet came to land and the crews stormed Winchester, and Osric the Alderman with the men of Hampshire, and Æthelwulf the Alderman with the men of Berkshire [note this Æthelwulf: he is a man to remember], fought against the army, and put them to flight, and had possession of the place of slaughter. And Æthelberht reigned five years, and his body lies at Sherborne."¹

Æthelberht was succeeded by the next brother, Æthelred, in 866. Alfred was now seventeen, and

¹ English Chronicle, 860.

The Coming of the Danes 69

was beginning to take an active share in the affairs of the kingdom. He was recognised as "secundarius" in the realm. How much is implied in the title is uncertain. It may be taken as a general description of the part Alfred played as his brother's right-hand man, signing royal warrants next to him, acting as chief officer of the staff in war, and as first minister in time of peace. Soon after Æthelred's accession a general assembly, or moot of the Wise Men, was held, and the question raised whether there should be any division of the royal property between the two brothers. Alfred wished to have his share and to administer it independently. Æthelred replied that he had come into his inheritance so long before his brother, and had added so much to it, that division would be very difficult; but that after his own death Alfred should be sole heir. To this Alfred willingly agreed. The preference for a compromise rather than a quarrel, and of the future to the present, are characteristic both of the man and the family.

This was the situation when, with appalling suddenness, the two young men found themselves the only effective representatives left of the royal house of the West Saxons, and the only English princes who had preserved their royal inheritance. What actually happened is more easily told than explained. In the year 866, when Alfred was

70 The Coming of the Danes

eighteen years old, a great fleet of Danish keels sailed up the mouth of the Wash and landed an army in East Anglia. The four main divisions of Teutonic England, Northumbria, East Anglia [England], Mercia, and Wessex were practically independent of one another. England was divided into four sections isolated like watertight compartments in a ship, in any one of which a disaster might occur which would leave the rest for the time unharmed. The overlordship which Ecgberht had won for Wessex in 827 carried with it hardly any administrative responsibilities and somewhat dubious obligations of mutual defence. So when the Danish host landed in East Anglia there was no national army, but only the East English militia or *fyrð*, which could be summoned to meet it. The men of each kingdom were well satisfied if they could transfer the burden of an invading host to another folk. What happened in East England indicates how far England was from being a nation with a national consciousness as yet, and suggests the doubt whether the different elements ever would have been welded into one without overwhelming pressure from the outside. The Danish host took up winter quarters and patched up some kind of terms with the East English. It was part of their strategic plan to fight only with extremely mobile forces; so that the first necessity for a successful campaign was to

The Coming of the Danes 71

find a sufficient number of horses. With the whole force horsed they would be able to appear unexpectedly at the point where they had marked down their booty, work their wild will on abbey or town, and disappear laden with spoil long before any local *fyrð* could assemble.

The East English, thinking perhaps that if the pagans were horsed they would be rid of them, found them horses, and so prepared the scourge which was to be used for their own backs. But the turn of Northumbria came first. There, an internecine struggle had prepared the way for a foreign invasion. Osberht, the hereditary king, had been dethroned, and a rival, Ælla, not of royal blood, sat on the throne. The Danes, profiting by the distraction of the country, marched straight into York. Then the two parties united, too late, in an attempt to rally against the common enemy. They succeeded in getting into York over a wooden stockading, which was all its defence. There the Danish leaders turned at bay, and drove the Northumbrians before them. Osberht and Ælla were both slain, and so great was the slaughter that those who were left were glad to make peace with the Danes on their own terms. A puppet king was set up in the northern half of Northumbria, and the rest was reserved for plunder rather than possession by this army of pirates. Then England

72 The Coming of the Danes

learned what a Danish conquest meant. At Tyne-mouth, Streoneshealh, Melrose, and Lastingham smoking and ghastly ruins of once famous abbeys told where the culture and piety and learning of Northumbria lay slain and buried. Holy Island was visited and its ancient monastery plundered. The Bishop of Lindsey went southwards, and the bishopric of Hexham came wholly to an end. Northumbria, which had once been famous as the home and school of saintly men like Cuthbert and Cæadda, and the early makers of English poetry and prose like Bede, Cædmon and Cynewulf, now became for two hundred years the most backward, rude, and forbidding part of England.

With an appetite whetted by success, the Danes turned on Mercia. They seized the passage of the Trent at Nottingham and formed a winter camp there, intending to break out on Mercia as soon as they found a favourable opportunity. But the Mercian king, Burhred, was brother-in-law of the young king of Wessex, and Mercia itself marched so closely with the West Saxon borders that if it fell to the Danes it would provide an open door, or rather a choice of open doors into Wessex. So when the news came to Æthelred and Alfred that a Danish camp was formed at Nottingham, and with it an appeal from Burhred for help, they at once gathered an army and marched

The Coming of the Danes 73

towards Nottingham. The Danes were too skilful in tactics to withdraw from a fortified position into the open, and there was as yet no Saxon army which could hope to attack a Danish camp successfully. So the campaign ended without a victory or defeat for either party. So far as any one could be said to have had the upper hand it was the Danes, and their success was won by diplomacy rather than by arms. A treaty was made in which Æthelred and Alfred were outwitted by Ingwar [Hingwar], the Norwegian pirate king. On the other hand, the brothers were so far successful as to avert the Danish onslaught from Mercia. It suited the pirate host best to follow the line of the richest plunder and the least resistance, and they soon found that East England offered both advantages as compared with Mercia.

At the close of the year 869 the Danes turned on East England. How much resistance they met with on this march is uncertain.¹ In spite of famous deeds on the part of the defenders they found easy and abundant booty at Peterborough, then known as Medehampstead, and they sacked Crowland and Ely. In each place they found a thriving abbey and left a black and crimson ruin. The sack of Crowland is described in detail in a

¹ The incredible story of the exploits of Algar and lay brother Tolby rest only on the authority of the forger Ingulf.

74 The Coming of the Danes

book which claims to be of William the Conqueror's time, but is really a much later forgery, Abbot Ingulf's "History of Crowland." The incident which describes how the story came to be told cannot be accepted as authentic. It can only be told now to illustrate the kind of tales which pious monks used to tell long afterwards about this terrible time. "While the monks of Crowland were being killed, Thurgar,¹ a boy of ten years old, stood by. He had seen Lentwine the superior killed, and expected to die like him. But the young Danish Earl² Sidroc pitied him, seeing that he was so young and fair, and spared him, and to ensure his safety took off his little monk's coat and put on him a Danish cloak so that he might pass for a Dane. So Thurgar hid himself and escaped, and lived to tell what he had seen when the Danes burned Crowland." Before the East English had gathered an army to meet the Wikings the enemy had crossed the Devil's Dyke and set up their winter camp at Thetford. To attack then was too late, but with desperate courage the attempt was twice made. The second attempt

¹ This name is one of the things which proves the story false. It can be shown to be an impossible name for a boy at this time.—F. Y. P.

² This word is often printed *Jarl*. That is the later spelling of the word, not earlier than 1300. Earl is the old Norse form, and also the old English.

ended with the capture of the king of East Anglia [England], afterwards known as St Edmund, in 870. The king was offered his life and his kingdom if he would forsake the Christian religion and reign under a Danish lord. He refused. The Danes then tied him to a tree and shot at him with arrows and finally cut off his head.¹ The memory of the martyr-king was potent for many generations in East England. Whatever may be thought about the medical miracles of King Edmund, there is no doubt about the miraculous potency of his memory in the minds of men. To commemorate him rose that magnificent pile of buildings which may still be traced at Bury St Edmunds. It is said that in the days of the abbey's prosperity it was the largest in England; it is still an imposing and striking sight. The figure of the martyr-king may still be recognised — an English St Sebastian — on the screens in East Anglian churches. After this East England passed permanently into Danish hands, and Guthrum the Dane, the leader of the host, became its king.

It had already been seen that Mercia could not

¹ Of his passion I would fain insert some particulars into our history, that the sons of men may know and perceive how terrible is Christ, the Son of God, in the counsels of men, and with what glorious triumph He adorns those whom He tries here under the name of suffering, that His saying may be fulfilled, "He is not crowned except he strive lawfully." This is the comment of Simeon of Durham.

76 The Coming of the Danes

alone offer any serious resistance to the Danish invasion. So nothing now stood between the Danes and the kingdom of Wessex. The future of England turned on the question whether the two brothers could withstand the on-sweep of the storm.

Such incidents as had occurred in the capture of East England lost nothing in the telling, as they spread from east to west, and from north to south. They help us to understand the paralysis of horror which seems to fall upon Wessex when the news comes unexpectedly that the Danes are on its borders or its coasts. They also enable us to estimate at its true value the spirit of the man who could make up his mind that though all the rest of England were prostrate at the pirate's feet, Wessex should stand, though it stood alone, and if it fell, fall fighting. It is clear that unless some new factor of this kind had appeared, England was fast becoming a group of Scandinavian provinces. Her people were slipping back to the heathendom they had so recently left, and which now had so many *muscular* arguments as to its efficacy in the victorious Danish host. Learning was gone; religion seemed to be going with it. Men's minds were dominated by a great terror, which was rapidly undoing what four hundred years of patient civilising work had begun to do. England—if it was to be Angle-land at all, and

The Coming of the Danes 77

not Daneland, had need to find a deliverer who should be both soldier and civiliser in one.

The impression that this is one of the great crises not only of English but of European history, is enhanced when we look beyond the coasts of England itself. The ravages and settlements of the Northmen in Europe, although they were sporadic, occasional, and without any settled line of policy, had, in fact, assumed the appearance of having followed a well-designed plan of campaign. They had overrun, conquered, and settled parts of Ireland under the leadership of a certain Thorgisl, who established a short-lived Scandinavian kingdom in the northern half of Ireland. They had taken advantage of the isolated islands north of Britain, and had settled permanently in the Faroes, Shetlands, and Orkneys. Then they had crept round the north of Scotland and established themselves in the Hebrides. As one wave of adventurers followed another, they had come further south and settled along the south coast of Ireland and in the Isle of Man. Names like Orme's Head and Tenby indicate that they had secured a footing on the Welsh coast. At Llanfairfechan there is a valley known by a name which stands for "the cry of the slain," where a Danish force was met and defeated by the Britons; and all round the coast are traces and traditions of landings of Danes,

78 The Coming of the Danes

sometimes successful and sometimes the reverse. So that on the west of England a long arm with very tenacious fingers had been stretched out.

Eastwards of the British Isles their settlements ran, not continuously, but with no long break, from Friesland, round the coast of what is now Holland and Belgium, to the mouth of the Seine, on to Normandy, and round to the mouth of the Loire. The Loire, the Garonne, the Seine, the Rhine, and the Elbe had been turned into highways for pirate plunderers and had carried the spoil of Wiking raids. In between these two long arms lay England, a rich fruit still unplucked. If England fell to the Northmen also, it might be possible for some clever and statesmanlike king to make a great Scandinavian kingdom, pagan and persecuting towards the Christian folk, rude and barbaric in its ideas and sentiments and habits, but strong and terrifying in its unquestioned supremacy in the art of fighting. Up to this time the power of unity under a single skilful head and hand had been lacking, and the marauding bands fought sometimes with, sometimes against, one another. In place of deliberate and strategic unity there is a rough instinctive sympathy which binds together the Wiking hosts, whether settled or still engaged in piracy. The unit of their armies is not the individual, but a group gathered under the leadership of a chosen chief. When a

The Coming of the Danes 79

great expedition is on foot, it gathers recruits from all quarters. When an army suffers a repulse in one direction, the pirate world turns its attention with impartial rapacity to another. Events on the Loire have an immediate effect on England, and *vice versa*.

The invasion of England by the Danes, which had now begun, has some characteristic features which differentiate it from previous marauding incursions. The early marauders came from the fjords and glens of Norway, where nature had decreed that settlements of men should be small in size, and far between. The Danes had been members of a larger and more closely linked community, and brought the more ordered consciousness which grows from sharing a common life with many others. The Northmen from Norway were the Fin - Gaill, or White Strangers, marked by characteristic light hair, reddish beards, and blue eyes, which, in their descendants, still indicate where they settled. The type may be found, not seriously altered in externals, in some of the fishing villages on the Norfolk coast. The Danes were Dubhgaill—the common Scottish Dougal—or “dark strangers,” darker, at least in eyes and complexion than their predecessors.

The difference in geographical origin and physical appearance corresponded to a difference in character

80 The Coming of the Danes

between the two families of the same race. The first-comers of the Northmen were strictly pirates. They came for booty, and did not intend to fight for land on which to make permanent settlements. The different groups had only the kind of cohesion which belongs to a fishing fleet made up of boats, and groups of boats, from many quarters; and within the groups the only government was obedience freely rendered to a good skipper. Each sea king, with his own fleet, did that which was right in his own eyes, but many fleets would unite for a big cruise or foray.

The Danish invasion, on the other hand, has more of the character of a conquest by an army which accepts the responsibilities of victory. They fight under Skioldungs of royal race, who have under them earls commanding organised detachments of the hosts. It is true that in the initial stages the external features of the invasions are much the same. There is the same dependence on dominion at sea, the same use of rivers as natural highways into the enemy's country. On landing, their tactics were similar, though probably carried out by the Danes on a more extensive scale. Each host would seize a headland, or a strip of land at a river mouth, an island, or a few acres enclosed by a bend in the river, then draw a trench and earthworks across the side which was

The Coming of the Danes 81

most accessible, and haul up its boats within the camp. This secured their retreat, if retreat became necessary. It also gave them a base from which sharp, well-directed blows might be struck into the enemy's country. The camp was easily defended if attacked, and, when a sufficient guard had been told off for the defence, and the rest of the invading army had been turned into horsemen, they had at their service an extremely mobile force, unhampered by commissariat, and as daring in inventing plans of campaign as it was rapid and destructive in executing them.

But when the Danes had once secured a footing, these initial points of similarity gave way to striking points of difference. Instead of retreating booty-laden to their ships after they had harried the coasts and looted the monasteries, they struck at the centres of authority, the kings and capitals. When they were masters of a kingdom, their favourite plan was to set up a puppet king who would pay tribute to them, and undertake to abdicate when they found it convenient that he should do so.¹ In some places they settled in considerable numbers, and became the folk of the district, as happened in the case of the Danes under Guthrum. In other places they simply

¹ This plan was also followed by Halfdene the Northman when it suited him.

82 The Coming of the Danes

removed the chief man of the village or district, and established a Danish earl in his place.

A great deal of ingenuity has been expended, both in ancient and modern times, on the question: "What was the cause of the Danish invasion?" There are, at least, three stories which obtained currency, and these are found in several different versions. One tells how Ragnar Lodbroc, a famous Viking, was shipwrecked and seized by Ælla, King of the Northumbrians, and thrown into a pit full of serpents; and how, while he was dying of the bites of the serpents, he sang a weird and wonderful death-song, telling of all his old battles, and bequeathing to his sons the duty of avenging him. The song was carried to Denmark, and brought his sons to England to exact vengeance. Another account says that the same Lodbroc was driven by a storm to the coast of East England, and, on landing, was slain by Beorn, the huntsman of King Edmund. The pious king, as a punishment, put Beorn into a boat and let it drift to sea. The boat drifted to Denmark. There Beorn told his own version of the story, and made the sons of Lodbroc believe that it was King Edmund who had slain their father, and invited them to come and avenge him. A third story tells how Osberht, King of Northumbria, had robbed one of his nobles, Beorn Butsecarl, of his

The Coming of the Danes 83

wife, and how Beorn, to revenge himself, invited the Danish Guthrum to invade Northumbria, and promised to help him. But before the Danes came, Osberht had been deposed, and Ælla set in his place.

It is possible that there is some element of truth in these traditions, though it is certain that none of them are exactly true as they stand. Incidents like these may have had to do with one or other of the many expeditions which left the shores of Denmark for England. In any case, they supply rather the occasion than the causes of the invasions from the north. The true causes must be sought elsewhere: the shore settlements of Norway were liable to famine, and population was constantly pressing on the means of subsistence. The increase of shipping made it easy to take to the sea and piracy for the livelihood which the land would barely yield. Some of the leaders who became Wiking chiefs were local earls, who found themselves crowded out by the new fashion of extended kingship which was beginning to obtain in Norway and Denmark. History connects this new and disturbing fashion with the ambition of a woman. Harold of Norway asked the maiden Gyda to be his wife. "She answered that she would never sacrifice her maidenhood and take for husband a king who governed no more of a

84 The Coming of the Danes

kingdom than a few fylkir [tribes], and it seems to me wonderful that there is no king there who has the will to unite Norway and become its supreme king, as have done King Gorm in Denmark, and King Eric at Upsala." This awakened the ambition of Harold Fairhair.

In the search for causes it must be remembered that there is a stage in the life of peoples as well as of individuals, when a *casus belli* is hardly required to bring about an appeal to arms. War is then as natural as football in an English public school. It is loved because it is strenuous, exciting, and full of hazardous possibilities. It is the wine of life. It offers to men and nations the charm which is always so seductive to the natural man, of matching one man against another, and proving in the only final way known to the world outside the sphere of the kingdom of God, which is the better man.

The Northmen had many legends of battles and struggles, arduous journeys and strenuous toils. On these they were brought up. And their newer beliefs had sanctioned and confirmed this view of life as noblest, by telling of heroes translated from the crimson battlefield to the eternal glory of conflicts hereafter with Woden as their king.

Some of the sagas sound very bloodthirsty as they gloat over blood-red ship decks and heaps of

The Coming of the Danes 85

slain and wounded men. But the instinct which prompts them is not the bloodthirst of the Kurd, which delights in the torment and slaughter of its victims. It is the passionate love of action in a people loving the clang and clash of the battle-axe as the sweetest music in the world. For this they live :

“And chance and craft and strength in single fights
And ever and anon with host to host
Shocks, and the splintering spear, the hard mail hewn,
Shield breakings, and the clash of brands, the crash
Of battle-axe on shattered helms, and shrieks
After the Christ, of those who falling down
Looked up for heaven and only saw the mist,
And shouts of heathen and the traitor knights,
Oaths, insult, filth, and monstrous blasphemies,
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs,
Moans of the dying and voices of the dead.”

To the Wiking battle was not only the one fit profession for manhood: he had accepted the belief that it was the simplest and straightest road to heaven. In Walhalla, according to one famous ninth-century poet, the eternal joys were to be tasted by men who, having died sword in hand here, fought daily with one another there as a reward, and in the evening were miraculously healed of their wounds to join in the banquet of mead with the gods. When to the Scandinavian native love of fighting was added the assurance that England offered both abundant booty and

86 The Coming of the Danes

rich soil to the skilful warrior, as a prize for his skill, it is easy to understand, without hunting for more recondite causes, that men and ships were always to be had when an invasion was being planned.

It is necessary to keep in mind such inside features as these in the Danish character as well as the obvious facts of their doings, because only so can we estimate the real danger to England involved in a Danish conquest. It was not merely that a Danish conquest would change the proprietors of the soil. The struggle of the two peoples was a conflict between a civilisation which, though rudimentary, had elements capable of noble development within it, and a semi-barbarism which, so far as it had elements of civilisation at all, was so far removed from Christianity that, had it prevailed, it would have cut off England from Western Europe.

A parallel might be found in the case of a still more famous invasion, where the characters of the two sides are inverted. The Israelite tribes which settled in Canaan, led by Joshua, were inferior in the achievements of civilisation to the Canaanites they were to dispossess. The Canaanites had a higher civilisation, but a lower religion and less fighting ability. They had reached and passed their highest point; for though a nation may sink

The Coming of the Danes 87

far below its religion, it never reaches higher than the high-water mark made by its religious ideals. The kingdom of promise belonged to Israel, and only the kingdom of past achievement to the Canaanite: so that every success of Israel is, in fact, a step upwards. It opens a new career of possibilities. So with the Angle and the Dane. Measured by the universal standard of skill in arms, the Dane might claim at this time to be superior to Saxon and Angle; but it was only a superiority of the moment. The Saxon and Angle had the beginnings of a Christian civilisation, and the kingdom of promise was theirs. A religious fervour had been introduced into the long war of the races ever since Charlemagne had sealed his victories over the heathen Saxons by baptism and compulsory conversion. The Danes were always ready to retaliate, as in the case of Edmund the Martyr, by making the sacrifice of the Christian faith the price at which life would be spared. So it was not only the fight of Dane against Saxon; it was also a death struggle between Thor and the "White Christ." It was a rude challenge, which came from the Warrior God, disputing the empire of the Prince of Peace.

"I am the God Thor,
I am the war God,
I am the Thunderer.
Here in my Northland,

88 The Coming of the Danes

My fastness and fortress,
Reign I for ever.

.
Force rules the world still,
Has ruled it, shall rule it.
Meekness is weakness,
Strength is triumphant
Over the whole earth,
Still is it Thor's day.

Thou art a God too,
O Galilean;
But thus single-handed
Unto the contest,
Gauntlet or Gospel,
Here I defy thee."¹

This was what made England's need for a deliverer something more than England's need. The exceptional occasion had arisen when the Christian faith could only be defended by sword and battle-axe. Religion and land and home spoke with one voice, calling for a man who should first beat the heathen host in the battlefield, and then win over the men who formed it by a vigorous moderation in victory, and a wise ordering of his people in peace. England's need was for that rarest of persons in the world's history, a Christian king.

¹ From Longfellow's "Saga of King Olaf."

Chapter II

Under the Hammer of Thor

“ The earth is full of anger,
The seas are dark with wrath,
The nations in their harness
Go up against our path.
E'en now their vanguard gathers,
E'en now we face the fray,
As Thou didst help our fathers
Help Thou their sons to-day ! ”¹

Rudyard Kipling.

ALFRED'S conflicts with the Danes fall into three natural, but not quite exclusive, periods, two of them about equal in length, lasting seven years, and the third equal to the other two. The first begins with success and ends in defeat. The second begins in defeat and ends in victory. The third shows Alfred, having learned the lessons of defeat and victory, holding the enemy in check, and securing the peace of his kingdom both internally and externally. We may call the first series of conflicts the period when Alfred is under the hammer

¹ A word is changed here, with apologies to Mr Kipling, to avoid the use of the word “ host ” for Alfred's army, as it is the invariable word for the Northmen's force in the Chronicle.

90 Under the Hammer of Thor

of Thor. It seems, for a time, as if both king and kingdom must be crushed. But the real Wielder of the hammer proved to be a greater than Thor; and the effect of the hammering is to make a Deliverer for England. It made all the difference to England that the king had entire confidence in the Wielder of events. Failure is failure and nothing more to the man who fights for himself; but failure is discipline for success and nothing more to the man who believes he has a divine commission to execute and a divine Name to vindicate. Alfred saw his own task as an episode in the defence of Christendom against heathendom. His faith forbade him to believe that there could be any end to that struggle except in the victory of Christendom. It may be accepted as evidence of his statesmanlike view of the whole conflict that the records of his reign, written, in all probability, under his own eyes, give the movements of the Danish armies in Europe with the same accuracy and interest as their movements in England. To be able to keep the right perspective was to be saved from attaching too much importance to any single reverse. Every defeat made him better acquainted with the tactics of the Danes, until he knew, almost as well as their own leaders, what they were likely to do. But more striking than his knowledge of Danish warfare is the dogged, persistent, inflexible

Under the Hammer of Thor 91

determination not to be beaten, which the necessity of bearing up under defeat produced in the king. He becomes the first, if not the creator, of that famous type of Englishmen — the men who win impossible struggles because they never know when they are beaten. He is the historic incarnation of Tennyson's strong-willed man :

“ O well for him whose will is strong,
He suffers, but he will not suffer long ;
He suffers, but he cannot suffer wrong ;
For him nor moves the loud world's random mock,
Nor all calamity's hugest waves confound,
Who seems a promontory of rock
That compass'd round with turbulent sound,
In middle ocean meets the surging shock,
Tempest buffeted, citadel-crown'd.”

Alfred's first meeting with the Danes in the field came when he was a young man of twenty, and before he had succeeded to the throne. The year 868 was an eventful one for him. It was a year of famine, the year of his own marriage, and the year of his first experience under arms. He asked and obtained in marriage the daughter of Ethelred Mucil [*i.e.* the big], Earl of the Gainas, the *folk* whose name survives in that of their town Gainsborough. “The mother of this lady,” Asser tells us, “was Eadburg, of the royal line of Mercia, whom we have often seen with our own eyes a few years before her death. She was a venerable lady,

92 Under the Hammer of Thor

and after the decease of her husband, she remained many years a widow, even till her own death." It is said that every mother is in some degree prophetic of what her daughter will be. In the absence of more direct testimony as to the character of the wife chosen by Alfred, we may welcome the reflection of a noble womanhood which comes to us through Asser's memory of her mother.

The famine did not prevent a good deal of festivity when the wedding was celebrated. There were "continual feasts both by night and day, in which innumerable multitudes of people of both sexes took part." It was on this occasion that Alfred, only recently freed from the malady which had hitherto troubled him, was seized with the new and mysterious malady which the physicians could neither cure nor explain, except on the hypothesis of demoniac possession. If, as seems probable, this must be identified as epilepsy, it adds a pathetic interest to all his life, if we must think of him as doing all his work with the knowledge that he was liable to be seized with an epileptic fit at any unexpected moment.

Alfred had hardly time to bring his young wife home when he was called to leave her and take the field. This was the year in which "the army of pagans leaving Northumberland invaded Mercia, and advanced to Nottingham, which is called," Asser tells us,

“in the British tongue ‘Tiggocobauc,’ but in Latin ‘The House of Caves,’¹ and they wintered there that same year.” The Danes were led by two famous chiefs, Hingwar and Ubba, sons of Lodbroc—“Hingwar, a leader of great ability, and Ubba of extraordinary courage.”² Immediately on their approach, “Burhred, King of Mercia, and all the nobles of that nation, sent messengers to Ethelred, King of the West Saxons, and his brother Alfred, suppliantly entreating them to come and aid them in fighting the aforesaid army. Their request was easily obtained, for the brothers, as soon as promised, assembled an immense army from all parts of their dominions, and entering Mercia, came to Nottingham, all eager for battle; and when the pagans, defended by the castle (which they had captured), refused to fight, and the Christians were unable to destroy the wall, peace was made between the Mercians and the pagans, and the two brothers, Ethelred and Alfred, returned home with their troops.” It is creditable to Æthelred and Alfred that they did respond readily to the call for help from Mercia. Had there been a similar sense of solidarity in the other sectional kingdoms, the Danes would have found it difficult to gain a footing in England and maintain it. But

¹ The name has reference, of course, to the cave which is now called Robin Hood’s Cave, which still exists in Nottingham, and was even used as a house in this century.

² Henry of Huntingdon, p. 152.

their action was more creditable to themselves than threatening from the Dane's point of view. Nottingham had been seized in the late autumn. It was easy for the West Saxon king to collect an army when the autumn work in the fields was done. But it was certain that the army could not remain in the field when winter came on. All that the Danes had to do was to keep well within their defences, the castle and the city walls, and repel assaults. This they easily did. Alfred and Æthelred, finding that the Danes refused to be drawn into the open, and that winter was coming on, had to make the best of a bad business. Asser says, "Peace was made"; but by "making peace" the Danes always understood selling it for hard cash. They sold their victims a brief respite, while they turned their attention to East England.¹ Æthelred and Alfred returned home, knowing what they had to fear, and having seen with their own eyes the forbidding and ominous outlines of a Danish camp.

Alfred's second meeting with the Danes fell in the early spring of the year 871—that is, the year following the Danish conquest of East England. As soon as the frost had broken up, the Danish keels were beating up the Thames, supported by

¹ This is the same siege of Nottingham as that referred to on p. 73. It is mentioned there to explain the Danish campaign, and here to explain the course of events in Wessex and Mercia.

troops and horsed comrades on either bank. Their forces were augmented by a large number of Norwegian Wikings, who had joined in groups under their several leaders for this great foray. They found the Wessex men unprepared for so early an invasion. Without any serious opposition they "came to the royal city, called Reading, situated on the south bank of the Thames, in the district called Berkshire; and there, on the third day after their arrival, their earls, with great part of the army, scoured the country for plunder, while the others made a rampart between the rivers Thames and Kennet, on the right side of the same royal city."

Judge Hughes has identified, with great probability, the exact spot of the camp. "Anyone who has travelled on the Great Western Railway has crossed the very spot, a few hundred yards east of the station. The present racecourse must have been within the Danish lines."¹ A glance at the situation shows the skill with which the Danes had chosen the position. They had only one line of fortifications to erect and guard across the base of a triangular piece of land, the other two sides being protected by water. They had there a camp completely protected, where their ships might be drawn up and secured, and where the women, the wounded, and the booty of the army might be carefully guarded.

¹ T. Hughes' "King Alfred," p. 71.

96 Under the Hammer of Thor

It was evident that the crisis, which had long been foreseen and dreaded, had come. The men of Wessex were not wanting to themselves. Before Alfred or Æthelred could arrive, Alderman Æthelwulf marched out to stop their further progress, at the head of the Berkshire *fyrð*—a word which might well be translated by the term “commando,” with which recent events have made us more familiar than we are with our own Saxon word. Both the “fyrð” and the “commando” are derived from a common origin and tradition in the forests of Northern Germany, and stand for local defence forces, made up of inhabitants of the district which the force defends.¹

Æthelwulf engaged a much larger force than his own at Englefield, about six miles due west of Reading. He heartened his men, according to the late tradition of Simeon of Durham, by the assurance that the inferiority of their numbers was more than compensated by the superiority of their cause. “They be more than we, but fear them not. Our Captain, Christ, is braver than they.” No doubt, the skill and courage of Alderman Æthelwulf, and his knowledge of the ground, stood them in good stead; though they were only a local militia,

¹ Cf. Tacitus, “Germania”: “And what most stimulates their courage is, that their squadrons or battalions instead of being formed by chance are composed of families and clans.”

in the skirmish the Berkshire men had the best of it, and one of the Danish earls was killed. Four days later, Æthelred and Alfred had arrived with reinforcements. They caught a straggling force of Danes, unsupported, and outside the entrenchments. They surprised them, and cut the force to pieces. Meanwhile the incident had been seen from the camp, and a large Danish force issued out to avenge their comrades. This time it was the West Saxons who were thrown into confusion. It was not a battle so much as a fiercely contested and extended *melée*. For a time the issue seemed doubtful, but the West Saxons at length gave way.

Their leaders soon recognised that nothing could come of this blind fighting except the irritation of the Danes, and the loss of valuable lives. Alderman Æthelwulf was left dead on the field. He had proved himself a good leader, and a man of public spirit, eleven years before, when he led the Berkshire men to help in the defence of Hampshire, and the recovery of the booty taken in the sack of Winchester. His experience and weighty judgment could ill be spared. Æthelred and Alfred, satisfied that nothing could be done unless the Danes could be enticed out of their entrenchments, fell back to Reading.

This movement was successful. The Danes, assuming that as in Northumbria and East England a single crushing misfortune had taken the heart out

of the resistance offered to them, and that the way into Wessex now lay open, marched out of their camp, striking into Wessex along the top of the line of hills which runs from Goring to Swindon, where the old Roman road, the Ridge way or Ickleton Street, along which they marched, may still be followed. Meanwhile Æthelred and Alfred had fallen back, keeping to the valley through Ilsley, interposing between the Danes and Wessex, and their army had been increased by considerable reinforcements. Four days after the battle of Reading the two forces found themselves in touch at Ashdown. The Northmen were in the higher position, in two divisions, one led by the Norwegian kings, Bægsec and Halfdene, son of Lodbroc, and the other by the Earls Sidroc the Elder and Sidroc the Younger, Osbern,¹ Frena, and Harold (probably a Dane). During the night, the West Saxon bands were divided into corresponding divisions, and with the first break of dawn the attack was to begin. The rest of the story may be told by Asser, who evidently gives to us the account as he had heard it from an eye-witness.

“Alfred, as we have been told by those who were present, and would not tell an untruth, marched up promptly with his men to give them battle, for King Æthelred remained a long time in his tent in prayer,

¹ Asbjörn.

Under the Hammer of Thor 99

hearing the mass, and said that he would not leave it till the priest had done, or abandon the Divine protection for that of men. And he did so too, which afterwards availed him much with the Almighty, as we shall declare more fully in the sequel.

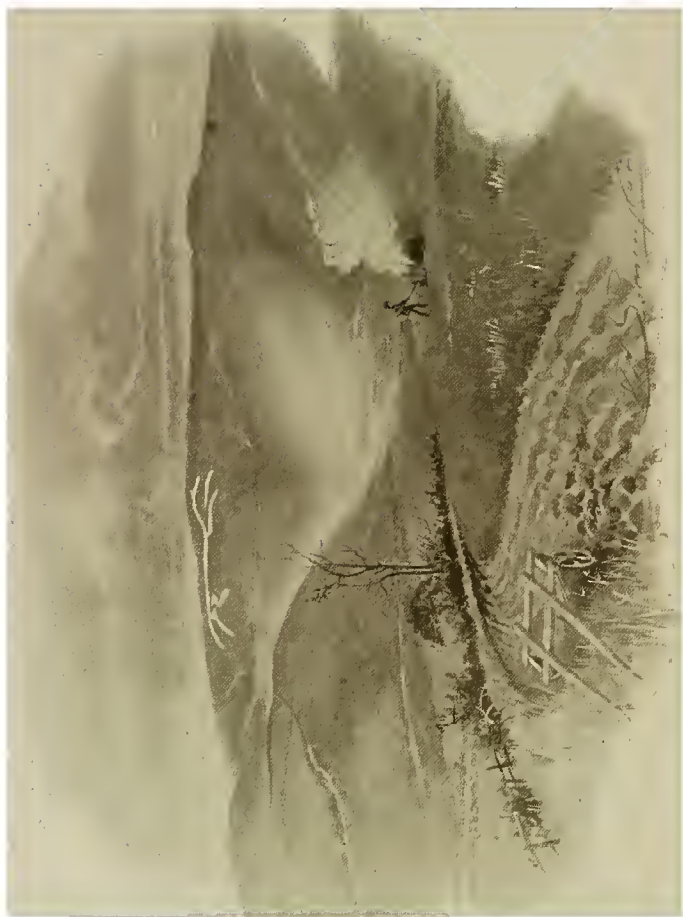
“Now the Christians had determined that King Æthelred, with his men, should attack the two pagan kings, but that his brother Alfred, with his troops, should try the fortune of war against the two earls. Things being so arranged, the king remained a long time in prayer, and the pagans came up rapidly to fight. Then Alfred, though possessing a subordinate authority, could no longer support the troop of the enemy, unless he retreated or charged upon them without waiting for his brother. At length he bravely led his troops against the hostile army, as they had before arranged, but without awaiting his brother’s arrival, for he relied on the Divine counsels, and forming his men into a dense phalanx, marched on at once to meet the foe.

“But here I must inform those who are ignorant of the fact, that the field of battle was not equally advantageous to both parties. The pagans occupied the higher ground, and the Christians came up from below. There was also a single thorn-tree, of stunted growth, and we have with our own eyes seen it: around this tree the opposing armies came together with loud shouts from all sides, the one party to

pursue their wicked course, the other to fight for their lives, their dearest ties, and their country. And when both armies had fought long and bravely, at last the pagans, by the Divine judgment, were no longer able to bear the attacks of the Christians, and having lost great part of their army took to a disgraceful flight. One of their two kings and five earls were there slain, together with many thousand pagans, who fell on all sides, covering with their bodies the whole plain of Ashdown. There fell in that battle Bagsac [the king], earl Sidroc the elder, and earl Sidroc the younger, earl Osbern, earl Frena, and earl Harold; and the whole pagan army pursued its flight, not only until night but until the next day, even until they reached the stronghold from which they sallied. The Christians followed, slaying all they could reach, until it became dark."

If we may accept the White Horse hill in Berkshire as the scene of the battle, Asser's account becomes singularly lucid. The long ridge of bare and open downs ends here in a hill somewhat higher than the rest, crowned by an old Roman encampment with rampart and fosse. But between this and the line of hills there is a dip, where the road from Kingston Lisle to Lambourn now crosses the downs. Alfred, who was born only eight miles away, must have known both the dip and the





THE WHITE HORSE HILL (BERKSHIRE)

(The Horse has recently been scoured. The "Castle" is the mound on the right)

Roman camp, which effectually blocked the road. It is at least conceivable that he and his brother pushed on and seized the "Castle," as it is called; that the armies met on the slopes which face one another; and that the Danes were eventually driven up the downs, and so back on Reading. The downs are as bare as a fen landscape, upheaved into great billow-like hills, solitary bushes and trees standing out so as to be seen for miles.

There is no battle of this period described in such detail. It is easy, with Asser's account before us, and the help of a hint or two from other sources, to reconstruct a picture of what happened. On this battle-ground we can see the successive incidents of the day. The easy and confident descent of the Danes, none of them on this occasion mounted; the anxious moment of waiting, when Alfred saw that his force would lose its chance of a charge if he delayed a moment longer; the unexpected charge up-hill like a boar (*aprinò more*), a phrase which may describe both the fierce charge home, led by the Prince, and also the wedge-headed form of the column which he led; the fierce struggle round the stunted thorn bush; then how Æthelred's ill-timed piety served him in the stead of generalship and enabled him to reserve his men,¹ full

¹ "In the midst of the battle, and when Alfred was hard pressed, the king came up with his fresh forces."—*Brompton*.

half the West Saxon army, and strike in when Alfred's attack had already thrown the Danes into some confusion; the yielding of the Danes in their loose formation to the pressure of the solid phalanx; and then the rapid retreat, always provided for in Danish battles should it be necessary, and which now robbed the West Saxon army of some of the fruits of victory.¹ Alfred came out of the day the hero of his army; he had been exposed to one of those critical tests of nerve and judgment which make men or mar them, and under the test the character of the young prince had shone pure gold. There is no doubt that from the date of Ashdown, Alfred—though hardly more than twenty years of age

¹ In favour of the White Horse hill as the site of the battle, three things may be quoted: (a) The White Horse itself: the fact that the only other White Horse is near Eddington, the scene of Alfred's other crowning mercy, seems decisively to connect Alfred with the Horse, and the Horse with a great victory. (b) The Seven Barrows, which give their name to Seven Barrow Farm, close to the scene of the battle. It is a curious coincidence if the Seven Barrows have nothing to do with the number of earls killed at Ashdown. (c) The strong and well-preserved local tradition about the White Horse focussed in the dialect verses which Judge Hughes has rescued from oblivion—

“ A was maade a lang lang time ago,
 Wi' a good dale o' labour and pains,
 By King Alferd the Great when he spwiled their consate,
 And caddled thay wosbirds¹ the Danes.

The Bleawin' Stwun in days gone by
 Wur King Alferd's bugle harn.
 And the tharnin' tree you med plainly zee,
 As is called King Alferd's tharn.”

¹ Wosbirds = birds of woe.

—is looked upon as a trusted leader of his people. If anyone can save England from being overrun by the Danes, he is regarded as the man to do it.

Æthelred and Alfred had indeed secured a great victory, but they had not annihilated the Danish army. It was still entrenched within the borders of the kingdom, and in a few days was ready again to take the aggressive. The record of what follows suggests the description spirited, if not very accurate, which Henry of Huntingdon long afterwards gave of the Danish invasion. "If the Danes were sometimes defeated, victory was of no avail, inasmuch as a descent was made in some other quarter by a larger fleet and a more numerous force. It was wonderful how, when the English kings were hastening to encounter them in the eastern districts, before they could fall in with the enemy's bands, a hurried messenger would arrive and say, 'Sire, King, whither are you marching? The heathen have disembarked from a countless fleet on the southern coast, and are ravaging the towns and villages, carrying fire and slaughter into every quarter.' The same day another messenger would come running and say, 'Sire, King, whither are you retreating? A formidable army has landed in the west of England, and if you do not quickly turn your face toward them, they will think you are fleeing, and follow in your rear with fire and

sword.' Again, the same day, or on the morrow, another messenger would arrive, saying, 'What place, O noble chief, are you making for? The Danes have made a descent in the north; already they have burnt your mansions, even now they are sweeping away your goods; they are tossing your young children on the points of their spears, wives are forcibly dishonoured, others they have carried off with them.' Bewildered by such various tidings of bitter woe both kings and people lost their vigour both of mind and body, and were utterly prostrated, so that even when they defeated the enemy, victory was not attended with its wonted triumphs, and supplied no confidence of safety for the future."

Henry of Huntingdon's description is that of an impressionist rather than a realist, but it has the virtues of an impressionist picture as well as its defects. It exaggerates the Danish atrocities, and it assumes a unity in England which did not exist, but it gives some idea of the problem which faced Æthelred and Alfred after Ashdown.

It is not easy to fit into a campaign the brief hints which are preserved of the battles which followed one another in breathless succession for the next two or three months. Most of the attempts to do so are highly conjectural. By far the most convincing is the account given by the Rev. W. H. Simcox of Alfred's year of battles. As this has

appeared only in the *Historical Review* for 1886, it is worth quoting in some detail. Mr Simcox knows the ground well, and in a case of this kind the hills and valleys themselves are the only authentic exegetes of the chroniclers available. His reconstruction of the campaign will appear from the following extracts: "The Danes, a fortnight after their defeat at Ashdown, resumed the aggressive. Either crossing the Kennet, or descending the Thames as far as the mouth of the Loddon, they turned boldly southwards, and struck to Basing on the last-named river. Their object may have been only to get plunder, perhaps, especially fodder; but it is at least as likely that it was a bold stroke at the heart of the West Saxon kingdom. The easiest route from Reading to Winchester was the same substantially for an ancient general as for a modern railway engineer. But that Halfdene or Guthrum should have tried the route at a time like this, makes one think that it was the Danes who imported into England the incapacity for knowing when they were beaten.

"We may conceive, then, that while Æthelred and Alfred held their victorious armies still on the west of the lines at Reading, the Danes gave them the slip, and, like Hannibal, threatened the capital of their besiegers. And the West Saxons, unlike the Romans, had no army, or certainly no general,

ready to maintain the defence without abandoning the attack. When we consider that the English army was a mere militia, that their commander was under thirty, and that he and most of them ¹ had seen only one campaign, we can only think it creditable to king and people that they succeeded in overtaking the enemy before they had seized Winchester, and thus prevented a disaster like that of York, years before. But this was all that they could do."

At Basing they came up with the enemy. The Danes, by some feint of offering battle in the open, entrapped the West Saxon troops into an assault on a "strong and carefully-chosen position," probably on the site of the future "Loyalty House," with the water meadows of the Loddon in front of it. The Danes were victorious, but they got no spoils; and the battle convinced them that they could venture no further into Hampshire. The two brothers had at least saved their capital by their rapid pursuit and daring assault.

The nature of the next move, and the character of the campaign, depends on where we fix the "Meretune," where the next battle was fought. Mr Simcox gives good reasons for rejecting two of the suggested identifications, and proposes, in their place, a hamlet called Marton, where two roads

¹ Mr Simcox understates the fact here.

meet, commanding access to the two southern capitals. "The street of Marton lies along the Roman road from Winchester to Marlborough; if the Danes were allowed to reach it, they had the choice between the direct south road to Salisbury, and the road by Andover to Winchester. At Marton—but nowhere in the rear of it—the Saxon army could bar advance to either of the capitals."

What appears to have happened after Basing, therefore, was this: "The victory of the Danes there was not decisive enough to give them the command of Hampshire, but Æthelred can hardly have been able after it to regain his command of West Berkshire; they would hold the Kennet against him. This only forced him back upon a second line of defence, still stronger than Ashdown, the range of high and steep downs which form the southern boundary of the Kennet Valley, the natural frontier between Berkshire and Hampshire. These counties and Wiltshire meet at a place called Buttermere Corner, within a couple of miles of Inkpen Beacon. Here political as well as military motives may have led the king to remain. By this course he avoided abandoning Berkshire altogether, and so avoided the risk of Berkshire abandoning him."¹ The Hampshire

¹ Anyone who will cycle over the track of this campaign as I have done this autumn (1900) will find it a delightful and most interesting expedition, and will also be convinced that Mr Simeox's account is very probably correct.

men probably held the eastern part of the range of down, from Basingstoke to the Hurstbourne Valley, watching against another advance on Winchester; the Wiltshire and Berkshire men would find a natural centre in the ancient camp of Walbury, on Inkpen Beacon; "and, if we like to be imaginative, we may fix the king's headquarters on Highclere Beacon, within signalling distance of both.

"For two months—approximately from Candlemas to Easter—the armies lay facing one another across the Kennet, with more or less serious attempts, on the part of each, to displace or break through the other." It seems reasonable to suppose that the three unnamed engagements which fall within this year took place during these two months. The fact that they were indecisive would sufficiently account for no names or details being given. The temper of the young leaders on the Saxon side makes it morally certain that they would not remain for two months in the face of a Danish army without repeatedly offering battle in more or less advantageous positions.

This process of *stale-mating* ended by a Danish attempt to turn the Saxon left. "They advanced up the Kennet Valley to Hungerford, and then turned to the South-West. For the first mile or two after leaving the river, the country was probably wooded, antecedent to cultivation; but beyond that

it must always have been open down, exposed to the view of watchers on the heights to the East. The Danes may have gained the start of the Saxons ; they were very likely more rapid in movement ; but the Saxons, moving on interior lines, would be abreast of them in time. The surface of the down along which they had to move is as level as the greensand vale at its base ; its edge is, moreover, skirted by a road, partly at least of Roman origin.

“So the two armies converged, without actual collision, till they reached the spur which Botly Down throws out to the westward. Here the traveller from Hungerford crosses a ridge neither high nor steep, less so, indeed, than Waxcombe Down, a little further south. But if not a steep pass, it is a narrow one. On the left were the thick oak and beech woods of Savernake, traversed to a point near this by the Wandsdyke ; on the right, like a trench in front of the wall of down, stretches the very steep combe occupied by the village of Shalbourne.

“On or behind this ridge, then, the West Saxon army took its post ; ready in one case to charge and come to close quarters from the higher ground, or in the other to keep under cover to the last minute, and discharge their arrows as the enemy showed against the sky line. But even apart from

such tactical advantage, it was strategically necessary to make a stand here; if the enemy were allowed to advance a step further, he had the choice of overrunning the Vale of Pewsey on his right, or Salisbury Plain on his front, or traversing by the Roman road the wooded country round Andover towards Winchester. Here, and here only, could he be barred from all three."

The ground makes it possible to conjecture the strategy of the campaign, but the available information in the chronicles is too meagre to reconstruct an intelligible account of the battle to which these operations led. The Danes fought in two bodies, and for the greater part of the day the Saxons more than held their ground. They had forced the Danes to retire, and victory seemed in their grasp when, apparently, King Æthelred was struck down mortally wounded. This catastrophe, and the endeavour to save the king, spread confusion and consternation through the West Saxon forces, and they retreated, leaving the Danes in possession of the field of battle. There Bishop Heahmund fell, and many good men.

Shortly after Easter, Æthelred died of his wounds, "having bravely, honourably, and with good report governed his kingdom five years, through much tribulation."¹ He was hastily buried in Wimborne

¹ Asser.

Under the Hammer of Thor 111

Minster, where his epitaph records that he met his death *per manus paganorum*. The tombs of the family were at Sherborne, and in the ordinary course Æthelred would have been buried there; but Bishop Heahmund of Sherborne was just dead, and his church may have been in pagan hands. The epitaph is preserved only on a fourteenth-century brass, but the epitaph may very well be older than the brass. The idealising power of memory and tradition was soon at work, and Æthelred came to be regarded by his people as a saint and martyr. He was at least a good man, who had borne through some most trying years the burden of responsibility for a kingdom. He had allowed no jealousy of his younger and more brilliant brother to break in on their loyalty to one another, or to cast its shadow on the darkening prospect of his people. It is much for a man in such circumstances to have left on his people the impression that he,

“Doomed to go in company with pain
And fear, and bloodshed, miserable train,
Turned his necessity to glorious gain.”

Chapter III

Alfred King

“We travelled in the print of olden wars.”
R. L. Stevenson, “Underwoods.”

THE accession of Alfred marks no long break in this year of battles. There was little time for mourning, and none for ceremony. Although, in ordinary circumstances, the Witan met and formally elected the king, or ratified the succession, no meeting of the Witan is recorded. Alfred's succession was inevitable. It had been provided for by his father's will, by formal agreement with his brothers, and by the ordinance of the Witan on a previous occasion: and the fighting men of Wessex had already crowned him king of their affections and their hopes. But in spite of the good wishes which met him on every side, and what Asser grandiloquently calls “the acclamations of the whole people,” the young king must have had anxious thoughts about the dignity and duty which fell to him.

“A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas”;
his kingdom seemed to be melting beneath his

touch, and the seas on which he was embarked were as stormy as the skies which held the prospect of the future. We may judge what Alfred's temper and feeling was, in taking up the kingship, by some scraps of evidence which have survived. Asser says he undertook the government of the whole kingdom "almost against his will, for he did not think that he could alone sustain the multitude and ferocity of the pagans." We cannot altogether overlook the evidence of the life of St Neot—though it may be somewhat discounted by evident desire of the writer to make the saint appear in the rôle of Nathan rebuking a haughty king—to the effect that Alfred had to face some old unpopularity with the commonalty caused by what they regarded as the arrogance of a young noble. If Alfred was conscious of this, it makes his decision to toil and suffer for the safety of Wessex the more heroic. It enables us to estimate at their true value the noble words in Alfred's "Boethius," which Sharon Turner rightly quotes as personal confirmation of Asser's statement: "Covetousness and the possession of this earthly power I did not like well, nor strongly desired at all this earthly kingdom, but *felt it to be the work I was commanded to do.*" That is the true note of sainthood—the surrendered human will identifying itself with the leading of the Divine will at manifest personal

cost. It may stand beside Cromwell's acceptance of a military career after he had passed forty years without handling a sword, Milton's preference for a "blameless silence" to the career for which he had been prepared in the Church, when he found that it could only be entered by "falseness and forswearing," or Carey's determination to face the great unknown of heathendom in obedience to the command to "preach the gospel to every creature."

Within a month after the death of Æthelred, Alfred took the field again, probably with nothing but the *fyrð* of Wiltshire and his own immediate followers to help him. "Let no one be surprised that the Christians had but a small number of men, for the Saxons had been worn out by eight battles in one year, . . . besides endless skirmishes both by night and by day, in which the oft-named Alfred and all his chieftains, with their men, and several of his ministers, were engaged without rest or cessation against the pagans." North Wiltshire was now lost. The Danes had received very large reinforcements by way of the Thames, and they were pressing southwards. On the hill above Wilton, south of the Wyly, Alfred, with the remnants of his broken forces, met the Danes again. The attack probably took the Danes by surprise, and for some time they were thrown into a dis-

orderly rout. When they discovered the smallness of the attacking force there was a rally. The second stand was effective, and turned the scale. Alfred was compelled to give way and leave the Danes in possession of the "place of slaughter."

Happily for England, by the end of the year of battles, the Danes, who had nowhere had to fight so hard for every point they gained, and had less to show for their losses than on any previous expedition, were as wearied and exhausted as Alfred and the men of Wessex. They had lost one king and nine earls. It is difficult to estimate the losses in the ranks owing to the ease with which the chroniclers drop into vague and extravagant expressions such as "many thousands," but it is probable that they were proportionately heavy. Alfred had at least secured one point by his stubborn resistance—the Danes had learned to respect if not actually to fear their enemy. From this time they shrink from meeting him in the open, and either manœuvre to avoid him or face him only behind entrenchments. They were as anxious now for peace as the men of Wessex; and throughout Wessex there must have been many ready to cry out for peace at any price. What the actual price was is not clear. A treaty was made, and it may be inferred that Alfred had to pay heavily, from the facts that he debased

the coinage to replenish his coffers, and that the tax on landowners was so heavy that some of them preferred to surrender their lands to the king rather than pay it.

The Danes retired from Reading on London, which was then reckoned as belonging to Mercia and not to Wessex. Mercia was incapable of offering resistance, and London remained in the hands of the Danes till Alfred re-conquered it, re-settled it, and gave it the chance of becoming the capital of England.

The withdrawal of the Danes was the beginning of a three years' respite for Wessex. The Danes were busy in Mercia and Northumbria. Mercia had remained throughout the Wessex campaign strangely inert, unable, apparently, to do anything for the young men who had come so generously to its help when the Danes first took Nottingham.

The reason for this slackness may have lain partly in dissensions and differences of opinion among the people, for it was the least homogeneous part of England; but it was certainly partly due, also, to the want of effective leadership. Burhred, Alfred's brother-in-law, had been king for twenty-two restless and troubled years, and had no heart for the struggle now. He fled to Rome, as other defeated kings had done before him:

“Foil'd by their fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,
They leave the brutal world to take its way,
*And patience! in another life, they say,
The world shall be thrust down, and we upborne.*”

Rome, in the Middle Ages, was the last hope and refuge of the “world's poor routed leavings.”¹ The hope which dazzled even keen eyes was, that if they could but touch with their own hands the hem of the garment of St Peter and St Paul, a new world would open for them where they could better “support the fervours of the heavenly morn.” The disadvantage of this method of making up for the defeats of this world by preparing for victories in another, was that it left others to fight their battles here, and to get the glory and the discipline which comes of facing difficulties and making sacrifices. In this case, Burhred appears in the ungallant position of a man who runs from his difficulties, and leaves his wife to face them alone. He did not live long after his arrival in Rome, but died there, very probably from an attack of the deadly malarial fever that slew so many of the northern sojourners in Rome. He was buried in St Mary's Church, in the part known as the Saxon school. His wife, Elswith—who was Alfred's kin in spirit as well as blood—remained to watch over the interests of her husband's late kingdom.

¹ Matthew Arnold, “Immortality.”

Long afterwards she made a pious effort to visit his tomb, but succumbed to the rigours of the journey, and died before reaching Rome.

What happened to Mercia after he had gone may be briefly told, though it compels us to anticipate the order of events. The Danes, for reasons of their own, perhaps unwillingness to split their forces, or fear of jealousy among the earls, would not put one of their own number into Burhred's place. It suited their purpose better to put up one of the late king's ministers who gave promise of the requisite weakness. He was to reign as long as the Danes allowed him, give what they asked him, and abdicate when they told him to go. Every chronicler in turn flings his epithet at this weak-kneed minister. The English Chronicle pillories him as an "unwise king's thane"; Asser calls him "a certain foolish man"; another, a "weak king who would do their bidding." One most descriptive epithet might still be added. He might be called the "tulcan king,"¹ set up to supply the Danish coffers. He soon found himself between the upper millstone of Danish avarice, and the nether millstone of the hate of the people he ruled,

¹ A "tulcan" is in Erse, and still in good Scots, a mock calf—a calf skin stuffed with straw—set up beside a cow to induce her not to withhold her milk. The "tulcan" Bishops of 1572 were so called because they were set up as a pretext for drawing the revenues of the sees during the minority of James First and Sixth.

who inevitably regarded him as a traitor. No one but Ceolwulf himself could be surprised when the attempt to hold such a position ended disastrously to the man who had accepted it for the sake of an empty name.

In the summer of 877 part of the Danish host turned to Mercia with a view to settlement. They parted the land amongst them as far as there were claimants for it. Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Rutland, and Northamptonshire, all retain traces of this Danish settlement in the frequent occurrence of the terminations "by," which was the Danish equivalent of the Saxon "tun." The centre and high-water mark of Danish influence was in the five Danish boroughs—Derby, Leicester, Nottingham, Lincoln, and Stamford, which appear to have been linked in a kind of confederation. The western half of Mercia, our Cheshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, and Oxfordshire remained free from Danish settlements, though for some time they were reckoned as a Danish possession paying tribute.

The settlement in Northumbria had been at least equally systematic. There, also, Halfdene began by removing an English under-king who had proved unequal to his task. Then he drove back the Picts and Strathclyde Britons, who were press-

ing on the borders of Northumbria. Possibly to avoid such turbulent neighbours he made no attempt to settle in Bernicia, the contemporary name for the lands forming the northern province of Northumbria, which we now know as the eastern lowlands of Scotland. There he left the English aldermen to rule unhampered. Halfdene fell back into Northumbria and parted the lands among the rest. "Thenceforth they went on ploughing and tilling them." The whole of the province of Deira—with its centre at York—became a Scandinavian district. The lordship of the soil passed into the hands of Northmen. The life of an English thegn was priced at but half the value of a Northern "hold." The "byes" take their name from Norse settlers such as Beorn and Grim, Orm and Tol, Thorold and Swein.¹ The trithings or Ridings of Yorkshire retain the Norse word "thing" for the assembly of the county, which there has completely displaced the Saxon word "moot."

Even the Saxon saints were not allowed to rest in peace. The remains of St Cuthbert, patron saint of all good hunters, and therefore also of Alfred, lay in secluded sanctity in Lindisfarne. Thither Halfdene went with sacrilegious hands and intent.

¹ Cf. note, Green, "Conquest of England" (p. 117), who quotes Barnby, Ellerby, Grimsby, Aislaby, Ormsby, Tolesby, Swainby, Thoraldby.

But Bishop Eardulf of Lindisfarne and Abbot Eadred received timely warning of his coming, and averted this supreme calamity by carrying away the body of the holy man. For nine vagrant years they carried their strange treasure from one hiding-place to another, now here, now there, till better times dawned, and the heathen settled down to the more comfortable assurance that Christian saints, whether living or dead, were rather to be esteemed for their scarcity, than feared for their mysterious potencies.

These years were a precious breathing space for Alfred. What the tension meant of watching the movements of this incalculable and destructive force may be judged by his own remark, "Oh, what a happy man was he, that man that had a naked sword hanging over his head from a single thread, *so as to me it always did.*"

But the difficulty of understanding the motives, or foreseeing the movements of the enemy, did not prevent him from seeing with singular precision where his own duty lay. It was certain that the Danes would come again, and it was equally certain that they would come, as they came before, by sea. Alfred seized the central and all-important feature of the situation, that Wessex would be saved or lost at sea. The power which controlled the sea, the channel, the rivers, and the estuaries would win

in the end. To fight the enemy successfully he must be able to watch their coming, and forewarn the *fyrð* on shore of their movements, to intercept supplies, to cut off a retreat, or to carry out a surprise attack on their fortified camps on the unfortified side. It is this kind of insight into the heart of a military problem which brings out the difference between a man with a genius for leadership, and the soldier who is merely a brave and spirited fighter of battles. A wise leader knows that he can only get a certain expenditure of energy out of his people, and it is his business to see that every pound of energy goes where it can be most effectively damaging to the enemy.

It is from this point of view that it is rightly regarded as one of Alfred's great achievements, that during those brief years he was able to call into existence a fleet of ships. The fleet itself was small ; it seemed almost too small to be of great service against the great flotillas which carried a Danish host. But it was everything to have a few ships. How Alfred got them is difficult to understand. We are told that he determined to have some longer than the keels of the Danes. But he had still to solve the problem of building and manning them ; that he can hardly have done without purchasing the services of some foreigners, such as the Frisians whom we find in his service some years later. Any

actual ship-building in England seems to belong to a later period of his reign. Even if he had hired detached Northmen, as seems possible, it does not detract from Alfred's achievement. It is only a statesman whose aims are stronger than his prejudices and instinctive limitations who knows how to pay his enemy to teach his countrymen to fight.

His measures were rewarded by success. His ships were able to intercept a small Danish fleet, hovering round the coast, and probably aiming at the mouth of the Thames as before. Alfred was with his fleet himself, determined to know at first hand something of the sea and the ways of seamen. The laconic record of the English Chronicle covers some nervous work for the young king, who was risking everything on an unfamiliar element. "And that summer King Alfred went out to sea with a fleet, and fought against the forces of seven ships, and one of them he took and put the rest to flight."

It is in the midst of this busy time that, according to Roger de Hoveden, we are to date the beginning of another of Alfred's famous activities. "In the year 872, Alchun, Bishop of the Wiccas,¹ having departed this life, Wrefrith, the foster-father of the holy church of Worcester, and a man most learned in the holy Scripture, was ordained bishop

¹ The folk of Worcestershire. Roger de Hoveden, Bohn's edition, p. 48.

by Ethelred, Archbishop of Canterbury . . . he, at the request of King Alfred, translated the books of the dialogues of the Pope Saint Gregory from the Latin into the Saxon tongue."¹ It is a long leap from building ships to translating a book of good counsels for the clergy. It says much for Alfred that, in the midst of preparations for war, he was already thinking of the duties of a time of peace. It shows where the king's tastes lay.

It was probably the first success of Alfred's navy, by land and sea, which precipitated on the West Saxons their next trouble. The Danes, finding that the mouth of the Thames was carefully watched, gave it a wide berth, and then crept along the coast looking for a favourable landing-place. They found what they wanted at Wareham, in Dorsetshire (Thornsaeta). There was a "monastery of holy virgins" which promised plunder, a fortification which easily fell into their hands, and on two sides the rivers Frome and Piddle to serve as the water barriers which they best liked. Alfred at once gathered such forces as he could command for an investment, and probably attempted a blockade to prevent reinforcements and supplies from reaching them by sea. The Danes were strongly entrenched behind their fortifications, and it was clearly impossible to capture their camp;

¹ The indication of time is doubtful.

but the issue seems to show that Alfred succeeded in making their position either untenable or very difficult to hold. A treaty was made, by which the Danes pledged themselves "speedily to depart his kingdom." Alfred was allowed to name the hostages he was to hold, and the treaty was ratified by a more solemn ceremony than had ever been observed before. Alfred swore by the relics of a saint, and the Danes by a holy ring (probably the ring of Odin) smeared with the blood of a "sacrificed animal and placed on an altar — an oath which they never would take before to any nation."

It is one thing to devise binding oaths, quite another to bind the men who swear them; and Alfred found that, as before in dealing with the Danes, "the lips were sworn but not the heart." The treaty was hardly completed, and the West Saxon investment relaxed, when all the Danes who had been able to secure horses sallied out of their camp by night, cut to pieces a small band of Alfred's men whom they encountered, and then rode straight to Exeter and shut the gates in the face of their pursuers. The violation of the oath was flagrant; but it may have been made to appear less heinous, and even partly justifiable, by the fact that Exeter was still in part a British town, and the oath had pledged them only to depart from Alfred's kingdom. This experience

must have convinced the West Saxons, if there had been any doubt before, that they could only expect their unscrupulous enemies to keep a pledge so far as they were able to compel them to do so.

The fact that Exeter was a British town made it all the more dangerous to have a Danish force there, lest it should make a centre for a hostile combination with the Cornwall Welsh. Alfred followed close behind, but could do nothing against the fortified city. Winter came on, and put an end to the campaign for a time, the Danes being left in possession of their excellent winter quarters; and Alfred was compelled to withdraw in order to prepare for a final struggle to free his kingdom from the menace of an enemy entrenched on its borders.

Things were evidently approaching a crisis in the spring of 877. Alfred had spent the winter in strengthening his fleet. If he could succeed in cutting off supplies from the sea, and in maintaining a close investment of Exeter by land, the army inside would be compelled to surrender. At first it looked as if the highest hopes of the West Saxon leader were to be fulfilled. The stars in their courses fought against the Danes, as if in retribution for the broken oaths. The Danish fleet, a hundred and twenty strong, sailed round the coast,

intending to land at Wareham and reinforce the host shut up in Exeter. Had they been able to carry out their plan, the whole history of England would have been changed. Its history might have been, not that of the Anglecyn [English kin], but of a Danish people. But another destiny was in store for England. When the great fleet reached Swanwick (Swanage), it was met by a tremendous gale, which drove the long keels in hopeless confusion on the rocks. A hundred and twenty ships were lost. The Danes lost control of the Channel, and the host at Exeter was practically at the mercy of Alfred.

The Danish forces still at Wareham were now isolated. They could not expect reinforcements or provisions from the sea for some time. They were compelled to choose between a daring dash for re-union with the army in Exeter, and surrender. They chose the exciting alternative. Horses were somehow purchased or captured; they broke out of their entrenchments and through the investing force and rode for Exeter. Alfred pursued them, but failed to overtake them. Before he could get within striking distance, they were safe within the walls. The army in Exeter was too big to remain there now that supplies were exhausted, and not big enough to face Alfred's army with confidence. For the first time since Ashdown, Alfred seemed

to have victory in his grasp. The Danes recognised that they were beaten, and surrendered on condition of being allowed to leave Wessex. They gave hostages, and swore many oaths. "And this time," the Chronicle says, "they observed the peace well," being, in fact, for the moment unable to do anything else.

The events which followed illustrate the "glorious uncertainty" which gives war its fascination to many temperaments. The Danes had withdrawn into Mercia, and had apportioned some of the rich lands in Gloucestershire and Warwickshire among themselves. The West Saxon army, feeling, no doubt, that it had done its work well, had been for the time disbanded, and the men had returned to their farms. Winter had set in, and, according to all the rules of war then recognised, campaigning ought to have been at an end. Suddenly the Danes, probably reinforced unexpectedly, and anxious to retrieve their footing in Wessex, "stole away to Chippenham after twelfth night." No opposition was possible, for Wessex was taken by surprise. They went where they would, overrunning the Western kingdom, and "sat down there."

130 The Hour of Darkness

traveller is overtaken by sundown in a desert. The confidence every man cherishes that his life is to be a success is suddenly overborne by the memory of his own failures, and in presence of the spectres of the past the living man becomes bloodless and ready to faint. When a man faces naked destiny in this way, alone, one of two things must follow. He either cowers before it and gives in, or he rises to wrestle with it, and to wrest out of the failures and blunders of the past a triumph for the future. He is compelled to go into himself, to find what elements of strength remain for the struggle, what is the thing deepest and strongest within him, and out of the elements of strength that remain to choose the weapons for his contest. It is then, if ever, that a man breaks through the veil of sense and finds that "spirit with spirit may meet." He finds God. If he comes then to know himself in relation to the Eternal, he issues from the conflict sharer in the victory of the Son of Man over sense and time. Even if, in the external conflict, defeat overtakes him, the great victory is his; he is victor by faith, and his life has attained one of the consummations for which it was given.

This was the kind of experience which suddenly overtook Alfred when the Danes stole into Wessex in mid-winter and seized Chippenham. The fact seems to have been as Henry of Huntington de-

scribes it, "They spread over the country like locusts, and there being no one able to resist them they took possession of it for themselves." There were no battles, no stormings of towns, no sieges, everywhere the West Saxons were found unprepared, without an army, and when confronted by troops of armed Danes obliged to surrender. Many of them gave up the struggle as hopeless and fled. "Mickle of the folk over sea they drove, and of the others the most deal they rode over: all but King Alfred, he with a little band hardly fared after the woods and on the moor-fastnesses": so the Chronicle tells the tale of disaster. Starvation drove some abroad and others into the hands of the Danes. Only in Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Somerset of all the "folk" in England were a few found faithful to Alfred. As regards the rest of Wessex, it seemed for some months as if it were only a matter of time before the Danes would do with it as they had done with Northumbria and Mercia and East England. They would part the lands among them and "remain ploughing and tilling."

There is no use attempting to minimise the straits in which Alfred now found himself. His glory does not lie in never having met disaster, but in having faced it and overcome it. The stories which are told about these months when he wandered almost

132 The Hour of Darkness

alone in the fastnesses of Somerset give some indication of his own feeling about the period. When he came to look back upon it he recognised that it was not only the military crisis of his struggle with the Danes, but also the spiritual crisis of his own life, and in the legends of ghostly visitants we find reflected his own explicit acknowledgment that he would have given up the struggle had not God stood by him and bidden him be of good cheer.

Alfred plunged into the woods of Somerset, then much more extensive than now. For a time he was in hiding even from his own people, who, Asser tells, did not know what had become of him or where he was. But even at the worst a few companions seem to have stood by their friend and leader. Ethelwerd says the king had with him "the province of Somerset only; no others assisted him except the servants who made use of the king's pastures." This may point to a fact, otherwise probable enough, that besides the passive sympathy and assistance of the men of Somerset the king had at least a small bodyguard of men drawn from the tenants of royal lands elsewhere, men with whom he had raced and hunted and played in happier days. Some time between January and Easter, Alfred found his way to a patch of firm ground in the midst of the marshes formed by the

The Hour of Darkness 133

Parret and the Tone. This gave him an easily defended inland fortress, with the same merits for sally and defence as Hereward afterwards found in the isle of Ely. Here at Athelney he made his headquarters, at first almost alone, living on the fish and water-fowl of the rivers and such food as his men could forage from the cottars in the neighbourhood. Later he was joined there by Ethelnoth the ealdorman of Somerset,¹ and Athelney was fortified to serve as a last retreat.

Long afterwards, when sunnier days had come to Alfred and from the secure haven of a settled kingdom he could look back with a pleasant flush of memory on the days of storm and stress as though they affected some one else,² he had many stories to tell of the hard fare and strange adventures of these Athelney days. They have come down to us from different sources, and as personal incidents of this kind are not recorded in the official Chronicle, none of them are quite free from suspicion. No doubt they have suffered embellishment by some of the hands through which they have passed. But it is at least open to us to believe that their origin was Alfred himself.

The most famous is the story of Alfred's stay

¹ Ethelwerd's Chronicle.

² "Suave mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis

E terra magnum alterius spectare laborem."—*Lucretius*.

134 The Hour of Darkness

in the neat-herd's hut. It comes to us from the life of St Neot, who was himself Alfred's cousin and contemporary, and whose earliest biography may belong to the tenth century. From the life of St Neot it has been incorporated by some later editor into Asser's life of Alfred. On one of his scouting or foraging expeditions Alfred came to the hut of a neat-herd who knew who he was. The cottar took the king to his hut, but did not tell his wife whom he had brought. No doubt he was a wearied and toil-worn object when the neat-herd led him in and set him down by his open fire, for mid-winter foraging in forest and marsh would soon make it difficult to distinguish a king from a travelling beggar. It was the good wife's baking-day, and a visitor did not improve her temper. But as the stranger sat by the fireside mending his bow and arrows, and she wanted to be busy elsewhere, she bade him mind the cakes and turn them as soon as they were done. When the time came Alfred's mind was full of other things, bows, arrows, Danes, faithless friends, friendly forests and hiding-places, and what not besides; and the cakes were soon burning. Perhaps the silence by the fireside suggested mischief to the good-wife, at any rate it was soon broken by a strident and contemptuous voice:

“Ca’sn thee moind the ke-akes, mon, and doosen zee ’em
burn,
I’m boun’ thee’s eat ’em vast enough, az zoon az ’tiz the
turn.”¹

So the famous conqueror of the Danes bore a “flyting” from the neat-herd’s wife. By way of enhancing the interest of the story, some fragment of a gracious deed of Alfred’s is interwoven with it by some of those who tell it. The neat-herd, it is said, was a certain Denewulf. When Alfred found that he was a man of native wit and intelligence he taught him to read. Denewulf made good use of his opportunities and at length became Bishop of Winchester. Professor Freeman points out that the Denewulf who became Bishop of Winchester became so in the very next year. So that evidently two stories have been woven into one, and we cannot now unravel them. There may have been more than one bishop in Alfred’s time who owed his start in letters and learning to the wise king.

There are two Athelney incidents which come to us from the life of St Cuthbert in the “Acta Sanctorum.” They are often rejected or omitted because they introduce an element of the supernatural. It is as great a mistake to reject them

¹ The original is in Latin verse. The version in Somerset dialect is from Giles’ “Asser,” in Bohn’s series.

136 The Hour of Darkness

as it would be to accept them as literal history. It is one of those cases where history requires us to forget our own point of view and enter into that of the time when the events happened. There is an objective and a subjective side to every crisis in history, a side which deals with the events as an observer would have seen them and a side which deals with the events from the point of view of the actors, revealing the feelings, aims, ideas, impulses, fears and hopes of the men who themselves took part in the events. A perfectly veracious subjective history would not in any age exclude the spiritual factors which are amongst the real forces which make history, and in the tenth century such factors could only be represented as objective and supernatural. The incidents recorded from the life of St Cuthbert have a bearing on Alfred's character, and help us to understand the temper in which he did his work both now and afterwards. The incidents are edited in many forms, both in chroniclers like William of Malmesbury, and in modern books, according to the taste and views of the editor. Professor Freeman maintains, quite rightly, that if the story is told at all it ought to be told in full. This is his own unmutilated version, omitting only the mistaken ascription of the incident to Glastonbury, which occurs in the life of St Cuthbert.

The Hour of Darkness 137

“Now it came to pass on a day that all Alfred’s folk were gone out to fish, save only Alfred himself, and his wife, and one servant whom he loved. And there came a pilgrim to the king, and begged for food. And the king said to his servant:

“‘What food have we in the house?’

“And his servant answered: ‘My lord, we have in the house but one loaf, and a little wine.’ Then the king gave thanks to God, and said:

“‘Give half of the loaf, and half of the wine to this poor pilgrim.’

“So the servant did as his lord commanded him, and gave to the pilgrim half of the loaf and half of the wine, and the pilgrim gave great thanks to the king. And when the servant returned, he found the loaf whole, and the wine as much as there had been aforetime.¹ And he greatly wondered, and he wondered also how the pilgrim had come into the isle, for that no man could come there save by water, and the pilgrim had no boat.

“And the king greatly wondered also. And at the ninth hour came back the folk who had gone to fish. And they had their boats full of fish, and they said:

¹ Does this mean that they did not miss what was gone, but had enough for their own use? If so, it illustrates well one of the great laws of giving.

138 The Hour of Darkness

“Lo, we have caught this day more fish than in all the three years we have tarried in this island.’

“And the king was glad, and he and his folk were merry, yet he pondered much on that which had come to pass. And when night came, the king went to bed with Ealhswytha his wife. And the lady slept, but the king lay awake and thought of all that had come to pass by day. And presently he saw a great light, like the brightness of the sun, and he saw an old man with black hair, clothed in priest’s garments, and with a mitre on his head, and holding in his right hand a book of the gospels adorned with gold and gems. And the old man blessed the king, and the king said unto him: ‘Who art thou?’

“And he answered: ‘Alfred, my son, rejoice; for I am he to whom thou didst this day give thine alms, and I am called Cuthbert, the soldier of Christ.¹ Now be strong and very courageous, and be of joyful heart, and hearken diligently to the things which I say unto thee; for henceforth I will be thy shield and thy friend, and I will watch over thee and over thy sons after thee. And now I will tell thee what thou must do. Rise up early in the morning, and blow thine horn thrice, that thy enemies may hear it and fear, and by the

¹ “Magnus miles mirabilis,” a Saxon hymn calls him.

The Hour of Darkness 139

ninth hour thou shalt have around thee five hundred men harnessed for the battle. And this shall be a sign unto thee that thou mayest believe. And after seven days thou shalt have of God's gift and my help all the folk of this land gathered unto thee upon the mount that is called Assandun (Ethandune). And thus shalt thou fight against thine enemies, and doubt not that thou shalt overcome them. Be thou therefore glad of heart, and be strong and very courageous, and fear not, for God hath given thine enemies into thine hand. And he hath given thee also all this land, and the kingdom of thy fathers, to thee and to thy sons' sons after thee. Be thou faithful to me, and to my folk, because unto thee is given all the land of Albion. Be thou righteous, because thou art chosen to be the king of all Britain. So may God be merciful unto thee, and I will be thy friend, and none of thine enemies shall be able to overcome thee.'

"Then was King Alfred glad at heart, and he was strong and very courageous, for that he knew that he would overcome his enemies by the help of God and St Cuthbert his patron. So in the morning he arose, and sailed to the land, and blew his horn three times, and when his friends heard it they were glad, and when his enemies heard it they feared. And by the ninth hour,

140 The Hour of Darkness

according to the word of the Lord, there were gathered unto him five hundred men of the bravest and dearest of his friends. And he spake unto them and told them all that God had said unto him by the mouth of his servant Cuthbert; and he told them that, by the gift of God and the help of St Cuthbert, they would overcome their enemies and win back their own land. And he bade them, as St Cuthbert had taught him, to fear God alway, and to be alway righteous towards all men. And he bade his son Edward, who was by him, to be faithful to God and Saint Cuthbert, and so he should always have the victory over his enemies. So they went forth to battle and smote their enemies and overcame them, and King Alfred took the kingdom of all Britain, and he ruled well and wisely over the just and the unjust for the rest of his days."

Such a statement as that "Alfred took all Britain" shows that the writer of the Saint's life is much more concerned for the honour of his hero than for grip of the stern-exact in the history he is telling. Some accounts separate the miraculous draught of fishes and the apparition of St Cuthbert, others make the speech of the saint less sermonic and more oracular. The sign of the turn of fortune's tide is to be in the extraordinary draught of fishes, "which will be so much the more extra-

ordinary because the rivers at this time, hard bound with ice, could warrant no such expectation; especially as the air, now dripping with cold rain, mocks the art of the fisher." (Is it possible that the patron of all good huntsmen had never heard of pike fishing?) But all accounts agree that the saint "divested the sleeping king of his anxiety," and this was the truth to which Alfred himself probably testified. In the time of his deep depression and despair, he was cheered by — one of those dream visitations, or spiritual intuitions, — or flashes of insight into the unseen, which often mark the turning-points in a good man's life, for —

". . . tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled."

Another of Alfred's Athelney adventures is often rejected altogether because it cannot be traced earlier than William of Malmesbury, who wrote about two hundred years later than Alfred's time. But, as the story at least illustrates the reputation Alfred bore with his countrymen, it is worth repeating.

"Venturing from his concealment," William of Malmesbury says, "he hazarded an experiment of consummate art. Accompanied only by one of his most faithful adherents, he entered the tent of the Danish king under the disguise of a minstrel, and being admitted, as a professor of the mimic art,

142 The Hour of Darkness

to the banqueting room, there was no object of secrecy that he did not minutely attend to both with eyes and ears. Remaining there several days, till he had satisfied his mind on everything which he wished to know, he returned to Athelney; and assembling his companions, pointed out the indolence of the enemy, and the easiness of their defeat." It is not sufficient ground for discrediting this story, that the same kind of thing has been told of other military leaders from the time of Gideon downwards, for it is also true that the same kind of thing has been done in almost every long campaign. Alfred's scouting exploit is not more wonderful than some of Baden-Powell's scouting adventures in our own time, and just as Baden-Powell earned from his enemies a soubriquet: "The wolf that never sleeps," so Alfred had the reputation of being "like a slippery serpent."¹

These stories preserve for us some of the outstanding excitements which relieved the weary weeks of waiting in the Somerset marshes. There is no doubt that when the time for action came, Alfred issued from his retreat a changed man. He is more cautious and self-restrained, though not a whit less courageous and spirited. He had made vows to God, as many men do in the time of their distress, and, as few do when the distress

¹ William of Malmesbury, p. 117. Bohn.

is passed, he deliberately set himself to discharge them. It is, perhaps, this change in Alfred's temper and outlook which is adumbrated in the following passage from the life of St Neot, repeated by Asser with many pious reflections:—

“But the Almighty not only granted to the same glorious king, victories over his enemies, but also permitted him to be harassed by them, to be sunk down by adversities, and depressed by the low estate of his followers, to the end that he might learn that there is one Lord of all things, to whom every knee doth bow, and in whose hand are the hearts of kings: who puts down the mighty from their seat, and exalteth the humble: who suffers his servants when they are elevated at the summit of prosperity to be touched by the rod of adversity, that, in their humility, they may not despair of God's mercy, and, in their prosperity, they may not boast of their honours, but may also know to whom they owe all the things which they possess.

“We may believe that this calamity was brought upon the king, because, in the beginning of his reign, when he was a youth and influenced by youthful feelings, he would not listen to the petitions which his subjects made to him for help in their necessities, or for relief from those who oppressed them; but he repulsed them from him, and paid no heed to their requests. This particular

gave much annoyance to the holy man St Neot, who was his relation, and who often foretold to him in the spirit of prophecy, that he would suffer great adversity on this account; but Alfred neither attended to the reproof of the man of God nor listened to his true prediction. Wherefore, seeing that a man's sins must be corrected either in this world or the next, the true and righteous Judge was willing that his sin should not go unpunished in this world, to the end that he might spare him in the world to come."

The saint must have been a Job's comforter if he found his way to the king in the days of his trouble with exhortations of this kind. His rule-of-thumb method of interpreting God's Providence gives us some criterion of the value we are to attach to his attempts to measure the justice of Alfred's dealings with his people. We shall certainly be justified in refusing to condemn Alfred unheard on the sole and unsupported evidence of a good man who seems to have had a bias towards censoriousness. But though we may hesitate to believe the particular charge brought against Alfred, no doubt the saint was substantially correct in maintaining, as he seems to have done, that the king was a better man for the disasters and privations he had had to meet. Asser may be only reflecting what he had heard Alfred him-

The Hour of Darkness 145

self say when he spoke of the Athelney days as having humbled his pride, and sobered his temper, and compelled him "to see life steadily and see it whole." The Hammer of Thor had done its work. It had had strong material to work upon, and now out of it had been hammered into shape a man whose every year of life after this time gave England more reason to think of him as *England's Herdsman, England's Darling*.

Chapter V

The Turn of the Tide

“The glory of conquering the consequences of defeat is greater than the glory of a bloodless victory.”—*Nettleship*.

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you and deliver the Midianites into thy hand.”—*Judges vii. 7.*

“For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host, but strength cometh from heaven.”—*Book of the Maccabees*.

“Possunt quia posse videntur.”

WHEN the tide has ebbed there is an interval of dead low water before it begins to flow again. Athelney marks low water in the fortunes of Wessex, but even at low water there were signs that the run of the tide was about to change.

The first good news which reached Alfred was of an important victory in Devonshire, and it must have come to him and his followers like the first breath of the spring which it heralded.

Asser's account of the event was evidently picked up on the spot, and is very spirited. “In the same winter the brother of Hingwar and Halfdene (*i.e.* Hubba, of evil repute), with twenty-three ships, after

much slaughter of the Christians, came from the country of Demetia (*i.e.* South Wales), where he had wintered, and sailed to Devon; and there, with twelve hundred others, he met with a miserable death, being slain while committing his misdeeds, by the king's servants, before the castle of Kynwyth [on the river Taw], into which many of the king's servants, with their followers, had fled for safety.

“The pagans (*i.e.* the Danes) seeing that the castle was altogether unprepared and unfortified except that it had walls in our own (*i.e.* British) fashion, determined not to assault it, because it was impregnable and secure on all sides, except on the eastern, as I myself have seen. They therefore began to blockade it, thinking that those who were inside would soon surrender either from famine or want of water, for the castle had no spring within reach.

“But the result did not fall out as they expected; for the Christians, before they began to suffer from want, inspired by heaven, judging it much better to gain victory or death, attacked the pagans suddenly in the morning, and from the first cut them down in great numbers, slaying also their king, so that few escaped to their ships. They gained a very large booty, and amongst other things the standard called the Raven. They say that the three sisters of Hingwar and Hubba, daughters of

148 The Turn of the Tide

Lodbroc,¹ wove that flag and got it ready in one day. They say, moreover, that in every battle, wherever that flag went before them, if they were to gain the victory the raven on the middle of the flag would appear living and flying; but if they were doomed to be defeated it would hang down motionless, and this was often proved to be so."

Their own deduction was that the raven had a kind of prescience which made it a valuable asset for the leader of an army. The value of a banner always depends largely on the sentiment it awakens, and the reputation it has; in this case both stood high, for the daughters of Lodbroc were said to have mysterious powers of working with spells, and could no doubt communicate their mystic powers to their handiwork. The Saxons probably shared the Danish estimate of its value, and celebrated their capture of the magic banner, and emblem of the predatory instincts of its owners, with great rejoicings. It may have been the good news of this capture and the consequent rise in the spirits of all who heard of it, together with his own revived hope, which decided Alfred to make another bid for victory.

The two acres of ground which formed the Isle

¹ Lodbroc means "shaggy breech," and is an epithet for a hawk, from its feathered legs. —F. Y. P.

of Athelney soon became too small for the men who found their way to Alfred, group by group, from the villages in Somersetshire, as spring came on. About Easter-time the little force became aggressive. They began with a guerilla warfare. "Alfred," says Asser, "with his vassals and the nobles of Somerset [Ethelnoth had been to him as Jonathan to David], sallied forth to make frequent attacks upon the pagans." It was then that Alfred gained his reputation for being able to "flash out from his hiding-places, rising up to smite his foes in the height of their insolent confidence, and never more hard to beat than after a flight."¹

After six weeks of successful bushranging work, the Athelney force was ready to face the risks of a campaign in the open.

About the middle of May, in the year 878 A.D., a rendezvous was appointed at Egbert's Stone (now abbreviated into Brixton), on the east side of Selwood forest. There "the men of Somerset and the men of Wiltshire, and that portion of the men of Hampshire which was on this side of the sea (*i.e.* all but the Isle of Wight), gathered in their array to meet the king. Now, when they saw the king alive after such great tribulation they received him as he deserved, with joy and acclamation, and encamped there for one night."² A local tradition

¹ William of Malmesbury,

² Asser,

150 The Turn of the Tide

says that the signal for the actual gathering of the West Saxons at Egbert's Stone was given by a beacon lighted on the top of Sturton Hill, where Alfred's tower now stands.¹ Such a beacon would be seen all over the district where Alfred had been in hiding, and where the rising had been organised and its aim was understood.

An army made up of men accustomed to live and act together requires no elaborate organising. The militia or local commandos fell into natural groups, under their accustomed leaders. Alfred knew that the only hope for his small force against the larger one he was to attack, lay in making his onslaught so rapid and unexpected that it would throw the Danes into confusion. The very day after the meeting at Egbert's Stone, the king struck his camp and moved on to Iglea. If this is Iley mead, near Melksham in Wiltshire, it was a clever move to take the Danes on an unexpected side. Instead of marching straight towards the Danish camp by roads which were probably well watched and guarded, Alfred took a northerly route,² which had the double advantage of cutting off the retreat of the Danes should they be beaten, and also of allowing Alfred to approach them from

¹ Hughes, p. 115, on authority of Dr Giles.

² Some of the points of Alfred's strategy might be illustrated from Lord Roberts' in approaching Bloemfontein,

higher instead of lower ground. The army rested over-night at Iglea (Iley), and there, it is said, St Neot appeared to Alfred and promised that on the morrow his misfortunes would end.

On the next day an early march of from five to seven miles brought Alfred abreast of the Danes at Ethandune (Eddington). The skill with which Alfred had chosen his position, and the experience of his forces in previous battles, told in his favour. The West Saxon army gave no advantage to the enemy. The Danes, after breaking themselves against its solid ranks all day, at last turned and fled. They succeeded in reaching their camp—not Chippenham, which was sixteen miles away, but probably a camp on Bratton Hill close to Eddington. The camp may still be seen "with its double ditches and deep trenches, and barrow in the midst sixty yards long, and its two entrances guarded by mounds. It contains more than twenty acres, and commands the whole countryside."¹ Into this camp the fugitives threw themselves, leaving a good many stragglers and much booty to fall into Alfred's hands.

This was the most important success Alfred had had since Ashdown, and he was determined to press it home. The camp was closely invested; it was not provisioned for a siege, and the Danes knew that

¹ Hughes, p. 119.

152 The Turn of the Tide

there was no hope of any relieving force for long enough. It was, as Asser points out, probably the despair of any relief, even more than actual hunger or fear of assault, which brought about the surrender of the Danes. They were fairly beaten, and had no resource but to throw themselves on the mercy of Alfred. After a fourteen days' siege Guthrum surrendered, offering terms which opened a new era in the conflict between Dane and Saxon. The Danes were to give as many hostages as Alfred wanted, and to ask for none in return; they would quit Wessex for good, and Guthrum declared his willingness to receive baptism and become a Christian. Ethandune was a brilliant military exploit, and is justly celebrated in song and story.

“But with his name four other names attune,
Which from oblivion guardian song may save:
Lone Athelney, victorious Ethandune,
Wantage his cradle, Winchester his grave.”¹

But the military glory of Ethandune itself pales before the work of the statesman which followed it. Alfred has never had credit enough for the prescience and self-restraint and calm recognition of facts which governed his conduct, when a fortunate victory might easily have tempted him to be truculent and vengeful. Had he, for instance,

¹ Alfred Austin,

attempted to use his victory as Charles the Great did, when a strategic victory was followed by a slaughter in cold blood, there would have been no peace in England for many a day.

Consider the factors in the problem Alfred had to face. His house had the right to claim to be kings of the whole of England. But in Northumbria, East England, and Mercia, the Danes had now been established for some years. An attempt had been made to rob him of his immediate patrimony, and make him an exile from his own kingdom. A passionate or sullen-tempered man would have hankered for revenge; he would have exacted some conditions which would have sown hatred and distrust, or set on foot an irreconcilable blood-feud between the two races. Alfred recognised that the problem presented by the facts was not how to get his revenge for the past, but how to make it possible for the two races to live together in future. There was an underlying kinship between them, and though the Saxons had four hundred years' start in the development of civilisation there was still so much in common that a far-seeing man could see that their destiny lay in fusion. The immediate aim of a West Saxon statesman might be said to be (1) to give his own people time to recover, and to enable them to reassert and develop their own national individuality; (2) to remove

Missing Page

Missing Page

156 The Turn of the Tide

For these and many other reasons it is probable that by this time the antipathy of the Danes towards the White Christ was beginning to disappear as they found points of contact with those who bore His name. They may help us to understand some of the instincts which drew the two leaders together.

The terms offered by Guthrum were accepted by Alfred. Hostages were given, and the army went away northwards to Chippenham and thence to Cirencester. Thirty days after the capitulation Guthrum, and some thirty of his nobles, returned with Alfred towards Athelney. At Aller, near Athelney, Guthrum was baptised, taking the name of Athelstan. Alfred himself stood godfather to his old enemy. According to the custom of the time, Guthrum's head was bound in a white headband, and eight days afterwards, at Wedmore, the "chrism" was loosed. At Wedmore there are still traces of King Alfred's summer palace, which explain why Wedmore was chosen as the place of entertainment for this large party of guests. There he and his companions remained for twelve days, while the foe-transformed-to-friend was treated right royally: "The king," says the English Chronicle, "greatly honoured him and his companions with gifts." Asser says more definitely that Alfred gave him "many fine estates."

It was during this time that the famous compact known as the Treaty of Wedmore, which influenced the relation of Dane and Saxon for a hundred years, was agreed upon. The original treaty has not survived, but its terms were probably embodied in the second treaty which was made six years later between Alfred and Guthrum, with the important difference that in the later treaty the geographical boundaries are more favourable to Alfred. The terms of the treaty are worth quoting in full for the spirit of fairness which pervades them; for the way they illustrate the legal and social customs of the time, and because the treaty is—what few treaties which end wars are—a great event in the social life of England as well as the end of the present war. Here it is in the form given by Bishop Stubbs.

ALFRED AND GUTHRUM'S PEACE

This is the peace that King Alfred and King Guthrum, and the Wise Men of all the English nation, and all the people that are in East Anglia [England], have all ordained and with oaths confirmed, for themselves and for their descendants, as well for born as for unborn, who reckon of God's mercy or of ours.

1. Concerning our land boundaries; up on the Thames, and then up on the Lea, and along the

158 The Turn of the Tide

Lea unto its source, then right to Bedford, then up on the Ouse and Watling Street.

[This division secured Alfred's rights over the whole of Wessex, London, and a wide London district running well into Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. The boundaries of English Mercia were probably defined in another treaty with the Five Confederated Danish Boroughs. Watling Street was the old Roman road which ran across the Midlands from London to Wroxeter near Shrewsbury via the Trent Valley.]

2. There is this: If a man be slain, we estimate all equally dear, English and Danish, at eight half marks of pure gold; except the ceorl who resides on rent (gafol) land and their freedmen (liesings); they also are equally dear, either at two hundred shillings.

[This provision makes the Dane and the Saxon equal before the law. The social estimation of a man was fixed by the price which had to be paid by any one who killed him, his blood-money. In this case two grades of equality are fixed by law; in the higher grade the Danish freedman (liesing) is made equal to the Saxon ceorl who resides on taxed or rented land with recognised rights.]

3. And if a king's thegn be accused of man-slaying if he dare to clear himself, let him do that with twelve king's thegns. If any one accuse that

man who is of less degree than the king's thegn, let him clear himself with eleven of his equals, and with one king's thegn. And so in every suit which may be for more than four mancuses.¹ And if he dare not, let him pay for it threefold, as it may be valued.

4. And that every man know his warrantor for men, and for horses, and for oxen.

[The importance of this is that it looks forward to the business relations of a settled community. The warrantor was a neighbour called in to "vouch to warranty" as to the good faith of a buyer or seller in a transaction.]

5. And we all ordained on that day that the oaths were sworn, that neither bond nor free might go to the host² without leave, no more than any of them to us. But if it happens that from necessity any of them will have traffic with us or we with them, with cattle and with goods, that is to be allowed on this wise: that hostages be given in pledge of peace, and as evidence whereby it may be known that the party has a clean back.

[This is intended to prevent the confusion which might arise on both sides of the line of separation from frequent desertions from one side to the other.

¹ A mancus was more than a third of a pound.

² The host always means the Danish and the *fyrð* the West Saxon army.

160 The Turn of the Tide

If any slave could become a free man by crossing Watling Street, or any man who had a grievance against his own lord or king enlist alien help in taking revenge, or any one who had been guilty of a crime escape its punishment by deserting to the enemy, government would be impossible; the peace of the kingdoms would be at the mercy of every quarrelsome outlaw, and the social distinctions—on which society itself rested—would be thrown into confusion. The provision amounts to a very comprehensive extradition treaty. The exception in the case of traffic is important. It points to the recognition of the main common interest which the two peoples had already found.]

This was probably the basis of the peace which, in July 878, brought to an end the first seven years' struggle with the invaders. The Danes wintered in Cirencester, and then marched into East England, where many of them settled down. Alfred, relieved at last from the pressure of immediately impending calamity, turned to throw himself into the execution of the plans he had been forming for securing the prosperity of that part of England which was left to him.

Alfred's conduct of the war and its termination may fairly be quoted as a reply to two questions which are sometimes debated in the court of con-

The Turn of the Tide 161

science, as well as in the historic settings in which they are recurrently presented; "May a Christian be a soldier?" and "Can a soldier be a Christian?" or rather, "What kind of a soldier will he be?" From a point of view which regards the life of Alfred as a "saintly life," the questions are of importance.

The reply which Alfred's case makes to the first question is that clearly there are occasions when a Christian *must* be a soldier, and perhaps it may be added, on St Paul's principle, that if there is any doubt about the "must," there is also a doubt about the "may." In the circumstances which Alfred had to face, when not only home and land were threatened, but also the very existence of Christianity, and the beginnings of civilisation it had brought with it, where it was certain that the Danes would leave nothing secure that was not protected by stout arms and keen swords, it was clear that the first duty of every man, whether as patriot or as Christian, was to fight "*pro aris et focis*," and stem the tide of invasion. It is also clear that the man who, under a strong sense of duty, withstands an invasion, must always be judged morally, on different principles from a man who makes fighting a profession, and binds himself to prosecute any war in which the crooked diplomacy of a statesman or the inflammatory

162 The Turn of the Tide

passions of his countrymen may happen to involve his country.

The other question, "Can a soldier be a Christian?" is really a more difficult one. The crux of the doubt has been stated by the historian of European Morals in the following way:—"War is not and never can be a mere passionless discharge of a painful duty. It is in its essence an attempt, and it is a main condition of its success, to kindle into fierce exercise among great masses of men the destructive and combative passions—passions as fierce and as malevolent as that with which the hound hunts the fox to its death, or the tiger springs upon its prey. Destruction is one of its chief ends. Deception is one of its chief means, and one of the great arts of skilful generalship is to deceive in order to destroy. Whatever other elements may mingle with and dignify war, this at least is never absent, and however reluctantly men may enter into war, however conscientiously they may endeavour to avoid it, they must know that when the scene of carnage has once opened, these things must not only be accepted and condoned, but stimulated, encouraged, and applauded. It would be difficult to conceive a disposition more remote from the morals of ordinary life, not to speak of Christian ideals, than that with which the soldiers most animated with the fire and

passion that lead to victory rush forward to bayonet the foe."¹ To state the question in such a way seems at once to put it beyond the sphere of argument and to make it clear that a soldier must surrender any idea of obedience to the spirit of Christ and give unfettered reign to the animal instincts of his nature. No better case than Alfred's can be quoted to show that this is not the only alternative which is offered to the Christian soldier.

The problem which Alfred faced and settled for himself might be stated thus: "Given a necessary war, what is the most Christian way of conducting it?" The answer which he gave to himself then is the one which the Christian man can still approve. He was bound first to secure the safety of his own kingdom and to defeat his enemy, but, having done that, to do nothing for revenge, to refuse to press the war to the bitter end, to deal with the enemy with the utmost clemency which was compatible with the security of his own kingdom and people. The only object for which a Christian leader will consent to wage war is to insure a durable peace; and he will not carry it on a day longer than the time when that end has become attainable by peaceful means, nor will he consent to the use of means in war which are likely to defer the peace which is his goal. The

¹ Mr Lecky, "The Map of Life," p. 87.

164 The Turn of the Tide

military genius is, at its best, a singular combination of daring and self-restraint. Its typical exploit and real test is not the bayonet charge in a blood fury against heavy odds, though that is no mean test of a nerve and courage, but the power to conceive the idea of a series of aggressive or defensive operations, to nurse it patiently, and work it out in detail, to adapt it to the actual facts, with their inevitable disappointments and disasters, and to carry it out successfully in spite of them all; to be able to wait through tedious delays, without losing nerve or courage or confidence, to show no irritation, and to allow no impatience to cause a hasty move, or give the enemy an advantage. A leader must save enough time from the encroachments of detail to make sure that he knows his own mind on the really important issues, to keep possession of himself, and yet he must give enough time to detail to ensure the adroit management of men and the skilful manipulation of his troops.

It is evident that for much of this work the discipline and habit of the Christian life is so good a preparation that it would be no paradox to say that a Christian man should make a better soldier than any other. The habit of constant action in obedience to an unexpressed principle, the attitude of faith which teaches a man to do all he can, and leave the issues with God, the self-restraint

and self-forgetfulness of the Christian temper, the tenacity which comes with the sense of being called to fulfil a Divine command, whatever may be the cost in humiliation and hardship: all these are the very stuff out of which the best soldiers are made. If to this is added freedom from vindictive temper, and readiness to look always to the interests of peace in the midst of war, we have a type of Christian soldier not less useful to his own country, and a great deal more profitable to humanity and the kingdom of God than the "unfettered animal."

No one can reconcile the fundamental contradiction between a profession which aims at destroying life, and the profession of a religion whose fundamental declaration is that God is glorified by giving peace among men. The natural work of the Christian life must always be the saving and building up of human life, and its instinctive method of destroying evil is by the creation of the good, but the value of the appeal to Alfred is that it helps to vindicate the truth that in the soldier's life where

"Men are tempted still
To evil as a guard against worse ill,"

there is room for a wide and real, though not the widest and most perfect, obedience to the spirit of Christ, and the cultivation of many of the finer products of Christian character.

Book 333

The Service of the People and
the Service of God

THEN he who shaped the world, God's Spirit Son
ennobled us, and granted gifts to us,
eternal homes, 'mid angels upon high,
and wisdom, too, of soul, full manifold
He sowed, and set within the minds of men.
To one he sendeth unto memory's seal,
through spirit of the mouth, wise eloquence,
and noble understanding : He can sing
and say full many a thing, within whose soul
is hidden wisdom's power. With fingers deft
'fore warrior bands one can awake the harp,
the minstrel's joy. One can interpret well
the law doom, and one the planet's course
and wide creation. One cunningly can write
the spoken word. To one he granteth skill,
when in the flight the archers swiftly send
the storm of darts, the wingèd javelin
over the shield's defence. Fearlessly another
can o'er the salt sea urge the ocean bark,
and stir the surging depth. One can ascend
the lofty tree and steep. One can fashion well
steeled sword and weapon. One knoweth the plain's direction,
the wide ways. Thus the ruler Child Divine
dispenseth unto us His gifts on earth ;
He will not give to any one man all
the spirits' wisdom, lest pride injure him
raised far above the rest by his sole might.

Cynewulf's "Christ." [Gollancz.]

Chapter I

The Sower

“ There is no greater service than that of the man who sows the seed of right ideas in the right places.”

“ The one security for personal fidelity and effective achievement lies in working from within : from the native love of order, beauty, right ; from faith in them as the mastering powers of the outer world ; from reverent allegiance to them, which makes acquiescence in their defeat impiety.”—*James Martineau.*

“ There is a path to success through the consciousness of weakness as there is a path to failure through the consciousness of strength.”—*The Note-Book.*

IT is convenient in looking for the outline of Alfred's life and work to disregard the strict chronological succession of events for some time after the Treaty of Wedmore. Alfred was engaged for some years in working out the purposes he had formed for the good of his people. His work was subject to occasional interruptions from the outside which may be conveniently grouped together later on, but it was, in the main, work within his own kingdom, the creation of order out of disorder, the constructive work of a statesman, and the instinctive following of impulses from within which

delighted in the creation of enlightenment, harmony, law, goodness, and godliness.

Before dealing with that work in detail it is worth while to attempt to come to close quarters with the remarkable personality which it reveals. In the measure in which that is done successfully Alfred leaves an impression as one of the rarest intellects and noblest personalities found anywhere in the front rank of historic characters. There is no need to introduce the legendary glories of later days to enhance our respect for him. There are enough facts recorded in that section of Asser's "Life of Alfred" which is contemporary with the events it describes, to enable us to form some conception of the singular combination of qualities which made a triumphant harmony in Alfred's life.

It is perhaps a kind of vanity to say that Alfred's mind was modern and scientific, in striking contrast to the mental atmosphere of his time. The terms will, however, serve to describe one of his distinguishing characteristics. The usual mediæval motive in education was, for instance, strictly ecclesiastical. Education was desired in order to maintain the supply of clergy, and it was not considered desirable to carry it further than was required for this purpose. Clerks were trained to chant and read select passages from the Latin

Bible, to calculate the return of **Easter**, and to copy and illuminate manuscripts.

Men like Biscop, Theodore, Bede, and Alcuin went further than this, and Bede, at least, had great natural originative capacity effectively disciplined. But even they do not seem to have dreamed of an attempt to educate men outside the Church on other than the traditional lines, or with any but the ecclesiastical motive. When young men of rank were educated at all their education had the hortatory bent which might be expected from its source. Here are a few illustrations from a catechism on natural science:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| <i>Q.</i> What is light? | <i>A.</i> The torch of all things. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is day? | <i>A.</i> The incitement to work. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is snow? | <i>A.</i> Dry water. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is spring? | <i>A.</i> The painter of the earth. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is the sea? | <i>A.</i> The path of the daring, the frontier of the land, the divider of continents, the hostelry of rivers, the foundation of rain, a refuge in peril, a treat in pleasure. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is the tongue? | <i>A.</i> The whip of the air. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is air? | <i>A.</i> The guardian of life. |
| <i>Q.</i> What is life? | <i>A.</i> The joy of the good, the sorrow of the evil, the expectation of death. ¹ |

It was possible with teaching of this kind to

¹ The disputation of Pippin, the most noble and royal youth, with Albinus the pedagogue. Quoted by Mombert : and Wells, p. 328, "Age of Charlemagne."

do a great deal of learning without getting much further. It was an education in words rather than in things. When we come to Alfred it is evident that a mind of a different quality is at work. He has the craving for facts which is characteristic of the scientific mind. He welcomes foreigners, Franks, Frisians, Gauls, pagans (*i.e.* Danes), Britons, Scots, and Armoricans, learned men like Grimbold the Frank, and John the Old-Saxon, Wulfstan the seafarer, and the Norwegian trader, hunter, and explorer Othere, in order that he may catechise them. "Like a most productive bee," Asser says, "he flew here and there, asking questions as he went, until he had eagerly and unceasingly collected many flowers of divine scripture, with which he thickly stored the cells of his mind." This was his method whatever the subject. When he sat at table he had some one to read to him. He made Werefrith, Bishop of Worcester, his chaplain and secretary, and, "after him Plegmund, a Mercian by birth, archbishop of the Church of Canterbury, a venerable man, and endowed with wisdom; Ethelstan also, and Werewulf, his priests and chaplains, Mercians by birth and erudite. These four had been invited out of Mercia by King Alfred, who exalted them with many honours. . . . By their teaching and wisdom the king's desires increased unceasingly, and were gratified. Night and day, whenever he

had leisure, he commanded such men as these to read books to him, for he never suffered himself to be without one of them, wherefore he possessed a knowledge of every book, though of *himself* he could not yet understand anything of books. He alone never ceased from studying most diligently to the best of his ability." Later on, his study was rewarded. Asser records how "the king by divine inspiration began on one and the same day to read and to interpret." This probably means that Asser suddenly discovered that the king could read and translate some part of a Latin author.

With the Saxon poems Alfred had been familiar from the first, and had probably, by this time, both read and written some of them.¹ He continued to love them and to commit them to memory. It is characteristic of his mental temperament that what he learned only made him want to know more, and to regret his own ignorance: "As if he had no consolation in all these things, and suffered no other annoyance either from within or without (yet he was harassed by daily and nightly afflictions), he complained to God, and to all who were admitted to his familiar love, that Almighty God had made him ignorant of divine wisdom, and of the liberal arts. But God, who is always the inspector of

¹ Cf. Metrical Introduction to the "Pastoral Care" (see p. 267); and the metrical version of "Boethius" (see p. 324).

the thoughts of the mind's action, and the instigator of all good intentions, and a most plentiful aider, that good desires may be formed—for he would not instigate a man to good intentions unless he also amply supplied that which the man justly and properly wishes to have—instigated the king's mind within; as it is written: 'I will hearken what the Lord God will say concerning me.' He would avail himself of every opportunity to procure coadjutors in his good designs, to aid him in his strivings after wisdom, that he might attain to what he aimed at; and, like a prudent bird which, rising in summer with the early morning from her beloved nest, steers her rapid flight through the uncertain tracts of air, and descends on the manifold and varied flowers of grasses, herbs, and shrubs, essaying that which pleases most; that she may bear it to her home, so did he direct his eyes afar, and seek without that which he had not within his kingdom."

It is necessary to keep in mind the king's personal habits and his own practice, in order to understand his motive in the large educational schemes which he promoted for the good of his people. It is the religious as distinguished from the ecclesiastical motive. He does not aim either at diffusing knowledge, or limiting it, in order to meet the immediate requirements of a church or a

body of clergy: that is the method and measure of education which becomes the cloak of obscurantism in all ages. He aims at letting light and order and wisdom into men's minds, because an illuminated and informed manhood is more to the glory of God than an ignorant manhood; and God is better served by an intelligent than a mechanical obedience. He has originality and vigour enough to break with the traditional method of making Latin the medium of education. He recognised that if the light was to get in, it must choose the easiest way. He was the first to issue translations of Latin books in English for popular use. The books which he chose are remarkable, and show how carefully he could fit means to ends.¹ The four classics which he caused to be translated for his people cover four abiding interests of his own mind, and give the outline of what he considered it necessary for an intelligent man to know. Bede's history was the finest product of the old Northumbrian culture, a genuine historical classic. Gregory's "Pastoral Care" made a handy book of morals for all who had to do with the Church. "Boethius" was the most popular philosophical classic of mediæval times, and Alfred made it a book of practical Christian philosophy, and general commentary on life. "Orosius" was the nearest available approach to a standard work on natural science, a

¹ See the chapter on "The King as Bookman."

rudimentary world-history, geography, and physiography. It was a remarkable achievement to have brought these within reach of men who could not read Latin. It is no matter whether they were much or little read. No doubt Alfred was more than a generation ahead of his people, and the soil on which his seed fell was hard trodden by alien feet, and stony at the best; but *the seed was sown*, and in due course would leave other seed to bear a better harvest.

Alfred's piety was as instinctive, natural, and genuine as each of his other interests. He was severe with himself, after the manner of the ascetic discipline of his time, and strenuously devout in the discharge of the conventional religious duties. His piety flowed in the channels cut for it by the Christian tradition of his age, but it also overflowed and made fresh courses for itself. "He attended the mass and other daily services of religion; he was frequent in psalm-singing and prayer, at the hours both of the day and night. He also went to the churches in the night-time to pray, secretly, and unknown to his courtiers; he bestowed alms and largesses on both natives and foreigners of all countries."

Anglo-Saxon religion was as yet in a pre-theological stage. We find no trace in Alfred's life of the theological interests in which Charles

the Great and Charles the Bald had a considerable share. So far as one can judge by the hymns of the period, the prominent elements in the religious character were a deep, reverential feeling towards the facts of external nature. Morning and evening, summer and winter, were great natural sacraments, bringing men continually into the presence of the Unseen whose works they were.

Ecce jam noctis tenuatur umbra,
 Lucis aurora rutilans coruscat
 Nisibus totis rogemus omnes
 Cunctipotentem
 Ut Deus nostri miseratus omnem,
 Pellat languorem tribuat salutem
 Donet et patris pietate nobis
 Regna polorum.
 Praestet hoc nobis.

Translation.

Lo, now the shades of night grow rare,
 The orb of day brightening shoots out its rays,
 With all our strength let us unite to ask
 The All-Ruler
 That God in his mercy may dispel our weariness,
 May grant us health,
 And in the Father's goodness may give to us
 The kingdom of heaven.
 May he perform our prayer.

This was, of course, a hymn for matins. The hymns for prime, terce, sext, none, compline, and vespers were often of the same kind; many of them are strictly practical, and resolve themselves into prayers

for chastity, self-restraint, and power to control the animal instincts. The Incarnation is hardly conceived as a spiritual fact at all, and belief in it is sometimes expressed in a gross fashion, which sounds to modern ears materialistic. Very little is said anywhere about the sayings or doings of Jesus Christ on earth, the emphasis falls on the nativity, crucifixion, ascension, and future judgment of the world by *God's Spirit Son*.¹ Many of the Saxon hymns express a child-like delight in miracles wrought by the saints. The child's love of the marvellous, the Teutonic reverence for the mysteries of nature, the Church's reverence for authority and tradition, the simple mediæval philosophy which explains the unusual by the supernatural—all combine to give a setting of miracle and fable to the facts and faith which then, as now, determined the essential character of the Christian life. Here, for instance, is a hymn to St Cuthbert, which although it originated in the North found its way into a Saxon hymnary, perhaps through the influence of Alfred himself, as St Cuthbert was his peculiar patron.

Great soldier, wonder-worker,
Radiant with many merits,
Cuthbert with his Lord
Rejoices in endless reward.

¹ Cf. Cynewulf's "Christ." The poem has some passages of rare beauty and strength.

Dreading the fires of the flesh
He trusted God heartily,
Despising all things mortal
For the service of love.

The bidding of the will of God
Gladly, laboriously, he fulfilled ;
Generous, willing, loving the light,
He was praised according to his merit.

He made the waters to flow
Of a spring, for a sign for ever
Where no traces of even a dribblet
Ever were seen.

He loosed a tongue long bound
From its wonted chains,
He made a harvest spring
Quick from a rocky soil.

We pray his help for ever
That we may be worthy to tell
Joyfully and for ever,
Glory to the Father uncreate,
Glory to the Son only-begotten,
One with the Holy Spirit,
For ever and for ever.

Minds less vigorous, and with less grip than Alfred's, may have stopped at the framework of miracle and marvel in which religion came to them, and perhaps never got any further. In Alfred's case there is unmistakable evidence, as we shall see, that he was not only a pious man in the conventional sense of the term, but that there was in him that

specific kind of goodness which can be recognised anywhere as the stamp of the over-mastering and transcendent personality of Christ on a man's life. He illustrates that deep and enduring transformation of character by which certain broad lines and characteristic features of the life of Jesus of Nazareth are reproduced in men who have received into open, sensitive, and receptive natures the full impression which that personality is capable of making. His religion became not only an efficient cause of action, but actually a formative, creative, determining, and controlling influence over a great part of his life.

Asser tells an interesting story, which shows the interaction of his religion and his native ingenuity and intelligence. "The king remembered that sentence of divine scripture, 'Whosoever will give alms, ought to begin from himself'" [Asser, of course, does not give his reference], "and prudently began to reflect what he could offer to God from the service of his body and mind. . . . He promised, therefore, as far as his infirmity and means would allow, to give up to God the half of his services, bodily and mental, by night and by day, voluntarily and with all his might; but inasmuch as he could not equally distinguish the length of the hours by night on account of the darkness, and oftentimes of the day, on account of the storms and clouds, he began to consider by what means and without any

obstruction, relying on the mercy of God, he might discharge the promised tenor of his vow until his death.

“After long reflection on these things, he at length by a useful and shrewd invention, commanded his chaplains to supply wax in a sufficient quantity, and he caused it to be weighed in such a manner that when there was so much of it in the scales as would equal the weight of 72 pence, he caused the chaplains to make six candles thereof, each of equal length, so that each candle might have twelve divisions marked lengthwise upon it. By this plan, therefore, those six candles burned for twenty-four hours, a night and a day, without fail, before the sacred relics of many of God’s elect which always accompanied him wherever he went. But sometimes they would not continue burning a whole day and night till the same hour when they were lighted on the preceding evening, owing to the violence of the wind, which blew day and night, without intermission, through the doors and windows of the churches, the fissures of the divisions, the plankings or the wall, or the thin canvas of the tents; they then unavoidably burned out, and finished their course before the appointed time. The king therefore considered by what means he might shut out the wind, and so, by a useful and cunning invention, he ordered a lantern to be beauti-

fully constructed of wood and white ox-horn, which, when skilfully planed till it is thin, is no less transparent than a vessel of glass. This lantern, then, was wonderfully made of wood and horn, as we before said, and by night a candle was put into it, which shone as brightly without as within, and was not extinguished by the wind ; for the opening of the lantern was also closed up, according to the king's command, by a door made of horn. By this contrivance, then, six candles lighted in succession lasted four-and-twenty hours, neither more than nor less, and when these were extinguished others were lighted."

As a strong personality sets its stamp on small achievements as well as great, a story of this kind throws a good deal of light on the character of the king. In him most diverse qualities are somehow combined, and contrive to stimulate one another. He has the poetic, imaginative, creative gifts, and yet he is strictly methodical. He has the scientific and mechanical bent, and it is united with a simple, unquestioning piety. He carves out of busy days time to live the contemplative life, and the time given to contemplation makes him not less but more efficiently active. He has the temper of a philosopher and the heart of a child, reverent towards tradition, but open-minded and receptive towards new truths. And all his qualities are pervaded with

the flavour of a consecrated personality—a will, a life, a self, humbly and reverently offered to God. These various elements are kept in unison by a strong co-ordinating faculty. It would have been impossible for the king to follow his bent, and to give tangible expression to so many of the inward impulses and motives which he found in himself had he not had, in a very remarkable degree, the instinct which creates order, the organising, methodical mind. The value of method to a man of many interests is that it liberates him from the friction and waste of time caused by disorganisation. He will create no organisation for its own sake, and he will attempt nothing, not even the practice of private devotion, without organising it to fit in with other claims on his time.

It was natural that, with this temperament, Alfred should attempt to express his habits of mind and thought in his work as chief public minister of his people. Asser's account of how he tried to make his administration an expression of the consecrated purpose and order in his own mind is most illuminative. "The king began, as was his practice, to consider within himself what more he could do to augment and show forth his piety; what he had begun wisely, and thoughtfully conceived for the public benefit, was adhered to with equally beneficial result. . . . Encouraged by this example, and wish-

ing to exceed the practice of his predecessors, he vowed humbly and faithfully to devote to God half his services, both day and night, and also half of all his wealth such as lawfully and justly came annually into his possession, and these vows, as far as human discretion can perceive and keep, he skilfully and wisely endeavoured to fulfil. But that he might, with his usual caution, avoid that which Scripture warns us against, 'If you offer aright, but do not divide aright, you sin' [In Asser's quotations from Scripture, the substance is generally right, though the words are amiss.], he considered how he might divide aright that which he had vowed to God; and—as Solomon had said, 'The heart of the king is in the hand of God'—his counsel he ordered with wise policy, which could come only from above, that *his officers should first divide into two parts the revenues of every year.*

"When this division was made, he assigned the first part to worldly use, and ordered that one-third of it should be paid to his soldiers, and also to his ministers, the nobles who dwelt at court, where they discharged divers duties; for so the king's family was arranged at all times into three classes." This division might be described more clearly. The classes at the king's court are (1) The king's body-guard, divided into veterans and juniors, and including hostages and guests, who served and were treated

as guards ; (2) clerks and ministers, or civil servants, including the bishops of neighbouring districts ; (3) men of noble birth holding office about the person of the king : these are to be distinguished from servants, who were often slaves or the sons of bondmen. Those whom Asser mentions later as foreigners lived also at the king's court : they were visitors from other lands for a short time, not regular guests, and often clerics or princes.

Asser is almost too mathematical to be correct in what follows, but it is clear that he means his remark to include all three classes of the court. "The king's attendants were most wisely distributed into three companies, so that the first company should be on duty at court for one month, night and day, at the end of which they returned to their homes, and were relieved by the second company. At the end of the second month, in the same way, the third company relieved the second, who returned to their homes, where they spent two months, until their services were again wanted. The third company also gave place to the first in the same way, and also spent two months at home. Thus was the threefold division of the companies arranged at all times in the royal household." We may ask whether it is Asser, or was it Alfred, who is here assimilating the practice of the English court to that of King Solomon? of whom it

is written, "And King Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel. . . . And he sent them to Lebanon, ten thousand a month by courses: a month they were in Lebanon, and two months at home."¹

"To these, therefore, was paid the first of the three portions aforesaid, to each according to their respective dignities and peculiar services; the second to the operatives whom he had collected from every nation, and had about him in large numbers, men skilled in every kind of construction. The third portion was assigned to foreigners who came to him out of every nation far and near, whether they asked money of him or not. He cheerfully gave to each with wonderful munificence, according to their respective merits, according to what is written: 'God loveth a cheerful giver.'" In its main outlines Asser's account is probably true. But it is not likely that Alfred regularly gave away to foreigners as much as he spent on his own retainers, his primitive civil service, and his court. Justice cannot ignore the proportion of claims any more than their existence, and justice with Alfred certainly began at home. Asser's statement may mean that these were the three recognised departments of expenditure, or first charges on the king's income, and that the first half of the royal income with which he

¹ 1 Kings v. 14.

is alone dealing here, was divided in regular but not equal portions between these objects.

“But the second part of all his revenues, which came yearly into his possession and was included in the receipts of the exchequer, as we mentioned a little before, he with ready devotion gave to God, ordering his ministers to divide it carefully into four parts, on the condition that the first part should be discreetly bestowed on the poor of every nation who came to him; and on this subject he said that, as far as human discretion could guarantee, the remark of Pope St Gregory should be followed, ‘Give not much to whom you should give little, nor little to whom much, nor something to whom nothing, nor nothing to whom something.’

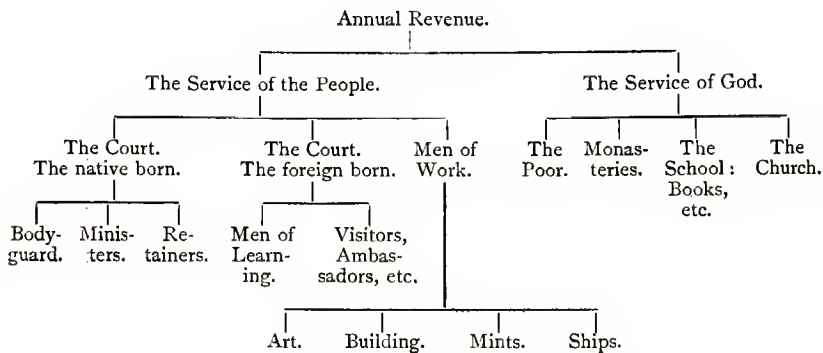
“The second of the four portions was given to the two monasteries which he had built, and to those who therein had dedicated themselves to God’s service, as we have mentioned before.

“The third portion was assigned to the school which he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation.

“The fourth portion was for the use of all the neighbouring monasteries in all Saxony (Wessex) and Mercia, and also during some years, in turn, to the churches and servants of God dwelling in Britain (*i.e.* Wales), Cornwall, Gaul, Armorica, Northumbria, and sometimes also in Ireland. Ac-

ording to his means, he either distributed to them beforehand, or afterwards, if life and success should not fail him."

Even if the working out of this scheme was not quite so methodical as Asser makes it on paper, it is important as an index of Alfred's aims and his many-sided view of the duties of a king. His plan might be illustrated by a diagram thus :



Such a scheme of expenditure is in itself a crown of honour which few men have woven for their memories. The best comment on its significance is a passage which may be quoted from Sir Henry Taylor. "So manifold are the bearings of money upon the lives and characters of mankind, that an insight which should search out the life of a man in his pecuniary relations would penetrate into almost every cranny of his nature. He who knows,



COUNT GLEICHEN'S STATUE : WANTAGE

[*T. Kewley*]

Inscribed thus :

Alfred found learning dead
And he restored it.
Education neglected
And he revived it.
The laws powerless
And he gave them force.

The Church debased
And he raised it.
The land ravaged by a fearful enemy
From which he delivered it.

like St Paul, how to spare and how to abound has a great knowledge; for if we take account of all the virtues with which money is mixed up—honesty, justice, generosity, charity, frugality, forethought, self-sacrifice—and of their correlative vices, it is a knowledge which goes near to cover the length and breadth of humanity, and a right measure in getting, saving, spending, giving, taking, lending, borrowing, and bequeathing would almost argue a perfect man.”¹

The quotation would not be as true of eastern as of western nations; but for England it comes so near to an acknowledged truth that we shall feel that we are not following any accidental order, but a most fit and natural one, if we accept Alfred's division of his revenues as our guide in following him through his manifold activities and reforms. Without being at least methodical enough to follow the king's own methods, we should inevitably lose our way among the many good works to which he put his hand.

¹ Sir Henry Taylor's "Notes on Life," quoted by Lecky in "Map of Life," p. 250.

Chapter II

Men of War

“ Keep ye the Law—be swift in all obedience—
Clear the land of evil, drive the road and bridge the ford.
Make ye sure to each his own
That he reap where he hath sown ;
By the peace among our peoples let men know we serve the Lord !”
Rudyard Kipling.

“ Ah God, for a man with heart, head, hand,
Like some of the simple great ones gone
For ever and ever by,
One still strong man in a blatant land
Whatever they call him, what care I,
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat—one
Who can rule and dare not lie.”—*Tennyson.*

“ A king’s raw material and instruments of rule are a well peopled land, and he must have men of prayer, men of war, and men of work.”
Alfred.

WHERE the reins of government are in the hands of a strong man with whom rests both originative and controlling power, the theory of government is apt to be instinctively assimilated to the facts. A strong king makes a predominant kingship, and leaves his office to his successor with many powers and dignities which it had not when he received it. Whatever aggrandises the kingship increases

the popular estimation and real importance of the officers employed about the royal person. Both of these processes may be traced during Alfred's reign. In the relation which personal service in the field bore to land tenure, in the sphere of justice, and in administration there were far-reaching changes which gave the king an authority which had not belonged to any of his predecessors. Parallel with this went an increase in the importance in the national life of the king's *hird* or household. More of the nation's work was done by men who were sent direct from the king, or who received their authority from him; and, as always, the men who did the work came to have the predominant authority among the people. Relationships between the king and his retainers which had been personal and variable came to be territorial and permanent. Land which had been peoples' land came to be regarded as the king's own, because only by using the public lands could men be rewarded who had rendered public service in the field or at court. The folk peace came to be the king's peace. A national and permanent war organisation had to be grafted on to a local and temporary one. Incipient changes in these directions may be traced much earlier than Alfred's reign; but all tendencies towards the centralisation of power were inevitably accelerated by the long

years of war, and the equally anxious periods of preparation for it. War always strengthens the executive and centralising, and weakens the deliberative and centrifugal forces in government.

The exact steps by which the changes were made may be partly gathered from available evidence, and partly conjectured by analogy; but it is impossible to make positive assertions as to date, origin, or authorship: "There are no constitutional revolutions, no violent reversals of legislation; custom is far more potent than law, and custom is modified infinitesimally every day. The alteration of law is often the mere registration of a custom, when men have recognised its altered character."¹ In the eyes of Alfred's contemporaries an acknowledged innovation would have seemed almost an impiety, so that it is not surprising that we learn of some of Alfred's most important modifications of the old Saxon system more by casual references made by Asser or the writer responsible for the *English Chronicle*² indicating that the change has taken place, rather than by any deliberate information as to the time and manner of its introduction.

If, while Alfred's vigorous personal share in these

¹ Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 184.

² *E.g.* *English Chronicle*, 894. The important change, or, rather, return to old practice, which divided the militia.

developments is singled out for emphasis, the co-operating factors are also kept in mind, such as the forces making for development in the traditional system, and the pressure of a long and exhausting war, something like a true conception of the course of events may be formed. Few things are more important for English constitutional history, and certainly few are more fascinating and interesting than to watch the growth of the great military, judicial, and administrative services out of what Asser calls the king's "family."

The germ, or, using a complementary metaphor, the material with which Alfred had to work, was the company of *gesiths*, men attached by special and personal ties to the king. Its origin is summarised by Bishop Stubbs :

"In Tacitus the *comites* [retainers or companions] are the personal following of the *princeps* [elected folk-king]. They live in his house, are maintained by his gifts, fight for him in the field. If there is little difference between companions and servants, it is because civilisation has not yet introduced voluntary helplessness. The difference between the companions of the folk-king and the household of the private man depends fundamentally only on the public and political position of the master. Now [*i.e.* at the later time of Alfred] the king, the perpetual *princeps* and representative of the race,

conveys to his personal following public dignity and importance. His *gesiths* and *thegns* [service men and war men] are among the great and wise of the land. The right of having such dependants is not restricted to him, but the *gesith* of ealdorman or bishop is simply a retainer, a pupil or ward: the free household servants of the *ceorl* are in a certain sense his *gesiths* also. But the *gesiths* of the king are his guard and private council; they may be endowed by him with land, . . . and admitted by him to the *Witenagemot* [national council]. They supply him with an armed force, not only one on which he can rely, but the only one directly amenable to his orders; for to summon the *fyrð* he must have the consent of the *Witan*. . . . The *gesiths* are attached to the king by oath as well as by gratitude for substantial favours.”¹

It was from this group of companion-attendants, possessing what Mr Herbert Spencer would describe as “indefinite incoherent homogeneity,” the same men being held available for all sorts of purposes, that Alfred was to develop and differentiate definite organs to perform the functions of government. Asser’s words already quoted indicate the broad lines of a triple division of the *hird* or royal household into soldiers, ministers, and nobles.

¹ Stubbs, “Constitutional History,” pp. 166-167.

On the first fell the burden of organising the military service, on the second the civil and judicial, on the third the court service. The "soldiers" are thegns, who owe him personal military service. The ministers are probably commissioners, whom the king trains and employs to visit local folk-moots (county sessions) for the administration of justice, and clerics, favourite bishops or monks, whom he employs as secretaries. The phrase, "the nobles who dwelt at court, where they discharged divers duties," points to the pecuniary recognition of some of the great officers who became the political leaders of the nation in later times, such as the Horse-Thegn¹ or Constable, the Cup-Thegn or Butler, and the Horder or Treasurer.

In each of these departments, and especially in the first two, Alfred's reign saw great and far-reaching developments, carried out, as we can see, at no small cost of personal energy to the king. "For all his bishops, earls, nobles, favourite ministers, and praefects [reeves, who afterwards became the shire-reeves or sheriffs] who, next to God and the king, had the whole government of the kingdom, as is fitting, continually received from him instruction, respect, exhortation, and command. Nay, at last, when they were disobedient, and his long patience

¹ English Chronicle, 897. Eadulf was King's Horse-Thegn. For instances of the other two offices Green quotes "Cod. Dip." 320, and "Aelfric Thesaurus," *id.*

was exhausted, he would reprove them severely, and censure freely their vulgar folly and obstinacy; and in this way he directed their attention to the common interests of the kingdom."

The reform which the war with the Danes made most imperative was the creation of a "new model" army which could meet the invaders on equal terms in the field. To do this, it must have three qualifications. It must be at least as well armed and horsed as the Danes. It must be able to mobilise at once, without waiting for the calling of the Witenagemot [wise men's meeting] or the folk-moot: and it must be able to keep the field as long as the exigencies of the campaign demanded, instead of melting away at the end of two months, as the *fyrd* was apt to do.

The customs which regulated the operations of the *fyrd* or *landwehr* had been formed when the only wars were brief and local, growing out of the quarrels of one folk with another. The men who formed it were still chiefly armed with stone axes, and probably often with spears with stone or bone heads. The Danes, on the other hand, carried brazen or steel-headed spears, broad double-bladed swords of bronze or steel, and their better men were protected by coats of mail, wooden shields, and helmets of leather with metal bands. On a campaign they were a standing army, with nothing to distract their attention from the end in view—

the successful termination of the campaign. It is easy to see that customs formed for inter-folk wars were of little use for this more serious and professional warfare. As the custom could not be radically and rapidly changed, it was necessary to devise a new instrument to meet the new need.

The new instrument was supplied by a large and rapid extension of the class of *thegns*.

Not even the patient investigations of Bishop Stubbs have succeeded in clearing up the perplexing mists of uncertainty which have gathered about the origin, duties, and varieties of thegnship. But certain features of the great social change made by the creation of a large class of thegns are sufficiently ascertained to enable us to see their character and effect.

1. A relationship which had been originally a personal one between the king and his retainers,¹ and therefore confined to such a number as the king could support out of his own domain, becomes a territorial relationship binding holders of a certain amount of land (five hides) to render military service to the king.

2. This change was closely connected with the increased expense of military service consequent upon the more elaborate armour required. It was impossible for the king to equip and maintain at his

¹ Thegns sometimes describe themselves as *ministri*.

own cost sufficient men for the new demands; the only alternative was to throw the cost of equipment and maintenance on the thegn himself, and to proportion the services required to the land held. Custom had regarded one hide of land as sufficient to support one man under the old arrangement. Five hides were now regarded as the amount required to support one fully-equipped thegn. The service of such men was personal, at their own cost of equipment, and at their own expense during the campaign.

3. In its origin thegnship, like royalty, went in families; but with the adoption of a land standard the tendency to form a caste of thegns broke down. "If a ceorl throve, so that he had fully five hides of his own land, church and kitchen, bell-house, and burh-geat [a manorial burh with or without jurisdiction], seat and special duty in the king's hall, then was he thenceforth of thegn-right worthy.¹ And if a merchant throve, so that he fared thrice over the wide sea by his own means, then was he thenceforth of thegn-right worthy." It was thus possible for any man who throve, either in the royal service or by sheer industry and enterprise, to rise into the rank of thegns. This was as good for the king

¹ Æthelstan's Laws, Stubbs' "Charters," p. 65. See, for special study of this passage, *Eng. Hist. Review*, 1897, article by W. H. Stevenson.

as it was for his people. It gave Alfred, instead of a body of household retainers, divided into seniors and juniors, and entirely dependent on him, an ever - extending force of substantial men living on their own resources, but equally bound by personal ties to the king.

Any one who can compare the history of England with that of any other country in Western Europe, will see at a glance the vast importance of this simple piece of legislation. Whoever was responsible for it — and Bishop Stubbs thinks that Alfred and his son Edward must have this credit,¹ — did something to fix the distinctive characteristics of English social life. To substitute a nobility of service for a blood nobility; to have many social grades shading by hardly perceptible stages into one another,² to connect wealth with definite public obligation, and the discharge of public obligations with popular esteem,

¹ "It is by no means improbable that the final binding of land-ownership with military attendance on the king in the form of the thegn's service is connected with the legislation of Alfred and Edward. To their date approximately belongs the definition of the Thegn as possessing five hides of land," etc.—Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 210.

² "The alodial ceorl, or landed freeman by birth, who for security has commended himself to the king and bears an honorary office at court, the official Ealdorman who owes his place to royal favour earned in the humbler status of a dependant, the mere courtier who occupies the place of the ancient gesith, the ceorl who has thriven to thegn-right, the landowner of five hides or more, and the smaller landowner who has his own place in the shire-moot, all stand on different steps of dignity." —Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 175.

are among the best guarantees of health in the body politic.

In the ealdorman or eorl ennobled for service or inheriting rank as a representative of the line of one of the folk-kings we can recognise the predecessor of the modern earl. The king's thegn corresponds broadly to the later baron or lord. And even then there were the beginnings of a commercial nobility in the merchants who throve "so that they fared thrice over the sea." The medial thegn, who comes next to the king's thegn, is the prototype of the country knight, and the poorer among the men of this class combine with thriving men of a lower class to make up the large classes of country gentlemen and sturdy yeomen which together make the backbone of English social life for many generations. It is well to remember that these ranks stood originally for definite public service rendered to the community, and that for generations public service was—except occasionally in the Church—almost exclusively connected with the possession of land. It is true that the ranks have long survived the circumstances of their origin and use, and that the sentiments about them have long survived their legitimate justification, but they make an interesting palimpsest in which we can read our history.¹

¹ When a cynical critic remarks that the only three things for which

The other great military reform which belongs to this time was the organisation of the *fyrð*. It was a reform quite independent of the *hird*, but takes a place naturally beside the measures for extending thegnship. It is possible that in both reforms we ought to recognise the influence of Carolingian military organisation. The author of the entry under 894 A.D. in the English Chronicle stops in the midst of his narrative of the exciting events of that year to say: "The king had divided his forces into two, so that one half was constantly at home, the other half in the field; besides those men whose duty it was to defend the towns." This seems to point to a very creditable attempt to organise the *fyrð* into an effective force. The oldest and the youngest men were probably told off to act as a guard for the walled and protected burghs, as in almost all Teutonic warfare down to the recent events in the Transvaal. To each stronghold a certain number of hides of land surrounding it was allotted. The fort looked to the dwellers on those hides for maintenance, and

an Englishman really cares, are "money, rank, and the Church of England," his indictment points, not to an original vice of nature, but to a survival of sentiments which, like some of the bones and muscles in the human body, were once required but are now useless and cumbrous: the survivals point to conditions of life when the relation of men to these three standards supplied a fairly reliable estimate of the worth of a man to his generation.

they looked to it for defence.¹ The more active and mobile were then divided into two portions, each relieving the other in the field at the end of the traditional two months' service. This had the great merit of making some portion of the *fyrd* always available for active service, a great improvement on the system which gave a leader the whole force of the folk for two months and then no army at all except his own immediate bodyguard.

As one reform in organisation inevitably leads to another, it is probable that Alfred's military reforms led to a re-grouping of the hundreds into which England is still divided. This is strictly an inference rather than an ascertained fact, and Alfred's share in this matter rests only on a balance of probabilities. William of Malmesbury says that Alfred "instituted centuries which they call hundreds, and decennaries—that is to say, tythings, so that every Englishman living according to law must be a member of both."² But his Chronicle belongs to the time when there would have seemed nothing extravagant in crediting Alfred with the authorship of the English constitution. The exact nature of the facts from which the inference is drawn is made clear by Bishop Stubbs' masterly summary: "The hundred which [like the Wapentake] first

¹ Cf. Oman. "King Alfred as Warrior." Bowker, p. 142.

² William of Malmesbury, p. 117, Bohn's edition.

appears in the laws of Edgar as the name of an English institution, has its origin far back in the remotest German antiquity, but the use of it as a geographical expression is discoverable only in comparatively late evidences. . . . The territorial hundred has been regarded as denoting simply a division of a hundred hides of land ; as the district which furnished a hundred warriors to the host ; as representing the original settlement of the hundred warriors ; or as composed of a hundred hides each of which furnished a single warrior." None of these theories exactly fits the facts as we find them in England. The variety in size and distribution of the hundreds is so great that it is impossible to make them coincide with any strictly numerical partition either of land or folk. "There are at the present day in England proper about 729 of these divisions, known as hundreds, wapentakes, and wards. Of these 88 are included in the eight counties which constituted the old division known as the Mercian Law, 241 in the fifteen counties of the Dane Law, 30 in the districts not included in this arrangement, and *not less than 370 in the counties of the West Saxon Law. The sea coast counties* are minutely divided ; the closeness of organisation diminishes as we proceed inland, or go northwards ; the hundreds become thinner and larger and the name itself disappears, super-

seded by the wapentake and the ward. Now the West Saxon shires appear in history under their permanent names and with a shire organisation much earlier than those of Mercia and Northumbria ; whilst Kent, Essex, and East England had throughout an organisation derived from their old status as kingdoms. It is in Wessex, further, that the hundredal division is, as we have seen, supplemented by that of the tithings [*i.e.* a sub-division of the hundred, probably the sphere of jurisdiction of the tithingman]. It may then be argued that the whole hundredal system radiates from the West Saxon kingdom, and that the variations mark the gradual extension of that power as it won its way to supremacy under Ecgberht and Æthelwulf, or recovered territory from the Danes under Alfred and Edward, Athelstan, Edmund, Edred, and Edgar. If this be allowed, the claims of Alfred, as founder not of the hundred law, but of the hundredal division, may rest on something firmer than legend. As the national power extended northwards the recovered territory was consolidated into shires and hundreds, the latter becoming larger as the distance from the coast increased, and as the larger and more ancient sub-divisions adhered to their old associations."

The evidence is strong enough to bear the inference that Alfred initiated some important changes in the constitution of the hundred, but not to show

what the exact nature of the change was. The large number of hundreds in the coast districts may point to some secondary connection with Alfred's schemes of national defence. But its main significance, as Alfred left it, was that it is a judicial sub-division of the shire. Although the hundred had had a military significance in its origin, it became chiefly an organisation for judicial and police purposes. A hundred was a district in which there was a hundred court. If it was regarded as a privilege to have a hundred court in the immediate neighbourhood, as to-day it is an object of ambition in rising towns to have a "borough bench," Alfred may have granted the right to establish a court in return for definite defensive obligations undertaken by the district. In the time of Edgar one ship was due from every three hundreds, and this may have been a development from the earlier obligation. In Alfred's time it may have had to do with the building of forts, or the upkeep and guarding of forts already erected. A document which gives details of the "Burgal Hidage," or the list of hides of land dependent on the burhs of Wessex, indicates that some arrangement of this kind was made. The large number of hundreds in Wessex is in any case a testimony to the "greater local activity and to the sense of administrative order which led

Wessex to her final supremacy." When Alfred came to be King of Mercia as well as Wessex, and began to press the Danes backwards, he probably re-grouped the hundreds of the West and South-West Midlands into new groups, forming his new shires, and giving each group its fortress. To these new shires he appointed new aldermen, keeping the old tribal aldermen, who represented the old royal families of the various folk, wherever that was possible. The success of the administrative and defensive organisation in the victorious kingdom would account for its imitation and adaptation throughout England at a later time; and it is probable that the extension of the system throughout England was made easier by the existence of a judicial institution among the Danes analogous to the hundred.¹

¹ An article entitled the "Hidation of some Southern Counties" in the *Eng. Hist. Review*, 1899, by F. Baring, suggests a different explanation of the inequalities of the hundred.

Chapter III

Peacemakers

“ It is God’s highest glory to give peace among men,
Man’s surest path of peace to glorify God.”—*The Note-Book.*

“ A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment,
Winnoweth away all evil with his eyes :
To do justice and judgment
Is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.”
The Proverbs of Solomon.

“ Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people
able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating unjust gain ;
and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, rulers of
hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens :
and let them judge the people at all seasons :
and it shall be that every great matter they shall bring unto thee,
but every small matter they shall judge themselves :
so shall it be easier for thyself, and they
shall bear the burden with thee.

If thou shalt do this thing and God
command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this
people also shall go to their place in peace.”—*Book of Exodus.*

ALFRED’S reign, and that of his son, exhibit traces
of a remarkable evolution in judicial organisation
and ideas. Evolution is an oily word, and the
ease with which it slips from the tongue or the
pen helps to prevent the effort to realise how much
in the way of toil, disappointment, energy, deter-

mination, what anxieties, irritations, misunderstandings, fears, hopes, doubtings, aspirations, defeats, victories, how much honest hard work and sweat of hand and brow, are involved in the achievement of even one stage in the evolution of a single national institution. "Hardship and sorrow," Alfred breaks out, "not a king but would wish to be without these if he could. But I know that he cannot."

Asser gives a glimpse of the human side of this evolution, which enables us to see something of the effort involved in the attempt to establish an efficient system of justice. The worth of the work Alfred did will perhaps be best understood if we consider first Asser's account of what it cost the king and his servants. Asser has done good service by preserving some of these details as they appeared to him. It is such facts as he preserves which give blood and muscle to the skeleton of constitutional history, and make it a living thing.

"The king, eager to give up to God the half of his daily service, as he had vowed, and more also, if his ability on the one hand, and his malady on the other, would allow him, showed himself a minute investigator of the truth in all his judgments, and this especially for the sake of the poor, to whose interest, day and night, among other duties of this life, he ever was wonderfully attentive. For

in the whole kingdom the poor, besides him, had few or no protectors; for all the powerful and noble of that country had turned their thoughts rather to secular than to heavenly things: each was more bent on secular matters to his own profit, than on the public good. [Note that when this king devotes his time to the service of God, he affords justice to the poor.]

“He strove also in his own judgments for the benefit of both the noble and the ignoble, who were constantly at obstinate variance with one another in the folk-moots before ealdorman and reeve, so that hardly any one of them would grant that to be true doom that had been judged for doom by the ealdormen and reeves. [Note the exact difficulty; the local courts could not enforce submission or ensure acceptance of their verdicts on those who applied to them, especially when the dispute lay between noble and ceorl. The king’s problem was how to make one justice for rich and poor alike.]

“And in consequence of this pertinacious and obstinate dissension, all desired to have the judgment of the king, and both sides sought at once to gratify their desire. But if any one was conscious of injustice on his side in the suit, though by law and agreement he was compelled, however reluctantly, to go before the king, yet with his own good-will he never would consent to go. For he

knew that in the king's presence no part of his wrong would be hidden; and no wonder, for the king was a most acute investigator in passing sentence, as he was in all other things. He inquired into almost all the judgments which were given in his own absence, whether they were just or unjust, throughout all his dominion. If he perceived that there was iniquity in those judgments he summoned the judges, either through his own agency or through others of his faithful servants, and asked them mildly why they had judged so unjustly, whether through ignorance or malevolence—that is, whether for the love or fear of anyone, or hatred of others, or also for the desire of money.

“At length, if the judges acknowledged that they had given judgment because they knew no better, he discreetly and moderately reprovèd their inexperience and folly in such terms as these: ‘I wonder truly at your insolence, that, whereas, *by gift from God and from me*, you occupy your office and rank [note that the king claims as an acknowledged right that he is the temporal fountain of justice], you have occupied the rank and office of the wise, yet you have neglected the studies and labours of the wise. Either, therefore, at once give up the discharge of the temporal duties which you hold, or endeavour more zealously to study the lessons of wisdom. Such are my commands.’

“ At these words the ealdormen and reeves would tremble, and endeavour to turn all their thoughts to the study of justice, so that, wonderful to say, almost all his ealdormen, reeves, and officers, though unlearned from their cradles, were sedulously bent upon acquiring learning, choosing rather laboriously to acquire the knowledge of a new discipline than to resign their functions.

“ But if any one of them, from old age or slowness of talent, was unable to make progress in liberal studies, he commanded his son, if he had one, or one of his kinsmen, or if there was no other person to be had, his own freedman or servant, whom he had some time before advanced to the office of reading [Asser evidently has special instances before his mind as he writes], to recite Saxon books before him night and day, whenever he had any leisure, and they lamented, with deep sighs in their inmost hearts, that in their youth they had never attended to such studies; and they blessed the young men of our days, who happily could be instructed in the liberal arts, whilst they execrated their own lot, that they had not learned these things in their youth, and now, when they are old, though wishing to learn them, they are unable. But this skill of young and old in acquiring letters, we have explained to the knowledge of the aforesaid king.”

The exact part which Alfred's work played in

the development of a national judicial system, and the importance of it, may be seen by recalling some of the steps by which the transition was made, from the Germanic conception of a folk-peace to the modern conception of the king's-peace :

(1) In the earliest stage the peace of the community rests on an alliance of the whole folk for securing good behaviour and obedience to custom. All who recognise and conform to the alliance are said to be within the folk-peace. Whoever acts against this commits a breach of the peace. He who sins against one sins against all ; and no man may redress his own wrongs until he has appealed to the guardians of the peace for justice. " Hence the peace is the great check on the practice of private war, blood feuds, and the so-called *lex talionis*" (*i.e.* an eye for an eye, etc.). The important thing to notice is that at this stage the folk are themselves the recognised guarantors sanctioning the bond and the fountain of justice. Justice is administered mainly by their officers, and the sanction behind their decisions is the collective force of the folk.

(2) From the beginning of monarchy the folk-peace was regarded as being under the protection of the king : " Of the three classes of offences that came under the view of the law, the minor infraction of right was atoned for by a compensation to the injured (this was the 'bót' by which the individual

good-will of the injured man was redeemed), and also by a payment of equal amount to the king, by which the offender bought back his admission into the public peace. The greater breaches of the peace, arising either from refusal to pay the fine, or from the commission of offences for which fines were inadequate, were punished by outlawry; the offender was a public enemy, set outside the law and the peace; his adversary might execute his own vengeance, and even common hospitality towards him was a breach of the law, until the king restored him to his place as a member of society. The third class of offences, which seemed beyond the scope of outlawry, and demanded strict, public, and direct, rather than casual and private punishment, was yet, like the former, capable of composition, the acceptance of which, to a certain extent, depended on the king as representing the people. In all this the king is not only the executor of the peace, but a sharer in its authority and claims. But this position is far from that of the fountain of justice and source of jurisdiction."¹ In the courts where the folk-peace was administered, the ealdorman, the bishop, and the king's gerefa (shire-reeve or sheriff) preside together. The ealdorman, appointed by king and Witan, represents the folk, the Bishop declares the law spiritual, and a reeve,

¹ Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 200.

appointed by the king, represents the interests of the king.

(3) Partly contemporary with stage (2) is a condition of judicial administration which must have been almost as confusing for those who lived under it as for students who try to realise its actual operation. In part arising from ancient rights, in part from the undefined prerogative of the king, there came into existence a large number of collateral and independent jurisdictions and centres for administration of the peace. There is *grith*, a Danish name given to a limited or localised peace under the special guarantee of an individual or a corporation, as in the case of the Church's *grith*. This word came into use during the Danish struggle. It corresponds partly with the English word *mund*: the man who is in the king's *mund* is under his *guardianship*, and can only be tried in his courts. Great landowners purchase, or receive as a gift, the right to have their own courts, with rights of *sac* and *soc* (*i.e.* literally "litigation and jurisdiction"). In these cases "such jurisdiction as had been exercised on behalf of the king, in or out of the popular courts, was vested in the recipient of the grant."¹ Dwellers on royal land had justice administered by royal officers, as part of their ordinary work; and the great highways were all in the king's *mund*, or

¹ Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 203.

peace. It would appear as if, with so many collateral jurisdictions, however anxious a king might be to give justice to all, it would be highly improbable that all should receive it. And, in fact, this very danger made it necessary that a remedy should be found. As the scope for the royal action is limited by special grants to individuals, his theoretical power and prerogative rise. Although the hundred-moot which met monthly was considered competent to declare folk-right in every suit, it was the right of every suitor who could not get justice in the hundred to apply to the shire-moot. When he had thrice demanded his right in the hundred court, he could apply to the shire, which met twice a year. As the idea gained ground that the king rather than the folk was the fountain of justice, this undefined position as the supreme guardian of justice was transferred from the shire to the king. Out of this inexhaustible "fountain" came new developments according to the need of the people.

(4) The era of conflicting theories is gradually succeeded by a time when the theory is simple, though the practice is still complicated by the recognition of ancient and traditional rights. There is a steady extension of the king's peace. From his own house and court it extends to the army, to the regular meetings of shire and hundred, and to all high roads. "The more serious public offences

were appropriated to the king's jurisdiction; the king's peace was used as a special sanction for the settlement of blood feuds; and it was used as a convenient 'frontier regulation' where English conquest and settlement were recent. What had been an exceptional right, becomes a right open to all who will claim it in the proper form."¹ Gradually all jurisdiction is, in theory, exercised either by the king through his officers, or by landowners who had their title through him. The royal officers acted in the hundred courts with freemen of all classes that still owed suit to these courts; and the shire courts were composed of all lords of land and shire-thegns, together with representatives of the humblest landowners.²

(5) Long afterwards the practice is strictly brought into accord with the theory. Judges are appointed by the king, and sent direct from him to the courts to try all cases in his name. All crimes are treated as breaches of his law. "The 'sovereign' is the fountain of justice: therefore the stream ceased to flow when the sovereign dies and the well-spring was covered by the tomb. Then the judicial bench is vacant, and all tribunals closed."³ As the sole fount of justice, the king alone can appoint fresh

¹ Sir F. Palgrave in "English Law before the Norman Conquest." Bowker's "Alfred," p. 229.

² Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 206.

³ Palgrave, "Normandy and England," iii. 193. Quoted by Stubbs.

judges and create new organs of justice to meet special cases.

If the terminus *a quo* and the terminus *ad quem* of this development are borne in mind, and compared with what Asser tells us of the judicial work of Alfred, it is clear that decisive and determining developments come in his time. Stages (2) and (3) and (4) are to some extent contemporaneous, though they can be arranged successively in an order of development; and it is Alfred who finds the old and creates the new type of judicial administration, which looks towards this goal. The special means which he uses to do this are—(1) the closer drawing of the tie between ealdorman and king, so that the ealdorman is made to feel that he holds his appointment at the king's will, and under responsibility to him; (2) the appointment of special commissioners from his own "ministers" to go and examine into the administration of justice in general, and in particular cases; (3) insistence that the judges should abide by the written laws, ancient dooms, or unwritten traditions of the kingdom, leaving them less discretion to follow their own likings, impulses, and prejudices, and making the justice they administered as far as possible a fixed quantity for rich and poor alike.

In matters of social and political development it is often many years, and sometimes even centuries,

before an institution or a movement reaches its true goal; it may require many hands and many heads to perfect it. That which is first in intention may be last in execution. The share of any single life in its growth is limited to the planting of a seed, or the watering and tending of a plant already growing. To the man who plants the seed, or creates the type capable of wide and far-reaching development, later times have most cause for gratitude. This service Alfred undoubtedly rendered to the development of judicial administration in England.

It is probable that through all Alfred's judicial activity, we ought to trace the influence of his acquaintance with the methods of Charles the Great. The plan of sending out special judges from his own immediate household is Carolingian. Speaking of one of the later developments of this plan, Bishop Stubbs says: "The historical connection between the judges of Henry I. and those of Charles the Great may be traced perhaps with as much probability on English as on Norman ground. If the capitularies of Charles the Bald include the territory which was afterwards Normandy in the plan for the operation of the imperial 'missi,' there is sufficient evidence that a measure of the same sort was taken in England as early as the days of Alfred."¹ The Alfred legend of later times

¹ Stubbs, "Constitutional History," vol. i. p. 478.

claimed for the king it idealised and transfigured that he was the author of the jury system, which for centuries was to be the safeguard of the liberties of Englishmen, and the protection of the commoner against rapacious superiors. The claim cannot, of course, be substantiated, for the germ out of which the jury grew is as old as the records of our Germanic ancestors. But that does not make it necessary to deny to Alfred some share in the development of the germ of the jury system. Whatever share Alfred had in the evolution of the jury may be connected with the visitations of his special judicial commissioners. One of the recognised Carolingian methods was the taking of evidence on oath of sworn recognitors. It is quite probable that when Alfred sent out "missi," they were authorised to use this method for various purposes, criminal and civil, and that in that way the evidence, and eventually the assistance of jurors in connection with the visits of the judges, came to have special prominence in the minds and memories of men who looked back upon the order of his time from stormier days.

Directly rising out of these judicial reforms came another step of vast importance, which also has affinities with the work of Charles the Great. By the Treaty of Wedmore Alfred had become king of part of Mercia as well as Wessex. But Mercia

had its own legal customs and its own Witan. Alfred made no attempt to destroy the individuality of the old Mercian folk, but became simply King of West Mercia, as he had before been King of Wessex and Kent, governing three kingdoms with three varying codes of law and custom. It was the beginning of a necessary and most important change to collect these laws, and so prepare the way for reducing them to a common code in a doom book which should serve for a united English kingdom. This Alfred did in the first *digest* of laws which England can call her own. The work is so important and so full of side-lights on the king's ideals, the social life of England, and the raw human material out of which the nation was to be fashioned, that it requires a later chapter to itself.

Chapter IV

Men of Work

“ I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor let the sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.”

William Blake.

“ The second part he assigned to the Men of Work.”

Asser.

“ There must be work done by the arms, or none of us could live. There must be work done by the brains, or the life we get would not be worth having. . . . Men are enlisted for the labour that kills—the labour of war: they are counted, trained, fed, dressed, and praised for that. Let them be enlisted also for the labour that feeds: let them be counted, trained, fed, dressed, praised for that. Teach the plough exercise as carefully as you do the sword exercise, and let the officers of troops of life be held as much gentlemen as the officers of troops of death . . . but neither this nor any other right thing can be accomplished, unless first of all both servant and master are resolved that, come what will of it, they will do each other justice.”—*John Ruskin.*

§ I. A ROYAL ECONOMIST: THE WORK OF A KING

ALFRED was England’s first great economist. With singular clearness of vision and mental grasp he saw that the proper sphere of government was the protection and promotion of the well-being of a whole people. Whatever was necessary to the

well-being of a nation and within the power of the king to accomplish, it was part of his duty to get done. There is a delightful sense of grappling with facts in the famous passage of his "Boethius" in which he explains his own view of his duties as king.

The passage is inserted in a chapter in which the mind of the philosopher is repudiating the desire of power for power's sake. "O Philosophy, thou knowest that I never greatly delighted in covetousness, and the possession of earthly power, nor longed for this authority; but [and here the king breaks in with his own *apologia pro vita sua*] I desired instruments and materials to carry out *the work I was set to do*, which was that I should virtuously and fittingly administer the authority committed unto me. Now no man, as thou knowest, can get full play for his natural gifts, nor conduct and administer government, unless he hath fit tools, and the raw material to work upon. By material I mean that which is necessary to the exercise of natural powers; thus a king's raw material and instruments of rule are a well-peopled land, and he must have men of prayer, men of war, and men of work." [Mark how the king grasps the broad essential outlines of human life.] "As thou knowest, without these tools no king may display his special talent. Further, for his materials he must have

means of support for the three classes above spoken of, which are his instruments, and these means are land to dwell on, gifts, weapons, meat, ale, clothing, and what else soever the three classes need. Without these means he cannot keep his tools in order, and without these tools he cannot perform any of the tasks entrusted to him."

Then follows a passage which, in spite of a superficial appearance of egotism, is the very opposite of egotistic. It is not the inflation of self out of all proportion to the world, but the recognition of the limitations which the world puts upon self. It is the acceptance by a man conscious of great natural ability of the limitations under which his ability must work, and the conditions under which alone it could be profitable to his country: "I have desired material for the exercise of government that my talents and my power might not be forgotten and hidden away, for every good gift and every power soon groweth old and is no more heard of, if wisdom be not in them. Without wisdom no faculty can be fully brought out, for whatsoever is done unwisely can never be accounted as skill. To be brief, I may say that it has ever been my desire to live honourably while I was alive, and after my death to leave to them that should come after me the memory of my good works."

If we compare Alfred's view of the science and art which is concerned with a nation's well-being with any of the will-o'-the-wisps which have successively misled the rulers of states, we get a standard by which to appreciate the worth of our great, simple-minded, clear-visioned king, with his wonderful gift of an inspired common-sense, able to do equal justice to the spiritual and the physical in human nature. Compare it with the military ideal which issued in the beautiful mists and vagrant romanticisms of chivalry, or the opportunist, selfish, logical, and short-sighted kingcraft of the Machiavellists which misled the Stuarts, or the frank materialised commercialism of our later time, vaunting its emancipation from noble ideals as though ideals were not the very marrow of life. Any comparison of this kind will serve to show how hard it is for an actual ruler to see, and how rare it is to find one able to follow consistently, aims which are not only well meant but also well adapted to conserve and increase the well-being of a whole people.

Alfred's definition of the aims of government will bear a severer test still. If we put it beside such a statement as Professor Marshall has prefixed to his "Economics of Industry," it will be seen that Alfred had seen the conditions of the problem as clearly in his own time as our most skilled

economists have done in ours. It is the temptation of the keepers of a nation's purse to think of men as a means to wealth; but the prosperity of a nation depends on understanding that wealth is a means to manhood. The ultimate test of a sound or unsound economic must always be the human and not the material one. It is the clear understanding of this difference between ends and means which is the special virtue of the most modern developments of economics, and it is found as clearly in Alfred's famous statement of the rulers' problem. Political Economy, after a long journey round, and having gathered much experience by the way, is returning to a point somewhere near its starting-place in England.

Here is Professor Marshall's statement:¹ "Political Economy or Economics is a study of man's actions in the ordinary business of life: it inquires how he gets his income and how he uses it. Thus it is on the one side a study of wealth, and on the other, and more important side, a part of the study of man. For man's character has been moulded by his everyday work, and by the material resources which he thereby procures, more than by any other influence, unless it be that of his religious ideals; and the two great forming agencies of the world's history have been the religious and

¹ Marshall's "Economics of Industry," chap. i.

the economic. Here and there the ardour of the military or the artistic spirit has been for a while predominant: but religious and economic influences have nowhere been displaced from the front rank even for a time: and they have nearly always been more important than all the others put together." That extract gives an important clue to the understanding of Alfred's long enduring influence on English history. The scientific explanation of that influence would be that his work rested on the broadest human basis. He dealt with men rather than words and systems; he knew what was in man, the needs which spurred him, and the hopes which inspired him, the pressure from without which thrust him onward, and the instincts from within which led him upward,

"Each stung that bids not sit nor stand but go";

and the beckonings which determined in which direction the going should be.

If we return now to follow the clue to character and interest left by the track of Alfred's expenditure, we are led to that part of it which was spent on his workmen. Asser's phrase is that the second part of the first division of the royal revenue (that is the second sixth) was paid to the "workmen whom he had collected from every nation, and had about him in large numbers, men skilled in every

kind of construction." Other references give us glimpses of various kinds of skilled workmen at work in the king's employment. There are goldsmiths, coiners, writers, and illuminators, who may for convenience be classed together as artistic. There are also men employed to build houses "majestic and good, beyond all the precedents of his ancestors, by his new mechanical inventions." There were the men employed

"to drive the road and bridge the ford,"

the civil engineers of Alfred's reign, the architects of earthwork forts and town fortifications of timber and stone, who set the stamp of the king's ingenious and constructive mind on every part of Wessex. All of these have some features of special interest which make them worth individual attention.

§ 2. ART

"No tongue can tell the power of a soul that strives to live in an atmosphere of beauty, and is actively beautiful in itself."

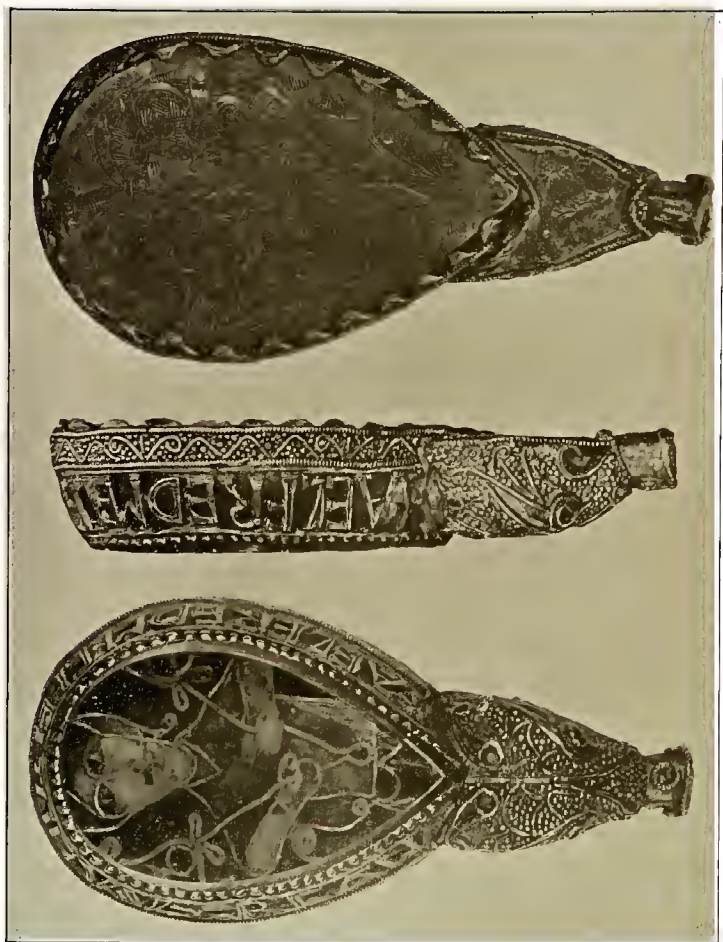
Maeterlinck.

As a patron of Art, Alfred's distinction is not that of accomplishing great things, but of having set on foot a development pregnant with possibilities and full of promise. A single instance of the work of his goldsmiths, known as King Alfred's Jewel, has by singular good fortune come down to

us, and naturally much is made of it. A frank estimate of its value will admit that its real importance is as evidence that the artistic spirit had been awakened, and was beginning to work with some taste and ingenuity, rather than that it had advanced to any very high degree of perfection in conception or achievement.

The jewel was discovered in 1693 at Newton Park, in the lowlands of Somersetshire, near the river Parret, somewhat to the north of the spot where the island and fortress of Athelney were formerly situated. There Alfred himself may have lost it. It is now preserved in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.¹ Pauli gives an exact and technical description of the jewel as it is now to be seen. It is "a polished crystal of an oval form, rather more than two inches in length and half-an-inch thick, inlaid with a mosaic enamel of green and yellow. This enamel represents the outline of a human figure, which appears to be in a sitting

¹ The contents of the old Ashmolean have now been transferred to the new Ashmolean Galleries attached to the Taylorian Buildings. Alfred's Jewel may be seen there to great advantage; close to it is a smaller jewel of similar construction and of about the same date. The pectoral cross of St Cuthbert, which is among the relics taken from the tomb of the Saint, and now exhibited in the Chapter Library at Durham, is very similar in workmanship and may belong to this date. There is also a small portable altar taken from the tomb. They were probably "given to St Cuthbert" by Athelstan at the same time as the stole mentioned on p. 10.



KING ALFRED'S JEWEL
(See pp. 228-230)

posture, holding in each hand a sort of lily-branch in blossom. This figure may be meant to represent St Cuthbert, or even Christ, or it may be simply a king in state attire. The reverse side of the jewel is covered by a plate of fine gold, on which somewhat tastefully and fancifully a flower is engraved. The oval sides are bordered by beaten gold, admirably and durably manufactured, bearing around them the words:

AELFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN

(Alfred ordered me to be made).

“The letters of this inscription are all capitals, and in their somewhat stiff form agree entirely with the initial letters in the principal parts of the authentic manuscripts of Alfred’s time. Still more than the letters the form of the two middle words, by their spelling, bears witness to the age claimed by the motto. At the extreme end, where the crystal and its border join the gold, it is finished by a beautifully worked dolphin’s head in gold, whose empty eye sockets must have once contained precious stones, and from whose open jaws a small golden pin protrudes. This probably served as a fastening to a cane, or some ornamental staff, on the point of which the jewel was placed. It may indeed have been a part of the king’s sceptre.”¹ The perfection

¹ This quotation is somewhat abbreviated.

of workmanship as distinguished from design which is reached in this jewel, gives some justification to the claim that "gold beating and gold gilding with the leaf had been carried in Alfred's time to a perfection never since surpassed."¹ No description quite does justice to the impression made by the jewel. Reproductions almost inevitably make too much of the inlaid design, which is crude and primitive. It is the elaborate and delicate gold work, and the solidity and harmony of the jewel and its setting, which makes it unique and striking. The small jewel close beside it in the Museum shows that it is not a solitary product of the fine workmanship of the period.

We may associate with the goldsmiths' art the coiners'. In the British Museum there are four hundred and fifty-four coins issued in Alfred's reign. Examination of these coins yields some interesting facts which help to fill in the outline of the history of Alfred's people, and to measure the impetus given to the social life of England by the years of peace he secured. The coins give the names of one hundred and thirty-four moneyers. Of these the majority who issue coins in Wessex have Saxon or Kentish names, a few are Frankish and Norse. The king's money is issued at Bath, Canterbury, Exeter, Gloucester, Oxford, Winchester,

¹ "Alfred and the Fine Arts." Bowker's "Alfred," p. 257.

London, and possibly at Lincoln.¹ Perhaps Alfred planned what Æthelstan carried out, the multiplication of mint places where his moneyers could go and strike what money was required. Outside Wessex a number of types of coins were produced bearing Alfred's name which witness to the far-reaching authority of the king over all of English kin, though they were produced in districts where Alfred cannot have exercised any of the ordinary rights of kingship. These types, produced in East England, Northumbria, and parts of Danish Mercia, may be grouped together as the Wiking coinage. It is of special interest that many of the moneyers who issue these coins appear from their names to be Franks. Such names as Stephen, Walter, Robert, Johannes, Martinus, Remigius, began to appear. A probable inference is that the coins were issued by traders, and the majority of these in East England were men of Frankish descent.

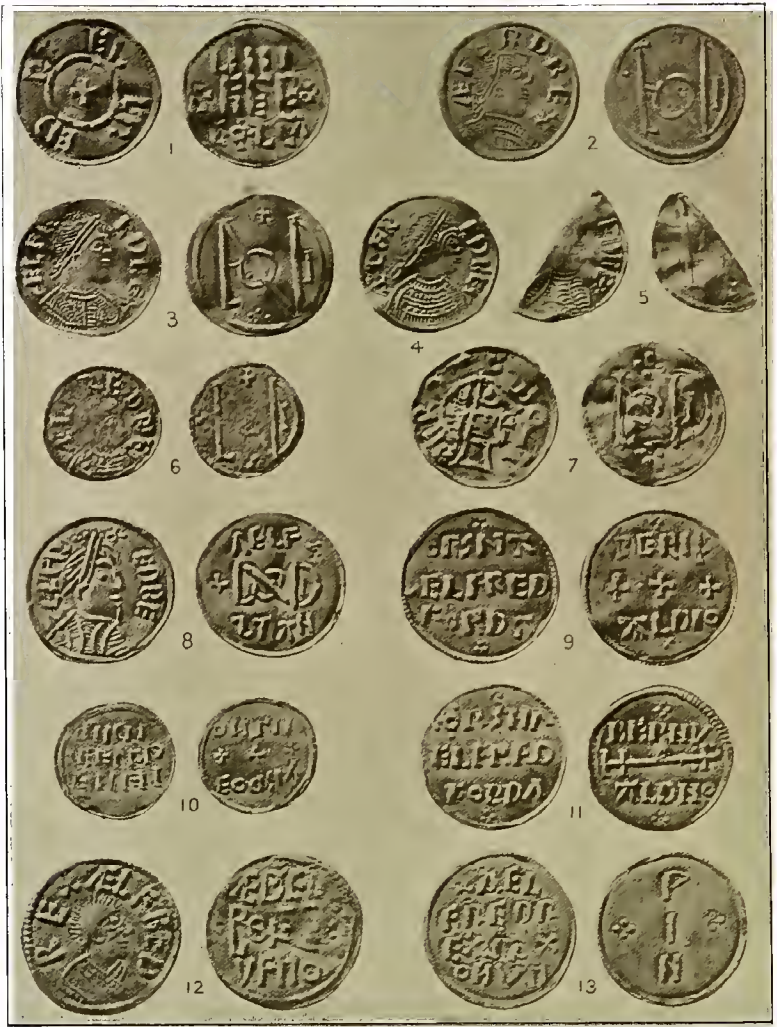
Everything is of importance which points to an increase of commerce, for commerce meant increase of prosperity, increase of communication between one province and another, and the accumulation of sinews of war. It is significant that Alfred first struck half-pence at London, Canterbury, and

¹ This is curious if there is no doubt of it. It is suggested that Alfred's family connection with the Gainas may give a clue to the existence of a mint at Lincoln. This is an ingenious suggestion made by Professor York Powell.

Oxford.¹ They must have been wanted for some special trade, and are probably due to foreign influence. Alfred's legendary connection with Oxford gives interest to the fact that some of his coins were struck there. The Kentish moneyer of Alfred, Bernwald, opens the series of Oxford moneyers, and nearly all later Oxford moneyers belong to London families. Oxford made an important link in commerce, and place of arms in war, between Mercia and Wessex. When Alfred had rebuilt London, he may very well have done something towards building Oxford. It is probably one of the places which he tried to fortify, but left unfinished, so that, although it cannot be claimed for him that he founded the University, it is quite possible that he was founder of the City of Oxford. His son Edward gave it a fortress, and in less than a century from this time the old line of the city wall, which ran from where New College now stands, past St Michael's, to the tower now within the prison, and then back in the direction of Christ Church and Merton, must have been clearly defined. Two or three of the most interesting types of Alfred's coins may be described :

Type iii.—Inscription arranged to form a cross : in each angle of the cross a compartment containing a trefoil slipped, and the centre square compartment

¹ York Powell. *Eng. Histor. Review*, vol. xi. (1896), p. 765.



COINS OF ALFRED

containing circle. Reverse—open quatrefoil ornament with quatrefoil in centre: leaves (sepals) in cusps: moneyer's name, etc., in compartments of quatrefoil (see illustration, p. 250). Type x. (old type).—Small cross pattée: around inscription in four divisions. Reverse—name of mint in monogram (Londonia) between moneyer's name, etc., in two lines across field: small cross pattée before and after monogram (No. 8 in illustration opposite). Type xix.—name of king and mint (Ohsnaforda) in three lines across field: ornaments. Reverse—moneyer's name (old type), etc., in two lines across field, divided by long cross on two slips. Sideways—pellets in angles of cross: ornaments¹ (No. 11 in illustration).

The artistic work on these coins is inferior in skill to that on the earlier coins of Offa, who is said to have employed Italian coiners, and to the later coins of Athelstan. The need of providing a coinage rapidly, the sudden demands of the Danes, which compelled Alfred to debase the coinage, and the unsettlement of the times, would all tell against the production of first-rate work and prevent the king from improving the coinage.

The work of the illuminators and writers of manuscripts is better in its kind than the work of the coiners. The manuscripts of Alfred's day which

¹ British Museum Catalogue of English Coins. Anglo-Saxon series, vol. ii. D, *cf.* pp. 34-35-37.

have survived are well written. The characteristics of the handwriting are freedom, lightness, and elegance.¹ There is generally a tendency to slope the letters a little and to join and interlace them. In the next generation the handwriting begins to lose its artistic character, it becomes thicker and heavier, and gradually begins to approximate to "that *ne plus ultra* of barbarism the black letter."² The initial letters of the chapter are regularly decorated, but without great splendour. Dragons or monsters of the bird species, and distorted human faces are drawn with a black pencil round the base of the letters, and red is added for shading.³

The monks of Athelney and the nuns of Shaftesbury, both Alfred's foundations, were specially devoted to the work of the Scriptorium. There is a manuscript produced by the monks of Alfred's monastery at Winchester, and a volume of Gospels and other readings produced at Canterbury, which are said to be as good as anything produced in Europe in the ninth century; and fifty years later than Alfred's time, when the effect of his work might be expected to appear most clearly, there is a Benedictional written for Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, which is regarded by competent

¹ Cf. Illustration opposite page 264.

² Sweet's edition of Gregory's "Pastoral Care."

³ Pauli.

judges as the culmination of the art of the Anglo-Saxon school.¹

It is wonderful that Alfred was able to do so much; but the true estimate of his service is seen rather when we measure it from his standpoint than from that of Art. The love for things beautiful is his rather than the power to create them.

The artistic impulse and quality which the king himself seems to have had as a child, had little chance of free development. He was too much employed in dealing with rough material to concern himself greatly with form. His work was rough-hewing rather than polishing. His services were of a kind calculated to tell more in the next generation than his own; for everything which raises the general level of intelligence, and quickens the pursuit of the ideal in a nation, shows itself eventually on a higher standard of artistic conception and performance. Art is always a secondary rather than a primary result of a nation's awakening and social progress.

§ 3. BUILDERS

One of the most fruitful pieces of work which Alfred did was to initiate an era of building and fortress construction. It was also one of his most

¹ A very beautiful page from this Benedictional has been recently reproduced as frontispiece to Gollancz's edition of Cynewulf's "Christ."

arduous undertakings. Alfred never lost sight of the sinister certainty that the Northmen would return; he knew that there must come a struggle between the men of the Dane-law and the men of Wessex for the possession of England. It is quite clear that he laid his plans to meet both events. He wanted to erect fortified strongholds round the coast, and he probably originated the plan for a line of fortresses across England which Edward and Æthelflaed afterwards carried out.

But the king's clear perception of coming events was not shared by his people. For the most part, they were content to live in the present, and postpone effort. Asser gives us a picture of the king, active, persistent, prophetic in insight, urgent, persuasive, determined, trying to level up his sluggish and short-sighted contemporaries to the level of his own foresight and energy. It is evidently this matter of building and fortification which he has chiefly in view in a passage in which he describes the king's instruction, exhortation, and command, and when none of these were effective, the severe reproof and censure which followed them. "But, owing to the sluggishness of the people, these admonitions of the king were either not fulfilled, or were begun late at the moment of necessity, and so ended less to the advantage of those who put them in execution;

for I will say nothing of the castles which he ordered to be built, but which, being begun late, were never finished, because the hostile army broke in upon them by land and sea; and, as often happened, the thwarters of the royal ordinances repented when it was too late, and blushed at their own non-performance of his commands. I speak of repentance when it is too late, on the testimony of Scripture, whereby numberless persons have had cause for too much sorrow, when many insidious evils have been wrought. But though by these means, sad to say, they may be bitterly affected and roused to sorrow by the loss of fathers, wives, children, ministers, servant-men, servant-maids, and furniture and household stuff, what is the use of baleful repentance when their kinsmen are dead, and they cannot aid them, or redeem those who are captive from captivity? for they are not able to assist those who have escaped, as they have not wherewith to sustain even their own lives. They repented, therefore, when it was too late, and grieved at their incautious neglect of the king's commands, and they praised the royal wisdom with one voice, and tried with all their power to fulfil what they had before refused—namely, concerning the erection of castles and other things generally useful to the kingdom." No better illustration of Asser's statements could be given than the entry in the English

Chronicle for the year 893. It describes the landing of the great army at Linnemouth, whence it had sailed from Boulogne with two hundred and fifty ships—the very disaster which Alfred had always feared. “This port is in the eastern part of Kent, at the east end of the great wood, which we call Andred (the wood is in length, from east to west, one hundred and twenty miles, or longer, and thirty miles broad: the river flows out of the weald). On this river they towed up their ships as far as the weald, four miles from the outward harbour, and there stormed a fortress: *within the fortress a few churls were stationed, and it was only in part constructed.*”

In spite of all difficulties in the shape of wooden-headed aldermen and sullen-tempered churls, Alfred managed to get some creditable things done. There were “cities and towns (*i.e.* burhs or forts) which he restored, and others which he built, where none had been before; royal halls and chambers, wonderfully erected by his command, with stone and wood; royal vills constructed of stone, removed from their old site, and handsomely rebuilt by the king’s command in more fitting places.”¹ Except in the case of fortifications, almost all buildings, even churches

¹ Asser. Alfred’s work at Old Sarum may be quoted as an illustration. An open moot-place is still shown and connected with his name, and he is said to have rebuilt the Roman fort which stood there.



ST MICHAEL'S (LATE SAXON) TOWER, OXFORD

and royal vills, had hitherto been of wood. Alfred stimulated the transition from wood to stone. The stone buildings of his period which survive, still bear traces of being designed to imitate familiar wooden structures. St Michael's at Oxford, and St Benedict's at Cambridge, are among the best-known examples of a type of later Saxon architecture. The former is in the true primitive style, gaunt, plain, with round-headed windows, good for shooting from with the bow. It served both as a church and as watch-tower of the city wall, guarding the old north gate of the city known as Bocardo. In recent years the windows have been cleared, and the curious archaic pillars, shaped like balustrades, may be seen.¹

At Athelney the king's ingenious turn of mind enabled him to keep the vow he had made in his day of need, that if God heard his prayer he would build a monastery there. The ground was swampy and offered great obstacles to building. Alfred supplied the secure foundation which nature denied. Four piers were sunk in the ground to support

¹ "It is worth while to climb the tower and remember the times when arrows were sent like hail from the narrow windows on the foes who approached Oxford from the north, while prayers for their confusion were offered in the church below." So says Mr Andrew Lang. When I tried the experiment in the autumn of 1890 the illusion was somewhat broken by the discovery of electric light apparatus in the lower part of the tower. The light was being laid on in the church. *Tempora mutantur!*

the whole structure, and upon them four arches were placed in a circular form. The building when completed was necessarily small, owing to want of space on the site, but the architecture was novel and ingenious enough to make it a marvel. The marsh-set island was joined to the mainland by a bridge "laboriously constructed between two other heights"; at the western end of which bridge was erected a strong tower, of beautiful work, by command of the king.¹ Another of Alfred's buildings was the convent near the eastern gate of Shaftesbury. This was for nuns, and his own daughter, Ethelgiva [Æthelgifu], having chosen a religious life, was placed in it as abbess.

The greatest of Alfred's constructive undertakings was the rebuilding of London. Already London was in the third stage of its history. It had first been a British settlement; and, according to the legend preserved by Geoffrey of Monmouth, looked back to a foundation by Brut,² a son of Aeneas. For nearly four hundred years it had been occupied by the Romans, drained, walled, laid out with broad streets, and furnished with forts and probably churches. Whether it was laid waste by the Saxons when they came, is uncertain; it is clear, however,

¹ William of Malmesbury. "Gesta. Pontif." ii. p. 255. Quoted by Pauli, p. 193.

² The origin of the name is obvious: "Briton" is the origin of "Brut," not *vice versa*.

that the Saxon distaste for living in walled towns diminished its importance for a time. By the seventh century it is the headquarters of the vassal state of the East Saxons. In 604, Æthelberht, King of Kent, and Siebert, under-king of the East Saxons, combined to give Mellitus, a bishop consecrated by Augustine, a bishop's see at London. From this time, Christianity and trade combined to make London important. Æthelberht built the Church of St Paul, and although it probably had to be rebuilt in Alfred's time, it is almost certain from that time to this a Cathedral dedicated to St Paul has looked down on London from the hill above Ludgate. Siebert, almost at the same time, became the founder of the Church at Westminster. Matthew Arnold has caught the atmosphere of Saxon legend and sentiment in the verses in which he tells the story of its consecration :

Rough was the winter eve,
Their craft the fishers leave,
And down over the Thames the darkness drew,
One still lags last, and turns and eyes the Pile,
Huge in the gloom, across in Thorney Isle,
King Siebert's work, the wondrous Minster new,
'Tis Lambeth now, where then
They moor'd their boats among the bulrush stems ;
And that new Minster in the matted fen
The world-fam'd Abbey by the westering Thames.

His mates are gone, and he
For mist can scarcely see

A strange wayfarer coming to his side—
 Who bade him loose his boat, and fix his oar,
 And row him straightway to the further shore,
 And wait while he did there a space abide.
 The fisher, awed, obeys,
 That voice had note so clear of sweet command ;
 Through pouring tide he pulls, and drizzling haze,
 And sets his freight ashore on Thorney Strand.

The Minster's outlined mass
 Rose dim from the morass,
 And thitherward the stranger took his way.
 Lo, on a sudden, all the Pile is bright !
 Nave, choir, and transept glorified with light,
 While tongues of fire on coign and carving play !
 And heavenly odours fair
 Come streaming with the floods of glory in,
 And carols float along the happy air
 As if the reign of joy did now begin.

Then all again is dark ;
 And by the fisher's bark
 The unknown passenger returning stands.
*O Saxon fisher ! thou hast had with thee
 The Fisher from the Lake of Galilee—*
 So saith he, blessing him with outspread hands ;
 Then fades, but speaks the while ;
 At dawn thou to King Siebert shalt relate
 How his St Peter's Church in Thorney Isle
 Peter, his friend, with light did consecrate.¹

London had been a port of some consequence under the Romans ; under the English it became a favourite meeting-place for foreign merchants of all kinds. Bede describes it as "the mart of many

¹ M. Arnold. "Westminster Abbey."

nations resorting to it by sea and land." In the eighth century the merchants are numerous enough to have their own quarters in Billingsgate, and in 978, seventy-seven years after Alfred's time, the wool traders alone have enough wealth and importance to have special privileges granted them by Æthelred.

These facts are sufficient to indicate the importance to England of not allowing London to drift out of touch with the main stream of the nation's development. In 851 the Danes had plundered the city and made themselves masters of it. From this time it had been a favourite landing and starting place for their expeditions. It was too large for the East Saxons alone to defend, with any forces they had, and it made a convenient entrance to the Thames waterway into the very heart of England. It had gradually come to be regarded as a Mercian city, and, unfortunately, the weakness of Mercia under Burhred had prevented any serious measures for re-capture. Each wave of Danish incursion had silted some of its atoms on the shore where it broke, and gradually London had come to have a considerable population of Danes. As far as the English were concerned, the work which had now to be done was, practically, a re-founding of the city.

It must have been a serious undertaking to

recover London from the Danes. No details are given either by Asser or the Chronicle, which would enable us to judge how long it took, or at what cost it was done. But in 883 Alfred "sat down against the army at London." The siege was probably long, and evidently of doubtful issue, for during it he vowed that he would send alms to Rome, and to St Thomas, and St Bartholomew in India, in the event of success.¹ It was three years later before the king was so far master of the situation as to begin to rebuild London. In the year 886 "Alfred," says Asser, "after the burning of cities and the slaying of the people, honourably rebuilt the city of London, and made it again habitable. And all the English submitted to him, except those who were under the bondage of the Danish men; and then he committed the town to the keeping of Æthelred, the caldorman of Mercia."²

Alfred's work of restoration left its mark on the city. The Roman walls had been partly destroyed and allowed to fall into decay. He had them rebuilt with the material he found nearest to his hand, for his quarry appears to have been the church of St Alban, which an earlier Saxon king had built. He reconstructed the bridge which

¹ English Chronicle, 883.

² English Chronicle, 889. Æthelred was husband to Alfred's daughter Æthelflaed, the Lady of the Mercians.

joined the northern and southern shores of the river, and to defend the bridge built a tower at the south-east corner of the restored wall. It was on the site of this tower that William the Conqueror, approving Alfred's judgment, established what is still known as the Tower of London. One road was driven diagonally from the bridge across the market to Westgate, now Newgate, and a second to a gate opening towards the north and east, still known as Bishopsgate. The corn market, where there was a weighing stone for wheat, stood to the west of the Cheap, or market-place, and a road was laid out along the north side of the Cheap, which is still called Cheapside.

The effects of this bold constructive piece of work were manifold. London defended by walls became impregnable against the Danes. Instead of being the starting-point of an attacking force and a place of retreat in case of need, as it had been, from that day to this London has never been taken by a foreign power. The Thames was only a little less important to England than the Nile is to Egypt; it was a great water highway into the heart of the country. The possession of London made it easy to hold the Thames, and to hold the Thames was to protect Kent, Wessex, and Mercia.¹ It was all-important for England that

¹ Cf. Article "Alfred and the Arts." Bowker's "King Alfred."

London was now brought into connection, commercial and racial, with Wessex; and that it began to assume its destined position as the commercial centre of English life. The service which a king renders to his people by giving them a national capital is inestimable. It is another item in Alfred's claim to be the King David of England. The service by which David, more than any other king, helped to create in Israel a vivid national consciousness was the capture which gave it Jerusalem for its brain and heart. London has had all the perils of Jerusalem, and has fallen into most of them, but it has also had a good many of its glories. Its history and geographical position marked it out for England's capital; to Alfred belongs some of the credit of giving it the opportunity to fulfil its destiny.

§ 4. SHIPS

“The founder of a navy is not the man who builds ships so much as the man who makes seamen.”—*The Note-Book*.

“On sea-power and school-power the future of this nation depends.”

During the years of peace Alfred never forgot that he must prepare to defend Wessex at sea as well as on land. Every year hammer and saw were kept busy along the coast, and sea-going Frisians were employed to teach the men of Wessex

how to build and manage their craft. The king's quick grasp of a situation had suggested to him that even on their own element he might outdo the Northmen. Their boats were built for carrying their crew of Wikings, not for fighting at sea. There they were safe, for hitherto no nation had ventured to meet them, except on land. Alfred saw that with larger and heavier ships, high enough to overreach them, and strong enough to bear them down, his men, though inferior seamen, might be more than a match for the Wikings.

Under the year 897 the English Chronicle records that "King Alfred commanded long ships to be built to oppose the ashes [Danish ships]. They were full-nigh twice as long as the others; some had sixty oars, and some had more; they were both swifter and heavier, and also higher than the others. They were shapen neither like the Frisian, nor the Danish, but as it seemed to him they would be most efficient."

The other events recorded under this year indicate that the ships had been built before, and were ready to go to sea at short notice. As this is the first naval engagement recorded in detail in English History, and the account may have been dictated by Alfred, and was certainly written under his immediate direction, it is worth giving the entry in the Chronicle in full:

“Then there came six ships to the Isle of Wight, and there did much harm, as well as in Devon, and elsewhere on the sea coast. Then the king commanded nine of the new ships to go thither, and they obstructed their passage from the port towards the outer sea [they caught them in the Solent, and blocked the exit]. Then went they with three of their ships out against them; and three lay in the upper part of the port in the dry for the men were gone ashore. Then took they two of the three ships at the outer part of the port, and killed the men. [So far they were entirely successful.] And the other ship escaped; in that also the men were killed except five: they got away because the other ships (*i.e.* Alfred's) were aground. And they were aground very awkwardly: three lay aground on that side of the deep on which the Danish ships were aground, and all the rest upon the other side, so that no one of them could get to the others. But when the water had ebbed many furlongs from the ships, then the Danish men went from their three ships to the other three which were left by the tide on their side, and then they fought against them. [This was a spirited and skilful move for the Danes to take the offensive, and evidently threw Alfred's men into confusion. The Danes loved a fight. Alfred's men had relied on their ships, but had not somehow been able

to avoid being caught by the ebbing tide.] There was slain Lucumon the king's reeve, and Wulfheard the Frisian,¹ and Ebb the Frisian, and Ethelere the Frisian, and Ethelforth the king's neat-herd, and of all the men, Frisians and English, seventy-two; and of the Danish men, one hundred and twenty. Then, however, the flood-tide came to the Danish ships before the Christians could shove theirs off, and they, therefore, rowed them out: nevertheless, they were damaged to such a degree that they could not row round the Sussex land; and here the sea cast two of them on shore, and the men were led to the king at Winchester; and he commanded them to be there hanged [for piracy]: and the men who were in the single ship came to East Anglia [England] sorely wounded. That same summer no less than twenty ships, with their crews, wholly perished upon the south coast."

Others of Alfred's expeditions were more successful than this; in one expedition in 885 a fleet on its way to East England met sixteen pirate ships "and fought against them, and captured all the ships and killed the men."² His larger ships compelled the Danes to alter their type of vessel also, and to build ships for sea-fighting. Fifty years later

¹ The Frisian speech was so closely cognate to the Saxon that a Frisian would easily understand an Englishman, and *vice versa*.

² English Chronicle, 885.

they had made sea warfare a fine art. That fact indicates the weight to be given to the claim made for Alfred that he is the founder of the English navy. There had been ships and sea battles before his time: Ecgfrith of Northumbria had employed a fleet in an attack on Ireland in 684; Ealhere, Alderman of Kent, had fought in ships against the Danes in the time of Alfred's father, Æthelwulf. But Alfred is the first to undertake the building of a fleet, and the first to have hired seamen, foreign and native, in his service. But a navy has to be refounded at least every century if it is to remain a navy. So that Alfred shares the honour of "founder" with many others: he is the first of a group of founders which includes some of the most famous names in English history, of whom none is more justly and honourably famous than the first.



AN ALFRED COIN, WITH MONEVER'S NAME.

Chapter V

Men of Prayer

“As with the priest, so with the people;
As with the people, so with the priest.”—*Isaiah*.

“The fire of the altar is always brought from the household hearth, the hearth kindled from the altar. It is from the earth itself that the salt of the earth is taken.”—*Dora Greenwell*.

“The soul of all improvement is improvement of soul.”—*The Note-Book*.

WHENEVER it is possible in dealing with the history of the Christian Church to perform a process similar to that which biologists describe as “making a section,” it is invariably found that developments of one kind or another are in progress. There is no such thing as rigidity either in organisation or belief in any period of the Church’s history. The persistence of certain names and external forms sometimes gives an appearance of permanence; but wherever the historian is able to get beneath the surface, he finds, not the fixity and rigidity which belong to dead things, but the processes of action and reaction, life and development, reformation and transformation, or decadence and failure, which belong to living bodies. It is part of the business

of the historian not to let the recurrence of names and forms in the Christian Church in different ages deceive him as to the real difference of the forces or the ideas for which the names stand. The facts and faith which create the forms of belief and organisation remain the same, but they express themselves variously, according to the material in which they have to work.

Alfred's time was no exception to this rule. It falls in the middle of a long period when the Christian Church was struggling hard to rise out of the slough of heathenism in which it found itself after the inundation of Europe by the northern nations. Society was a long time in unlearning heathenism. It was comparatively easy to make Christianity the religion of the court, to introduce the organisation of the Church as a thin veneer on the top of the underlying barbarism. But it was the work of generations to make any real change in the ideas and habits of the people. For centuries after England had been nominally Christian, heathen superstitions remained and heathen rites were openly practised. There is in the Vatican a manuscript of the eighth century which gives a list of the "superstitions and paganisms" still practised by the people¹; and the Penance Lists testify to their prevalence.

¹ "Indiculus superstitionum et Paganiarum," Pertz, vol. i. p. 191, quoted by Hatch. "Growth of Church Institutions," p. 158.

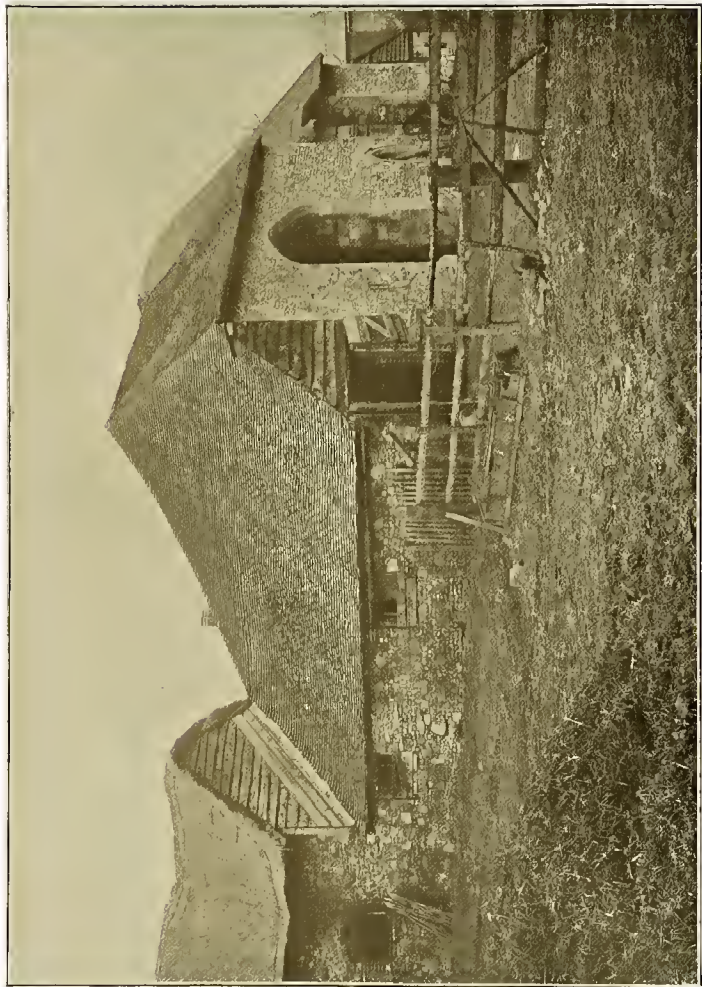
So long as the clergy mingled freely with the various classes of society from which they were drawn, they shared their vices, and to a great extent also their ideas. Throughout the eighth century Church Councils on the Continent repeatedly pass laws against clerks frequenting taverns, staying there till midnight, and tottering about the church from drunkenness while engaged in holy office.¹ An enactment of Charles the Great at Aachen which requires Presbyters and Bishops to live according to the canons, sets forth the perils from which the canonical rule is to save them. "Let them not be permitted to wander out of doors, but let them live under complete ward, not given to filthy lucre, not unchaste, not thieves, not murderers, not ravishers, not litigious, not passionate, not puffed up, not drunkards, but chaste in heart and body, humble, modest, sober, kind, peaceful, sons of God worthy of being promoted to holy orders, not living lives of luxury or unchastity or other kinds of iniquity, in the villages or homesteads adjoining a church, without control or discipline."

In the presence of these scandals the reforming energy which is always latent within the Christian Church found expression chiefly in two ways, either in founding monasteries to spread or uplift the ideal of monastic life, or in withdrawing the ordinary

¹ *Cp.* Hatch, who gives references G.C.I. p. 161.

clergy from secular life and compelling them to live together under a common rule of discipline. For at least two centuries evangelising zeal, piety and devotion, charity and faith, religious idealism and aggressive enthusiasm in the Christian Church took one or other of these forms. The instinct which created a celibate and separate Christian life, as a protest against the abuses of the time, has its modern parallel in the instinct which commends abstinence from alcohol as the only cure for the drunkenness which degrades modern English life. Most of the arguments which justify the one can be used to justify the other. None of those who took part in this great Reformation could possibly have foreseen that the time would come when the life-blood of Christian zeal and character would depart from the monastic system and the canonical rule, and that then men would try to embalm a carcass which cumbered the ground. The mistakes of later days ought not to hide from us the fact that in their time, and for their time, these two institutions stood for a great religious and moral reformation.

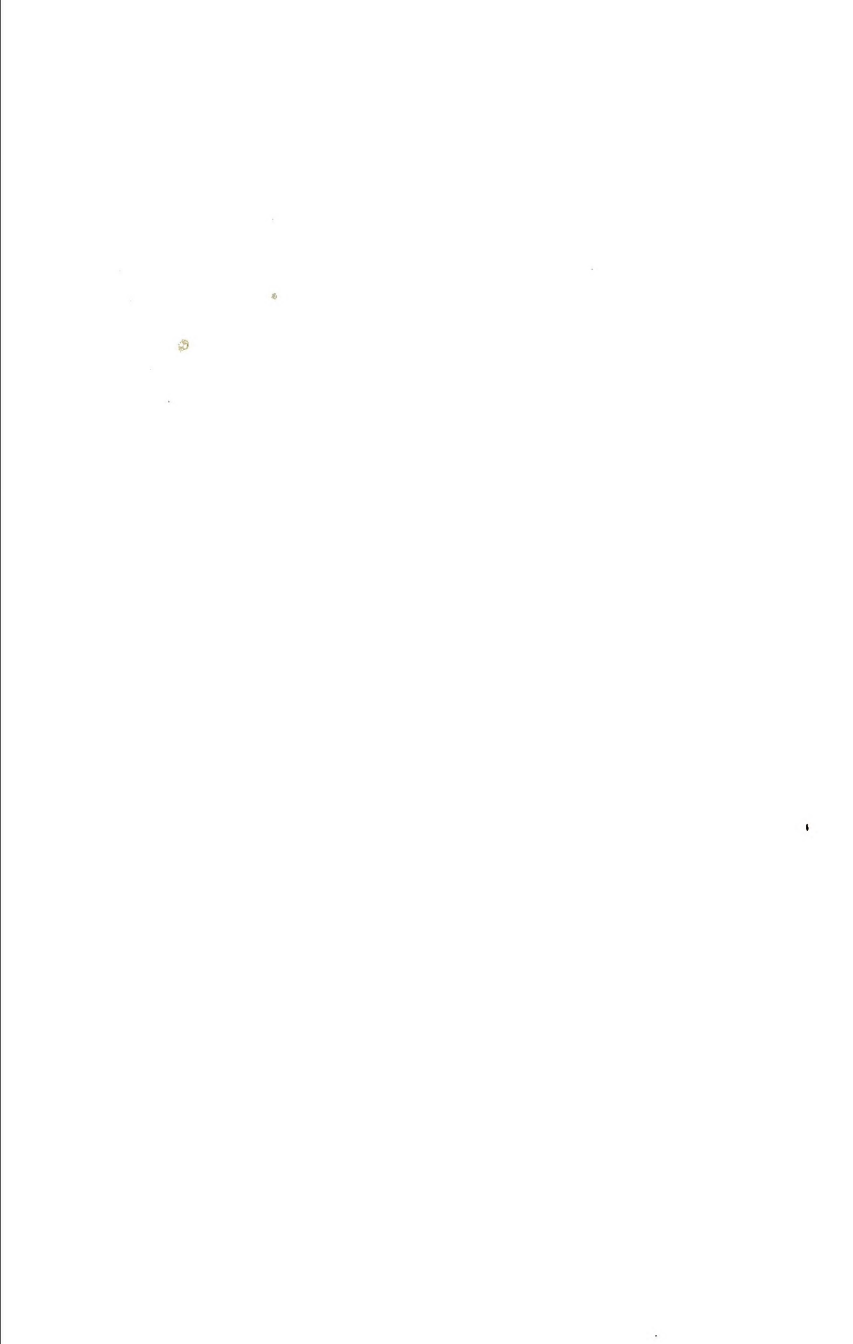
In that reformation Alfred took his full share. He founded monasteries at Athelney and Shaftesbury. The New Minster at Winchester, which became Hyde Abbey, was his foundation. He took a lifelong interest in the work of raising the



RUINS OF HYDE ABBEY, WINCHESTER

[H. T. Green]

(The gateway is all that remains of the original Hyde Abbey buildings: the premises are now used by a dairy farmer)



character and standing of the ordinary clergy, both on the secular side by seeing that they got their dues, and on the spiritual side by constant effort to elevate the character of men in holy orders. Asser's account of his aims, and his difficulties in carrying them out, illustrates well the conditions of the problem which confronted a Christian king.

“For whereas he often thought of the necessities of his soul, among the other good deeds to which his thoughts were night and day turned, he ordered that two monasteries should be built, one for monks at Athelney, . . . and in this monastery he collected monks of all kinds from every quarter, and placed them therein. For at first, inasmuch as he had no one of his own nation noble and free by birth, who was willing to enter the monastic life, except children, who could neither choose good nor avoid evil in consequence of their tender years, because for many previous years the love of a monastic life had utterly decayed from that nation as well as from many other nations, though many monasteries still remain in that country; yet, as no one directed the rule of that kind of life in a regular way, for what reason I cannot say, either from the invasions of foreigners which took place so frequently both by sea and land, or because that people abounded in riches of every kind and so looked with

contempt on the monastic life¹; it was for this reason that King Alfred sought to gather monks of different kinds to place in the same monastery.

“First, he placed there as Abbot, John the priest and monk, an old Saxon by birth, then certain priests and deacons from beyond the sea; of whom, finding that he had not as large a number as he wished, he procured as many as possible of the same Gallic race, some of whom being children he ordered to be taught in the same monastery, and at a later period to be admitted to the monastic habit. I have myself seen a young lad of pagan (Danish) birth who was educated in that monastery, and by no means the hindmost of them all.”

Alfred's plan was good, but he had to work with poor material. Asser goes on to tell what happened under Abbot John's *régime*. “There was also a deed done once in that monastery, which I would utterly consign to oblivion, although it is an unworthy deed. . . . For once upon a time, a certain priest and deacon, Gauls by birth, and two of the aforesaid monks, by the instigation of the devil and excited by some secret jealousy, became so embittered in secret against their Abbot, the above-mentioned John, that, like Jews, they circumvented

¹ The nobles were rich and would not become monks. The poor were too poor and would not be received, as they could not give anything in exchange for their keep.

and betrayed their master. For whereas he had two servants, whom he had hired out of Gaul, they taught these such wicked practices, that in the night when all men were enjoying the sweet tranquillity of sleep, they should make their way into the church armed, and shutting it behind them as usual, hide themselves therein, and wait for the moment when the Abbot should enter the church alone. At length when he should come alone to pray, and bending his knees, bow before the holy altar, the men should rush on him with hostility and try to slay him on the spot. Then they should drag his lifeless body out of the church, and throw it down before the house of a certain harlot, as if he had been slain whilst on a visit to her. This was their machination, adding crime to crime, as it is said 'the last error shall be worse than the first.'

"But the divine mercy which always delights to aid the innocent, frustrated in great part the wicked design of these wicked men, so that it should not turn out in every respect as they had proposed.

"When, therefore, the whole of the evil counsel had been explained by those wicked teachers to their wicked agents, and the night which had been fixed on as most fit was come, the two armed ruffians were placed, with a promise of impunity, to await in the church for the arrival of the Abbot. In the

middle of the night John, as usual, entered the church to pray, without anyone's knowing of it, and knelt before the altar. The two ruffians then rushed upon him with drawn swords and dealt him some severe wounds. But he being a man of a brave mind, and as we have heard say, not unacquainted with the art of self-defence, if he had not been a follower of a better calling, no sooner heard the sound of the robbers before he saw them, than he rose up against them before he was wounded, and, shouting as loud as he could, struggled against them, crying out that they were devils and not men: for he himself knew no better as he thought that no man would dare to attempt such a deed. He was, however, wounded before any of the people could come to his help. His attendants, roused by the noise, were frightened when they heard the word devils, and both those two who, like Jews, sought to betray their master, and the others who knew nothing of the matter, rushed together to the doors of the church; but before they got there those ruffians escaped, leaving the abbot half dead. The monks raised the old man in a fainting condition and carried him home with tears and lamentations; nor did those two deceitful servants shed less tears than the more innocent. But God's mercy did not allow so bold a deed to go unpunished. The ruffians who perpetrated it and all who urged them to it were

taken and put in prison, where, by various tortures, they came to a disgraceful end." Alfred wanted to make men of prayer by secluding his clergy in a monastery; and he hoped to do it by withdrawing men from secular life; but when he had accomplished that he found that he had to face the greater difficulty of getting the secular temper out of his monks. It was easier to change their homes than their hearts.

The monastic life was more acceptable to women than to men, and was deliberately chosen by many high-born women. For women who did not aspire to be housewives—and there were some—there was no alternative life-work. One of Alfred's foundations was for them. "Another monastery was built by the same king as a residence for nuns near the eastern gate of Shaftesbury, and his own daughter Ethelgiva [Æthelgifu] was placed in it as abbess. With her many other noble ladies bound by the rules of the monastic life dwelt in that monastery." This was maintaining a tradition which had already made England famous for its devotees of noble birth. Edith, daughter of King Edgar, had been brought up by her mother in the monastery at Wilton, and had become famous for her culture and piety.¹ As she lived to be ninety-eight, she may have had some share in founding the nun's house at Shaftes-

¹ "Monks of the West," Montalembert, edited by Gasquet.

bury. It was an English woman, St Lioba by name, who introduced monastic culture into Germany.

In addition to the monasteries of Alfred's foundation there were others which he supported. "The fourth portion (of the royal income) was for the use of all the neighbouring monasteries in all Saxony and Mercia, and also during some years in turn for the churches and servants of God dwelling in Britain [Wales], Cornwall, Gaul [France], Armorica [Brittany], Northumbria, and sometimes also in Ireland."

A list of benefactions, which includes France, Brittany, and Ireland, is not only evidence of Alfred's largeness of heart, but also of the internationalism of the system. The monastery was the one institution of the time in which men of different nations could live side by side. There, as everywhere, the larger citizenship in the kingdom of God, when it was realised in spirit as well as name, lifted men out of the narrower and exclusive citizenship of the tribe and nation. The monk was at home wherever there was a monastery. The obituaries of the principal monasteries bear witness to a union of hearts and community of prayer which drew together men of the most dissimilar races.¹ In passing from one country to another, it often happened that the only

¹ "Monks of the West," vol. v. p. 90, especially in the matter of prayers for the dead.

caravanserais to which travellers could turn were the monasteries. They formed regular stations of communication between nations; and they kept in repair the bonds of unity, affection, and common interest which made Christendom.

When a monastery was efficient, it was an educational centre of some value. The ordinary monasteries maintained schools, where the novices and a few out-pupils were taught reading, writing, and Latin; and there were others where students were introduced to the whole body of mediæval learning, scholastic philosophy, grammar and versification, medicine and botany, and the elements of mechanics, astronomy, and geometry. We are told that Theodore of Tarsus, Archbishop of Canterbury,¹ "with the help of his friend, Abbot Adrian, taught the young Anglo-Saxons, not only the Holy Scriptures, but also the rule of poetry, astronomy [especially used for chronological calculations], and arithmetic, and brought his scholars to use Greek and Latin almost as readily as their mother-tongue." Such libraries as existed were to be found in the monasteries. Alcuin mentions among the books in the library at York, manuscripts of Aristotle [*i.e.* Latin versions of a few of his works], Cicero, Pliny, Virgil, Statius, Lucan."² The function of

¹ "Monks of the West," vol. v. p. 145.

² There is an excellent and most interesting description of the ordinary life of a good monastery in Church's "Anselm," chap. iii.

such libraries was described as that of serving as "the intellectual arsenals of princes."

Besides the part Alfred took in founding and maintaining monasteries, he was busied with raising the character, standing, and intelligence of the clergy throughout his kingdom. In the history of the Christian Church there is a law always operating which might be described as an inverse Gresham's Law, applied in the moral sphere. Gresham's Law of coinage is that, when two currencies are in circulation, one being better in quality than the other, the bad money drives out the good. Within the Christian Church it is constantly found that, where there are two standards of Christian life and duty co-existing, the better tends to drive out the worse. A standard once accepted and realised even by a small number of persons, tends to get itself recognised and adopted by an ever-widening circle, and it is in this way that reformations of morals proceed. There is no doubt that, in some way such as this, the monastic ideal was leavening up the ideal for the life of the ordinary clergy.

Alfred would not tolerate the popular idea that it was enough to set apart a man to perform mass, as a mere *opus operatum*, whether he understood what he was doing or not. He held that men must dignify offices, rather than offices men.¹ He had no place in

¹ Cf. quotation from "Boethius," p. 320.

the Church for ignorant and unintelligent priests. He preferred to keep a bishopric vacant, unpopular though that was, rather than appoint an unsuitable person. He had to lift the Church out of the condition which made it discreditable to be in holy orders. As an indication of the feeling of the time, one case may be mentioned, which is recorded in connection with a Witenagemot held at Saltwich, where an estate was held by a family on condition that they should supply one of the family to be "of divine order"; but when asked to fulfil the condition "every one declared that he would rather forgo the land than he would take holy orders."¹ Alfred knew that the only way of getting over this discredit was to give to holy orders the solid argument of good men, who could command the respect and reverence of all. We can hardly dissociate from his influence the fact that within half-a-century of his death the expulsion of the secular clergy from the cathedrals had begun.

It is in the light of this effort to raise the standard of the clergy that we must read Alfred's introduction to Pope Gregory's "Pastoral Care." He chose the book because it attached supreme importance to the character of the man called to holy office; and he prefaced the book with an introduction which sets forth with characteristic

¹ Thorpe, "Charters," p. 166.

frankness his motives and aims. A copy was sent to every bishop, to be placed in his cathedral. As the preface is one of Alfred's most characteristic utterances, and the choice of the book gives insight into the king's ideals, it is worth giving both preface and contents in detail. The version here given is from Sweet's admirable and handy edition, published by the Early English Text Society. The two MSS., whose texts are given in full, were written in Alfred's reign.

"This book is for Worcester.

"King Alfred bids greet Bishop Waerferth with his words lovingly and with friendship; and I let it be known to thee that it has very often come into my mind what wise men there formerly were throughout England, both of sacred and secular orders: and how happy times there were then throughout England: and how the kings who had power over the nation in those days, obeyed God and His ministers, and they preserved peace, morality, and order at home, and at the same time enlarged their territory abroad: and how they prospered both with war and with wisdom: and also the sacred orders, how zealous they were both in teaching and learning and in all the services they owed to God: and how foreigners came to this land in search of wisdom and instruction, and how we should now have to get them from abroad if we were to have them. So general was its decay in England that there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English or translate a letter from Latin into English: and I believe there were not many beyond the Humber. There were so few of them that I cannot remember a single one south of the Thames when I came to the Throne.

"Thanks be to God Almighty that we have any teachers among us now!

"And therefore I command thee to do as I believe thou art

willing, to disengage thyself from worldly matters as often as thou canst, that thou mayest apply the wisdom which God has given thee wherever thou canst. Consider what punishments would come upon us on account of this world, if we neither loved it (wisdom) ourselves nor suffered other men to attain it : we should love the name only of Christian, and very few of the virtues. When I considered all this I remembered also how I saw before it had been all ravaged and burnt, how the churches throughout the whole of England stood filled with treasures and books, and there was also a great multitude of God's servants, but they had very little knowledge of the books, for they could not understand anything of them because they were not written in their own language. As if they had said :

“Our forefathers who formerly held these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and bequeathed it to us. In this we can still see their tracks, but we cannot follow them, and therefore we have lost both the wealth and the wisdom, because we would not incline our hearts after their example.’

“When I remembered all this, I wondered extremely that the good and wise men who were formerly all over England, and had perfectly learned all the books, did not wish to translate them into their own language. But again I soon answered myself and said :

“They did not think that men would ever be so careless, and that learning would so decay.

“Through that they abstained from it, and they wished that the wisdom in this land might increase with our knowledge of languages.’

“Then I remembered how the law was first known in Hebrew, and again, when the Greeks had learned it, they translated the whole of it into their own language and all other books beside. And again the Romans, when they had learned it, they translated the whole of it through learned interpreters into their own language. And also all other Christian nations translated a part of them into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me, if ye think so, for us also to translate *some books which are most needful for all men to know*, into the language we

can all understand, and for you to do as we very easily can if we have tranquillity enough—i.e. that all the youth now in England of free men, who are rich enough to be able to devote themselves to it, is set to learn as long as they are not fit for any other occupation, until that they are well able to read English writing: and let those be afterwards taught more in the Latin language who are to continue learning and be promoted to a higher rank.

“When I remembered how the knowledge of Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many could read English writing, I began, among other various and manifold troubles of this kingdom to translate into English the book which is called in Latin *Pastoralis*, and in English *Shepherd’s Book*, sometimes word by word and sometimes according to sense, as I had learned it from Plegmund my archbishop, and Asser my bishop, and Grimbold my mass-priest, and John my mass-priest. And when I had learnt it as I could best understand it, and as I could most clearly interpret it, I translated it into English: and I will send a copy to every bishopric in my kingdom: and on each there is a clasp¹ worth fifty mancus. And I command in God’s name that no man take the clasp from the book, or the book from the minster: it is uncertain how long there may be such learned bishops as now, thanks be to God, there are everywhere: therefore I wish them always to remain in their place unless the bishop wish to take them with him or they be lent out anywhere, or any one make a copy from them.”

This introduction is followed by a speech in metre, in which the book itself is supposed to speak as to its origin, much after the fashion of Alfred’s jewel:

¹The word *Aestel* here used is of doubtful meaning. The Bishop of Bristol thinks it means “a marker either of metal or of wood with metal fittings, so constructed as to be fixed upon the binding, and to bring a small plank across the page wherever desired. This would keep the parchment flat when apt to buckle, would mark the reader’s or transcriber’s place, and would minimise the risk of injury by fingering.” Bowker, p. 193.

“This message Augustine over the salt sea brought to the islanders, as the Lord’s champion had formerly decreed it, the Pope of Rome: the wise Gregorius was versed in many true doctrines through the wisdom of his mind, his hoard of cunning thoughts: for he gained over most of mankind to the Guardian of Heaven, best of Romans, wisest of men, most gloriously famous. Afterwards King Alfred translated every word of me into English, and sent me to his scribes south and north; and ordered more such to be brought to him after this example that he might send them to his bishops, for some of them needed it who knew but little Latin.”

Then follows Gregory’s Herd-book, as translated by Alfred. Each chapter has a brief heading describing its contents. The headings indicate the character of the book.

- I. That unlearned men are not to presume to undertake teaching.
- II. Nor again let the learned who are unwilling to live as they have learned in books, undertake the dignity of teaching.
- III. Concerning the burden of government, and how the ruler must despise all hardships and how afraid he must be of every luxury.
- IV. And how often the occupation of power and government distracts the mind of the ruler.
- V. Concerning those who are able to be useful when in power, both by their examples and virtues, and yet for their own comfort avoid it.
- VI. Concerning those who through humility avoid the

- burden of government, but if they are really humble do not resist the divine decree.
- VII. That often the ministration of teaching is very blamelessly desired, and that often many very blamelessly are compelled to undertake it.
- VIII. Concerning those who wish to be made bishops, how they seize on the words of the Apostle Paul to defend their desire.
- IX. How the mind that wishes to be above others deceives itself while it thinks to do many good works, and simulates it before other men if he have worldly honour, and then wishes to neglect it when he has it.
- X. What kind of man he is to be who is to rule.
- XI. What kind of man he is to be who is not to rule.
- XII. How he who properly and regularly attains thereto is to conduct himself in it.
- XIII. How the teacher is to be pure in heart.
- XIV. How the teacher is to be foremost in good works.
- XV. How the teacher is to be discreet in his silence and useful in his speech.
- XVI. How the teacher is to be sympathising with and mindful of all men in their troubles.
- XVII. How the ruler is to be the companion of the well-doers from humility, and severe against the vices of the wicked from righteous anger.
- XVIII. How the teacher is not to diminish his care of inner things on account of outer occupations, nor on the other hand neglect the outer affairs for the inner.
- XIX. That the ruler is not to do his good works for vain-glory only, but rather for the love of God.
- XX. That the ruler is to know accurately that vices often deceive and pretend to be virtues.

Sometimes an excellent moral is enforced by a quaint exegesis—as, for instance, under Chapter II. we read: “Many wise teachers also fight with their

behaviour against the spiritual precepts which they teach with words, when they live in one way and teach in another. Often when the shepherd goes by dangerous ways, the flock which is too unwary falls. Of such shepherds the prophet spoke—‘Ye trod down the grass of God’s sheep, and ye defiled their water with your feet, though ye drank it before undefiled.’ . . . Of whom again God spoke through the prophet—‘Bad priests are the people’s fall.’ No man injures more the holy assembly than those who assume the name and order of the holy office, and then pervert it; for no man dare admonish them if they do wrong, and sins become very widely extended since they are so much honoured. But they would, of their own accord, flee the burden of so great a sin, being unworthy of it, if they would hear with the ears of their heart and carefully consider the words of Christ when He said — ‘He who deceives one of these little ones, it were better for him to have a millstone tied to his neck and so to be thrown to the bottom of the sea.’ By the mill is signified the surfeit of this world and also of man’s life and their toil, and by the bottom of the sea their end and the last judgment. The mill is turned when the man is ended, the great mill is turned when this world is ended. He who attains holy orders, and with bad examples, either of words or of works,

leads others astray, it were better for him to end his life in a humble station and in earthly works, for if he do well in these he will have a good reward for it; if he do ill he will suffer less torment in hell if he arrive there alone, than if he bring another with him." So, line upon line, precept upon precept, the great Pastor teaches that Christian character is the sign-manual of the Head of the Church upon His followers, and the true miracle by which the Church lives the miracle of the transubstantiated character.

The passage in the king's introduction to his book which refers to the teaching of young men of gentle birth is of great interest. Asser tells us that in the division of that half of the royal revenue which was devoted to the service of God was a "portion assigned to the school, which he had studiously collected together, consisting of many of the nobility of his own nation." This was obviously, like the school of Charles the Great, a Palatine school which moved about with the king from place to place, for the young men attached to the court. It would be often at Winchester, under the shadow of the old and new foundations already there. Two of Alfred's own children were educated at this court school. "Edward and Æthelwitha, we are told, were bred up in the king's court, and received great attention from their attendants and nurses;

may, they continue to this day, with the love of all about them, showing affability and even gentleness towards all; nor among their other studies which appertain to this life, and are fit for noble youths, are they suffered to pass their time without learning the liberal arts, for they have carefully learned the Psalms and Saxon books, especially the Saxon poems, and are continually in the habit of making use of books.”¹

Something more systematic and organised than the court school seems to be implied in what Asser says about Æthelward, the king's youngest son. He “was consigned to the schools of learning where, with the children of almost all the nobility of the country, and many also who were not noble, he prospered under the diligent care of his teachers. Books in both languages, namely Latin and Saxon, were read in the school. They also learned to write.” It is just possible to connect this determined effort of the king to enforce the duty of education with a later development. When the canonical rule came to be recognised, and the secular clergy were ejected from the cathedrals in the tenth century, a special officer was appointed and charged with the instruction of the younger

¹ Asser, p. 69. The names of Alfred's children usually given are Eadward, Æthelgifu, Ælfryth, Æthelweard, Æthelflaed. Asser probably means to indicate with Edward the second daughter who afterwards married Baldwin II. of Flanders.

clerks and the young men who were taught along with them. This official is known as the Scholasticus, or schoolmaster, and when he adds to that office the secretaryship of the whole body of canons he is known as the cancellarius or chancellor. As the importance of the school increases, the cancellarius has the right to nominate assistants, who bear the title "rector scholarum," or "magister scholarum." An ingenious suggestion has been made by Dr Hatch that the survival of these names in the University of Oxford may point to the fact that "the dignified position of the Chancellor of the University of Oxford is only the historical continuation of the schoolmaster and secretary of the canons of St Frideswide."¹ Unfortunately, this suggestion does not help to assign a date for the origin of the hypothetical schools, but it makes it at least possible to maintain that a school of some kind had existed under the shelter of the monastery long before it had any independent existence which could be recognised in official documents.

¹ Hatch, "Growth of Church Institutions," pp. 172 and 187.

Chapter VI

Laws

“He found the laws powerless, and he gave them force.”

Inscription on Count Gleichen's Statue of Alfred at Wantage.

“In early times the quantity of government is much more important than its quality. What you want is a comprehensive rule binding men together, making them do much the same things, telling them what to expect of each other—fashioning them alike, and keeping them so. What this rule is does not matter so much. A good rule is better than a bad one, but any rule is better than none; while for reasons which a jurist will appreciate, none can be very good.”

Walter Bagehot.

“Law, order, duty, and restraint, obedience, discipline.”

Rudyard Kipling.

“Those counsels to which time has not been called, time will not ratify.”—*Bacon.*

THE most important duty of a king towards the laws in a community in the stage of Wessex in Alfred's time is not to make laws or to alter them, but to secure the keeping of those already in existence. Posterity likes to have a Solon to look back upon as the author of its laws and constitutions; but, in fact, constitution-making, in the strict sense of the word, plays a very small part in the history of mankind. If we are to have a Solon at all in

England, Alfred will do very well as a claimant for the part, but he is essentially an English Solon, believing only in cautious and wary innovations, because "he does not know how much of his work will please those who come after him."

Alfred's contribution to the growth of England's laws can best be understood by reference to the conditions of society which he found. As the men were the laws must be. He has left us striking witness that the actual land he ruled was far removed from the ideal community which he believed possible. It is evident that his mind was haunted by the ideal of a perfect social order, a community obedient to the laws of the kingdom of God, in which the spiritual order of life, which is the consummation of human relations, might be achieved. His actual work is a fine illustration of how practical and useful the legal work of a man inspired by the noblest ideals for society may be, how it may deal with intractable facts and persons, and always deal with them so as to modify them in the direction of the ideal.

In the society with which he had to deal the prevalent crimes were witchcraft, man-slaying, assault and battery, rape, robbery, cattle-lifting, and slave-stealing; private feuds were common, and were handed on from one generation to another. The type of life was coarse, animal, and semi-barbarous.

The people were litigious, but not law-abiding. It was only possible by slow and laborious steps, continued through long and tedious intervals, to instil into a people of this fibre that notion of a reign of law which has become to us like the instinct of a second nature.

Perhaps the best familiar instance with which we may compare Alfred's work is one which was often in the king's own mind, and which has left its mark on his work, the case of Moses and the tribes of Israel. Moses, like Alfred, had to deal with a gathering of different folk who, only a little removed from the condition of wild desert tribes, had been brought into connection, though only superficially, with a civilisation which contained far higher elements. He had seen the vision of an ordered community welded into a unity, and made powerful by obedience to the yea and nay which are graven into the life of the universe. He, too, had to bring a noble ideal to bear upon most intractable material, and, in spite of all deductions, he did it with magnificent success. The Israelite tribes make a good example of the nation-making power of law in the development of an uncivilised people. They were, in the beginning, the most unstable of all nations—idolatrous, fickle, sensual, shallow, passionate, greedy, and cunning. They finally passed under the discipline of rigid law,

and they came out the most stable of all nations in their characteristics¹; and fifteen hundred years of alternate persecution and prosperity have not been able to disintegrate the character so formed.

How much this parallel meant to Alfred we may judge from the long and ingenious preface to his ecclesiastical laws, which was, to judge by internal evidence, dictated by himself. He began with an almost literal transcription of the Decalogue. The second commandment is omitted in its usual place, and stands as the tenth, in an abbreviated form—“Work not thou for thyself golden gods or silver.” In the fourth commandment, the Saxon text has an alteration very characteristic of that emphasis on the eternal Christ, almost to the “confounding of the Persons,” which appears in Saxon hymns.² “In six days Christ wrought the heavens and earth, and all shapen things that in them are, and rested on the seventh day; and for that the Lord hallowed it.”

After the ten commandments come selections from the Mosaic code, chiefly from chapters *xxi.*, *xxii.*, and *xxiii.* of the book of *Exodus*.³ In

¹ In this respect Ezra completes the work of Moses.

² *E.g.* Cynewulf's “Christ,”

“Then he who shaped the world God's Spirit Son.”

³ In this chapter the word Mosaic is used to describe the whole system of dooms which had its historical origin with Moses, begun in the desert and continued after the settlement of the tribes in Canaan.

order to bring out the points of similarity and difference between the two sets of dooms we cannot do better than follow Judge Hughes' method of placing them in parallel columns.

Exodus xxi. (R.V.)

1. Now these are the judgments that thou shalt set before them. If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve; and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he come in by himself he shall go out by himself, if he be married then his wife shall go out with him. If his master give him a wife and she bear him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant shall plainly say, "I love my master, my wife, and my children, I will not go out free," then his master shall bring him unto God (or unto the judges) and shall bring to the door, or unto the doorpost, and the master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall serve him for ever.

Alfred's Dooms.

1. These are the dooms that thou shalt set them. If anyone buy a Christian bondsman, he he bondsman to him six years, the seventh he be free unbought, with such clothes as he went in with such go he out. If he himself have a wife, go she out with him. If, however, the lord gave him a wife, go she and her bairn to the lord. If then the bondsman say, "I will not go from my lord, nor from my wife, nor from my bairn, nor from my goods," let then his lord bring him to the church door, and drill through his ear with an awl, to witness that he be henceforth a bondsman.

The adoption by Alfred of such a Mosaic regulation is not to be taken too seriously. It does not mean that a system of septennial liberations was

ever more than an ideal. But it is valid as a witness to the existence of personal slavery among the southern folk of England. "The Saxon 'theow' was much more like a Roman slave than a mediæval serf."¹ He was not attached to the land but to his owner. Not only were slaves bought and sold, but there was so much slave trading that selling men beyond seas had to be specially forbidden.

It is clear from the evidence that in the matter of abolishing servile conditions of life Alfred accepted for himself the highest standard which his time knew. The Church had already set the fashion, and accustomed men to regard the freeing of slaves as a religious work. Bishop Wilfrith in the seventh century had liberated two hundred and fifty men and women whom he found attached as slaves to his estate at Tilsey. Archbishop Theodore, the author of the English Diocesan system, denied Christian burial to kidnappers, and prohibited the sale of children by their parents after the age of seven. In 816 a provincial council at Chelsea (Celchyth) binds its members to free, by will, every Englishman who, during their tenure of the lands of the bishoprics, had become a slave. But for such voluntary efforts, raids, poverty, and crime, the main feeders of slavery, might have kept large numbers of Englishmen in a permanently servile

¹ Pollock, "English Law before the Norman Conquest," p. 224.

state. One of the dooms in which Alfred modifies the Mosaic code shows how slaves were manufactured.

Exodus xxii.

If a man shall steal an ox or a sheep, and kill it or sell it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.

Alfred's Doom.

If anyone steal another's ox and slay or sell him, give he two for it, and four sheep for one. If he have not what he may give, be he himself sold for the fee.

The share which Alfred took in the good work of making freemen is seen in one of the provisions of his will.

"I beseech in God's name and in the name of His Saints that no one of my kinsmen or heirs obstruct the freedom of those whom I have redeemed. The West Saxon Wise Men have pronounced it lawful that I leave them free or bond as I will. But I for God's love and for my soul's good, will that they be master of their freedom and of their will; and in the name of the living God I bid that none disturb them, neither by money cess, neither by any manner of means that they may not chose [*i.e.* to prevent them from choosing] such man as they will. But I will that they give back to the families at Domersham their land deeds and their freedom, to choose such master as may to them be most agreeable for my sake and for Ælflaed's and for the

friends that she did intercede for and I do intercede for. And let them [*i.e.* the beneficiaries under this will] seek also with live stock for my soul's health so far as may be and as is fitting, and as ye to give me shall be disposed." Judged by the standard of his own time in this matter, Alfred's treatment of the slave question probably seemed, to his kinsmen, liberal if not quixotic; judged by our standard it seems strange that he should have owned slaves at all; that may help us to measure how "the minds of men have broadened, with the process of the suns."

The twenty-first chapter of Exodus is given almost literally, with the exception of the seventeenth verse. When the king reaches the eighth verse of chapter xxii. an important modification strikes him, and he inserts it without apology. Verses 7 and 8 read: "If a man shall deliver unto his neighbour money or stuff to keep and it be stolen out of the man's house, if the thief be found he shall pay double. If the thief be not found, then the master of the house shall come near to God (or the judges) to see whether he have not put his hand on to his neighbour's goods." Alfred adds: "If it were live cattle, and if he say that the army took it, or that it died of itself, and he have witness he need not pay for it. If he have no witness and they believe him not, let him then swear."

Some of the other changes are as follows:—

Exodus xxiii. 3.

Neither shalt thou favour a poor man in his cause.

6. Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause.

7. Keep thou far from a false matter, and the innocent and righteous slay thou not, for I will not justify the wicked.

8. And thou shalt take no gifts, for the gift blindeth them that have sight and perverteth the words of the righteous.

9. And thou shalt not oppress a stranger, for ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Alfred's Dooms.

Doom thou very evenly :
doom thou not one doom to the wealthy, another to the poor, nor one doom to the more loved, others to the more loathed doom thou not.

Shun thou aye leasings :
A sooth-fast man and guiltless slay thou him never.

Take thou never meed monies, for they blind full oft wise men's thoughts and turn aside their words.

As for the stranger and comer from abroad, meddle thou not with him, nor oppress thou him with unright.

Here Alfred breaks off and sums up the last section in the chapter in the pithy words, "Swear ye never to heathen-gods, nor in nothing call ye upon them."

The fact that Alfred, who felt himself free to alter and modify these Hebrew dooms as he thought his own time required, was nevertheless able to transcribe two chapters and a half almost bodily from the Mosaic law indicates how similar were the problems with which the doom-makers had to deal. When the chapters from Exodus are carefully read with this in view, it also becomes clear how simple and undeveloped the structure of society was in

both cases. The regulations are those required for a primitive agricultural people, all usury is forbidden, and the main object of the law is to guarantee to every man the right to live and to preserve intact the bare means of subsistence.

The extracts from Exodus are followed by a historical argument which is an excellent illustration of the king's style and way of thinking: "These are the dooms that the Almighty God himself spake to Moses, and bade him to hold, and when the Lord's only-begotten Son, our God, that is Christ the Healer, on middle-earth came, He said that He came not these dooms to break, nor to gainsay, but with all good to do, and with all mild-heartedness and lowlymindedness to teach them. Then after His throes, ere that His apostles were gone through all the world to teach, and while yet they were together, many heathen nations turned to God. While they all together were, they sent errand-doers to Antioch, and to Syria, to teach Christ's law. When they understood that they sped not, then sent they an errand-writing to them." The errand-writing is of course the epistle from the council of Jerusalem as it is given in Acts xv. 23-29, containing the relaxation of the ceremonial law. Then, to put the conclusion of the whole matter as the king had learnt it from his New Testament, he adds: "That ye will that other men

do not to you, do ye not that to other men [note the negative form of the commandment]. From this doom a man may think that he should doom every one rightly; he need keep no other doom-book. Let him take heed that he doom to no man that he would not that he doom to him, if he sought doom over him."

We should have to come to the days of the Long Parliament and the Commonwealth before we should find such another preamble to a statement of English law. It is significant that the two periods of England's history which are wittingly formative, the times when early England and modern England were in the making, both furnish us with legislators saturated with the feeling that law is of God rather than of man; that it is the revelation of a pre-ordained spiritual order in social life, and that it is man's business in his law-making to discover what that pre-ordained spiritual order is, and to approximate to it as nearly as he can.¹

It is clear that Alfred was somewhat puzzled by the contrast between his premises and the conclusion at which he was bound to arrive; the ideal of the

¹ Is there any real hope that England will see another period as fruitful as those of Alfred and Cromwell until we have shaken off the idea that laws are the instruments by which one class or one trade may better itself at the expense of others, and have returned to the older majestic conception of the duty of the law-maker as that of interpreting as best he may the Divine will for humanity?

preamble seemed remote from the actual dooms he had to collect and publish. This is how he bridged the chasm in his own mind. "Since that time [the time of the Jerusalem Council] it happened that many nations took to Christ's faith, and there were many synods through all middle-earth gathered, and even throughout the English race they took to Christ's faith through holy bishops, and other wise men. They then set forth for their mild-heartedness that Christ taught as to almost every misdeed that the worldly lords might with their leave, without sin, for the first guilt, take their fee boot which they then appointed: except for treason against a lord, to which they durst not declare any mild-heartedness; for that the Almighty God doomed none to them that slighted Him, nor Christ, God's Son, doomed none to him that sold Him to death, and He bade to love a lord as himself. They then in many synods set a bot for many misdeeds of men: and in many books they wrote here one doom there another." This is perhaps as good theology and history as the time would allow. Alfred's line of argument shows at least the logical working of his mind, and the sense of a need of an evolutionary philosophy of history which neither he nor any one else in the world of his time was able to satisfy.

He concludes the explanation of his doom-collecting thus: "I then, Alfred the King, gathered

these together and bade to write many of these that our forefathers held, those that to me seemed good: and many of those that seemed not good I set aside with my Wise Men's council, and in otherwise bade to hold them: for that I durst not venture much of mine own to set in writing, for that it was unknown to me what of this would be acceptable to those that came after us. But those that I met with, either in the days of my kinsman Ine, or of Offa, King of Mercia, or of Æthelberht, that first of English race took baptism, those that seemed to me to be rightest I gathered them herein and let the others alone. I then, Alfred, King of the West Saxons, showed these to all my own Wise Men, and they then said that they all seemed good to them to hold."

Then follow the collected dooms approved by Alfred and his Wise Men, with Æthelberht's and Ine's dooms each by themselves. These are probably the only laws into which a touch of poetry has been allowed to come. "If a man burn a tree in a wood let him pay full wite of sixty shillings, *because fire is a thief*. But if any one fell many trees in a wood let him pay for three trees, each with thirty shillings. He need not pay more, because the *axe is an informer, not a thief*."

The extent of Alfred's actual achievement in the legal development of England was heavily dis-

counted by the nature of English judicial procedure. Some of the features of what served for a judicial system are startling. The procedure was, as in all primitive societies, formal, rigid, and cumbrous. Disputes about property were settled, not by a careful investigation of the truth in disputed matters of fact, which was regarded as impossible in those days, but by the weight of the oaths which could be mustered by the parties in the dispute. What the law did was to declare how many oath-helpers were required, and how many churl's oaths were equal to a thane's. The oaths of the oath-helper were not by way of testimony to particular facts, but affirming or denying the whole claim of the man on whose side he was; and this requirement of good fame and good repute was a rough workable system that acted, on the whole, well.

In the case of criminal accusations, a man was compelled either to clear himself by oath or to stand his trial by ordeal. The common ordeals in England were sinking or floating in cold water, and recovery within a limited time from the effects of plunging the arm into boiling water, or handling or walking on red-hot iron.¹ These were old

¹ "Ordealium was a trial; and was either by going over nine red-hot ploughshares, as in the case of Queen Emma, who was accused with the Bishop of Winchester, over which she being led blindfold, and having passed all her irons, asked 'when she should come to her trial'; or 'twas by taking a red-hot coulter in a man's hand, and

Teutonic customs which perhaps originally implied an appeal to the god of water or of fire, but as Christianity gained strength, by many small steps long since forgotten, the heathen elements were abolished. Christian elements were introduced first, in addition to, and then in place of, heathen practices, to give the original custom a different character. Eventually, as late as the beginning of the thirteenth century, the heathen practices were discountenanced by the Christian Church. As the ordeal was only appealed to in cases where the accused was disqualified from clearing himself by oaths, it does not imply such gross miscarriages of justice as might be expected from the rough and ready method of settling a man's guilt. In civil and criminal cases extreme importance was attached to the exact wording of the oaths; if in swearing a slip of the tongue was made, or any similar blunder, the case was lost.

It will be readily understood that in such a system extreme importance was attached to the ties of kinship and neighbourhood which gave every man his place in society, and gave him the right to call on his friends to swear to his character or good

carrying it so many steps and then casting it from him. As soon as this was done, the hands and feet were to be bound up, and certain charms to be said, and a day or two after to be opened: if the parts were whole the Party was judged to be innocent, and so on the contrary."—*Selden*.

faith. The sense of mutual responsibility, under what was called the frith borh¹ system, was highly developed, and was, in fact, the chief security for the peace and welfare of the nation. "It is most needful," Alfred's dooms declare, "that every man warily hold his oath and his pledge. If any man is forced to either of these in wrong, either to treachery against a lord, or other unright help, it is better to belie than to fulfil. If he, however, pledge what it is right for him to fulfil, and belie that, let him give with lowly-mindedness his weapon and his goods to his friends to hold, and be forty nights in prison in a king's town, and suffer there as the bishop assigns him; and let his kinsman feed him if he himself have no meat. If he have no kinsman or no food, let the king's reeve feed him. If he flee out near the time and one take him, let him be forty nights in prison as he should at first. If, however, he escape, let him be looked on as a runaway, and be excommunicated of all Christ's churches. If, however, another man be his surety, let him make boot for his breach of suretyship as the law may direct, and for the pledge breaking as his confessor may survive him." We may compare this other doom—"If a man kinless of father's kin fight and slay a man, then if he have mother's kin let them find a third of the were, his guild brethren

¹ Frank pledge is a mistranslation.

a third, and for a third let him flee. If he have no mother's kin let his guild brethren pay half and for half let him flee. If a man slay a kinless man let half his were be paid to the king, half to his guild brethren."

One of the most singular features of this whole system to modern eyes is the attempt to reduce all wrongs and injuries to a monetary standard, and the fact that the monetary standard was proportioned, not to the nature of the wrong, but to the social grade of the injured person, which again in its turn depended mainly on the possession of wealth in some material form. This fact well digested may help us to realise that the modern commercial standards of judgment, which are sometimes deplored as the result of recent industrial developments, represent not so much the corruptions of a society originally pure, as the survivals in modern society of a primitive barbarism.

When the nature of this primitive system of justice is understood, it is clear that it is as yet impossible to speak of legislation or codification of laws in our sense of the term. The nature of Alfred's work was determined by the material which came to him. All old English laws are, strictly speaking, amendments. They pre-suppose behind them the vast common law of each folk, English, Saxon, Dane,

Northman or Jute. What Alfred did for the laws of England may be analysed thus: (1) He made a collection of the Kentish and West Saxon and Mercian statutes, amending the old common law that was handed down unwritten. There were the laws of Kent consisting of the dooms of the first Christian king, Æthelberht, and the additions made by his successors, Aldhaere, Eadric, Wihtraed; the laws of his own predecessor, Ine of Wessex; and the famous collection of dooms of Offa the great Mercian king. In the case of the first two, he seems to have incorporated the whole collection without modification by him. In the case of the Mercian dooms, alterations or modifications of dooms which did not please him were made with the consent of the Witan.

(2) He added some laws of his own which were to run for all three kingdoms—such, for instance, as the law of treason: "If any one is treacherous about the king's life by himself, or by protecting outlaws or their men, be he liable in his life and in all that he owns." The value of the king's life had been greatly increased by becoming the symbol of the unity of the three kingdoms, and this is an expression of its enhanced value to the united kingdom.

(3) By issuing together the existing dooms he supplied a basis for judgments on the frontier

districts where two law systems met. Alfred's laws became the basis of the judicial system for the Welsh in the west of England, as well as for West Saxons and the Mercians that were under Alderman Æthelred. In the days of Edward, the next king, when it became necessary to have some common basis of judgment for Danes and English, the regulations accepted are expressly traced back to the ordinances of Alfred and Guthrum—*i.e.* to the enactments in their convention of peace.

(4) It was perhaps even more important for the time, and it certainly made most immediate impression on his own people, that "he found the laws powerless, and he gave them force." The extraordinary weakness of the Saxon judicial system was in its lack of executive force. Jurisdiction had begun by being voluntary. The court at first could not compel obedience to its decision any more than a tribunal of arbitration to-day can compel the sovereign states to fulfil its award. Though it had got beyond this stage before Alfred's time, the man who had won his suit was still left to gather "the fruits of judgment" for himself. And if everything else failed he might wage war openly on his obstinate opponent. Under such circumstances the courts might set afoot deadly feuds quite as easily as settle them. Alfred made it clear that the whole might of the king lay behind

the law, and that there was an adequate sanction of force to compel obedience. The word "carcer," for prison, begins to appear in his laws, indicating that there was no English word in use which meant the same thing, and we know that his dooms introduce the thing as well as the word. The strenuous executive provisions of the king are quite sufficient to account for all that was told afterwards about the peace of the land in his time; how women might travel safely by the high-roads unprotected, and gold bracelets might be left there and not be stolen. These are the traditional equivalents for a reign of justice in the land.¹ Alfred's reputation as a creator of order rests, and most firmly, on the high ideal which actuated his measures; the cautious and practical statesmanship with which he accepted and utilised the material that came to his hand; and the executive force he supplied behind the whole judicial system.

¹ The stories about bracelets and the like occur in Iceland, in Denmark, and elsewhere. They are common Teutonic folk-traditions. Of course, the story in Horne's "Mirror of Justice" about Alfred hanging his judges is mere fiction.

Chapter VII

Strangers

“Let us recognise with frankness . . . the principles of brotherhood amongst nations.”—*W. E. Gladstone*.

“The brotherhood of man as an actual fact is essential to the real and endless advance of humanity.”—*W. D. Mackenzie*.

“Beyond home and city lies the broader sphere of humanity, for which there is but small native passion, and hence but little inspiring force impelling us to its duties. Yet here are our widest relations. And it is here chiefly that Christ becomes an inspiration through His loyalty of love. Christ is humanity to us, the Son of Man, the Brother of all men.”—*The Note-Book*.

ENGLAND has had two rulers to whom religion was pre-eminently the moulding power in life, the dominant influence by which character and destiny were shaped—Alfred and Cromwell. We have had other religious kings, but in these two, motives, ideas, sentiments, aims, are all steeped in the consciousness that man is a being in relation to God, and that God has a will and purpose which man is here to fulfil. Religion is a key to their lives, without which they can only be partly understood. Both of these men were pre-eminent in their time for the largeness of conception which inspired their dealings with foreign peoples. Both made a pro-

found impression on their contemporaries by the vivid and personal interest which they took in the affairs of lands distant from their own. It is tempting to see some relation of cause and consequence between the common elements in both lives; it is certainly true that when religion is strong it tends to break down parochialisms and provincialisms of thought. Lover of his country as he was, Alfred thought of England, not as an independent and isolated unit, but as a member in the body of Christendom. The unit was the larger one composed of the Christian peoples. His patriotism was all the richer because he wanted England to be not only his "fatherland," maintaining the tradition of his ancestors, but also a worthy part of Christendom, sharing the virtues and graces and duties which have no country. So, to Cromwell England was not only his own country, it was also a vital part of the great Protestant community, bound to do its part in all that concerned the community as a whole. It is also true that habits of thought and feeling which issue in the sense of human solidarity may be greatly promoted and quickened by a religion which deals with man simply as man, brought into relation to a World Ruler, and which steadily regards the essentials which are universal rather than the differences that are local and particular. In the modern religious phrase, it was the feeling

and experience of God's Fatherhood that seems in them to lie at the root of, and to issue in, the sense of human brotherhood.

This side of religious influence is finely illustrated in Alfred's history. He is the first English king whose name penetrates to the far East, and draws men to him from alien Ireland in the West. He has what we should call a world-wide reputation. Asser speaks with Celtic largeness of "daily embassies sent to him by foreign nations, from the Tyrrhenian Sea to the farthest end of Ireland."¹ He is evidently closer to the facts when he says that he has "seen and read letters, accompanied with presents, which were sent to him by Abel, the Patriarch of Jerusalem." The English Chronicle records that, in the year 883, "Sighelm and Athelstan carried to Rome the alms which the king had vowed to send thither, and also to India, to St Thomas and St Bartholomew, when they (*i.e.* the king and his men) sat down against the army at London." William of Malmesbury repeats the statement, and adds "that Sighelm, Bishop of Sherborne, prosperously penetrated into India." Some manuscripts read Judea for India, but that need not throw discredit on the statement of the Chronicle. There was nothing impossible in an

¹ An alternative suggestion is Hiberiae (Spain) for Hiberniae (Ireland).

expedition to India; Christian missionaries had reached India and China more than three centuries before this. Cosmas, an Egyptian merchant-monk, had written a "Christian Topography" at that time, and had mentioned the settlements of Nestorian Christians in Ceylon and Malabar.¹ The transition from "India" to "Judea" would easily be made in a manuscript, and it might be done in order to bring the Chronicle into agreement with Asser's statement about Abel of Jerusalem. The conclusive consideration, however, is that an embassy to St Thomas and St Bartholomew would have no particular reason for going to Judea, and every reason, according to Christian tradition, for going to India. Ecclesiastical tradition has, from very early days, associated Bartholomew with India. Eusebius states that when Pantaenus, in the reign of Commodus (180-192), arrived at "the Indies," he found his own arrival anticipated by some who were acquainted with the Gospel of Matthew, to whom Bartholomew, one of the apostles, had preached, and "had left them the Gospel of Matthew in the Hebrew, which was also preserved until this time."²

The documents and the probabilities point to one expedition, with several objective points; India

¹ Bishop of Bristol in Bowker's "Alfred."

² Eusebius, Bk. v. c. 9, 10.

being the ultimate one, and Rome and Jerusalem being taken on the way. No one will be unwilling to believe that England and India first came into touch in this gracious way, and to find in Alfred's reign this prophetic and romantic anticipation of later history. It may be that a relationship which began in the charity and Christian zeal of one of England's kings is some day to be consummated in the charity and Christian zeal of a whole nation.

The English Chronicle mentions four occasions on which Alfred sent alms to Rome, in 883, 887, 888, and 890. In the year 889 the entry is: "In this year there was no journey to Rome, except that King Alfred sent two couriers with letters." It implies a regular interchange of embassies between England and Rome, when their cessation for one year is considered a notable event. In return for Alfred's courtesies, Pope Martin sent to England a reputed fragment of the "rood on which Christ suffered"; he also, "at the prayer of Alfred, freed the English school in Rome"—that is, he set free from taxes all sojourners from England living in the English hostels or quarter of Rome.

To the West Saxon, accustomed to think of his own tribal land as itself a complete and independent kingdom, it was almost as wonderful that Alfred should exercise a fraternal hospitality to Welshmen, Irishmen, Northmen, Franks, and Old Saxons

(North Germans), as that he should send embassies to Rome and alms to India. Franks, Frisians, pagans (*i.e.* Danes), Irishmen, and Armoricans, are equally "foreigners," even in Asser's vocabulary. In dealing with them, Alfred showed the cosmopolitan temper of which he must often have heard as the characteristic of "the great, the ancient and wise Charlemagne."¹ It was part of Charlemagne's policy to attract to his court men of learning and distinction from all parts of the world. Alfred succeeded in doing the same thing, though he was less fortunate in his generation of learned men. Frankland had no man to send to England as good as Alcuin, whom England had given Charlemagne, unless John the Erin-born can be reckoned in the scales. It is evident that to Alfred and Charlemagne, as to most men of superabundant and radiant intellectual force, it was a pleasure to surround themselves with minds well stored with information and experience in matters remote from their own surroundings, so that, on occasion, they might dip into their experiences and learning as we dip into a new book. Amongst those who were attracted by Alfred were some whose names have survived, and have been already mentioned. There were Othere, the Halgoland fur-trader and walrus-hunter, and Wulfstan, the traveller and explorer; and

¹ Asser, p. 65.

there was Grimbald the Frank.¹ He was "a venerable man, and good singer, adorned with every kind of ecclesiastical discipline and good morals, and most learned in Holy Scripture."

John, the Old-Saxon priest and monk, was imported to act as the head of Alfred's new monastery at Athelney, where, as has been told, he fell upon sore trouble. He was "a man of most energetic talents, and learned in all kinds of literary lore, and skilled in many other arts. . . . By the teaching of these men the king's mind was much enlarged, and he enriched and honoured them with much influence." Most famous of all was Bishop Asser himself, the Welsh monk, who gravitated to Alfred's court, and who, happily for us, has preserved all that he could remember of the king's wise sayings and personal habits, possibly with a view to his canonisation.

¹ Grimbald was, centuries later, made the centre of the famous forged passage inserted in Asser's biography to prove that Oxford is a more ancient foundation than Cambridge. The celebrated interpolation describes a very pretty scholastic quarrel between Grimbald and the learned men he had brought with him to Oxford, on the one part, and the old scholars whom he found there on his arrival, on the other. The latter refused altogether to embrace the laws, modes, and forms of prelection instituted by the same Grimbald, and proved that "St Gildas, Melkinus, Nennius, Kentigern, and St Germanus" had all approved their way of doing things. This paragraph is only known to have existed in one manuscript copy of Asser's life; it is not known what source of information the author of the interpolation had, but there is no doubt, from internal evidence, that the forger knew Oxford and the habits of thought which grow there.

The account of Asser's relations with Alfred is so interesting, and so full of vital and realistic touches that it is best to read it as he tells it himself. "In these times, I also came into Saxony¹ [England] out of the furthest coast of Western Britain, and when I had proposed to go to him [*i.e.* Alfred], through many intervening provinces, I arrived in the country of those Saxons who live on the right hand [*i.e.* south], which in English is called Sussex, under the guidance of some of that nation; and there I first saw him in the royal vill, which is called Dene.² He received me with kindness, and after much familiar talk he eagerly asked me to give myself to his service and become his friend, to leave everything belonging to me on the left or western bank of Severn, promising to give in exchange more than as much in his own dominions. I answered that I could not carelessly and rashly promise such things; for it seemed to me unjust that I should leave those sacred places in which I had been bred, brought up, and tonsured, and at last ordained, for the sake of any earthly honour and power, unless perforce. Upon this he said,

¹ In Wales and the Highlands of Scotland the Englishman is still the "Sais" or "Sassenach" or Saxon, indicating the remembrance of the fact that the Englishman was once the foreigner and the Celt the native-born.

² There are several Deans which might claim the honour of being the meeting-place of Alfred and Asser; there are two near Chichester and two near Brighton.

“If you cannot consent to this, at least let me have your service in part; spend six months of the year with me here, and the other six in Britain’ [*i.e.* Wales].

“To this I answered, ‘I could not even promise that easily or hastily without the advice of my friends.’

“At length, however, when I perceived that he was anxious for my services, though I knew not why, I promised him that if my life were spared, I would come back to him after six months with such an answer as should be agreeable to him as well as advantageous to me and mine. With this answer he was satisfied, and when I had given him a pledge to return at the appointed time, on the fourth day we left him and returned on horseback towards our own country.

“After our departure a violent fever seized me in the city of Winchester, where I lay for twelve months and one week, night and day, without hope of recovery.¹ At the appointed time, therefore, I could not fulfil my promise of visiting him, and he sent messengers to hasten my journey, and to ask why I tarried. As I was unable to ride to him I sent another messenger to tell him why I

¹ During this year, therefore, Alfred was away from Winchester, and ignorant that Asser was continuously ill, knowing only that he was for some reason at Winchester.

tarried, and tell him that if I got well from my illness, I would fulfil what I had promised. My sickness left me, and by the advice and consent of all my friends, for the good of that holy place, and of all that dwelt therein, I did as I had promised the king, and devoted myself to his service on condition that I should stay with him six months in every year, either continuously, if I could spend six months with him at once, or alternately, three months in Britain [Wales], and three in Saxony [England]. For my friends hoped that they should sustain less tribulation and harm from King Hemeid, who often plundered that monastery and the parish [*i.e.* diocese] of St Deguy [David] and sometimes drove out the prelates (as they drove out Archbishop Novis, my kinsman, and myself), if in any way I could win the notice and friendship of the king [Alfred]. When, therefore, I had come into his presence at the royal vill called Leonaford [Lenford] I was honourably received by him, and stayed that time with him at his court eight months: during which I read to him whatever books he liked, and such as he had at hand; for this is his most usual custom both night and day, amid his many other occupations of mind and body, either himself to read books, or to listen while others read them.

“ And when I again and again asked his leave to

depart, and could in no way obtain it, at length when I had made up my mind by all means to demand it, he called me to him at twilight, on Christmas Eve, and gave me two letters, in which was a long list of all the things which were in two monasteries called in Saxon [English] Ambresbury and Banwell [*i.e.* Amesbury¹ in Wiltshire and Banwell in Somersetshire]; and on that same day he delivered to me those two monasteries with all the things that were in them, and a silken pall of great value, and a load for a strong man of incense: adding these words, that he did not give me these trifling gifts because he was unwilling hereafter to give me greater; and in the course of time he unexpectedly gave me Exeter with all the diocese which belonged to it in Saxony [England] and in Cornwall, besides other gifts every day without number, of every kind of worldly wealth, which it would take too long to tell up here lest it should make my reader tired.

“But let no one suppose that I have spoken of these gifts in this place for the sake of vainglory or boasting, or to obtain greater honour. I call God to witness, that I have not done so; but that I might certify to them that are ignorant how open-handed he is in giving. He then at once gave me leave to ride to those two rich monasteries and

¹ Amesbury had been a British foundation, and became a large and important monastery.

afterwards to go back to my own country." So the zealous Welsh abbot passed into the service of the Saxon king and became a court bishop, and Alfred acquired his Boswell.

One romantic incident is recorded which illustrates well the magnetism which Alfred's name had for lovers of Christian culture far and near. It has all the charm of heroic legend, but it is history from the solid bed rock. The English Chronicle tells under the year 891 how "three Scots [Irish] came to King Alfred in a boat without any oars, from Ireland, whence they had stolen away, because they desired for the love of God to be in a state of pilgrimage, they recked not where. The boat in which they came was made of two hides and a half: and they took with them provisions sufficient for seven days; and then about the seventh day they came on shore in Cornwall and soon after went to King Alfred. There they were named Dubslane [Dubhslaine], and Maccbethu [Macbeth], and Maelinmun [Maclinmain]. And Swifneyh [Suibhne], the best teacher among the Scots, had died." That helps us to understand how the isolated remnants of culture and piety from all over the British Isles drifted towards Alfred. Men of this kind born and bred in happier days fled from the rising tide of barbarism which beat higher and higher on their own shores. As the storm grew darker elsewhere, such light as there was seemed to

concentrate about Alfred's court and to glow all the brighter for the prevailing gloom.

What it meant for an Irishman to leave his home and fare forth over the unknown sea in a coracle may be partly understood from the following beautiful lament, composed by a more famous Irish exile three centuries before, a lament that may well have come into the minds of Dubslane and his followers, for it is of a kind which, once heard, was not likely to be forgotten.¹

Delightful to be on Benn-Edar [Howth]
 Before going over the white sea,
 The dashing of the wave against its face,
 The bareness of the shore and its brim.

Delightful to be on Benn-Edar [Howth]
 After coming o'er the white-bosomed sea,
 To row one's little coracle
 Ochone! on the swift-waved shore.

How swift the speed of my coracle,
 And its stern turned upon Derry ;
 I grieve at my errand o'er the noble sea
 Travelling to Alba [Scotland] of the ravens.

My foot in my sweet little coracle,
 My sad heart still bleeding :
Weak is the man that cannot lead,
Totally blind are all the ignorant.

There is a grey eye
 That looks back upon Erin ;
 It shall not behold while I live
 The men of Erin nor their wives.

¹ Cf. *English Historical Review*, vol. v. p. 216. (1890.)

My sight o'er the brine I stretch,
 From the ample oaken planks ;
 Large is the tear of my soft grey eye
 When I look back upon Erin.

Were the tribute of all Alba mine,
 From its centre to its border,
 I would rather the sight of one house
 In the midst of fair Derry [The Oak Grove].

The reason I love Derry is
 For its stillness, for its purity,
 For its crowds of white angels,
 From the one end to the other.

The reason why I love Derry is
 For its stillness, for its purity,
 Crowded full of heaven's angels
 Is every leaf of the oaks of Derry.

My Derry,¹ my little oak-grove,
 My dwelling and my little cell ;
 O God everlasting, in heaven above,
 Woe be to him that violates it.

Beloved are Durrow and Derry,
 Beloved is Raphoe in purity :
 Beloved Drumhome of rich fruits ;
 Beloved are Swords and Kell.

Beloved to my heart also in the west
 Drumcliff at Culcinne's strand ;
 To behold fair Loch Tual,
 The shape of its shores is delightful.

¹ At Derry was a monastery founded by Columba.

Delightful is that, and delightful
The salt main whereon the seagulls shriek,
On my coming from Derry afar;
It is still, and it is delightful.
Delightful!

There is surely no more tenderly passionate expression of home-love and land-love in all our poetry than this: its strength is some measure of the attraction which was strong enough to draw Irishmen from home to the court of Alfred. If the Celtic monks from Ireland and Wales brought sentiment like this, simple, sensuous, and passionate in expression, to that court, it is no wonder they were welcome: they would strike a chord of feeling that is in complete consonance with much English eighth and ninth century verse.

It was only to be expected that as the mildness and generosity of Alfred's rule became known, its cosmopolitan breadth, and its inherent merits and attractions, it would draw into the circle of his influence and protection princes as well as subjects. Not only did "all the Angelcyn [English kin] turn to Alfred," some of the princes of Wales, always unsettled and at feud among themselves, at this time voluntarily sought his protection. "For instance King Hemeid [Asser's foe] with all the inhabitants of Demetia [S. Wales] compelled by the violence of the six sons of Rotri [Roderick] had

submitted to the dominion of the king. Howell, son of Rhys King of Gleguising, and Brocmail and Fernmail, sons of Mouric King of Gwent [Monmouth], compelled by the violence and the tyranny of Earl Æthelred of the Marchmen, of their own accord sought King Alfred that they might enjoy his government and protection from him against their enemies."

These strong expressions about Earl Æthelred show that Asser is taking the point of view of his countrymen: probably strong feelings were roused by the injury done to the keen sense of dignity of the Kelt by the stern frontier rule of Æthelred. But Æthelred's rule was justified by its results. Asser continues the catalogue of those who sought Alfred's protection: "Helised also, son of Teudyr [Theodore], King of Brecon, compelled by the force of the same sons of Rotri (Roderick), of his own accord sought the governance of the aforesaid king; and [this is the climax, for Roderick's sons were in alliance with the Danes] Anarawd, son of Rotri (Roderick), with his brother, at length abandoning the friendship of the Northumbrians, from which he received no good but harm, came into King Alfred's presence and eagerly sought his friendship. The king received him honourably, accepted him as his son by confirmation from the bishop's hand, and presented him with many gifts; thus he became

subject to the king with all his people, on the same condition, that he should be obedient to the king's will in all respects, in the same way as Æthelred with the Mercians." The kings of Dyfed (Pembrokeshire) and Morganwy (Glamorgan) became in this way Alfred's men.

Asser shows the process which was going on under his very eyes. So inestimable was the work of a strong, generous, and beneficent ruler in the chaos and confusion of a time when the hand of every man that ruled in Britain was against every man, each owning only the authority of the strongest, that men who by nature hated the Sais and all his doings were drawn voluntarily to accept the overlordship of Alfred. There had been an old alliance between the Welsh royal families and the West Saxon kings based on a common hostility to the Mercians. But it must have required strong pressure from without, and stronger attractions from within, to reunite them now in voluntary and friendly ties.

Chapter VIII

The King as Bookman

“A good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.”—*Milton*.

“He mingles the ideas with a kind of enthusiasm.”—*Goldsmith*.

“’Tis good to have translations, because they serve as a comment, so far as the judgment of one man goes.”—*Selden’s Table Talk*.

IT has already been mentioned that Alfred issued a number of books for the instruction of his people. Several of these are now accessible in excellent and scholarly editions. The *Universal History of Orosius*, which was written early in the fifth century, and translated and edited by Alfred, has been published for the Early English Text Society by Dr Sweet. The Latin text is printed opposite the translation, and italics are used to indicate Alfred’s modifications of the original. The translation of Bede’s “*Church History of the English*,” probably prepared under Alfred’s orders by one of the Mercian scholars in his service, has been edited, with a translation, in the same Society’s series by Mr Thomas Miller. Pope Gregory’s “*Cura Pastoralis*,” to which reference has already been made, has also been edited by the same skilful hand. Professor

Napier is preparing "The Flores or Blooms." An attractive edition and a translation of Alfred's version of Boethius "On the Consolations of Philosophy" have recently been issued from the Clarendon Press by Mr Sedgefield. These may be specially mentioned as accurate, convenient, and accessible. Before the millenary celebration of Alfred's reign is over, it is reasonable to hope that the materials for an Alfred Library will be reasonably complete.

Under these circumstances, the object of such a chapter as this should rather be to whet than to satisfy curiosity as to the king's literary work. For it is better that Alfred should speak for himself than that any one should speak for him. But there is one thing which can probably be better done here than in any single or separate edition of one of his books: his literary work as a whole may be used as a gateway into the mind of the king, a key to his interests, which may help in understanding his many-sided personality. It may be fitted into its place as part of his life-work.

For this purpose it is convenient to take first the book into which the king put most of himself, Boethius "On the Consolations of Philosophy." The original has a very extraordinary history. It was composed by the Senator Amicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, a man of high descent, great wealth, and exceptional intellectual force, who lived under the

312 The King as Bookman

Ostro-Gothic King Theodoric in Italy between 480 and 526 A.D. Boethius rose from one honour to another until he came to be the most powerful man in Italy under the Emperor. His upright rule made him many enemies, and after he had enjoyed a long spell of power, they at last enlisted the king's sympathy in overthrowing Boethius. The great Senator was accused of being concerned in a conspiracy against the king, and in spite of an eloquent defence was convicted and thrown into a dungeon at Ticinum. His property was confiscated, and after months of imprisonment he was tortured and put to death. The extraordinary light and shade in his career, the dramatic contrast between the years of beneficent power and universal respect, and the sudden fall to the dungeon and to death, the really great qualities of the man, his familiarity with the literature of Greece, his inheritance of the culture of an ancient civilisation as well as the titles of Rome, and the fact that neither his high birth nor his exceptional privileges and virtues could save him from the stroke of misfortune, made a profound impression both on his own time and on the generations which followed. Boethius was to the Middle Ages what Job was to the Hebrew—the typical person in whom the ironies of fate and the inequalities of Providence were arraigned and brought to judgment. No doubt every man of culture with

whom fortune played freaks, as it certainly had seemed to do with Alfred, felt drawn to identify his troubles with those of the Roman Senator. This is probably to be reckoned as one of the factors which led Alfred to translate the book.

Apart from the interesting personality of the author, the "Consolations of Philosophy" has real merit. It is one of the select books, among the best in literature, that have issued from prison.¹ Marco Polo's "Travels," Malory's "Morte d'Arthur," Villon's "Ballads and Testament," are characteristic prison-books of the Middle Ages. Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" is the greatest of them all. The "Consolations of Philosophy" consists of a sustained dialogue between the mind of Boethius and the Spirit of Wisdom. It would have been a great gain if Alfred had ventured to use his own word in the title, as he has done in the text, and had called the book the "Consolations of Wisdom." Where the Latin has "Philosophy, that is the Spirit of Wisdom," Alfred has "se wisdom and seo gesceadwisnes"—*i.e.* "Wisdom and Reason." If this translation had been adopted, it would have given the clue to the process by which the musings of a philosopher more versed in Pagan than Christian learning came to be regarded for ages as a Christian's *vade mecum* in the troubles of life.

¹ Chapter iii. Book I.: "After that Philosophy, that is to say, the Spirit of Reason."—*Sedgefield*.

314 The King as Bookman

The link is supplied by the conception of a personalised Wisdom or Reason (the *Logos*) revealing and expressing the mind of God, which is so deeply implanted in all Greek-Christian thought. The *Logos* or Word of God, which in the first eighteen verses of St John's Gospel is expressly identified with the pre-incarnate Christ, was also identified with the "Wisdom" which is personalised in the canonical book of Proverbs, and still more strikingly in the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon. It is only necessary to read together such a passage as that quoted below, and the passages in Boethius where Philosophy speaks, to see how natural it was for men who knew both books to supply the absent link and believe that Boethius found his consolation in communion with the Eternal Word.

The following verses are from the Wisdom of Solomon:—

- “1. When a righteous man was a fugitive from a brother's wrath
2. Wisdom guided him in straight paths :
3. She shewed him God's kingdom,
4. And gave him knowledge of holy things. . . .
5. When in their covetousness men dealt hardly with him,
6. She stood by him and made him rich.
7. She guarded him from enemies,
8. And from those that lay in wait she kept him safe.
9. And over his sore conflict she watched as judge,
10. That he might know that godliness is more powerful than all.
11. When a righteous man was sold

12. Wisdom forsook him not.
13. But from sin she delivered him ;
14. She went down with him into a dungeon,
15. And in bonds she left him not." ¹

There is probably an echo of such philosophy as John the Erin-Born had taught in such a passage as this: "Now Wisdom is of such kind that no man of this world can conceive her as she really is: but each strives according to the measure of his wit to understand her if he may. But Wisdom is able to perceive us exactly as we are, though we may not be able to perceive her exactly as she is: for Wisdom is God." We may compare the statement: "For Christ dwelleth in the Valley of Humility and in the *Memory of Wisdom.*"

In order to understand the importance of Alfred's work in translating this book, something should be known of the large place it filled in mediæval literature. Mr Sedgefield has collected some of the interesting facts about its history. "Hundreds of manuscripts of it," he says, "are still to be found in dozens of libraries." It was one of the first books printed in Europe. Each century after Alfred's time saw it freshly translated and edited, and it was one of the first books to be turned into the vernacular as the European nations became articulate.

Amongst its numerous translators were Jehan de

¹ Cf. Proverbs viii. 21-31. Ecclesiasticus xxiv. 1-22. Wisdom of Solomon x. 1-14 (above), vii. 22-30.

316 The King as Bookman

Meun in France, and Geoffrey Chaucer and Queen Elizabeth in England. Sir Thomas More wrote an imitation of it. Leslie, Bishop of Ross, wrote another for the comfort of his prisoned mistress Mary Queen of Scots. Traces of its influence are found in Beowulf. Chaucer's poems are steeped in it. Among those whom it influenced are Gower, Lydgate, Spenser, Lorrin and Clopinel the authors of the "Roman de la Rose," Dante and Boccaccio. It is no small honour that the very first of all the many translations of a book which was to console and interest so many of the world's greatest minds should have come from Alfred, and that he gave it to his people a hundred years before any other people had received it in their own tongue.

The king's plan in dealing with the book is in harmony with the practical nature of his aim. The original is written in a ponderous, lengthy, and rhetorical style which conforms to Boethius' idea of the requirements of a classic work. But Alfred was concerned with the matter of the book rather than the style of a classic. He had a genius for coming to the point. What he wanted to do was to make a useful book, giving his people access to the sources of thought and feeling in which Boethius found consolation. To attain his end he felt himself at liberty to adapt his author to his readers. He would not have recognised the meaning of a claim to "copyright" in ideas.

“For the thought’s his who kindles new youth in it,
Or so puts it as makes it more true.”¹

Where he felt he could improve on the original he did not scruple to do so. Where he thought the original unsuitable for his people, or too difficult to follow, he felt free to omit a passage; where an allusion occurs which his readers would not understand, he adds an explanation which is not always correct, as — *e.g.* when he refers to “the bold Roman chief that was called Brutus, and his other name Cassius.”

It is probable that the original was read and translated to him by Asser, or another of his learned priests, and that as they discussed passages together, and the annotations of commentators were explained to him, his own mind would kindle and light up the subject by reminiscence, or suggestion, or some fresh thought from the store of his original and fertile mind. It is evident that he had the Napoleonic quality, which is said to have made the great Emperor’s conversation so interesting, of being able to recall, on the spur of the moment, all that he had heard or thought on any particular subject.

The result, however obtained, is a very interesting book, which gives us a striking index to the subjects in which Alfred was interested, and the sphere

¹ Lowell. “Franciscus de Verulamio sic cogitavit.”

318 The King as Bookman

in which his mind moved. The most personal of the insertions is the famous Chapter XVII., which has been quoted already.¹ Mr Sedgefield classifies the remainder of Alfred's notable comments and additions under the headings "Biblical and Christian," "Mythological," "Historical," "Geographical," "General," "Similes," and "Metaphors." This gives some indication as to their scope, though hardly of their contents. Apart from the purely explanatory notes on history, geography, or mythology, which are sometimes inaccurate, there are a number of passages which might be grouped as giving Alfred's views on the constitution of nature, others from which we might reconstruct his mental and moral philosophy; and a large group which might be brought together to illustrate an alertness in observing natural facts, and using them as illustrations for ideas which occasionally remind us of the method of the greatest of all Teachers.

The typical passage which illustrates the current natural philosophy is in Chapter XXI.:

"One Creator there is without any doubt. And He is the ruler of heaven and earth, and of all creatures, visible and invisible, even God Almighty. Him serve all things that serve, they that know Him, and they that know Him not, they that know they are serving Him and they that know it not, . . . The Lord hath so caught and led, and managed all His creatures

¹ See "A Royal Economist," p. 221.

with His bridle, that they can neither cease from motion nor yet move more swiftly than the length of His rein alloweth them. Almighty God hath so constrained all His creatures with His power, *that each of them is in conflict with the other, and yet upholdeth the other*, so that they may not break away but are brought round to the old course and start afresh. . . . Thus do fire and water behave, the sea and the earth, and many other creatures that are as much at variance as they are: but yet in their variance they can not only be in fellowship, but still more one cannot exist without the other, and ever one contrary maketh the due measure of the other. So also cunningly and befittingly hath Almighty God established the law of change for all His creatures. Consider springtime and autumn: in spring things grow, in autumn they wither away. Again, take summer and winter: in summer it is warm, in winter cold. So also the sun bringeth bright days, and at night the moon shineth by the might of the same God, . . . By the same order the alternatives of the ebb and flow is ruled. These ordinances God suffereth to stand as long as He willet¹.

As God is the centre of the natural world, so also He is the centre and source of all moral life. This is elaborated in a very quaint and ingenious parable.

“The wheels of a wagon turn upon its axle, while the axle stands still and yet bears all the wagon and guides all its movement. The wheel turns round, and the nave next the wheel moves more firmly and securely than the felly does. Now the axle is, as it were, the highest good we call God, and the best men move next unto God, just as the nave moves nearest the axle. The middle sort of men are like the spokes, for one end of each spoke is fast in the nave, and the other is in the felly; and so it is with the midmost man, at one time

¹ P. 51, Sedgfield's “Boethius.”

thinking in his mind upon this earthly life, at another upon the Divine life, as if he looked with one eye heavenwards, and with the other earthwards. Just as the spokes have one end striking in the felly and the other in the nave, while in the middle the spoke is equally near either, so the midmost men are at the middle of the spokes, the better sort nearer the nave, and the baser near the fellies, joined, however, to the nave, which in turn is fixed to the axle. Now the fellies are fastened to the spokes, though they roll on the ground: and so the least worthy men are in touch with the middle sort, and these with the best, and the best with God. Though the worst men have their love towards this world they cannot abide therein, nor come to anything, if they be in no degree fastened to God, no more than the wheel's fellies can be in motion unless they be fastened to the spokes and the spokes to the axle. The fellies are fastened furthest from the axle, and therefore move least steadily. The nave moves nearest the axle, therefore is its motion the most sure. So do the best men; the nearer to God they set their love, and the more they despise earthly things, the less care is theirs."

This parable of the wheel evidently pleased the king greatly, and he worked it out in detail with fine precision.¹

A few of the pithy epigrammatic sayings of the king may be added, chosen partly with a view to bringing out the ideas on which Alfred himself seems to have worked.

"A man never by his authority attains to virtue and excellence, but by reason of his virtue and excellence he attains to authority and power."²

"Ye need not take thought for power nor endeavour after it, for if ye are only wise and good it will follow you, even though ye seek it not."³

¹ Pp. 151, 152, Sedgefield.

² P. 35, S.

³ P. 36, S.

"Ye seek what ye cannot find when ye seek all that is good in one form of good." ¹

"One of the righteous and upright in purpose that are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem." ²

"Fools think that everybody is as blind as themselves, and that none can see what they themselves cannot." ³

"The evil will scatter like smoke before a fire if the deed cannot be accomplished." ⁴

"Out of unmeet and inordinate apparelling, out of dainty meats and diverse drinks, the raging frenzy of lewd desire awakeneth and confoundeth men's minds grievously." ⁵

"Even as the wall of every house is firmly set in the floor and the roof, so is every kind of good firmly seated in God, for He is both roof and floor of every form of good." ⁶

"Perhaps thou wilt say the good at times begin what they cannot bring to an issue ; but I say they always accomplish it. Though they may not always be able to bring to pass the deed yet they have the full purpose ; and the unwavering purpose is to be accounted an act performed, for it never fails of its reward here or in the next world." ⁷

"Every other thing man desireth either because it will help him to power or to get some pleasure, save only a true friend : him we love for love's sake, and for our trust in him, though we can hope for no other return from him. Nature joins friends together and unites them with a very unseparable love ; but by means of worldly goods and the wealth of life we oftener make foes than friends. By these and many other reasons

¹ P. 84. ² P. 7. ³ P. 141. ⁴ P. 136. ⁵ P. 129. ⁶ P. 127.

⁷ Pp. 127-8. This is sufficiently near to Browning's verse to make the parallel worth quoting :

" Thoughts hardly to be packed
Into a narrow act,
Fancies that broke through language and escaped,
All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,—
This was I worth to God, whose wheel the pitcher shaped."

322 The King as Bookman

all men may be shown that all bodily excellences are inferior to the qualities of the soul." ¹

"A man's goodness and high heritage are rather of the mind than of the flesh." "True high birth is of the mind, not of the flesh." ²

"What a man most loves, that is his god." ³

"Every one knows that all men are come of one father and one mother." ⁴

To Alfred, as to Napoleon, there had come some faint anticipation of the great discovery of the unity and progress of life which we call evolution. "There are many living creatures without motion such as shell fish, that, nevertheless, have a certain measure of reason, for they could not live if they had no jot of it. Some are able to see, some to hear, some to feel, others to smell. But moving creatures are more like unto men, for they have not only that which creatures without movement have, but more to boot; they are like men in loving what they love, hating what they hate, shunning what they abhor, and seeking what they love. Now men have all that we have said, and in addition the mighty gift of reason, while angels have unerring intelligence (intuition). Creatures are thus made to the end that those without movement may not exalt themselves above those that move, nor strive with them; and that moving creatures may not rise above men, nor men above angels, nor angels

¹ P. 57. ² P. 75. ³ P. 84. ⁴ P. 74.

above God. It is pitiful that the greater part of men seek not after that which has been given them, to wit, reason; nor seek that which is above them, possessed by angels and wise men, that is to say, intuition. But most men do like beasts in that they desire worldly delights like beasts. If, however, we had any portion of this unhesitating understanding that angels have, we might perceive that their understanding is far better than our reason. Though we think upon many things, we have but little perfect understanding free from doubt; but the angels have no doubt concerning any of the things they know, for their perfect knowledge is as much better than our reason, as our reason is better than the understanding of beasts, or any part of the wit vouchsafed to them, whether to those that move or to those that move not. But let us raise our minds as high as we can towards the crowning point of the highest intelligence, that thou mayest most speedily and easily come to thine own home whence thou didst issue. There thy mind and thy reason may see clearly everything that is now in doubt."¹

If it is remembered that all these extracts are not in the original, but are additions made in Alfred's version, though not all originating with him, some idea may be formed of the width and

¹ Pp. 171, 172.

324 The King as Bookman

variety of the king's information, the genuineness of his interests, and the workings of his mind.

In addition to the prose version of Boethius, there is a metrical alliterating version which probably came from King Alfred himself. The authorship has been disputed, but Mr Sedgfield has shown good reason for accepting it as Alfred's. There is a touch in the Preface to the manuscript which contains both versions which is very like that of the king; the last two sentences look as if they had been dictated by him. We may reasonably regard him as the originating mind behind the whole.

“King Alfred was the interpreter of this book, and turned it from book Latin into English, as it is now done. Now he set forth word by word, now sense by sense, as clearly and as intelligently as he was able, in the midst of the various and worldly cares that oft troubled him both in mind and in body. These cares are very hard for us to reckon, that in his days came upon the kingdoms to which he had succeeded, and yet when he had studied this book and turned it from Latin into English prose, he wrought it up once more into verse, as it is now done. And now he prayeth and in God's name beseecheth, every man that careth to read this book, to pray for him, and not to blame him if he understand it more rightly than he (Alfred) could. *For every man must, according to the measure*

of his understanding and leisure, speak what he speaketh and do what he doeth."

The special interest of Alfred's "Orosius" for us is in the large additions made to the original by the king. The original was the work of a young Spanish priest who, about 415 A.D., undertook, at the request of St Augustine, to write a kind of supplement to "The City of God." Augustine had set out to

"justify the ways of God to men"

against the calumnies of those who said that Christianity had been the cause of the downfall of the Roman Empire. His reply is to set forth a new philosophy of history, with the Gospel for its pivot, showing how the world was the better for Christianity. He saw that his argument required some account of the history of the nations untouched by his narrative, and this part of the task he committed to the young Spaniard. In a disconnected, rambling fashion, but with evident zeal and industry, Orosius gives a history of the world, from Adam to Alaric, inserting proper sentiments whenever he can contrast a heathen practice with the habits of his own time. The gossiping character of the book, and its grouping of isolated facts about the history and geography of many nations, made it easy for Alfred to introduce items of information

326 The King as Bookman

when he felt that he knew more than the author. In the process of describing Central and Northern Europe, which are included under the term Germania, Orosius comes to the Swedes. Here Alfred breaks in thus: "Othere told his lord, King Alfred, that he dwelt northward of all the Northmen. He said that he dwelt in the land to the Northward, along the West Sea. He said, however, that that land is very long north from thence, but it is all waste except in a few places where the Fins here and there dwell for hunting in the winter, and in the summer for fishing in the sea." Then follows the account of Othere's voyage of exploration. It has the charm of description and adventure which still make the accounts of Arctic exploration fascinating reading. With the instinct of the discoverer, Othere set off to find how far the land extended to the North. He gives exact details as to the number of days occupied in sailing northwards. He doubled the North Cape, and entered the White Sea. He tells about the people whom he found, and the walruses, which he calls "whales with very noble bones in their teeth," not equal, however, to the whales in his own country which are often 50 ells long. Othere described also his own Norwegian home in "the shire called Halgoland,"¹ and how his wealth came from rent

¹ Not Heligoland, but Halgoland in Norway. Othere belonged,

paid by the Fins "in skins of animals, and birds' feathers, and in whale bones, and in ships' ropes made of whales' hides, and of seals."

Following Othere's exploits is an account of a voyage by Wulfstan (an Englishman, as we may tell from his name), from Sleswig to the mouth of the Vistula. This is not so scientific as Othere's, but it is full of interesting details about the habits of the heathen Esthonians or inhabitants of Eastland.

Besides these longer insertions, there are others in Alfred's manner, giving information which he thought was required to make the book useful, such as the description of a Roman triumph, the origin and nature of the functions of the Roman Senate, and the exact spot at which Cæsar was said to have crossed the Thames.

In addition to the "Pastoral Care" of Gregory already mentioned, Alfred caused to be translated for his clergy another of the books of the great Pope, known as the "Dialogues" of Gregory. The veneration which in Old English literature gathers round the name of Gregory the Great, as the man who in 597 A.D. sent Augustine to bring the Gospel to Britain, may account for the choice of this book. The book itself is a collection of stories, often of

no doubt, as was pointed out by Vigfusson, to the famous Haurdic family whose exploits and kinships are told in old Scandinavian prose and verse. Some of them settled in Iceland,

328 The King as Bookman

a grotesque character, with religious morals such as became the common stock of monkish ethic lore in later days. It competed successfully with the barbarian anecdotes of the time, and perhaps helped to send them to the oblivion into which it has now followed them. The book has not yet been definitely edited. The most interesting feature for us is the preface.

“I, Alfred, by the grace of Christ, dignified with the honour of royalty, have assuredly understood, and through the reading of holy books have often heard, that we to whom God hath given so much eminence of worldly distinction, have peculiar need at times to humble and subdue our minds to the divine and spiritual law, in the midst of this earthly anxiety; and I accordingly sought and requested of my trusty friends that they for me, out of pious books about the conversation and miracles of holy men, would transcribe the instruction that hereinafter followeth: that I, through the admonition and love, being strengthened in my mind, may now and then contemplate the heavenly things in the midst of these earthly troubles.” This may be regarded as first-hand testimony to the king’s motive and method in publishing the book.

Alfred’s claim to be responsible for the slightly abbreviated edition of Bede’s “*Historia Ecclesiastica Anglorum*” rests formally on a statement in Ælfric’s

homily on St Gregory's day, in which the preacher says explicitly that King Alfred translated Bede's history out of Latin into English. This statement is only a hundred years later than Alfred's time, and in the absence of any other person to whom the translation could be ascribed with any probability, has long passed unchallenged. Recently the book has been critically examined, and its latest editor, Mr Thomas Miller, has found internal evidence to show that, though of Alfred's day, it was translated in Northern Mercia and probably at Lichfield. The natural conclusion is that some Mercian scholar was employed by the king to English the book that of all the learned works made by Englishmen probably interested him the most.

The "List of Martyrs," which is said to be Alfred's, presents internal evidence satisfactory to Dr Wülker, that it was at least "in use in Alfred's time, and was probably then composed."

The only other book which has a good claim to bear the stamp of the king's mind is that known as the "Blooms, or Blossoms, of King Alfred." The idea of the title may be compared with that which reappears in the "Little Flowers of St Francis." It consists of an adaptation of St Austin's [Augustine] "Soliloquies" and his epistle to Paulina in the "Vision of God," together with extracts from

330 The King as Bookman

Austin's [Augustine] "City of God," and from Gregory and Jerome; and amongst these are many passages that appear to be comments of the king himself. In its present form, the book comes to us in a debased Saxon of the twelfth century. But Professor Wülker has shown that it is very closely allied with Alfred's "Boethius," and that the two books must be from the same hand. There is a very striking parallel in Chapter XVII. to the famous chapter of the same number in "Boethius," already quoted.¹ It only remains now for someone to take up the study of the book, and to investigate carefully the fascinating question whether this may not be *the long lost Handbook or commonplace book* whose origin Asser describes, or, at least, one of its successors.

"On a certain day we were both of us sitting in the king's chamber, talking on all kinds of subjects, as usual, and it happened that I read to him a quotation out of a certain book. He heard it attentively with both ears, and addressed me with a thoughtful mind, showing me at the same time a book which he carried in his bosom, wherein the daily courses and psalms, and prayers which he had read in his youth were written, and he commanded me to write the same quotation in that book. Hearing this, and perceiving his ingenuous benevolence, and devout desire of studying the words of divine

¹ "A Royal Economist," p. 221.

wisdom, I gave, though in secret, boundless thanks to Almighty God, who had implanted such a love of wisdom in the king's heart. But I could not find any empty space in that book wherein to write the quotation, for it was already full of various matters; wherefore I made a little delay, principally that I might stir up the bright intellect of the king to a higher acquaintance with the divine testimonies. Upon his urging me to make haste, and write it quickly, I said to him:

“‘Are you willing that I should write that quotation on some leaf apart? For it is not certain whether we shall not find one or more other such extracts which will please you, and if that should so happen we shall be glad that we have kept them apart.’

“‘Your plan is good,’ said he.

“I gladly made haste to get ready a sheet, in the beginning of which I wrote what he bade me; and in the same day I wrote therein, as I had anticipated, no less than three quotations which pleased him, and from that time we daily talked together, and found out other quotations which pleased him, so that the sheet became full, and deservedly so, according as it is written, ‘The just man builds upon a moderate foundation, and by degrees passes to greater things.’”

Any one who has experience of how a common-

332 The King as Bookman

place book grows, will see the points of likeness between this account of Alfred's note-book and the "Blooms of King Alfred." If we think of the quick-witted king and his learned priest sitting together, reading, discussing, translating, comparing memories, scintillating in the contact of minds, it is not difficult to understand how this book, as well as Alfred's adaptations of the classics for his people, assumed their present form.

The preface of this royal note-book has the charm and truth of the poetic imagination which crystallises Alfred's thought, and makes his sayings memorable. It is quite in the manner of some of the insertions in "Boethius." Alfred describes himself as in a wood full of comely trees, fit for spears and stud shafts, and helves to all tools, and bay timbers and bolt timbers. "In every tree I saw something which I needed at home, therefore I advise everyone who is able, and has many wains, that he trade to the same wood where I cut the stud shafts, and there fetch more for himself, and load his wain with fair rods, that he may wind many a neat wall, and set many a comely house, and build many a fair town of them; and thereby may dwell merrily and softly so as I now have not yet done. But He who taught me, to whom the wood belonged, (?) may He make me to dwell more softly in this temporary cot, the while I am in this world, and also in the everlasting

home which he has promised us through St Austin, St Gregory, and St Jerome, and through many other holy fathers: as I believe also for the merits of all these He will make the way more plain than it was before, and especially enlighten the eyes of my mind, so that I may search out the right way to the everlasting home and the everlasting glory, and the everlasting rest which is promised us through those holy fathers. May it be so.

“It is no wonder though men swink in timber-working, and in the carrying and building; but every man wishes, after he has built a *cottage on his lord's lease* by his help, that he may sometimes rest him therein, and hunt, and fowl, and fish, and use it every way under the lease, both on water and on land, until that he earn bookland and everlasting heritage through his lord's mercy.

“So do the Wealthy Giver who wields both these temporary cottages and the Eternal homes! May He who shaped both, and wields both, grant me that I be meet for each, both here to be profitable and thither to come!” This is the wisdom and piety of the man of deeds, who thinks of words as standing for real things, and much like needful tools: to whom also spiritual conceptions are so sharply defined, and clearly conceived, that it is as natural to speak of this life as a *cottage built on a lease* as of the eternal life as the *many mansions of my Father*.

Book 30

The Triumph and Passing of Alfred

Chapter I

War and Peace

“ I will camp against thee round about,
And will lay siege against thee with a fort,
And I will raise siege works against thee. . . .
And the multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel,
Even all that fight against her and her stronghold and that distress her,
Shall be as a dream, a vision of the night.”—*Isaiah of Jerusalem*.

“ Now 'tis most like as if we fare in ships
on the ocean flood, over the water cold
driving our vessel, through the spacious sea
with horses of the deep. A perilous way is this
of boundless waves, and there are strong seas
on which we toss here in this feeble world
o'er the deep paths. Ours was a sorry plight
until at last we sailed unto the land,
over the troubled main.”—*Cynewulf's "Christ."*¹

ALFRED'S work for England was not ended without being tested. For three years (893-896) it was tried by the severest test to which it could be submitted — a prolonged, stubborn struggle with Hasting the Northman and his “Grand Army.” Hasting was the one man who was at the moment capable of uniting the Northern world under his banner; strong, experienced, respected, his name was an

¹ Gollancz's edition.

inflammatory watchword among Northmen. Had his attack been made with equal force and strategy earlier in Alfred's reign, it might easily have been successful. When it did come, it only proved how the integration and consolidation of Alfred's kingdom had given a new vitality and solidarity to the nation's life.

For our knowledge of the campaigns of these years we are dependent on the English Chronicle, which at this point becomes exceptionally full and vivid. It is very probable that in the entries for these years "we can hear Alfred's voice."¹ The remarkable compilation known as the English Chronicle had probably originated in the Bishop's Roll kept in Wolvesey Abbey for the Winchester diocese. The original entries were then supplemented from Bede and other sources, such as the Northumbrian Chronicle that had grown up on the tail of certain MSS. of Bede. The whole, in the form in which it has come down to us, is clearly the work of many hands; and it is only about Alfred's time that the plan of making meagre notes gives way to a more full and connected narrative, which follows up certain subjects systematically, such as the movements of the Danes.

Professor Earle thinks that Alfred took the Chronicle in hand in 887. He thinks it was he

¹ Bishop of Bristol.



W. T. Green

RUINS OF WOLVESEY ABBEY, FROM CHEESE HILL STREET, WINCHESTER

(This is where the English Chronicle was written)

who changed its character by giving it an English form, and by introducing facts drawn from Bede's "Church History." After Swithun died it seems as if Alfred's share in the compilation becomes more marked. At all events, the contemporary entries have the vigour, freshness, and close touch with facts characteristic of Alfred's work. If, as is most probable, we may think of the records of the final campaign against the Danes as dictated or revised by Alfred himself, it heightens for us the interest of the account given of them in the Chronicle.

(891) "This year the host went eastward, and King Arulf, with the East Franks and Saxons and Bavarians, fought against that part which was mounted, before the ships came up, and put them to flight.

(893) "In this year the great host, about which we spoke before, came again from the eastern Kingdom westward to Boulogne, and there was shipped; so that they came over in one passage, horses and all [Napoleon's plan] and they came to land at Linnemouth, with two hundred and fifty ships. [Lymne, close to Hythe.] This port is in the eastern part of Kent, at the east end of the great wood which we call Andred. This wood is in length, from east to west, one hundred and twenty miles, or longer, and thirty miles broad. The river of which we before spoke flows out of the weald.

"On this river they towed up their ships as far

as the weald, four miles from the outward harbour, and there stormed a fortress.

“Then soon after that Hasting¹ with eighty ships landed at the mouth of the Thames, and wrought himself a fortress at Milton. [Near Sittingbourne: the ships would sail up the channel between the Isle of Sheppey and the mainland.] And his host did the like at Appledore.”

It is clear that Hasting's plan was to paralyse the resistance of Alfred by attacking in two places, with forces about equally strong, which though separated by the breadth of Kent could co-operate and play into each other's hands.

Alfred disappointed the expectation of the Northmen by not attacking either camp. “He gathered together his forces, and proceeded until he encamped between the two hosts, as near as he could for the wood fastnesses, so that he might be able to reach either of them in case they should seek any open country. From this time the enemy always went out along the weald in bands and troops, by whichever border was at the time without forces; and they also were sought out by other troops almost every day, either by day or night, as well from the king's force as also from the towns.” This was *stale-mate* for both the Danish

¹ Hasting=Hastein: he was a Northman, not a Dane. He was probably a son of Earl Atle of Gaular in Norway.

hosts. The king, placed midway between the two camps, was able to prevent either force from making an aggressive movement, and also to prevent their forces from effecting a junction. The Northmen were compelled to confine themselves to local raids.

Meanwhile, Alfred was getting anxious about the Dane-law. If the Danes of East England and the Northmen of Northumbria were to rise, he would have half England in open hostility in his rear, as well as the Grand Army of the North on his front. In 894, the year after the landing of Hasting, the peace was openly renewed to allay restlessness. "In this year the Northumbrians (the Northmen of Northumbria) and the East English (the Danish leaders) had given oaths to King Alfred, and the East English six hostages; and nevertheless, contrary to their plighted troth, as oft as the other hosts went out with all their force, they also went out either with them or on their own part."

Either the negotiations were a blind, or the ties of kinship and the recrudescence of old instincts were together too strong for the leaders. About twelve months after the landing of Hasting the new-comers and the Danes settled in East England were in open alliance. "The host did not come out of their entrenchments with their whole force more than twice; once when they came first to land, before the forces were assembled; and a

second time when they would go away from their entrenchments. Then they had taken much booty, and would at that time go northward over the Thames into Essex towards their ships.

“Then the king’s forces outrode and got before them and fought against them at Farnham [near Slough] and put the army to flight, and retook the booty; and they fled over the Thames, where there was no ford, then up along the Colne into an island.

“Then the forces there beset them about so long as they there had any provisions, and the king was then on his way thitherwards with the division which warred under him.”

Alfred was bringing up the reinforcements which the reorganisation of the national defences had put at his service, when an unexpected development took place. “While he was on his way thither, and the other force was gone homewards, and the Danish men remained there behind, because their king had been wounded in the battle, so that they could not carry him away, then those who dwell among the Northumbrians and amongst the East English, gathered some hundred ships and went about south, and some forty ships about to north, and besieged a fortress in Devonshire by the North Sea; and those who went about to the south besieged Exeter.” This was a repetition of Hast-

ing's Kentish plan of campaign, adapted to the long tongue made by Devonshire and Cornwall. It was a clever strategic move which not only relieved pressure on the Thames army, but opened the way for co-operation with the restless Welsh kingdoms. It had to be met by a prompt counter-move.

“When the king heard that, then turned he westward towards Exeter with all his force, except a very strong body of the people eastward.” Alfred's army divided into two parts. The king probably took his personal retainers, and the available body of thanes, leaving the local defence forces. “These (*i.e.* all who were not with Alfred) went onwards until they came to London; and then, with the townsmen, and the aid which came to them from the west, they went east to Bamfleet [Benfleet].”

At Benfleet (near Southend) Hasting had skilfully concentrated all his forces, and entrenched them in the fashion which, ever since first blood in this long duel was drawn at Reading, had been regarded as impregnable. “The fortress at Bamfleet [Benfleet] had ere this been constructed by Hasting, and he was at that time gone out to plunder. And the great host was therein. Then came they [the forces under Alderman Æthelred of London] thereto, and put the host to flight, and stormed the fortress, and took all that was within it, as well the goods as the women, and the children also, and brought

the whole to London. And all their ships they either broke in pieces or burned, or brought to London or to Rochester." A king could have no higher military success than that the army trained by him should win such a victory in his own absence.

"And they brought the wife of Hasting and his two sons to the king: and he afterwards gave them up to him again, because one of them was his godson, and the other Æthelred the Ealdorman's (of London). They had become their godfathers before Hasting came to Bamfleet [Benfleet], and at that time Hasting had delivered to him hostages and taken oaths; and the king had also given him many gifts; and so likewise when he gave up the youth and the women." Alfred was strong enough not to be afraid that his leniency would be mistaken for weakness. The success of the policy which had changed Guthrum from a pagan foe into a Christian neighbour, probably led him to hope that similar measures might be successful again, and he kept to his policy steadily, although his enemies took advantage of his concessions. He knew that to beat them in the field was little use unless he also won their respect and confidence. The Chronicle emphasises the ingratitude of the Northmen. "But as soon as they came to Bamfleet, and the fortress was constructed, then he (*i.e.* Hasting) plundered that very part of the king's realm which was in

the keeping of Æthelred his gossip. And again the second time he had gone out to plunder that very same district, when his fortress was stormed."

The interest of the campaign now changes from London to the west, where skilful movements were in progress. "Now the king with his forces had turned westward towards Exeter, as I said before, and the host had beset the city." His arrival at once raised the siege. "When he arrived there, then went they [the Danes] to their ships." Hoping to be able to co-operate with this west country Wiking force, and perhaps to catch Alfred between two hostile armies, the Danes from Essex rapidly executed a forced march into the heart of the district where Alfred's strength and the most of his property lay. "When both the other armies had drawn together at Shoebury in Essex, and there had constructed a fortress, then both together went up along the Thames; and a great addition came to them, as well from the East English as from the Northumbrians. They then went up along the Thames till they reached the Severn; then up along the Severn. Then Æthelred the alderman, and Ethelm the alderman, and Ethelnoth the alderman [Alfred's Somerset Achatas], and the king's thanes who were then at home in the fortified places, gathered forces from every town east of the Parret, and as well west as east of

Selwood, and also north of the Thames and west of the Severn, and also some part of the North Welsh people." There was no bickering about turns of service now. This was a rising of a people in arms. Its spontaneity, rapid organisation, and success, mark the progress which these counties had made since the dark day when "the army stole away to Chippenham, and overran the land of the West Saxons, and sat down there."

"When they [the English forces under Æthelred, alderman of the Hwiccas] had all drawn together, then they came up with the host at Buttington on the banks of the Severn [in Shropshire] and there beset them about on either side in a fastness. When they had now sat there many weeks on both sides of the river, and the king was in the west in Devon, against the fleet, then were the enemy distressed for want of food. Having eaten a great part of their horses, the others being starved with hunger, then went they out against the men who were encamped on the east bank of the river, and fought against them; and the Christians had the victory." As Æthelred had them in a fastness, the Danes probably had no alternative except surrender, or a pitched battle on ground chosen by their enemies. The strategy of the whole of their checking movement reflects great credit on the two aldermen in command.

“And Ordhelm, a king's thane, was there slain, and of the Danish men there was very great slaughter made; and that part which got away thence was saved by flight.” But defeat only proved again the extraordinary power of recuperation in the Wiking army. One beating was never enough for the Danes. Their lightness in marching, their intrepid disregard of difficulties, and their extraordinary speed made them still dangerous. “When they had come into Essex to their fortress and to their ships, then the survivors again gathered a great host from among the East English and the Northumbrians before winter, and committed their wives and their ships and their wealth to the East English, and went at one stretch day and night, until they arrived at a waste city in Wirrall which is called Liga-ceaster (Chester). Then were the (English) forces unable to come up with them before they were within the fortress.” The old Roman fort must have been lightly held. It was far from the scene of war, and its small defence force must have been taken completely by surprise to find the great Danish host confronting it. Once inside, the Danes were well able to hold their own if they could get enough supplies of food.

“Nevertheless, they (the English) beset the fortress about for some two days, and took all the cattle which was there about; and slew the men whom

they were able to overtake without the fortress ; and burned all the corn, and with their horses ate it every evening.

“This was about a twelvemonth after they first came hither over sea.”

The year 895 brought desultory fighting over a wide area. There was no organised campaign ; and the Danes, though they gave a great deal of trouble, must have been steadily dissipating both strength and numbers. “In this year the army from Wirrall went among the North Welsh, for they were unable to stay there (in Wirrall) ; this was because they had been reft both of the cattle and of the corn which they had plundered. When they had turned again out of North Wales, with the booty which they had there taken, then went they over Northumberland and East England in such wise that the (English) forces could not overtake them before they came to the eastern parts of the land of Essex, to an island that is out on the sea which is called Mersea.” Here they had a position which exactly suited their wants for defence. Probably they would have remained there had they had supplies enough to face the winter.

About the same time the army from the West set out for Essex, where there was to be a concentration of the Danes for a great winter camp.

“As the army which had beset Exeter again turned homewards then spoiled they the South Saxons near Chichester; and the townsmen put them to flight, and slew many hundreds of them, and took some of their ships.”

The year had one more surprise in store for the anxious defenders of Wessex. “Then that same year, before winter, the Danish men who had sat down in Mersea towed their ships up the Thames and then up the Lea.” During the winter and spring the Danes occupied the time in making fortifications on the Lea. The fact that Danish East England lay behind them, and that the camp could be reached by the Lea, partly explains their departure from their ordinary ways. But it is also evident that the new camp was intended to be a base for operations against London. The event proved Alfred’s wisdom in making the town a stronghold. “In that same year (896) the fore-mentioned army constructed a fortress on the Lea, twenty miles above London. After this in summer a great body of the townsmen and also of other people, went onwards until they arrived at the Danish fortress; and there they were put to flight and four king’s thanes were slain. Then after this during harvest the king encamped near to the town while the people reaped the corn, so that the Danish men might not deprive them of their crop.”

It was by a skilful manœuvre that the king got rid of

“the scandalous hive of those wild bees
That made such honey in his realm.”

“On a certain day the king rode up along the river, and saw where the river might be shallowed, so that they would be unable to bring out their ships.” Lambarde¹ says, “he caused the water to be abated by two great trenches; so that they wanted water to return.” “And they then did thus: they built two forts on the two sides of the river where they had already begun the work, and had encamped before it; then perceived the host that they should not be able to bring out their ships. They then forsook them, and went across the country till they reached Bridgenorth by the Severn: and there they built a stronghold.” Alfred’s tactics were completely successful. The nest was “smoked out,” and the only course left to the wild bees was to leave hive and honey behind them, and settle elsewhere.

“Then the forces rode westwards after the king; and the men of London took possession of the ships; but all which they could not bring away they broke up, and those which were not worth taking they brought to London.² Moreover, the Danish men

¹ Writing about 1576.

² A Danish battleship, no doubt one of these, was discovered a short time ago during some excavations in Tottenham Marshes. It ought to have been preserved; but, unfortunately, a crowd of some

had committed their wives to the keeping of the East English before they went out from their fortress. Then sat they down for the winter at Bridgenorth.

“This was about three years after they had come hither over sea to Linnemouth.”

The campaign of 897 brought at last relief from the strain and tension of this anxious time. “In the summer of this year the army broke up, some for East England, some for Northumbria: and they who were moneyless procured themselves ships there, and went southwards over sea to Seine.

“*Thanks be to God, the Host had not utterly broken down the English nation:* but during the three years it was much more broken down by mortality among cattle and among men; and most of all of this, that many of the most worthy king’s thanes in the land died during the three years.”

With this sigh of relief the writer of the Chronicle sees the Grand Army of the Northmen melt away and serious peril to the country at an end. Later in the year 897 the sea-fight already described¹ took place; but the assailants in this case were marauders practising piracy on their own account, and Alfred treated them as such by sending the captured pirates to the gallows.

hundreds of people assembled, determined to secure mementos of the old ship. They got beyond control, and ended in clearing the ship away.

¹ Page 248.

The sun of Alfred's day set in a great peace. In the year 898 the Chronicle records the deaths of two of his stalwart lieutenants: and the next two years are memorable for the felicity which has no history. It is not the least of the satisfactions in the story of this great reign that we may think of the much-tried king, weather-beaten, stormed-tossed, passing out of the storm and stress of conflict into the quiet and rest of these years, watching his much-loved and well-served people enjoying some of the fruits of his labour; maturing in himself and in his kingdom the plans he had conceived and nursed with steadfast patience; seeing of the travail of his soul and being satisfied. Perhaps we may venture to fill in this vague outline of these years in our thought, at least in one respect, and say of Alfred what was said of another full and active life which ended in a great peace:

“Warrior with deep unwillingness to wound,
Smiter that ne'er didst learn the art to stab,
Exquisite knight, so gentle to the end,
Of chivalry antique and gracious words,
Foeman with sweetness of an elder day,
Not in the press of war didst thou go down,
But seeing death was near thou didst retire,
Preparing as a runner for that course,
That final struggle and that different field,
With pain preparing and with solemn care.”

In the rhythmical collection of Alfred's sayings, a

work of late origin and uncertain authority, the king's dying words to Edward his son are given. "Thus quoth Alfred: 'My dear son, sit thou now beside me, and I will deliver thee true instruction. My son, I feel that my hour is near, my face is pale, my days are nearly run. We soon must part. I shall to another world, and thou shalt be left alone with all my wealth. I pray thee, for thou art my dear child, strive to be a father and a lord to my people: be thou the children's father and the widow's friend: comfort thou the poor and shelter the weak: and with all thy might right that which is wrong.

"And, my son, govern thyself by law, then shalt the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward. Call thou upon Him to advise thee in all thy need, and so shall He help thee the better to compass that which thou wouldest.'"

As the end drew near, and he foresaw its coming, we can believe that the king spoke sometimes in this strain. But a speech of this kind is very much what would be made for Alfred, if not by him.

We may partly realise what this coming of the end meant to Alfred by recalling how the Christian hope was interpreted in the current poetry of Alfred's time. In a passage of rare beauty, Cynewulf describes the rest to which the Christian triumphantly passes:

"There is the angels' song; the bliss of the happy;
there is the gracious presence of the Lord;

brighter than the sun, for all the blessed ones,
there is the love of the beloved ; life without death's end ;
a gladsome host of men ; youth without age ;
the glory of the heavenly chivalry ; health without pain
for righteous doers ; and for souls sublime
rest without toil : there is day without dark gloom,
ever gloriously bright ; bliss without bale ;
friendship 'twixt friends, for ever without feud ;
peace without enmity, for the blest in heaven,
in the communion of saints. Hunger is not there nor thirst,
sleep nor grievous sickness ; nor sun's heat,
nor cold, nor care, but there that blissful band
the fairest of all hosts, shall aye enjoy
their sovran's grace, and glory with their king."

In telling the end the English Chronicle is laconic and impressive by its simplicity. It begins the entry for the year 901 thus: "This year died Alfred, son of Æthelwulf, six days before the mass of All Saints. He was king over the whole English nation, except that part which was under the dominion of the Danes. And he held the kingdom one year and a half less than thirty years.¹ And then Edward his son succeeded to the kingdom."

¹ There is some uncertainty as to the exact date. The Chronicle understates the length of his reign, which was within a month or two of thirty years. The year is variously given as 899, 900, and 901. See *English Historical Review*, 1898.



HYDE ABBEY CHURCH, ST BARTHOLOMEW'S, WINCHESTER

W. T. Green

Chapter II

The Shadow of a Great Name

“All the Anglecyn turned to Alfred.”

“For good ye are and bad, and like to coins,
Some true, some light, but every one of you
Stamp'd with the image of the king.”

Tennyson.

“A people is but the attempt of many
To rise to the completer life of one ;
And those who live as models for the mass
Are singly of more value than they all.”

Browning.

“At times the genius of a people seizes a man, severs him from the unnamed crowd, and by a stroke, often unconscious, fashions him into the ideal type of a whole epoch.”—*Sabatier.*

“Extra invidiam neque extra gloriam.”

ALFRED had hardly passed away when a halo of legend and reverent unrealities began to gather round his name. Asser's biography was possibly written in order to present his claims to be recognised as a saint; this motive would sufficiently account for the tincture of the supernatural with which he has flavoured his narrative. The conventional saint was bound either to work miracles or to have them worked for him. Had Rome

356 The Shadow of a Great Name

had any room for saintly memories at that time, probably he would have been canonised, but Rome was then slipping down the easy descent to the pit, and desired other company.

Somehow a story got on foot that Alfred's spirit had been seen near his tomb. There is no contemporary account of the king's burial, but there seems to have been some jealousy about the place of interment between the clergy of the New Minster, founded by Alfred, and the clergy of the Old Minster, now the cathedral. This might supply the motive for supposing the departed king to be dissatisfied and restless. It seems certain that the final resting-place was Hyde Abbey. Sir John Spelman accounts for the origin of the story that Alfred's ghost haunted his tomb, as a clerical revenge for his austere demands from his "men of prayer." "Through his strictness towards religious men in holding them severely to the observance of the orders of Holy Church, he was nothing pleasing to many of them; yet perhaps they could never have given so much liberty to the venting of their stomachs as to raise tales of him after his death, and say that his ghost walked, had they not had some discerning that his life and ways were not perfectly pleasing to the Fathers of Rome."

In the eleventh century *aberglaube* had still further taken possession of Alfred's name, and he was

becoming a mythical hero. The Cotton manuscript of the "Pastoral Care" has a preface of about this date, in which the historic Alfred is hidden behind accumulated superlatives of eulogy expressed in archaic and stilted prose.

In the twelfth century Henry of Huntingdon finds it impossible to set forth his "indefatigable government and endless troubles except in verse." Sir John Spelman's translation of Huntingdon's poem is good enough to bear repetition :

"Thy true nobility of mind and blood,
O warlike Alfred ! gave thee to be good,
Goodness industrious made thee ; Industry
Got thee a name to all posterity.
'Twi'xt mixed hopes and fears, 'twixt joy and grief
Thou ever felt'st distress and found relief,
Victor this day, next day thou dost ne'ertheless
I' th' field dispute thy former day's success.
O'ercome this day, next day for all the blow
Thou giv'st or tak'st another overthrow.
Thy brows from sweat, thy sword from blood ne'er dry,
What 'twas to reign, so to us signify.
The world cannot produce so much as one
That through the like adversities has gone ;
Yet found'st thou not the rest thou fought'st for here,
But with a crown Christ gives it thee elsewhere."

The king's literary fame continued to grow after his death. Ethelward says that nobody knows how many volumes he produced. William of Malmesbury mentions that he was at work on a translation of the psalter at the time of his death. This is in itself probable, and may very well account

358 The Shadow of a Great Name

for the origin of one of the Saxon psalters which we have. There is a twelfth-century collection of proverbs, each of which begins with "Thus said Alfred." It is in this book that the famous epithets occur which focus for us the Alfred *cultus* of the time.

"At Seaford there sat many thanes,
Many bishops, many learned,
With earls and awful knights :
There was Earl Ælfric very learned in the law,
There also was *England's herdsman*
England's darling :

He was king of England, he taught them,
All who could hear him,
How they should lead their lives.
Alfred was a king of England that was very strong.
He was both *king and scholar*, he *loved well God's work* :
He was *wise and advised* in his talk :
He was the *wisest man in all England*.
Thus quoth Alfred, *England's comfort* :"

Then follow the sayings. It is quite possible that some of these may be genuine, but it is not possible to discriminate, except on dubious internal evidence, between the originals and the accretions. A translation of the "Fables" of Æsop, and a treatise on Falconry, are also ascribed to Alfred, perhaps with some idea that the English Solomon should not come far behind the fame of the more ancient king "who spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five; and he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in

Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall; he spake also of beasts and of fowl, and of creeping things and of fishes." Mr Jacobs has shown in the introduction to his edition of Caxton's Æsop's fable that the ascription to Alfred of a version of Æsop is wholly mistaken. That Alfred wrote on Falconry is not probable, but that he was fond of hunting and hawking we have excellent testimony.

When criticism has removed the needless excrescences of *aberglaube*, and when all allowances have been made for hero-worship, it is clear that there are few kings in history who have less need of fictitious glory than Alfred, or whose fame rests on a more solid basis. His influence and character remain stamped on the most permanent elements in our national life. He is the father of English prose. Until his time the vernacular literature of England had been poetic, and had sprung almost entirely from Northumbria. Alfred first created for literary use a prose vehicle for the thought of his people, and showed how virile, forceful, expressive, and picturesque it might be. We owe it to him that, in spite of the use of another tongue by the Normans at court, and the inundation of French which came with the friars, there were monuments of literary culture which endured, kept the language of the people from neglect, and

360 The Shadow of a Great Name

at last emerged to perpetuate the ascendancy of the ancient tongue. It is a great thing to make a people's songs, and the man who does it has his hand on the rudder of destiny: it certainly means no less an influence on the future of a people to have shaped the vehicle of their thought, and put into the national currency ideas, expressions, and symbols of thought, many of which were to become permanent.

Alfred stamped his influence on the history of the Church by his determination to make character the qualification for ministry. The priest was to be a guide and teacher of the people, and alone among the rulers of his time he maintained that this was a higher duty than that of ministering at the altar. In education, in military organisation, in the history of the English as a sea-going and sea-ruling people, in administrative and judicial history, his reign makes beginnings whereof the endings are not yet.

To see all this it is necessary to be, as we now are, at some historic distance from him. The higher the mountain the further you must be from its base, if its true altitude is to be seen. We can judge now of the total effect of his work in perspective; but of Alfred as a man his contemporaries were better qualified to speak. In matters in which his own time was best able to judge, such as his personal character and influence, the testimony is unanimous and com-

plete. He is always and everywhere the saintly warrior, statesman, bookman, servant of his people, accepting every service because it is part of the larger service in which he finds perfect liberty. Professor Freeman, with great force and eloquence, has described the place which Alfred fills in his gallery of historic portraits. He writes as an enthusiast, and rightly, for it requires enthusiasm to speak justly of Alfred. The king has the soul-kindling qualities which flame from some few of the men and women whose souls are themselves kindled with fire of the Most High. It is no marvel when those who write of him catch some spark of the sacred fire. The passage is too good to bear mutilation:¹

“Alfred . . . is the most perfect character in history. He is a singular instance of a prince who has become a hero of romance, who, as a hero of romance, has had countless imaginary exploits and imaginary institutions attributed to him, but to whose character romance has done no more than justice, and who appears in exactly the same light in history and in fable. No other man on record has ever so thoroughly united all the virtues both of the ruler and of the private man. In no other man on record were so many virtues disfigured by so little alloy. A saint without superstition, a scholar without ostentation, a warrior all whose wars were fought in the defence of his country, a conqueror whose laurels were never stained by cruelty, a prince never cast down by adversity, never lifted up to insolence in the hour of triumph; there is no other name in history to compare with his. St Lewis comes nearest

¹ Freeman, “Norman Conquest,” vol. i. pp. 49-53.

362 The Shadow of a Great Name

to him in the union of a more than monastic piety with the highest civil, military, and domestic virtues. Alfred and Lewis alike stand forth in honourable contrast to the abject superstition of some other royal saints who were so selfishly engaged in the care of their own souls that they refused either to raise up heirs to their throne, or to strike a blow on behalf of their people. But even in St Lewis we see a disposition to forsake an immediate sphere of duty for the sake of distant and unprofitable, however pious and glorious, undertakings. The true duties of a king of the French clearly lay in France, and not in Egypt or at Tunis. No such charge lies at the door of the great king of the West Saxons. With an inquiring spirit which took in the whole world, for purposes alike of scientific inquiry and of Christian benevolence, Alfred never forgot that his first duty was to his own people. He forestalled our own age in exploring the Northern Ocean, and in sending alms to the distant churches of India ; but he neither forsook his crown, like some of his predecessors, nor neglected his duties, like some of his successors. The virtue of Alfred, like the virtue of Washington, consisted in no marvellous displays of superhuman genius, but in the simple, straightforward discharge of the duty of the moment. But Washington, soldier, statesman, and patriot, like Alfred, has no claim to Alfred's character of scholar and master of scholars. William the Silent, like Alfred the deliverer of his people, had no call to be also their literary teacher ; and in his career, glorious as it is, there is an element of intrigue which is quite unlike the noble simplicity of both Alfred and Washington. The same union of zeal for religion and learning, with the highest gifts of the warrior and the statesman, is found on a wider field of action, in Charles the Great. But even Charles cannot aspire to the pure glory of Alfred. Amidst all the splendours of conquest and legislation, we cannot be blind to an alloy of personal ambition and personal vice, to occasional unjust aggressions and occasional acts of cruelty. Among our own later princes, the great Edward alone can bear for a moment the comparison with his glorious ancestor. And, when tried by such a standard, even the great

Edward fails. Even in him we do not see the same wonderful union of gifts and virtues which so seldom meet together ; we cannot acquit Edward of occasional acts of violence, of occasional recklessness as to means ; we cannot attribute to him the pure, simple, almost childlike disinterestedness which marks the character of Alfred. The times indeed were different ; Edward had to tread the path of righteousness and honour in a time of far more tangled policy, and amidst temptations, not harder, indeed, but far more subtle. The legislative merits of Edward are greater than those of Alfred ; but this is a difference in the times rather than in the men. The popular error which makes Alfred the personal author of all our institutions hardly needs a fresh confutation. Popular legends attribute to him the invention of trial by jury and of countless other portions of our law, the germs of which may be discerned ages before the time of Alfred, while their existing shapes cannot be discerned till ages after him. Alfred, like so many of our early kings, collected and codified the laws of his predecessors ; but we have his own personal witness that he purposely abstained from any large amount of strictly new legislation. The legislation of Edward, on the other hand, in its boldness and originality, forms the most marked of all epochs in the history of our law. It is perhaps, after all, in his literary aspect that the distinctive beauty of Alfred's character shines forth most clearly. The mere patronage of learning was common to him with many princes of his age. Both Charles the Great and many of his successors had set brilliant examples in this way. What distinguished him was his own personal appearance as an author. Now, as a rule, literary kings have not been a class deserving of much honour. They have commonly stepped out of their natural sphere only to display the least honourable characteristics of another calling. But it was not so with the Emperor Marcus ; it was not so with our Alfred. In Alfred there is no sign of literary pedantry, ostentation, or jealousy ; nothing is done for his own glory ; he writes, just as he fights and legislates, with a single eye to the good of his people. He shows no signs of original

364 The Shadow of a Great Name

genius ; he is simply an editor and translator, working honestly for the improvement of the subjects he loved. This is really a purer fame, and one more in harmony with the other features of Alfred's character than the highest achievements of the poet, the historian, or the philosopher. I repeat, then, that Alfred is the most perfect character in history. And he was specially happy in handing on a large share of his genius and his virtue to those who came after him. The West Saxon kings, for nearly a century, form one of the most brilliant royal lines on record. From the Saint to Edgar the Peaceful, the short and wretched reign of Eadwig is the only interruption to one continued display of valour under the guidance of wisdom. The greatness of dynasty, obscured under the second Æthelred flashes forth for a moment in the short and glorious career of the second Eadmund. It then becomes more permanently eclipsed under the rule of Dane, Norman, and Angevin, till it shines forth once more in the first of the new race whom we can claim as English at heart, till, if not Alfred himself, at least his unconquered son, seems to rise again to life in one who at once bore his name and followed in his steps [Edward I.]”

If it were necessary to sum up the impression which the study of Alfred's life leaves, it might perhaps be said that he creates a type which has never lost its influence in England's history. He is the ideal Englishman. He has great common-sense, but it is common-sense raised to the power of genius. He is a mystic, but he is a practical mystic. He is a reformer, but a reformer who builds on the past and yet builds for the future. He lives to serve God and his country, and he discovers that by serving the Kingdom of God wisely and simply he can serve his country best.

The Shadow of a Great Name 365

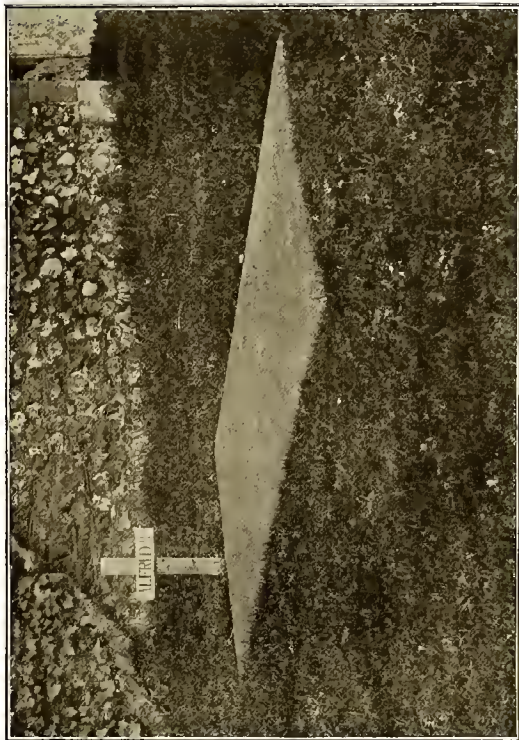
The effect of his life is that a new element is introduced into our history: a new standard of achievement is held up to our kings, and a new consciousness of unity in loyalty to the ideal king awakens among his people. In some measure it is true of all who come after him that they are *stamped with the image of the king*.

In spite of the endeavours of his biographer to make Alfred an English Solomon, he occupies a place in our history more like that of David than Solomon in Israel's history. Did David give to Israel a capital? So also did Alfred for England. Was it David who rolled back the tide of invasion, and conserved the individuality of his folk? Alfred yet more. Was David the sweet singer of Israel? Alfred was for his time hardly less. There is no Bathsheba and no tragedy of Uriah, no Absalom's revolt, and no unruly breed of sons and daughters in Alfred's history. Instead there is a line of noble men and women, trained and able to carry out their father's policy, and give effect to his prayers for his people. To both kings it fell to perform that undefined but most necessary service, which is called awaking the national consciousness, and in both cases the work once done has proved practically indestructible. England is a new England after Alfred's time; his long conflict with the Danes merges the old folk-jealousies in a larger

366 The Shadow of a Great Name

and more generous unity, and into that unity the Danes themselves, with their love of adventure, and passion for the sea, and keen commercial interests, are at last absorbed.

Some day, perhaps, a religious history of England will be written which will not be an ecclesiastical history. A historian will be found to do for our history what the Lake poets did for Nature when they declared that God was not only transcendent over Nature, but immanent in it. Such an one will take account of the way in which epochs issue in men, and men in turn create epochs. He will perhaps discover that, as the sensitiveness of the plant to the needs of its environment has some relation to its success in the struggle for permanence, so the sensitiveness of the human spirit to the needs of man and the calls of God has something to do with the perpetuation of a man's influence in human history. He will explain why it is that the men who chose to live for eternity are yet the men from whom the ideas, forces, movements, ideals spring which most dominate time. Then we shall understand why it is that there are a few Englishmen who, though buried long ago, are, like Oliver Cromwell, not dead: and among them we shall number with the best Alfred the West Saxon.



111. T. Green
SUPPOSED RESTING-PLACE OF ALFRED'S BONES: HYLE ABBEY CHURCHYARD
(The cross is added)

Summary of Dates and Events for Reference

(ADAPTED FROM PAULI'S HISTORY)

History is most easily realised when attention is concentrated on the sequence of cause and consequence, personalities and their influences, the rise and decay of institutions and ideas, rather than on dates. For this reason this narrative has been burdened with as few dates as possible. The important dates of Alfred's reign are collected here for those who want them.

Year.	Date.	Locality.	Events.
849	...	Wantage	Alfred born.
852	...	...	Battle near Ockley.
853	Easter (April 4)	Chippenham	Burhred of Mercia marries Ethelswitha.
...	...	...	Alfred's journey to Rome.
854	...	Wilton	King Æthelwulf.
855	...	...	Æthelwulf and Alfred at Rome.
856	July	France	Æthelwulf is affianced to Judith.
...	Oct. 1	Verberie	Marriage with Judith.
858	Jan. 13	...	King Æthelwulf dies.
860	July (?)	...	King Æthelbald dies.
861	...	...	Judith returns to France.
862	July 2	...	Swithun, Bishop of Win- chester, dies.
866	February (?)	...	King Æthelberht dies.
867	Nov. 1	...	Arrival of Hingwar and Hubba.
...	...	...	Ealhstan, Bishop of Sher- borne, dies.
868	March 21	...	Battle at York.
...	...	...	Alfred marries Elswitha.
...	...	...	Siege of Nottingham.
869	Sept. 21	...	Battle near Kesteven.
870	Nov. 20	...	King Edmund of East Anglia dies.
871	January (?)	...	The Danes take Reading.
...	After 3 days	...	Fight at Englefeld.
...	...	...	Battle at Reading.

368 Summary of Dates and Events

Year.	Date.	Locality.	Events.
871	After 4 days	...	Battle near Ashdown.
...	After 14 days	...	Battle near Basing.
...	...	...	Assembly at Swineburgh.
...	After 2 m'nths	...	Battle at Merton.
...	April 23	...	King Æthelred dies.
...	May	...	Battle at Wilton.
872	Autumn	...	Compact of the Danes with Burhred of Mercia.
...	...	...	Werefrith, Bishop of Wor- cester.
873	...	...	Fall of the kingdom of Mercia.
874	...	Rome	King Burhred dies.
875	...	...	Division of the Danish army.
...	...	...	A small sea-fight in the Channel.
876	...	...	The Danes take Wareham.
877	...	...	The Danes march towards Exeter.
...	August	...	Sea-fight.
878	...	...	The Danes leave Exeter.
...	...	...	They take Chippenham.
...	...	...	Blockade of Kynwith Castle, in Devonshire.
...	...	...	Alfred in Somerset.
...	Easter (Mar. 23)	Athelney	Intrinchment there.
...	May 5-12	...	Sally to Brixton.
...	...	...	Battle at Eddington.
...	14 days later	...	Chippenham taken.
...	July	...	Treaty of Wedmore.
...	12 days later	...	Guthrum - Athelstan leaves Wedmore.
879	...	...	Retreat of the Danes.
...	...	...	Hasting in Fulham.
...	...	...	Denewulf, Bishop of Win- chester.
882	...	...	Sea-fight.
883	...	...	Embassy to Rome and the East.
884	...	Dene	Asser arrives at Alfred's Court.
885	Summer	...	The Danes land near Ro- chester.

Summary of Dates and Events 369

Year.	Date.	Locality.	Events.
885	...	...	Sea-fight at the mouth of the Stour.
...	Nov. 11	Leonaforð	Alfred meets Asser.
886	...	...	London rebuilt, and confided to Æthelred.
887	...	...	Æthelhelm sent on an embassy to Rome.
888	...	Padua	Queen Ethelswitha dies.
890	...	...	Beornhelm sent Ambassador to Rome.
...	...	...	King Guthrum - Athelstan dies.
891	Sept. 1	...	Battle near Louvain, on the Dyle.
892	...	...	The Danes land in Kent.
894	Easter (Mar. 31)	...	The Danes go into Berkshire.
...	...	...	Battle at Farnham.
..	August 24	York	Guthred of Northumbria dies.
...	...	...	Danes in Devonshire.
...	...	...	Storming of the fortress of Bamfleet [Benfleet].
...	...	...	Hasting besieged at Buttington.
...	...	...	Passes the winter near Chester and in Wales.
895	...	...	Devastations in Wales.
...	...	...	Return to Essex.
896	...	...	Fortifications on the Lea.
...	...	...	The Danes march to Bridgenorth.
...	...	...	Witenagemot at Gloucester.
...	...	...	Dispersion of the Danes.
897	...	...	Sea-fight on the coast of Devonshire.
...	Summer	Winchester	Alfred on the coast.
898	...	Wulfamere	Alfred meets Æthelred and his bishops.
899	...	Celchyth	The same.
901	Oct. 28	...	King Alfred dies.

Index

A

	PAGE
Abbeys	72
Ælflaed	271, 279
Æthelbald	12, 15, 66, 67, 68
Æthelberht	68
Æthelwold's Benedictional	234
Æthelred	68, 72, 94, 110
Æthelwulf (King)	3-7, 29, 35, 63-66, 67
Æthelwulf (Alderman)	96, 97
Ælla	71
Alfred (<i>see</i> Contents)	
Amesbury	303
Anskar	50
Art	227
Ashdown	98
Asser (<i>passim</i>)	180-183, 184-187
Asser and Alfred	300-303
Athelney	133-145, 234

B

Bægsec	98
Basing	106, 107
Bede	175, 310, 328-9
Benedict's Saint (Cambridge)	239
Beorn	82
Beowulf	20
Berkshire Ballad	17, 102
Blooms of Alfred	310, 330-2
Boethius	113, 175, 222, 310-324
Builders	235
Burhred	93, 117
Buttermere Corner	107
Buttington	346

C

	PAGE
Cædmon	18, 19, 72
Canaan	86
Candle Clock	181
Ceolwulf	119
Charles the Bald	37, 142
Charles the Great	30, 38, 40, 41, 201, 218
Children, Alfred's	271, <i>note</i>
Chippenham	128
Christ	87, 155, 179
Christian Church and Heathenism	252
Christian Soldier	160-163
Chronicle, The English	338
Coiners	230-233
Cromwell, Alfred and	114, 293, 366
Crowland	73
Cuthbert, Saint	72, 135, 136-140, 178, 228
Cynewulf	21, 72, 168, 353

D

Danes	70, 79-86, 337-344
Denewulf	135
Durham	10

E

Eadburg	65
Eadburg, daughter of Ethelred Mucil	91
Ealhstan	63
Ealhswith [Alfred's wife]	91, 138
Eanwulf	63
Edmund, St	75, 87
Education	15-18, 170-172, 261, 270
Egbert's Stone	149
Elswith (of Mercia)	117
Ely	73, 133
Englefield	96
Ethandunc [Eddington]	151
Ethelgiva	259
Ethelnoth	149
Ethelwerd's Chronicle	132
Exeter (Siege of)	125, 127
Exodus, Book of	276-281

F

	PAGE
Freeman, Professor	12, 360
Fyrd	96, 114, 194, 196, 201, 202

G

Gregory's "Dialogues"	327
Gregory's "Pastoral Care"	124, 175, 263-270, 310
Grimbald	299
Guerir, St	53
Guthrum	75, 82
Guthrum's Peace	157-160
Gyda	83

H

Halfdene	98
Harold of Norway	83
Hasting	337-344
Heahmund	110
Henry of Huntingdon	103-104, 130
Hincmar (Archbishop)	49
Hingwar (Ingwar)	93
Hubba (Ubba)	93, 146
Hughes (Judge)	95, 102
Hundreds	203-205
Hyde Abbey	356

I

Ideals of Kingship	221-224
Ilsley	98
Ine	14, 290
India	296
Ingulf	74
Ingwar (Hingwar)	73, 93
Irish Lament	305-306
Irish Monks	304
Isle of Wight (Sea-fight)	248

		J	PAGE
Jerusalem			295
Jewel, Alfred's			228
Johannes Scotus Erigena			43-48
John the Old Saxon			48, 256
Joshua			86
Judges			210
Judith			7, 63, 64, 67
Jurisdictions			214
Jury			219
K			
Kipling, Rudyard			89, 273
L			
Lea (River)			349-350
Lentwine			74
Leo III.			30
Leo IV.			32
Lewis the Pious			38-40
Lodbroc, Daughters of			148
London			116, 240-246
M			
Malmesbury, William of			141, 202
Manuscripts			233, 234
Mercia			116, 220
Meretune (Marton)			106
Michael's, Saint (Oxford)			239
Milton			114
Monasteries			254
Moses			275
N			
Navy			249-250
Neot, St			53, 134
Northmen			77-79, 84
Northumbria			119-120
Nottingham			72, 93

O

	PAGE
Oaths	286
Offa	31, 233
Olaf, Saga of	88
Ordeal	286
Orosius	175, 310, 325-326
Osberht	71
Osburh	7-13
Othere	298
Oxford	232, 239

P

Paschasius Radbertus	42
"Pastoral Care" (<i>see</i> Gregory)	
Peterborough	73
Proverbs	357

R

Rabanus Maurus	42
Ragnar Lodbroc	82
Reading	97
Religion	176, 293, 294
Revenue, Divisions of	186-189, 226
Rome	31, 33-35, 297

S

Sabatier	55
Schools	271
Servatus Lupus	42
Shaftesbury	234
Ships	122, 246
Simcox, Rev. W. H.	104
Simeon of Durham	75
Spelman, Sir John	35, 356
Stubbs' Constitutional History	192, 193, 199, 203
Swanwick (Swanage)	127
Swithun, Bishop	29

		T	PAGE
Tacitus		8, 155, 193
Taylor, Sir Henry		188
Tennyson		91
Thegnship		197
Thomas (Saint)		244
Thurgar		74
V			
Verdun, Treaty of		38
W			
Wales, South		147
Wales, North		348
Walhalla		85
Wantage		3
Wareham		124
Wedmore		156-160
Welsh Kings		307-8
Werefrith (Bishop of Worcester)		123
White Horse Hill		100, 102
Wiking		25, 85, 95
Wilton		114
Winchester		254
Witan		67, 69, 112

