# THE BIRTH OF ENGLAND

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Honouring the Brave

# The Birth of England

(449-1066)

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ILLUSTRATED BY
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# CONTENTS

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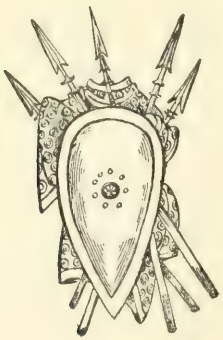


# CHAPTER I
# BEFORE THE BEGINNING

BEFORE beginning the story of the birth of England I would like to tell you in a few words something of the story of early Britain before the English came.

The Britons were a barbaric people. They lived in mean huts, of wattle and mud, and spent their time in hunting and fighting. There were many tribes in the country and each had a separate king or chief, but there was no unity among them and they were constantly fighting with one another. The land they dwelt in was a wild land of forest and marsh, mostly uncultivated, though the tribes in the south of the island had learnt something of agriculture from the Gauls.

Fifty-five years before the birth of Christ, Julius Caesar came to Britain. His troops were terror-stricken when they saw the native inhabitants, wild-eyed men and women with streaming hair, their bodies stained blue with woad. Julius Caesar thought Britain a miserable place and soon went back to Rome, but he returned the year after to make fuller investigations. It was not until a hundred years later that the Romans

came again. This time they came with serious intention to conquer Britain and make it a Roman province. The Britons fought heroically, and some-

Roman Invasion of Britain

times successfully, but at last they were conquered. Two great names stand out as leaders in this life-and-death struggle, Caractacus, the gallant British chief who was led as prisoner through the streets of Rome; and Boadicea, the warrior queen, who, after being finally defeated in battle, took poison to escape becoming a Roman captive. From her time (A.D. 62) for over three hundred years the Romans ruled Britain. They built walled cities, London, York and Chester, among others. Chester is surrounded by the Roman wall to this day. They built a great wall from the Tyne to the Solway to keep out the Picts and Scots, who were con-

stantly invading Britain. They taught the Britons how to use tin and iron for making weapons, how to make pottery and many other useful things. The Britons still spoke their own language, and the two peoples did not become one.

At the beginning of the fifth century Italy was very much harassed by the Goths, wherefore, in order to protect the heart of the Empire, the Roman legions were recalled from Britain.

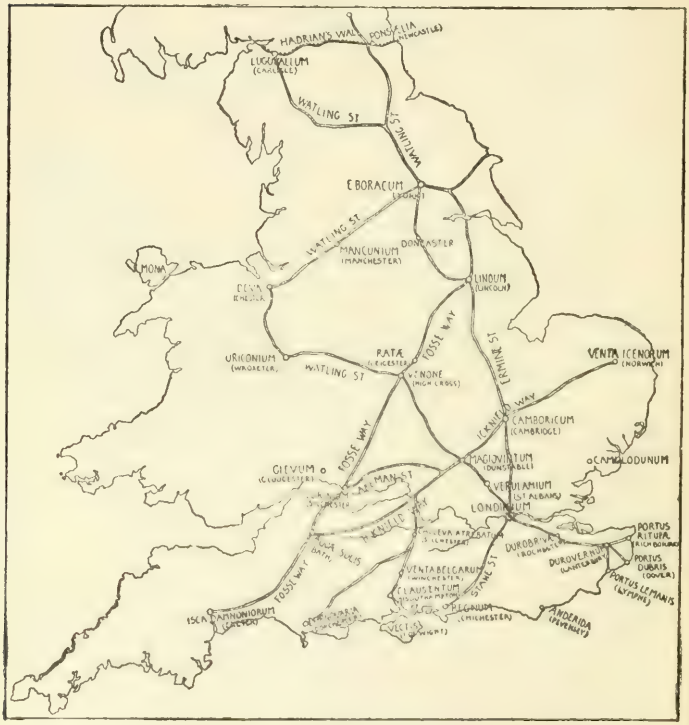
Boadicea

The Britons were not at that time a warlike people, for the Romans had treated them as a subject race, and had allowed them no share in the government. The Roman frontier had been carried as far north as the Firths of Forth and Clyde, but beyond that limit lived the savage Picts and Scots, the latter of whom came originally from Ireland, and they were constantly making raids into Britain. They were a fierce and savage people and the Britons had now to meet them relying on their own resources.

There were besides other enemies whom the Britons had to face, pirates from North Germany, belonging to three tribes, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. As these raiders were our English ancestors, you will want to know something of the land from which they came and why they came.

At the mouth of the Elbe in Germany there is still

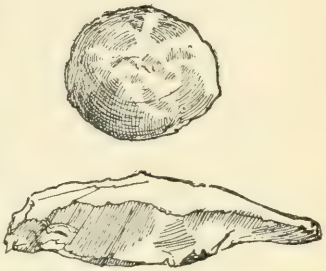
a little strip of land called Angeln, in what is now known as Schleswig-Holstein. This was the early home




**Rough Map of Roman Britain showing the probable Routes of the most important Roads and the chief Roman Towns**

of the Angles. They were a farming folk and over their country were spread little scattered homesteads where the people were able to make a scanty livelihood by tilling the land, raising the crops, tending the sheep,

weaving the wool into clothing, and making coverings for the feet from the hides of animals. There was no king over them, but there were leaders. The one tie was the tie of blood. The communities were something like the Scottish clans of later times. Every tribesman was responsible for his brother and bound to retaliate should he be slain.



Pyrites and Flint for striking light (Early British)

The life was a simple one. The women did the weaving and spinning, and attended to the household. The men were occupied with the outside work of the farm when they were not fighting with neighbouring tribes. Their houses were in most cases little more than huts in which the cattle and pigs were sheltered as well as the other inhabitants—an arrangement which can be seen to this day in remote parts of Ireland. The richer folk had more substantial dwellings, but even these were mean and comfortless, compared to a farmhouse to-day. A peat fire would warm the room, but the smoke could only escape through a hole in the roof, for there were no chimneys, and there was no glass to the windows in those days. The floor was usually covered with bracken, and the people slept on it, covered with rough blankets or the skins of animals.

Saxon Peasant Girl

The one dread of these people was that pirates should visit their coast, and steal their simple belongings. The chief kept a band of the bravest men ready at any moment to attack invaders, whether they came by land or sea. It was a great privilege to be one of this company of warriors. They had a most delightful life according to the ideas of those days, for when they were not fighting they were feasting or resting. The chief's wife and her maidens would honour them by appearing in the great hall, where they used to sit, pouring out their horns of ale or mead and giving them presents and praising their prowess. When the men had drunk a good deal they would recount their heroic deeds, and at length would fall asleep listening to music and the songs sung by the gleemen.

Saxon Spearhead (Iron)

The landowner and his eldest son alone, before the tribes migrated to Britain, had the right to attend at the mote or meeting where was discussed the business of the community. This assembly would take place in the open air. All the men entitled to go would be fully dressed in armour, wearing their helmets and shields, as if they were going to battle. The rest of the people, though they called themselves free, were practically owned by their employer.

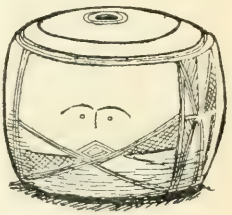
It was the proud boast of the people that they had never bowed their necks under alien rule. As the sons grew up in the farms and villages there was no place for the younger ones, and bands of youths would join together and form foraging expeditions. They

could build sea-worthy ships, and in these the youths would sail away, intent on nothing but pillage and adventure.

First they went only to the countries nearest to them. One day they decided to try their luck in more distant parts, and a body of these Saxon pirates came to England and began to plunder and slay. They found that it was a more fertile country than their own barren strip of land, and when they sailed back with their booty their tales fired other men with eagerness to imitate their exploits.

Incense Cup

The Romans had done much for Britain in making roads, and clearing parts of the forests. The Saxons found fields of corn ready to be reaped, cattle to be slain, and domestic utensils to be stolen. To Britain were directed the thoughts of the adventurers of other lands, much as in the time of Elizabeth people thought of America as a land of infinite possibilities. But, though Britain was far more cultivated than the districts the pirates came from, it was still largely forest and marsh land.



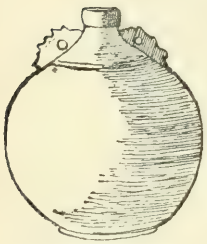
Found in child's grave. Thought to be an object of worship by Early British

The England that we see to-day as we rush through in trains and motor cars, or as we survey it from some high hill like the Worcester Beacon, is a land of tilled fields, fine houses with ornamental parks, and sleepy villages with the smoke from the cottage chimneys giving a sense of comfort within. It is a land of mighty cities with forests of factory chimneys rising to the sky, reminding us that our commerce reaches to the ends of the earth, and

of sleepy provincial towns that have something of the glamour of the past.

We are told that God made the country and man made the town. But this does not express the exact truth, for though God gives us the country, with almost intolerable toil and hardship it has to be made useful to the needs of man. The forests must be hewn down, the marshes drained, the fields ploughed and sown. We must dig deep into the earth for the coal and iron and tin to supply our wants.

The country our ancestors came from was in some ways not unlike wild parts of America to-day. In certain provinces of Canada, Manitoba, for instance, you may see advertised "Free Farms for Settlers." It sounds wonderful to get something for nothing in this hard old world. But if, when you grow up, you think you would like to try your luck in one of the colonies, and obtain a grant of land, you will understand why it is given. You will find the farm part of a vast expanse of country, without a fellow-creature within hail. You will have to build your homestead, and, in order to do this, you must first fell the trees and clear the ground. You will have to make a road and plant the crops. You will have to build where there is water near at hand, and perhaps to sink wells in order to obtain a sufficient supply. The Government will have given you a grant of what is called virgin soil, that is, ground which never from the beginning has been cultivated by man.



Clay vessel with holes for suspending

If you have not the courage for this immense toil you

may go to Canada and buy a ranch which has already been cultivated, where a dwelling has been built, and all is in working order. You will then live in a district which is in much the same sort of cultivation as the better parts of Britain were when the Saxons first settled there. For when they first came over only parts of the country were cleared. In the depths of the wood the wild bear lived, and packs of fierce wolves would stray into the villages, and terrify the people and steal their sheep. Wild boars lived in the marshy country, deer ranged at will. Hunting was almost as dangerous as going to war, and levies of men would sometimes be raised to go out against the wolves and destroy as many as possible.

Early Briton

Man had to learn to tame the animals and make them useful for food and for other purposes. When the animals were domesticated it became necessary to feed them, for they were no longer wild creatures able to provide for themselves. The farmer must have grass-

land to graze his cows and sheep, he must lay by fodder for the wintertime. He must build shelters to protect his stock from the weather. In the course of centuries most of the animals that could not be domesticated have disappeared from England.


AFTER the Romans had left, the Britons were attacked on all sides and, moreover, the native tribes were still quarrelling with one another. Had they been able to show a united front to their foes the course of English history might have been different. They were in despair and could contrive no better way of vanquishing the Picts and the Scots, than by inviting the Saxons to attack them.

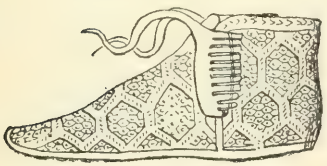
The British chief who decided on this policy, after having consulted his people, was Vortigern. The leaders of the Angles and Saxons were two chiefs named Hengest and Horsa. Some historians think that these were mythical heroes, but there is no convincing reason against the common acceptance of Hengest and Horsa as commanders of the expedition.

The alien warriors landed at a little spot in Kent called Ebbsfleet—the Isle of Thanet—near the towns we now know as Margate and Ramsgate. A bird's eye view of England in the fifth century would be different

from one to-day. As every generation passes, changes take place. On one side of the island the sea has receded, and where once were dashing waves are now pleasant fields; on the other side the sea has encroached year by year, and where once stood flourishing towns, there is now but an expanse of water. Ebbsfleet is part of the mainland, but in Hengest's and Horsa's time it was on an island, and big ships could sail up the channel, where cows graze to-day. Perhaps some of you have been to this historic spot, where in imagination we may see the Saxon chiefs disembarking.

Roman Matron

The Britons did not oppose their first landing, and for five or six years they were employed by the British chiefs in fighting the Picts and Scots. Mr Sharon Turner, in his "History of the Anglo-Saxons," tells us "they were promised food and clothing and were stationed in Thanet. . . ." But the ambition of Hengest was not satisfied without conquest, and about six years after his arrival he was anxious to obtain the kingdom of Kent.



Roman Shoe

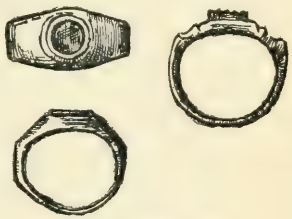
As the story goes Vortigern, King of Kent, came to Hengest and Horsa with his proposal that the Saxons should help him to fight the Picts. A splendid feast was given at which this suggestion was discussed. Hengest's beautiful daughter Rowena served the chieftains, as was the custom at great banquets. Vortigern, watching

her deftly pouring wine into his cup, looked upon her and loved her. When she had left the hall, Vortigern, careless of the rights of his people, turned to Hengest and said :

" Your daughter is very fair to look upon—and I would take her to wife. Give her to me, I pray you."

" And what will you give to me for such a gift ? "

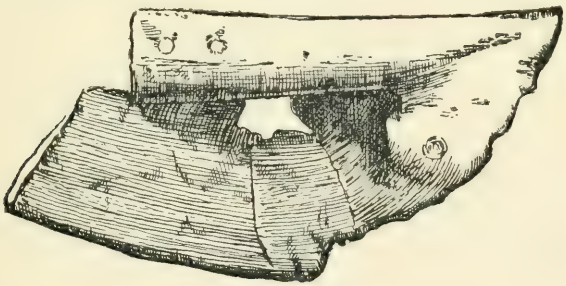
" I will give you my fair kingdom of Kent," said the enamoured chief.



Bronze Finger Rings

" It is well," replied Hengest, who would have been glad to dispose of any number of daughters on the same condition. Legend does not tell us what Rowena thought of the arrangement, and it is not likely that she would have been consulted.

When the other British chiefs heard of the bargain, they were furious. Vortigern had no right to dispose



Iron Knife or Axe

of his kingdom in this way, and they refused to have Hengest to rule over them. They punished Vortigern by dethroning him, and his son Vortimer was chosen as their chief. Vortimer was a spirited youth, and for

five years he fought Hengest and his warriors, and the Saxons could find no safe landing in the kingdom of Kent. Then he died and his father was forgiven and recalled to the kingdom. This was the moment Hengest was waiting for. He went to Vortigern and said:

"Give me your kingdom. I gave you my daughter."

Vortigern did not know what to do. His long years of exile had taught him not to act on his own responsibility alone, so he called a meeting of the British and Saxon chiefs, and an equal number of Saxons and Britons obeyed the summons. While they were engaged in excited discussion, suddenly Hengest cried, in tones of command, "Draw your daggers!" At this signal every Saxon weapon flashed in the air, and its owner stabbed to death the British chief who was nearest to him. The unhappy Vortigern alone was spared by command of Hengest.

Vortigern did not long survive, for in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which is the great authority on this period (though it was not begun till some time after), we read: "In 455 Hengest and Horsa fought with Vortigern the king on the spot which is called Aylesford. Horsa was slain and Hengest took the kingdom with his son Æsc."

These few words are all that we know of Horsa, who had the happiness to die a warrior's death, in the hour of victory, as, in our later history, we shall read that Wolfe fell at Quebec, and Nelson in the battle of Trafalgar.

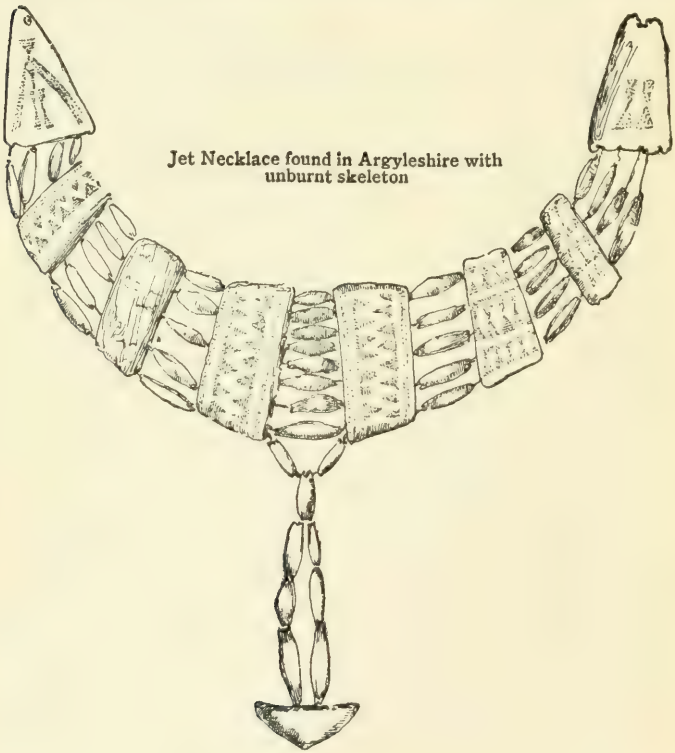
The battle of Aylesford was very important, for it was the beginning of the conquest of Britain by the Saxon tribes. Battles were in those days to the death, and the vanquished were frequently all slain.

British Chiefs slain by Hengest and his Saxons

This was the case in the next encounter at Crayford, where "Hengest and Æsc fought the Britons and slew four hundred men."

Enamelled Fibula, Roman-British, Isle of Wight

The fights ended in the massacre of the defeated Britons. It is possible that the women may occasionally have been spared and enslaved, and it is probable

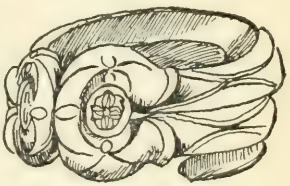


Jet Necklace found in Argyleshire with unburnt skeleton

that the children were not killed. Still, a vast number of the Britons met with violent deaths at the hands of their conquerors. It is terrible to think of the lives of the Britons. Those were most fortunate who fell in open fight, for many were driven from their homes, and like the Israelites of old hid themselves in caves and in thickets and in rocks. In wild parts of the Yorkshire moors there are still traces of their retreats —pathetic signs of their struggle for existence ere, worn out and exhausted from hunger, they died.

Metal Boss

There is a secluded little village in Leicestershire named Ipstones, surrounded by hills, where people tell us that descendants of the Britons live to-day. In many such remote spots, far from the Roman roads, little settlements of Britons may have survived, for it would have been impossible to destroy a whole people by killing them in battle.



Celtic Armlet

But I am anticipating a little, for I want to give you a few more details of the struggle of the unhappy Britons with the victorious Saxons. The Britons returned again and again to the attack, and it was twenty years before the kingdom of Kent was won—after which, the Chronicle tells us, the Britons " forsook Kent land and fled with much fear to London."

Bronze Ring (Sussex)

All this time fresh companies of Saxons had been coming over, and it was not until nearly fifty years after the landing of Hengest

and Horsa that the Saxons took the British stronghold of Anderida, near Hastings (491). Ælla and Cissa were the leaders of the Saxons, and in this terrible fight every Briton was killed.

Celtic Shield

The conquest of South Britain took place a few years later (519), when after the battle of Charford five thousand Britons lay dead on the field.

Thus the victories of Aylesford and Crayford determined the fate of the kingdom of Kent, the siege of Anderida that of the kingdom of Sussex, and the victory of Charford that of Wessex (England south of the Thames, except Kent, Sussex, Surrey, Devon and Cornwall).

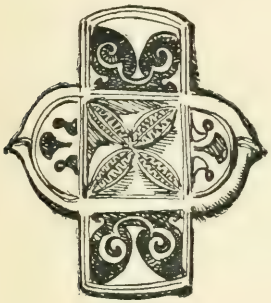
An ancient writer, Aneurin, gives a description of a battle which will give you some idea of the appearance of the pagan Saxons. He was a Welshman, and he wrote a poem called "The Gododin."

Mirror-back

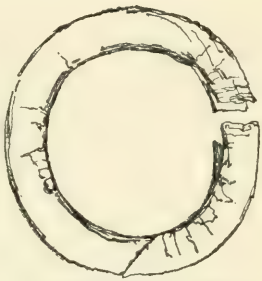
He tells us that at the battle of Cattraeth were present three hundred warriors arrayed in gilded armour, and wearing torques, or twisted necklaces, of gold, "White sheathed piercers, and four-pointed square helmets." Some had spears and shields—the latter made of wood. Their leader, more gorgeous than the rest, wore armour and a mantle made from the skin of a beast. Round his neck was a string of amber beads. And though he looked such a magnificent warrior,

we who nowadays think it is only women who should wear long hair will be surprised to learn that, in accordance with the general custom of his day, he had flowing hair.

The Saxon chief wore a leathern tunic to which armour made of rings was sewn. In the Chelsea pageant which took place in 1908 there were beautiful reproductions of the Saxon dresses, and though the episode which was shown was later than the time of



Harness-boss



Jet Armlet (Early British)

which I am now writing the dress had not materially changed. In the pageant the king wore a crown of gold, and carried in his hand a staff. He was encased in a shirt of mail, and his legs were bound with leather thongs. The Saxon soldiers were very martial figures with long spears and round helmets, their daggers sheathed in wood at their waist, and a crimson cloak clasped on the left side. The king and the chiefs were distinguished from the common people not so much by the fashion of their dress as by the richness of their jewels.

Our Saxon ancestors generally slept in their linen

or woollen shirts. There was no daily bath, and the poorer folk wore their clothes till they could no longer hold together. It was long ages after this before habits of cleanliness, as we understand them, became customary.

## CHAPTER III HOME LIFE

SOME girl readers may ask—what about our sex? Where were our ancestresses all this time? The men have had all the star parts to play in the birth of England as you have told it so far. Did other women besides Rowena come over with Hengest and Horsa and their warrior band, or were they left to look after the flocks and the crops?

The first bands of pirates, as I have told you, were the younger sons of the Saxon farmers, who, unable to make a living in their own land, and yearning for a life of adventure, crossed the sea and harried the coasts of England. Most of them were unmarried. But those who were married left their wives and children at home. Too often they never returned, and their household would not know what had become of them. After certain parts of England had been settled, the Saxon warriors,

Saxon Sword

having obtained some land, would go back and fetch their families.

What a day of excitement it must have been when the father who had been away for long months returned! His wife, maybe, had almost ceased to hope that he was still alive. She had had no word of him though many others had returned from similar expeditions. Their dwelling was close to the seashore, and the children would often run down to the beach to watch the boats, and occasionally, when they saw some of the pirate bands returning, would rush back to the hut where they lived, and call out to their mother to come, for "it must be father this time." But there had been many false alarms, and the mother had grown sad and weary, though she was too busy looking after the crops, weaving the wool, and superintending the farm, to give way to despair. At last one day the children summoned her and she went with them to the shore. This time the father had returned. What a great deal he had to tell them and what plans had to be made! He told them that he had obtained land in a splendid country, much better cultivated than their own, and that he would take them there. The rivers were the principal highways in Germany but in England were well-made roads, fields of corn and luxuries they had never heard of.

It may be that on his allotment was a deserted Roman villa, which, though he could not appreciate its beauty, made a very comfortable dwelling.

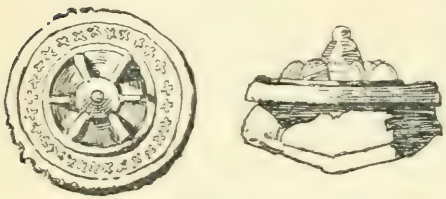
"Roads, father?" one of the elder children might have asked. "Have the Britons made roads?"

"No," we can fancy him saying, "the Britons are not able to do that, but the Romans who for a long time were their masters in Britain have made splendid roads."

This was to be their home

He could not foresee the long ages through which those highways were to be used in England, and they are there to this day. Some of them now run through private parks, and are grass-grown, but they were so well constructed that it has been suggested that they should be excavated and set apart as special roads for motor cars.

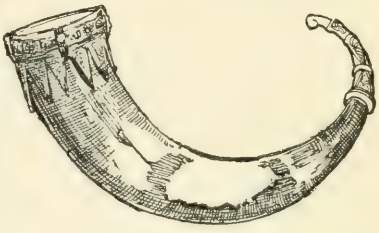
The small household belongings of the Saxon home would soon be got together, the cattle would be driven to the seashore, for often the emigrants took all they had with them. The children would be made useful in carrying the smaller things, and the younger ones would be in charge of an elder sister, for the mother had so much to do in superintending the move. A fine day and a favourable wind and they would embark. The children's eager voices would be hushed to silence, as for the first time they crossed the ocean, and saw their little barque making its way over the broad expanse of sea. The family was eager for the new life, though the older members may have felt homesick, as they saw the shores of their native land fade from their sight. But they landed on the coasts of Kent full of hope, and made their way to the settlement, where the father had acquired his share of the land, which was always divided by lot. Before bringing them over he had made preparations to receive them. A wooden dwelling had been put up, and storehouse, barns, and stables built. In the house there was one long room, the hall, and



Bronze Gilt Brooch

father, mother and children trooped in. This was to be their home. A few slaves were in attendance, conquered British women who meekly obeyed the command to bring immediately food and drink.

First they brought great flagons of ale, and poured it into horns, and the travellers quenched their thirst, for it had been a long and tiring journey. Then there would be a simple meal, perhaps a dish of eels, a joint of horse flesh, which they would have thoroughly enjoyed, though it does not sound very appetising to us, and loaves of barley bread. The father remained at table drinking, but as soon as their hunger was satisfied the children scampered off to look at the new domain. Outside their house were little huts, made of mud and thatch. Strange women were seen coming in and out, bent on various tasks. They were talking a strange language, and the Saxon children, as they looked at these sad-faced women, wondered what they were saying, and why they seemed so miserable. They were the British women who had lost all that was dear. Their little homes had been burnt, their husbands, fathers and brothers had fallen in battle, their children had died of want, and they alone remained, slaves of the Saxon conquerors. They had become dulled by their suffering, and looked at the bright-eyed, sturdy children of their masters with curiosity rather than hatred. The boys and girls rushed about till they came to a little mud wall which surrounded their farm, and outside



Saxon Drinking Horn

this they saw a moat, full of water. "No one can get in here," they said gleefully.

It was a bright day in August, and the fields were golden with the ripening corn. Presently the children met their father and mother, who both seemed in good spirits, though rather serious.

"We must reap the corn this week," the man was saying to his wife, "and get everything in order for the winter."

How these Saxon settlers loved the country life! There would be work for all and no time for idleness. The cattle must be tended, the land cultivated, for there were no shops in those days and the people were dependent for food upon their own exertions. It was a continual fight with Nature, and the children had their part to play. Besides doing all sorts of things about the homestead, they would help their mother to weave and sew and cook the simple meals.

When the harvest had been safely gathered in, all were in a state of excitement, for there was to be a holiday. The day chosen was some time near the end of September—our Michaelmas Day. The hall was freshly strewn with rushes; great bowls of mead, a sweet drink made of honey, plenty of ale, fish of all sorts, apples and nuts, haunches of mutton, and joints of beef were spread on the table. In the earlier part of the day the father had perhaps gone to attend one of the yearly motes, where offenders were tried, and where public interests were discussed, and he would bring back some of his friends and their wives to join in the revels. The festive proceedings would last for a long time, and often the men would go on drinking

till late into the night. Then the guests would sleep in the hall in which they had feasted, lying on the rush-strewn floor.

There were three other feasts in the year: the spring feast, which took place about Easter; the midsummer feast, when the people would light great bonfires; and the winter feast, when the fires would be piled with blazing logs inside the halls, and the Saxon gleemen would sing their songs, and all would be merry and glad.

The work on the farm was much the same as it is to-day. In the spring ploughing and sowing and tending the young lambs, which had to be looked after carefully, for they were apt to die in the late spring frosts. In the early summer would come the haymaking and sheep shearing, and in the autumn the harvest. And when that was garnered there would be preparations for the winter; pigs and other animals had to be killed and salted, so that they would keep, and ale and mead had to be brewed. During the dark days of winter the farmer would look to his buildings and do any necessary carpentry, and the mistress and her maids would pass the time weaving cloth, and making garments for the household.

British Woman

In early times in England the Saxon women were not really free, though they had a better position than women have to this day in lands like Turkey. They could hold property. As we have seen, they were very energetic

and ready to do a full share of all the hard work of the farm. They had quite as much to do as the men, who it was said "were much influenced by the holy and thoughtful counsels of women."

There were two parts to a Saxon marriage: the betrothal, and the wedding. When a young man

Saxon Ladies spinning

had selected the girl that he wished for his bride he applied to her father, and they discussed how much he was to pay for her. Then her consent had to be obtained, and the bridegroom promised to keep her "as a man ought to keep his wife."

Before the wedding the bridegroom was required to promise that the money necessary for the house-

hold expenses should be provided. Then came the marriage ceremony, and on the day after, the bridegroom gave to the bride what was called the morgengift, that is a sum of money or dowry, as previously agreed.

The children in those days were not happily circumstanced unless they had good parents, for a father had absolute control over his sons and daughters, and might even kill them. As the boys grew up they became free on the day that they received the spear and the shield. They could then choose wives for themselves and start housekeeping on their own account.

Saxon Spearhead

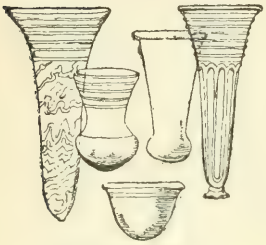
They would marry perhaps in one of the rare intervals of peace.

The bridegroom would bring home his bride, and point proudly to all the improvements which he had contrived for her. The house was more comfortable than the dwelling she had left, for every generation, from earliest times to the present day, has had an increasing desire for comfort, and has striven to enjoy more luxury, than the one that went before. Could we see the little house to which the young Saxon took his bride we should notice that they did without what we consider to be the necessities of life. There would be hangings on the wall to keep out the draught, sometimes beautifully embroidered in silk, and generally of brilliant shades, for the Saxons loved bright colours. There would be a long table,

Spur
(Shropshire)

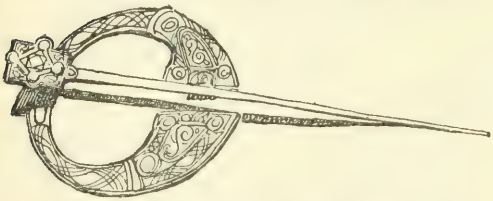
and wooden seats and benches, and perhaps candlesticks.

The bedroom would have in it a simple bed made of wooden planks, and covered very often with the skin of an animal for coverlet; the pillows and the mattress would probably be stuffed with straw. And there would be one or two chests in the room to contain the spare clothes of the household.



Drinking Vessels

In Anglo-Saxon times people were more dependent upon themselves than they are now, and men and women did many things in their homes which are done now in factories and workshops. They had to weave their cloth, dress the skins of animals, make their clay pots, their weapons, and almost everything required in their daily life.



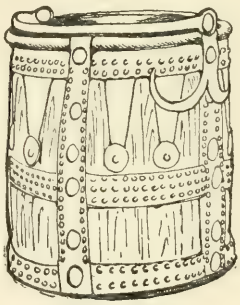
Anglo-Saxon Brooch of Gilt Bronze

Among other things made by the Anglo-Saxons were beautiful jewels, though these were made by skilled craftsmen and not as part of the ordinary work of the household. The jewels were worn by the chiefs in battle and by their wives.

If you wish to see exactly the sort of things which people wore then you should spend a Saturday afternoon in the Anglo-Saxon room at the British Museum. There you may see rugged necklaces of

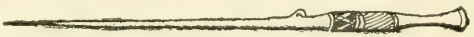
stones, wonderful brooches and clasps of gold, and enormous pins, that look as if they might have been

Glass Drinking-cup (Taplow)



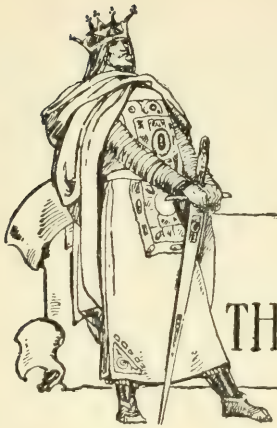
Saxon Bucket

used as weapons, for the mantles of the men. You will find there curious ornaments for the hair, and combs very much like the combs of to-day. You will also see buckets and other vessels which were used in the houses. Many of these things were found in the Anglo-Saxon burying grounds. People were often buried with many of their belongings. Among other relics is the bracelet of a child. The Saxons did not make much glass, but there is some shown which is extremely beautiful in colour. The weapons that you will see are worn with age, and some of them were discovered in the bed of the river Thames. After lying there many hundreds of years, they are now carefully preserved among the treasures of the nation.



Anglo-Saxon Bronze Pin

Anglo-Saxon Bronze Armlet (Sussex)



# CHAPTER IV
# THE SEVEN KINGDOMS

WE must return now to the stern business of war. After the victory of Charford (519) Cerdic reigned as King of the West Saxons. He was not able to extend his kingdom, for the Britons had successfully repulsed him at Mount Badon.

It was at this battle that Arthur, the legendary hero, was in command of the British. Romance has woven a mesh of beautiful stories around the exploits of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. His valour and his high ideals have become a household word, and for many generations it was believed by the people that he would

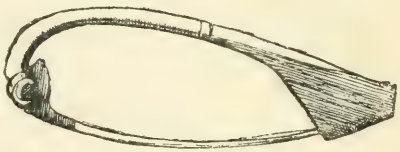
> "come again and thrice as fair,
> Come again with all good things.
> And war shall be no more."

It was said that on his last resting-place was the inscription, "Hic jacet Arturus, Rex quondam, rex futurus" (Here lies Arthur. The king that was—the

king that is to be). But in truth the real King Arthur was buried in the Abbey of Glastonbury. In the reign of Henry II. his grave was opened, and on a leaden cross was found the inscription in Latin, "Here lies buried the famous King Arthur in the isle of Avalon," and within the hollowed trunk of a tree which had served for a coffin was found the skeleton of a very tall man, with ten wounds in the skull.

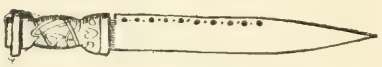
Silver-gilt Fibula

England was very gradually won. For over one hundred and fifty years fresh bands of Angles and Saxons were continually coming over and conquering different parts of the country.



Bronze Fibula

This long period may seem to you as nothing more than a cruel time of bloodshed and murder. You must remember, however, that the Saxons had not the same feeling for the sacredness of human life that we have now, and they were as ready to kill as be killed. All men were fighters, and to die in battle was considered the most worthy of deaths.



Saxon Knife

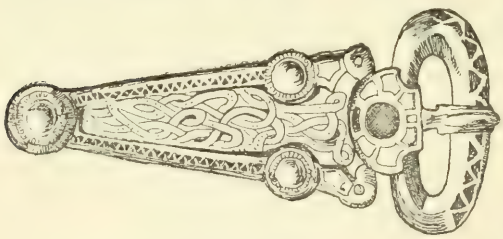
Gradually seven kingdoms came to be established in England. We have seen that after twenty years of hard fighting Hengest founded the kingdom of Kent. Ella had won the kingdom of Sussex, Cerdic the

kingdom of Wessex. The other kingdoms founded were Northumbria (all England north of the Humber and south of the Tweed), Mercia (middle England), East Anglia (Cambridge, Suffolk and Norfolk), and Essex. Scotland north of Edinburgh was occupied by the Picts and the Scots.

Bead

Pendant

This was the position of the seven kingdoms about the middle of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, but it did not last for long, for one kingdom warred with another and the boundaries were constantly changing. There was a desire on the part of each of the rulers of these kingdoms to become supreme, to be overlord of the others. It was a desire which unconsciously led toward a united England. The common people do not seem to have minded when one kingdom was merged into another, for they were closely akin, and their race, speech, customs, and religion were much alike.



Fibula (Kent)


THE Saxons were heathen when they came to England. They brought with them their own beliefs, and for long years afterwards looked to their gods for help.

Their chief deity was Woden, who had but one eye, for he had bartered the other for the precious gift of wisdom. He was the inventor of runes and letters. Runes were mystic letters the characters of which were formed almost entirely of straight lines. He was the guardian of the roads and the patron of all the arts. Woden means "wanderer," and he went to and fro over the earth. His dress was the colour of the sky, and when he journeyed he wore a broad-brimmed hat shading his face so that no one should notice his disfigurement. Two ravens were perched upon his shoulders. He sent them out every day and they came back to him at night and told him all that was going on in the world. They were called Hugin, which means thought, and Munin, which means memory.

Woden had a wonderful palace called Valhalla—the

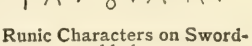
Hall of the Chosen Slain. The supreme desire of the heathen warriors was to be worthy to enter there. It was large enough to contain them all for it had five hundred and forty doors, and an opening wide enough to let in eight hundred men riding side by side. But only those who fell in fight might pass in. When a battle was raging there would be seen in the sky the shadowy forms of the Valkyrs, or shield maidens, who would bear away with them the bravest of the warriors who had fallen and would take them to Valhalla. The walls of the Hall of the Chosen Slain were of shining spears, and the roof gleamed with the lustre of thousands of golden shields. These were the gifts of the gods to the heroes. To the bravest a special honour was accorded, for Woden descended from his throne, and went himself to the entrance to receive them. He would lead them to their place at the banquet which was held in their honour. They would be regaled with great bowls of mead, and the flesh of a wonderful boar, which was killed and eaten yet always came to life again, so as to be ready to be served up at the next feast of the gods.

Woden

Sacrifices of animals were offered up to Woden. The

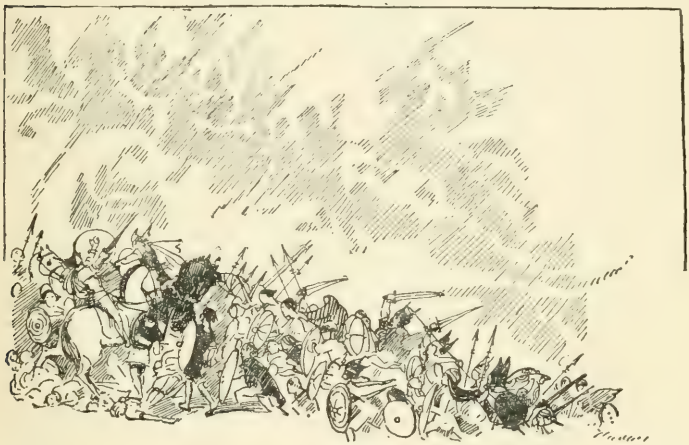
horse was an especially welcome tribute. His own horse, called Sleipnir, had eight feet so as to bear his master swiftly across the heavens.

Wednesday (Woden's Day) recalls the memory of Woden. In the old times he was worshipped once a week in the temples where his image was set up. Woden was called the All-father and he was supposed to teach people how to be truthful and brave, wise and good.



Runic Characters on Sword-blade

Woden's wife was Frigga, who was represented as a



The Valkyrs

beautiful, stately woman. She advised him in his difficulties, and sometimes, when she disagreed with him, managed to spoil his plans. For the gods and goddesses were like men and women, and were supposed to make mistakes at times.

Frigga was especially the guardian of marriage. She

was the goddess of the clouds, and her raiment would be radiant or gloomy as the sky is clear or overcast. She was the queen of heaven, and shared with Woden the power of seeing and knowing all that was happening in the world. The superstitious heathen especially venerated her, for it was said that though she knew the future she would never tell it. She wore on her head herons' plumes, which were meant to signify secrecy. She had her own palace and welcomed to it happy married people who, having been true to each other, were privileged to live together after death. Frigga, for all her tenderness and lovableness, had one fault. She loved beautiful things too well. One day, tempted by a golden statue of Woden in his temple, she stole it and had it made into a jewel for her use. I have not space to tell you of her punishment for this crime. It was said that Woden and Frigga had seven sons, and from these sons sprang the rulers of the seven kingdoms established in Britain. All the Anglo-Saxon kings traced their descent to Woden, and further to Brow, Scyld and Sceaf.

Frigga

The second god in importance with the Anglo-Saxons was Thor, whom we commemorate on Thursdays. Longfellow, in his spirited poem of "The Challenge of Thor," gives us a vivid description of the power of this god:

"I am the God Thor,
I am the War God,
I am the Thunderer!
Here in my Northland,
My fastness and fortress,
Reign I for ever.

Here amid icebergs
Rule I the nations;
This is my hammer,
Miölner the mighty;
Giants and sorcerers
Cannot withstand it!

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

Thor was the god of the thunder and the lightning, and the thunderbolt was said to be his hammer.

We learn what we know of these gods in the eddas or sagas, which were dramatic poems written in the ninth and tenth centuries. They give us not only the beautiful myths and legends of the gods, but make us understand, more than we could otherwise do, the feelings and hopes of the people who worshipped them.

One of the most poetical of these myths is that of Balder, who, though not one of the mightiest gods of the Anglo-Saxons, was greatly loved by them. The story of Balder is especially interesting to us, for it seems to

foreshadow the Christian faith which was to sweep away all these dim, shadowy beliefs.

Balder was the son of Woden and Frigga, and was known as " the beautiful." He was the god of the sun and he brought joy to the hearts of men. Frigga knew that a sad fate was awaiting her son, but she hid it from him and, mother-like, sought to avert his doom. She

Thor

sent a message to all things animate and inanimate on the earth, begging them not to harm her beloved child. The messengers went joyfully on their errand; the people promised gladly, the stones promised, the trees promised, the plants promised—all save the mistletoe, a plant which had been sacred to the Druids, and which was forgotten. Frigga was very happy for she did not think that the little mistletoe could do any harm.

Loki, the god of fire, was the evil genius of the gods,

and he had long nourished feelings of jealousy and hatred against Balder, the good and pure. Unfortunately he discovered the secret of the mistletoe, and having made a shaft from its stem, he chose an opportunity when the gods were amusing themselves to make use of it. Knowing that Balder could not be harmed,

Balder dead

the other gods were shooting arrows and hurling stones at him, when suddenly Loki pressed a bow into the hands of the blind god, Hodur, Balder's twin brother, and bade him aim a shaft with the rest. Hodur entered readily into the fun, as he thought it, and, directed by Loki, shot his arrow with such keen aim that Balder was slain.

The body of the sun-god was carried to the seashore and placed on his dragon-ship. His wife, who had loved him dearly, bending over to take a last farewell, fell dead at his side. She too was placed on the bier that she might be with him in the dark land to which he was going, the shadowy kingdom of Hel. With great difficulty the ship on which Balder and Nanna lay was launched. It was set fire to, and as it slowly drifted from their gaze, the weeping gods saw that the glorious glow of the sinking sun was not brighter than the light from the burning vessel.

Matthew Arnold, in his magnificent poem of "Balder Dead," tells how heralds were sent through the world to beg all "living and unliving things to weep," that by their tears Balder might yet return to dwell with the gods.

As Balder was the symbol of the sun, so like the sun he set, and through the twilight and the darkness of the night, remained hidden. But as the sun rises again each day, so Balder after the twilight of the gods was to rise anew. He was in very truth the emblem of the resurrection from night to morning, from winter to spring, from death to life. And the Anglo-Saxons believed that after he had risen again he would reign for ever in a world where darkness could never be, and where sorrow and suffering would be no more. The Midsummer Day when, in the far north, the sun never sets, was fittingly set apart for his worship.

Loki, who had brought about Balder's death, was for a long time kept bound in a dim cavern. His only companion was his faithful wife, who would not leave him. A poisonous snake was fixed over his head, so that its venom should drop continually upon him, but

she sat and caught the poison as it fell. At intervals the bowl would be full and she would have to empty it, and then the drops would fall upon Loki and he would writhe in agony. It was his struggles as he turned and twisted in torture that caused earthquakes. At the twilight of the gods he rent his chains asunder and took part in the last dread battle, when he died fighting against Heimdall. Loki's day was Saturday, although this day is named after Saturn, the Roman god who was chased out of heaven and deprived of his divinity.

The other days of the week commemorate other gods of the Norsemen. In the word Sunday, Balder, the god of the sun, is honoured. On Monday the pale moon which has been dead for so many millions of years, and which the northern folk believed was guided through the sky by Mani, was remembered. On Tuesday we think of the god Tiu, who was the director of war and battle. Because he could only give victory on one side he was always thought of as being one-handed. It was said that the other hand had been bitten off by the wolf Fenris, the child of the wicked Loki and a giantess. The other gods were afraid of this wolf, who had been brought to Asgard, the home of the gods, to be trained. Tiu, the all-courageous, alone dared to feed him. Fenris grew so strong and powerful that the gods were dismayed, and one day they brought a wonderful silken cord to bind him. It did not appear to be very strong and they pretended that they only wanted to see how easily he would free himself. Fenris consented to be bound on condition that he should hold in his mouth a hand of one of the gods, as a pledge of good faith. Tiu alone was brave enough to volunteer and the wolf was secured. Fenris found he

could not break the mystic cord with which he was entangled, and in revenge he bit off the god's hand.

Some say that Friday was named after Frigga, but it is more generally believed that it is so called after Freya, the goddess of beauty. She was a leader of the Valkyr maidens, and was often represented half clad in armour, with flowing robes beneath. She was the goddess of fruitfulness, rain, and sunshine, and had a wonderful boar with golden bristles. She was married to Odur, who was said to represent the warm sun in summer. When he left, she wandered, weeping, over the world looking for him. Thus was there rain on the earth, and as Freya's tears turned to gold, so gold is to be found in many parts of the earth to this day.

Freya

There were also lesser divinities, elves and sprites, in whom the Saxons believed. To them the whole earth was inhabited by an unseen people, good and bad, who were ready to help or hinder them as they were pleased or displeased. The woods were full of them, they dwelt in the rivers, they hid in the mountain fastnesses. There were terrible and wicked giants who were jealous of the

gods. These giants were very greedy, and ready to kill anything to satisfy their appetite, like the giant in " Jack the Giant Killer." It was said that it was their heavy footsteps which had made the valleys, and so spoilt the even surface of the earth, and that the tears of their wives had made the rivers.

There were dwarfs too, ugly little creatures who lived in hidden places, and were never allowed to come

out except at night. To this day in Ireland the peasant folk will tell you of the " little people " who live underground and hurry away at the first gleam of dawn.

> " From haunted spring and grassy ring,
> Troop goblin, elf and fairy ;
> And the kelpie must flit from the black bog-pit,
> And the brownie must not tarry."[2]

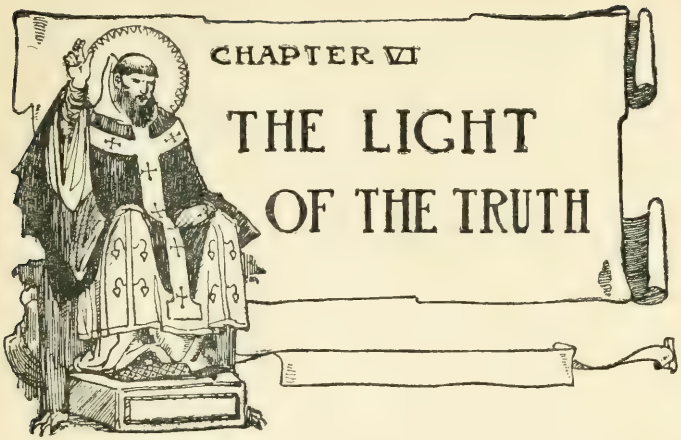
There were fairies so tiny that they could sleep in the heart of a flower. Such a one was Ariel.

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's wing do I fly
After summer merrily."

The elves would dance in the moonlight, and if by chance any mortal trod in the fairy circle he would be befriended by them.

A day was to come when the gods were to be exiled from Asgard and Valhalla, and all their beautiful palaces. In the twilight of the gods they were to be called upon to fight with the powers of evil, and to be overthrown, but only for a time. In the eddas was foreshadowed a mightier power and stronger, which was to replace the heathen gods, but His name they dare not utter.

If you would know more of these legends of long ago you should read H. A. Guerber's beautiful account of them in "Myths of the Norsemen," and Victor Rydberg's "Teutonic Mythology"; each of these authors is a mine of information as to the Norse myths of long ago.



# CHAPTER VI

# THE LIGHT OF THE TRUTH

BRITAIN in the time of the Romans had been largely converted to Christianity. Many churches had been built and the faith was held by the more enlightened of the people.

But, as we have seen, the Britons were at last subjugated by the Northern races. The conquerors brought with them the worship of Woden and Thor, as I told you in the last chapter. Many of the old myths were very beautiful, and had in them a beginning of that desire for some knowledge of the mystery of life which is at the root of all religion. The worship of the old gods taught the virtues of courage, endurance, fidelity. But the more refining influences that help to raise men and women from the merely primitive instincts were wanting. The conquerors utterly despised the religion of the conquered.

It was not till they had been nearly a hundred and fifty years in England that they began to listen to and accept for themselves the truths of Christianity.

Ireland, where they had not penetrated, always remained a Christian country.

Ethelbert, King of Kent, had married Bertha, the daughter of the Frankish King Charibert of Paris (596). She was a Christian, and when she married, and left Gaul (the ancient name for France), brought with her a Christian bishop. She came with her retinue to Canterbury, the capital of King Ethelbert's kingdom, and she asked her husband for a building in which she and her fellow-Christians could worship. There was in Canterbury a little ruined church dedicated to St Martin, which was built in the time of the Roman occupation, which stands to this day. This church was given to Bertha, and here she would go for her devotions. She had felt homesick on first coming to this heathen land, but when she could go and hear the beautiful prayers and chants, and kneel at the altar and pray for the conversion of England, she felt reconciled to her husband's country. She put aside all the money that she could to help to restore the little church, the home of her soul. She sometimes begged her husband to come with her, but he always refused, though all the time, almost unconsciously, he was becoming interested in her faith.

Ethelbert and Bertha

There was at that time in Rome a young deacon

named Gregory, a man of high ideals about the Church to which he belonged. He had taken to heart the command, " Go ye out into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature," and he often wondered what share he could take in the spreading of the message.

As you know, many of the Britons were slaves, who could be bought and sold like cattle. Some of the Anglo-Saxons also became slaves through being unable to pay their debts or through being taken prisoner in the fights between the different kingdoms. Their wives and their children would be sold with them, and thus slaves became one of the principal exports from Britain.

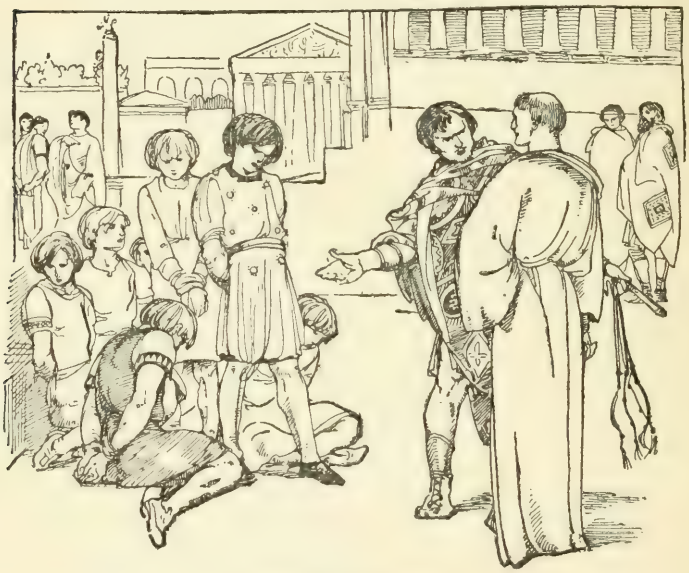
Anglo-Saxon Bishop

It happened one day that Gregory was wandering through the market-place in Rome. There had been a special arrival of Saxon youths that week, and the slave dealer had them on exhibition, waiting for purchasers. Little gaping crowds of Romans gazed with amusement at these new-comers. They were so unlike their own dark-haired, dark-eyed boys. Gregory stopped in front of them, with pitying looks, as they stood there patiently, though their hearts were full of bitterness. He turned to the coarse-looking trader, who had just made a bargain with a wealthy Roman for two of the younger lads, and was in very good spirits. The man turned eagerly to the young deacon, hoping for another customer.

" From what country do they come? " asked Gregory.

"They are Angles," was the answer.

"Not Angles—but angels," he said dreamily, looking at their fair hair and delicate skin. And then, remembering what he had heard of Britain, recalling that it had once been a Christian land, and now was heathen, he said sadly, "They ought to be made like the angels in heaven."



Gregory and the Angles

It was the feeling that, though these Angle slaves had no more rights than dumb animals, yet they nevertheless belonged to a kingdom where there is neither bond nor free, that made Gregory remember them, and determine that something must be done to convert England. He knew that Bertha was

**Augustine walking to Canterbury**

the wife of the King of Kent, and that her influence and example were being felt, and that already many people were talking of the new faith, and ready and eager to hear more of it.

Therefore when Gregory became Pope he decided to send a mission to England, and he selected for its leader Augustine, not the St Augustine who wrote the "Confessions," some two hundred years before, but a Roman abbot. Twenty tonsured monks came with him, and they landed at Ebbsfleet, where Hengest and Horsa had disembarked nearly a hundred and fifty years previously.

Bertha had heard that these missionaries had started on their journey and that Augustine had felt discouraged and was not inclined to proceed. She was very relieved when she knew that he had arrived, for she had persuaded her husband to give him a hearing. Ethelbert was a tolerant man, but, being a heathen, he was fearful of spells and charms, so he would not receive Augustine and his monks in a house but in the open air, where the wicked spirits would have less power to harm him. Accordingly it was on a down near Minster that Augustine endeavoured to set forth clearly the Christian faith. He was an eloquent speaker, but he spoke in Latin, and Ethelbert could not understand him. There was an interpreter to translate the speech, but it no doubt lost much of its appeal in the process. Ethelbert said that there was a great deal in the Roman abbot's argument, but he refused to deny Woden and Thor. Bertha, who longed that he might share her faith, was bitterly disappointed, but she did not give up hope. For her sake her husband promised that the new teachers need not fear persecution, and he

gave them leave to preach their doctrine throughout his kingdom.

They therefore wended their way to Canterbury, the chief city. One of their number walked in front, carrying a silver cross, and the other monks followed, chanting hymns of praise. The people from the scattered hamlets came out on to the roadside to see them pass, and many trailed after the stately procession, half in curiosity, half in derision. What did it mean ? they soon began to ask themselves. Who were these men, and what was the message that they brought ? The harvests had been bad, Freya had forgotten them. Woden too did not seem to care what became of them. Perhaps the gods were angry. It was difficult to know how to please them, and sometimes the punishments that they sent seemed quite undeserved.

When Augustine and his band reached Canterbury the monks grouped themselves round the cross and sang in supplicating voices, " Turn from this city thine anger and thy wrath, O Lord, turn it from thy Holy House for we have sinned." Then their tone changed to one of triumph, and in a burst of jubilation they sang in chorus, " Alleluia ! Alleluia ! Alleluia ! " After this Augustine spoke to the people, and they listened eagerly, many rallying round the silver cross, the emblem of the new faith.

Ethelbert had been far more impressed with Augustine's arguments than he knew at the time. He could not dismiss the subject from his mind. Bertha's serenity of mind was a perpetual wonder to him ; she seemed to have an inward source of comfort and help in the trials of life that he could not understand. Were not the old gods whom he had so zealously

worshipped somewhat careless of mankind? Why did they send

"Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands."

He felt the need of some solution of the mystery of life and death other than his faith in them could give. Bertha, who knew him well, watched the workings of his mind with great joy. She knew that so broad-minded a man would not hesitate when conviction came. Soon she had her reward, for on her return one day from a service at her well-loved church of St Martin, her husband told her that he wished to be baptised.

And so it is that Ethelbert has come down in history as the first Christian king in England, though his kingdom was but the fair county of Kent.

The news at once spread over his kingdom, where many had been baptised already, and many more followed the ruler's example.

Canterbury was the headquarters of Augustine and his monks, and is still the city from which the head of the English Church takes his title. Augustine had good reason to be satisfied with what he had done, and returning to Rome he was consecrated by Gregory the Great as first archbishop of England.

The conversion to Christianity meant much more than a change of faith, great as that was. It was of supreme importance to the development of England. We are still told that as a nation we are insular, that our thoughts are bound in by prejudice as our land is by the sea, and that we are unwilling to know and under-

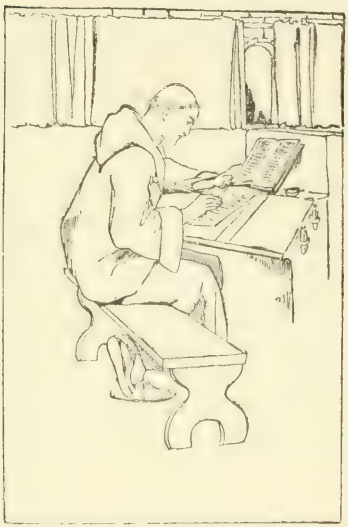
stand other countries and other peoples. In the early days of the Saxon conquest England was entirely shut off from the continent of Europe. She had little chance of knowing what was going on in other countries, particularly in Rome, which was the centre of civilisation. Before Christianity came to England there was not a single book written here. The men were so busy fighting, the women looking after their farms and households, that there was no time for learning new arts and crafts. The Church came not only as a spiritual teacher but as a teacher of the refining arts of life. Perhaps the first lesson that these fierce people learnt was not to be so cruel. "Peace on earth" was preached to the little kingdoms constantly at war with one another. Christianity did not abolish war, it has not done so in two thousand years, but the pitiless massacre of the vanquished foe, as happened after the siege of Anderida, was no longer to be tolerated. It was felt that there was a difference between killing a man in the heat of battle and murdering him in cold blood, because he happened to have fought on the vanquished side.

Anglo-Saxon Ecclesiastic

Though some men are born fighters there are others who love the occupations of peace, who want to learn and to teach. At last such people could follow their natural bent. For, with the foundation of the monasteries, which followed on the conversion of England, these thoughtful and intelligent men and women had a refuge to which they could go. Monasteries were houses of peaceful occupations, homes of

learning, and to them went those whom we should now find as writers and artists, doctors and clergymen. A monastery was of such importance in educating the people that directly any king became converted he founded one.

One of the rules in these religious houses was that all the inmates should be industrious. There was plenty of work for everyone, no matter what their qualifications. Some would be occupied in draining the marshes, digging trenches, and cultivating the fields. Others would be employed in the garden, where were grown all the herbs and simples that were used for curing the sick, for the monks were the only doctors. Inside the monastery all sorts of trades and callings were carried on: weaving and dyeing cloth, curing and tanning skins, making clothes and shoes, embroidering Church vestments, illuminating books, and teaching the children. Men and women who live in monasteries and convents to-day do not as a rule engage in secular occupations, though in some convents the Sisters conduct schools. But the Anglo-Saxon members of religious establishments might have had for their motto, "All religion

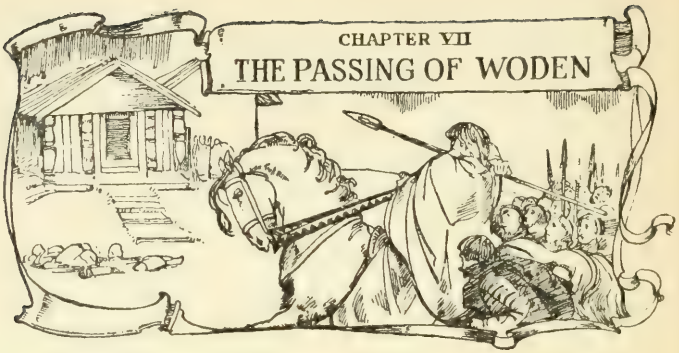


A Monk at work upon a Manuscript

has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good."

Everyone recognised how important it was that these settlements should not be interfered with. The monasteries were therefore unmolested in times of strife, though villages were destroyed and houses burnt, and the crops trampled down in their immediate neighbourhood.

In early days men and women occupied the same monastic establishment, but Rome never looked on this arrangement with favour. And so nunneries were founded for the holy women to live apart. These houses too were the centre of all the finer arts of life. The nuns, by their kindly tenderness and practical help to the poor, by nursing the sick, by teaching the children and comforting the sorrowing, became endeared to those who were fortunate enough to live near them.



## CHAPTER VII
# THE PASSING OF WODEN

YOU must not think that, with the conversion of Ethelbert and the kingdom of Kent, England became at once a Christian country. That was only the beginning. Before the final triumph of the faith there was a long struggle lasting nearly a hundred years (597-681). The inhabitants, one by one, had to be convinced, and people are always reluctant to change their opinions and beliefs. Their arguments might be no better than, "What was good enough for my father is good enough for me"; but with the nation as with the individual, all life is progress, from childhood to youth and on to maturity. The seven little kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon times were the beginnings of the great British Empire that we know to-day, and the worshippers of Woden and Thor were the forerunners of the Christianity of our day.

Ethelbert's daughter Ethelburga had married Edwin, King of Northumberland. When she went to live in the North she took with her Paulinus, a man of the true missionary spirit, whose faith and courage were never daunted. Edwin was a heathen and a

valiant fighter ; to this day we remember him, for he gave his name to Edinburgh. Once he was nearly assassinated, but his life was saved through the heroic action of Lilla, one of his followers, who threw himself in front of the king. Lilla fell dead but Edwin was only slightly wounded. Edwin had a great idea of kingship, and he insisted on royal state more than any of his

Edwin

predecessors. He was the fifth Bretwalda of England. A Bretwalda was a king who was acknowledged as chief over the other kings in England. The title was given him because of his great qualities, and it was the highest honour. Whenever he went through his kingdom Edwin rode a magnificent horse. In front of him was borne the standard of purple and gold, and the symbol of empire, a feather tuft, at the end of a spear.

Ethelburga was anxious, as her mother had

been before her, to convert her husband. He was willing to hear about her religion, but did not trouble much about it. So the matter remained until Ethelburga gave birth to a daughter, when the queen, seeing that the little child appealed to her husband, begged him, for her sake, to give some heed to the teaching of Paulinus. Edwin was very busy just then with one of his many struggles with Wessex, but he consented to think seriously of the matter, if he should win in his next battle. Victory came to him and he kept his word.

Paulinus

The wise men of Northumberland were summoned to a great meeting to discuss the question. Paulinus was present. He was a striking figure in his monk's garb, tall and thin in build, his careworn face lit with the fire of enthusiasm. The heathen priests were also there. It was a matter of great moment to them. Some of them were jealous of the faith, believing still in the old gods; others dreaded it, for it would take away their occupation. The thegns were ready to hear both sides. The king presided over all.

Paulinus spoke with fervour, and the assembly was much impressed.

Then the heathen priest Coifi stood up in his place. All eyes turned to him—what would be his verdict ?

" None have served Woden and Thor with more care than I. None have offered sacrifices to them so regularly, yet they have bestowed no special favour

on me. Will this new god of whom we have heard pay more heed ? "

It was a selfish idea of religion, but it was one which appealed to some of the assembly.

At the back of the hall a fine grey-haired ealdorman had been listening. His face bore the impress of deep thought. As he stood up all eyes were upon him for he was one of the wisest of the Witan. Looking towards the king, his voice quivering with emotion, he spoke out :

Saxon Thane

" So seems the life of man, O king, as a sparrow's flight through the hall when you are sitting at meat in winter-tide, with the warm fire lighted on the hearth, and the icy rain storm without. The sparrow flies in at one door and then tarries for a moment in the light and the heat of the hearth fire, and then flying forth from the other, vanishes into the wintry darkness whence it came. So tarries for a moment the life of man in our sight, but what is before it, or after it, we know not. If this new teaching tells us aught certainly of these let us follow it."

The feeling of the more thoughtful people present was with the ealdorman. Coifi then urged that in token of their contempt of the heathen gods, their images and altars should be destroyed.

This seemed a difficult thing to accomplish, for the unconverted would resent it as an outrage.

" Who will undertake this momentous office ? " asked the king.

In eager tones, Coifi replied, " I will, for who can more fittingly than myself destroy those things which I worshipped in my folly for an example to all others, through the wisdom which has been given me by the true God ? "

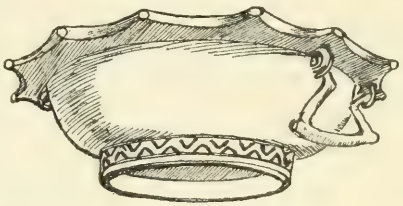
Then, as the Venerable Bede tells us in his " Ecclesiastical History," " immediately in contempt of his vain superstitions, he desired the king to furnish him with arms and a stallion, that he might mount and go forth to destroy the idols ; for it was not lawful before for the high priest either to carry arms or to ride on anything but a mare. Having therefore girt a sword about him, with a spear in his hand, he mounted the king's stallion and went his way to the idols. The multitude beholding it thought he was mad." When he reached the temple at Godmanham he hurled his spear at it in defiance, and broke in pieces the images of the gods.

So Northumbria became a Christian kingdom.

But the neighbouring ruler, Penda, King of Mercia, who was jealous of the power of Northumbria, thinking that many of the Northumbrians were heathen at heart, decided, as a staunch believer in Woden and Thor, to break the power of Edwin. A Christian king, Cadwallon of Wales, was glad to ally himself with Penda, for he wished to settle his own grudges against Northumbria. Edwin was loyally supported by the thegns and their followers, who were glad to have an opportunity of fighting for the faith, whatever the issue. The armies met at Heathfield, and there was a terrible

encounter, for both were struggling for all they held most dear. Edwin and his eldest son fell on the battlefield, and his second son, seeing the day was lost, surrendered to Penda.

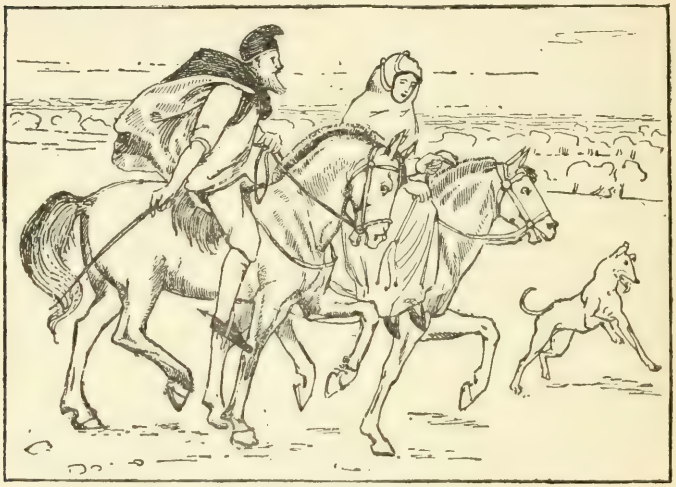
For a time this was a great blow to Christianity, and Mercia under Penda rose to be the principal kingdom in England. East Anglia, which was by this time a Christian kingdom under Sigbert, was next attacked. Penda hated Sigbert for his utter contempt of all the things that this world counts as good. Sigbert had left the government in the hands of his ealdormen and had taken refuge in a monastery from the cares of life, where he hoped to end his days in peace. His people, terrified at the thought of Penda's coming, urged him to return. He considered all warfare to be unfitting for one who had embraced the holy life, and though he consented to lead his soldiers, he rode unarmed. Thus he was among the first to fall, and with his death Penda triumphed over East Anglia and a large number of the people returned to heathenism.



Anglo-Saxon Bronze Bowl

But this set-back was only for a time. Oswald, the brother-in-law of Edwin, was striving to regain Northumbria, where Cadwallon, the last British king, was gradually gaining ground, and at Heaven's Field he planted the cross, under whose shadow the decisive battle was to be fought. Whilst his warriors dug the ground Oswald held the cross in place, and when it

was firmly planted he knelt and prayed for victory. Bede tells us that "even to this day" (about 730) "many are wont to cut off small splinters from the wood of the holy cross, and put them into water, which they give to sick men or cattle to drink, or they sprinkle them therewith, and these are presently restored to health."



Riding

In that battle Cadwallon fell, and Oswald became King of Northumbria.

Penda called on the heathen gods for help to subdue Oswald, of whom you will hear more in the next chapter, when I write of Aidan. Oswald was anxious to reconvert East Anglia, and gathering together a large number of men, he met Penda's forces at Maserfeld. Again the heathen warrior left a Northumbrian king dead on the field, and allowed the greatest indignities to be offered to the body.

"Woden and Thor have not deserted me," cried Penda. "I have not called on them in vain. Edwin of Northumbria fell at Heathfield, Oswald has fallen —I am the king of England. I will stamp out this new faith. The cross shall be a symbol of defeat and shame."

Year by year Penda triumphed more and more, though in spite of this Christianity was gaining ground. To the old warrior's great disgust, his own son became a Christian.

Iron Stirrup (Anglo-Saxon)

Oswy had succeeded Oswald in Northumbria. Penda was now eighty, but as full of vigour as a man of middle age, and rallying his forces, he prepared to deal with the new king as he had dealt with his predecessors.

The long struggle ended at Winwæd. The voice of the grand old heathen had never sounded more full of command than it did on that day. He was among the first to fall, and those of his followers who were not killed by the sword were drowned in the river as they tried to escape.

Penda might have for his epitaph the words which have been put into the mouth of another heathen, the Emperor Julian, who had tried to stem the oncoming tide of Christianity, nearly three hundred years before, "To think that century shall follow century, and that in them all shall live men, knowing that it was I who was vanquished and the carpenter's son who conquered."

# CHAPTER VIII THE EARLY CHURCH

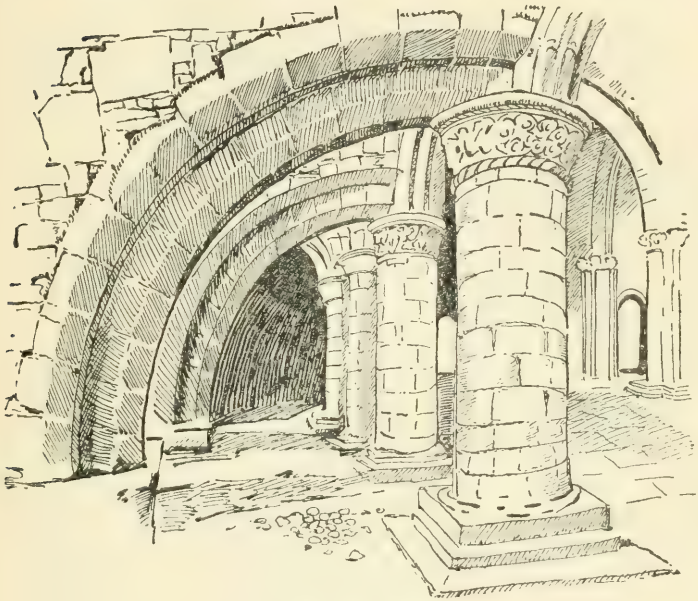
IN telling you about Oswald I mentioned Aidan, who was one of the early saints of the Church. I want to tell you now of him and of his successor, Cuthbert, and of the Venerable Bede, who, in his "Ecclesiastical History," wrote of both these men.

A monk from Ireland, St Columba, had come over to Scotland, and there at Iona, a barren island off the west coast, he founded a monastery (about 563). Oswald, who fell in battle against Penda, was at one time there in exile. When after the victory at Heaven's Field he won back his kingdom, he remembered that quiet retreat, and sent a messenger there asking the monks to come and help in the conversion of Northumbria. The monks discussed with one another who should go on this mission. None of them were anxious to leave the settlement, where they were leading useful and happy lives, for conflict with the fierce heathen people. One monk, however, volunteered, but he soon came back. He brought a very discouraging account of the men and women among whom he worked. They were obstinate, stiff-necked people, nothing could be done

with them. It was mere waste of time to teach them, he said.

A young monk who was listening seemed to feel that the missionary had not gone the right way to work.

"Was it their stubbornness or your severity—did



The Crypt (Iona)

you forget God's word to give them the milk first and then the meat?"

"Perhaps I did not understand them, Aidan," said the missionary, in tones of humility.

The monks discussed the difficulty one with another. They would not abandon the heathen Northumbrians—for were they not commanded to go out into all the

world, without any reservation? Who should go? Who was so suitable as the young monk who had counselled gentleness rather than harshness?

"Will you go in his place, Aidan?" they asked.

"I will go," he said. "I feel that I am called to go, and not by my fellow-monks alone."

Setting out he sailed to Lindisfarne, which is an island off the coast of Northumberland. There he built a monastery, and became the first bishop. Many converts gathered round him, and a band of monks who were fired with true missionary zeal. Aidan felt that his message was for the peasant folk. Augustine, with all the authority of Rome at his back, had preached the gospel to the great ones first, but Aidan went to the poor. He tramped from village to village in the bleak Northumberland country, accepting shelter from the snowstorms and thunderstorms, caring not what he ate or where he slept, inspired with a passion of love for the Master whom he served.

Anglo-Saxon Bronze Disc (Essex)

Oswald bade him come to a great banquet which he held in his honour. As Aidan passed into the hall he noticed outside a rabble of thin, ill-clad people, who were waiting for some chance bounty from the king's table. As was customary, Oswald had sent out alms, but there was not enough to go round.

"The people cry for bread, O king," said one of his thegns.

Aidan watching the burning of Bamborough

" Bear them that meat," said Oswald, pointing to the dish in front of him, which had not been touched, " and let the silver plate be broken and give them the pieces."

Aidan's eyes moistened for a moment, then, with a gesture of affection he seized the king's hand, saying :

" May this hand never grow old."

Some time after, Oswald's arm was cut off when he was slain in battle, and was kept as a sacred relic in the church at Bamborough. It was said that it did not decay, because of the blessing of Aidan.

Aidan became very despondent when he saw Penda triumphing again and again. When Penda set fire to Bamborough, Aidan, watching the flames from Farne Island, where he had retired for a time, called God to witness the terrible misery the heathen were inflicting on the people. As he was praying people noticed that the wind had changed, and the fire attacked Penda's soldiers and left the village undestroyed.

King Oswy, who succeeded Oswald, gave Aidan a beautiful horse, so that he need no longer tramp over the countryside, but could use all his strength for his work. One day he met a weary, hungry man, who asked for alms. Aidan at the time had nothing with him, so he dismounted, and gave the king's gift to the beggar. Oswy was annoyed when he heard of it. " The horse was for your use," he said.

" Is the foal of a mare more valuable in your eyes than the son of God ? " asked Aidan.

Aidan did not live to see the downfall of Penda, and it was said he died of a broken heart because of the triumph of the heathen king.

The night he died a young shepherd, Cuthbert by name, guarding his flocks on the Northumbrian hills,

and watching the stars, as was his wont, saw a vision of angels carrying a soul to glory. He believed that he had witnessed the journey of Aidan's soul. Shepherds are often poets, and Cuthbert had always been a dreamer. After he had seen this vision he longed to lead the religious life, and joined a company of monks who lived near by. It can be said of him, with even more certainty than of Aidan, that he preached the gospel to the poor. The people loved him, for he was but a peasant and he preached to peasants. With all his spirituality he had a great deal of common-sense. There are many curious legends about him given in his life by the Venerable Bede, indeed that life mostly records miraculous occurrences. He evidently was a great lover of animals, and these stories often tell of his relations with them. Thus on one occasion we are told that after a day's work among the labouring people he found himself in the evening riding across a lonely moor. He noticed a ruined shepherd's hut and, dismounting, he sought shelter there. He had nothing with him to eat and was very hungry, but he resignedly devoted himself to prayer. In a little while, however, his horse directed his attention to the roof of the hut, and there, in a napkin, he discovered bread and meat which evidently had but just been cooked, and he shared this meal with his steed.

St Cuthbert's Cross

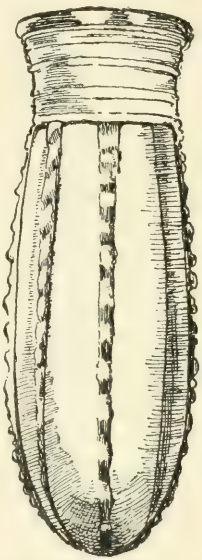
Another story tells how one of the monks, curious to

know where Cuthbert went every evening after the monastery was closed, stealthily followed him. What was his surprise to see the saint walk down to the shore and into the sea. There he remained all night in prayer, with just his head and shoulders above the

St Cuthbert fed by an Eagle

water. In the morning there were two otters disporting in the waves, and Cuthbert warmed his feet with their breath and dried himself with their hair—a rather unpleasant sort of towel, one would think—and then he blessed them.

Birds were especially dear to him. One time he was miraculously fed by an eagle. Another time two crows which had been guilty of tearing with their beaks at the roof of the monk's house were forbidden again to do so by St Cuthbert. The birds disobeyed, and they were banished from the island. Soon afterwards they returned, very humble and penitent, and one brought with him in his beak as a peace offering a piece of fat bacon.



Olive-green Glass Cup

But I must turn from these legends to the disputes in the Church at that time. England had been converted by two different groups of people. As a general statement it can be said that the south of England had been converted by St Augustine, who, as we have seen, was sent by Pope Gregory the Great and had been made Archbishop of Canterbury. These converts owed their allegiance to the Church of Rome. But Aidan and the band of monks who lived in Iona were disciples of Columba, and followed the traditions of the Irish or Celtic Church, which dated from the first conversion of Britain, for Ireland had never reverted to paganism. It remained a Christian country, while England, under the Anglo-Saxon kings, had, as we have seen, passed through a period of heathenism.

Now between these two Churches, the Church of Rome and the Irish Church, there was rivalry. Rome required absolute obedience to all her traditions. The monks

of Lindisfarne adhered to the practices which were taught by St Columba. The differences, so trifling in themselves, began to be regarded as of supreme importance. The principal one was as to the date at which Easter should be celebrated.

It was decided at last that this question should be thoroughly discussed, and a meeting for the purpose, which was known as the Synod of Whitby (664), took place in the monastery over which ruled the wise and learned St Hild, one of the great names in the Church history of the time. Of her I will tell you something later.

The hall of the monastery was crowded on the day appointed for the meeting. Rival monks could hardly speak to each other for fear of quarrelling on the absorbing topic before the discussion began. King Oswy, who presided over the gathering, spoke very clearly, and urged on his hearers how important it was to act with uniformity in all matters. When he had finished speaking Bishop Colman, who had succeeded Aidan, set forth very clearly the reason why the British Church thought that they had chosen the right date for Easter. Then Wilfrid, Archbishop of York, who was in favour of the Roman observance, had his say. He forgot the courtesy of debate as he wound up with a remark to the effect that the other date was adopted "only among these persons," pointing to the Bishop of Lindisfarne and his clergy, "and their partners in obstinacy the Picts and Britons; who belonging to some parts only of two remote islands, are making these foolish efforts to fight against the whole world."

The question was then argued on both sides and at last King Oswy gave his decision in favour of the Roman practice.

The Northumbrian king asked Colman whether he admitted that the Pope was the successor of St Peter. On his answering "Yes," the king then asked if he admitted that St Peter held the keys of heaven. "Yes," was the answer. "Then," said the king, "I will never offend the saint who is the doorkeeper of heaven!"

This was a great blow to Colman, and rather than submit to the decision he left Lindisfarne, and sailed away, with thirty of his monks, to Iona, where they continued the British practice.

St Hild

I have mentioned to you the name of St Hild, and I would like to tell you something about her, for she was one of the great influences in the early days of the Church. She was the sister of Edwin, King of Northumbria, and when she was thirteen Paulinus baptised her, on a day that has been called the birthday of the Northumbrian Church (Easter Eve, 11th April 627). Bishop Aidan was very interested in her and she held posts at the head of several monasteries before she founded the one at Whitby, of which she was abbess, and which was the greatest monastery at that time in the north of England. Here she ruled over a community of nuns and monks, and it is interesting to know that the nuns always took precedence of the monks. Many

of the notable clergy of the time were trained in her monastery and under her guidance. It was a centre of culture.

One event which happened during her sway at Whitby stands out as of special importance.

Among the lay brothers was a man of lowly birth, Caedmon by name. He was a shy, sensitive man, and did much of the meaner work of the monastery. So nervous was he that when there was any merrymaking, and he was called upon to sing a song, he always refused.

One day a feast was being held and he saw that it would be his turn to sing to the harp. In an agony of nervousness he fled from the hall, and went out into the stables to tend the cattle, this being part of his duties. After he had finished his work he fell asleep, and as he slept he heard a voice saying to him :

" Caedmon, sing me something."

" I cannot sing," he replied, " and for this cause I left the feast."

" Nevertheless thou must needs sing to me," urged the voice.

" What must I sing ? "

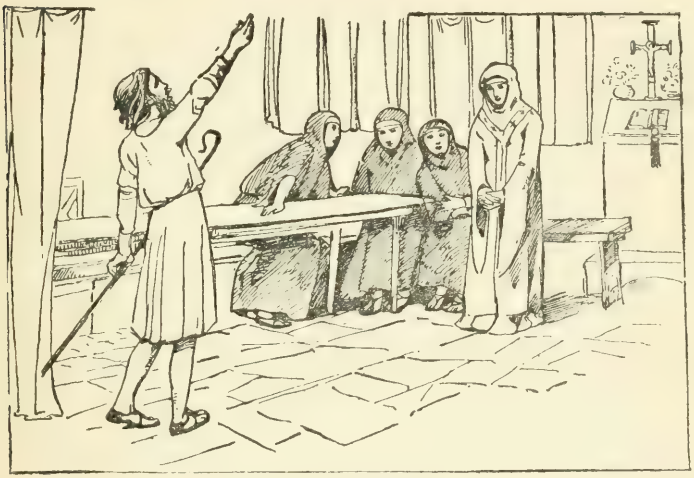
" Sing the beginning of creation."

Without any premeditation Caedmon at once began to sing verses to the praise of the Creator :

" Now should we praise the guardian of the heaven-realm,
The Maker's might and his mind thought
And the works of the glorious Father, as He of each wonder
Eternal Lord, created the beginning.[24]

In the morning he was taken before the Abbess Hild and he told her his dream. Undoubtedly, she said, he

had received a gift from the Holy Spirit. He was asked by the nuns and monks to translate some verses of the Bible into poetry. These, next day, he brought, and all felt that they were the work of a genius. He was invited to enter the monastery as a monk — and Whitby Abbey was ever proud of the inspired cowherd, who thus, in middle life, was set apart to be the father of English poetry.



Caedmon the Herdsman Poet

Hild for many years ruled the monastery. At last she became ill, and for six years she suffered much though she never neglected her duties. She died when she was sixty-six, having won the loving respect of all who knew her. A nun living in a neighbouring monastery had a vision of her ascending " to the gates of the eternal home, and to the company of the citizens

of heaven, with a great light, and with angels for her guides."

Meanwhile Cuthbert had grown tired of the difficulties in the monastery and had decided to live in absolute retirement. The little island of Farne seemed suitable for the life of an anchorite, and when Cuthbert left the monastery for this quiet retreat he said to his fellow-monks, "If by the grace of God it shall be granted to me that I may live in that place by the labour of my hands, I will willingly abide there; but if not, God willing, I will very soon return to you." The monks helped him to build a dwelling on the lonely island of his choice. It was but a two-roomed hut with an oratory and the room in which he lived. The mound round it was so high that he could see nothing but the sky. He sowed the land with barley and lived on barley bread and fish. There he remained for some years in work and prayer. Then he was recalled to the world by the offer of the bishopric of Lindisfarne. He was very reluctant to accept it, but the king himself (Egfrid), and bishops, and the great thegns sailed to the island, and they entreated him to reconsider his decision. He felt at last that the offer was a call from heaven and he accepted.

Two years afterwards he knew that his life was drawing to a close, and he desired to return to the solitary island to die. A monk was with him at the end. When all was over he lighted a torch and ran with it to the highest point in the island, where the signal could be seen by the monks of Lindisfarne. A messenger, knowing the sad import of the little light, went into the church of the monastery, and when the monks had finished chanting the sorrowful words, "Thou hast cast us out and scattered us abroad; Thou hast also been displeased;

Thou hast shown thy people heavy things ; Thou hast given us a drink of deadly wine," told them that the great saint had passed to his rest. Cuthbert had wished to be buried at Farne, but had yielded to the entreaties of the monks that his body should be taken to Lindisfarne. The coffin which received his remains had many adventures, for it was removed to Chester-le-Street, to Ripon and to Durham, where it found its last resting-place.

Shrine of St Cuthbert

Bede, who is the chronicler of these times, was born about seven years before the death of St Hild. There is a story told of his early childhood in a monastery. There had been a terrible plague in the year 686 and many of the monks were victims. In the Abbey of Jarrow, where he lived, the abbot was obliged to shorten the service, for there was no one left to sing the antiphons. But he felt that the service was incomplete, and in a few days he managed to recite it in full with the assistance of the childish treble of Bede.

There is little to tell of the life of Bede. He spent it at Jarrow in teaching and in study. He was a man of great education for that time, for he knew Greek and Hebrew. He loved the quiet life in the monastery and would never fail to be in his place in the chapel. For he

said, " I know that angels visit the canonical hours and the congregations of the brethren. What if they do not find me among the brethren ? May they not say, ' Where is Bede ? ' "

His was a life of calm tranquillity devoted to the Church and to his work of writing, for he wrote many other books besides the " Ecclesiastical History." He wrote the " Life of St Cuthbert," in which you find all the curious miracles recorded ; he wrote commentaries on the Bible, and made translations.

There is a touching story told of Bede in his old age. His eyesight was failing him, and certain foolish people who had a grudge against him invited him to preach in a church in which there was no congregation. He spoke eloquently, and as he ended with " Glory be to the Father——" it was said that in place of the usual reply by the worshippers, a host of angels answered, " Amen, very venerable Bede."

The story of his death, though it has often been told, always bears retelling in the words of a fellow-student at the monastery, in a letter to a friend :

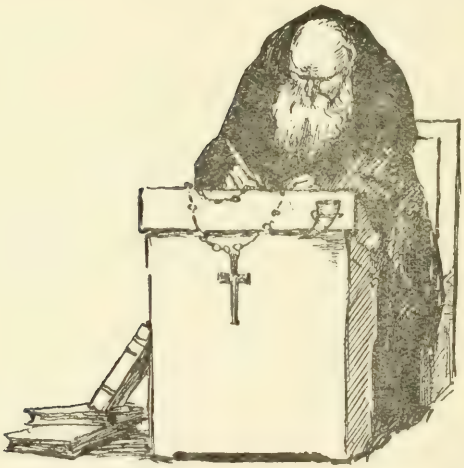
" When the Tuesday before the Ascension of Our Lord came, he began to suffer still more in his breathing, and there was some swelling in his feet. But he went on teaching all that day and dictating cheerfully, and now and then said among other things, ' learn quickly, I know not how long I shall endure, and whether my Maker will not soon take me away.' But to us it seemed that haply he knew well the time of his departure ; and so he spent the night, awake, in giving of thanks.

" And when the morning dawned, that is, on the Wednesday, he bade us write with all speed what he had

begun. And this we did until the third hour. And from the third hour we walked in procession with the relics of the saints, according to the custom of that day. And there was one of us with him who said to him, 'There is still one chapter wanting of the book which thou hast been dictating, but I deem it burdensome for thee to be questioned any further.' He answered, 'Nay, it is light, take thy pen and make ready, and write quickly.' And 'I have certain treasures in my coffer, some spices, napkins and incense; run quickly and bring the priests of our monastery to me, that I may distribute among them the gifts which God has bestowed on me.' And this I did trembling, and when they were come, he spoke to every one of them, admonishing and entreating them that they should diligently offer masses and prayers for him, and they promised readily. But they all mourned and wept, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, because they thought that they should see his face no long time in this world. But they rejoiced for that he said, 'It is time for me, if it be my Maker's will, to be set free from the flesh, and come to Him, Who, when as yet I was not, formed me out of nothing. I have lived long; and well has my pitiful Judge disposed my life for me; the time of my release is at hand; for my soul longs to see Christ my King in His beauty.'

"Having said this and much more for our profit and edification, he passed his last day in gladness till the evening; and the aforesaid boy, whose name was Wilbert, still said, 'Dear master, there is yet one sentence not written.' He answered, 'It is well, write it.' Soon after the boy said, 'Now it is finished.' And he said, 'It is well, thou hast truly said, it is finished.

Take my head in thy hands, for I rejoice greatly to sit facing my holy place where I was wont to pray, that I too, sitting there, may call upon my Father.' And thus on the pavement of his little cell, chanting 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,' and the rest, he breathed his last."




THE struggle to make England one kingdom under one king, which, consciously or unconsciously, was always in progress, received a fresh impetus in a new danger that had come upon the people. The Saxons were not to be left in undisputed possession of the country.

In Scandinavia and in Denmark lived a brave, fierce heathen people, who had great difficulty in getting a living. Their country was ice-bound in winter, with long dark nights and short days, when little work could be done. In summer the sun shone brightly into the middle of the night, for they were near the land of the midnight sun. The people lived on fish caught by their men-folk in the open sea, on milk, butter and cheese, and on the scanty crops which grew on the barren soil.

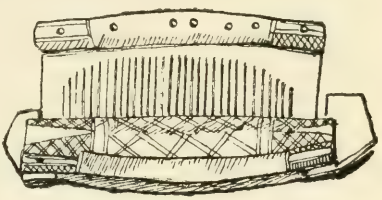
They were a wild, adventurous race, and they longed for a fuller life than their land could give them. They took to the sea in their pirate boats and, sailing away to neighbouring countries, would land at a retired spot, and plunder and burn the small settlements which they

found near the coast. They loved destruction for its own sake, and if they could not carry away the plunder they generally burnt it. As they leapt into their boats again to sail home, they would look round with triumph on their faces at the distant glare of a burning village, the outcome of their day's work.

Viking Warrior

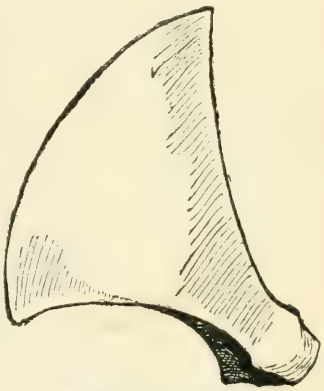
In an evil hour for England they longed for further adventures. Some of the vikings, for so they were called, had come to the north of Scotland, others had passed the remote Shetland Isles on their way to Ireland. They had found little as yet to attract them. But they had often heard of a fertile country, cultivated and inhabited, which had been conquered by men of the same strain as themselves. The country was England. What men had done men might do, so the vikings began to turn their attention to southern England. What

good spoil would be there, what wild attacks could be made, what flames of burning homesteads would leap into the sky! Their other forays seemed but a schoolboy's freak compared with this adventure.



Danish Comb and Case (York)

They began by harrying the coast of Dorset (787). Then they grew bolder and turned their thoughts to London, then rising in importance as one of the leading cities in England. Ethelwulf, the King of Wessex, had heard of their plans. Stories had been told him of the cruelty of these pirates and he dreaded lest his country should be overrun by them. If they were successful he was sure they would not be content with the spoil which they could take with them in their ships, but would try to make a settlement in England. The Saxons had conquered the Britons—were they to be vanquished in their turn?



Danish Iron Axe-head (found in the Thames)

Ethelwulf summoned all the fighting men of Wessex, and they gathered to resist the invaders, with himself, a kingly leader, at their head.

The forces met at Ockley (851) and the Danes were for the time completely routed. Ethelwulf's courage inspirited his soldiers, who fought with

desperation born of their fear of the sea-robbers of whose terrible doings they had heard.

"So wide and so far their ravage they knew,
If a sail but gleamed white 'gainst the welkin blue,
Trumpet and bugle to arms did call,
Burghers hastened to man the wall,
Peasants fled inland his fury to 'scape
Beacons were lighted on headland and cape."

It was told how children had been lifted up on pointed spikes and tossed from one soldier to another, to die at last in torture, and how the weak and the aged had been treated with nameless cruelty.

In terror-stricken tones the English people would tell each other of what had befallen a village congregation while reverently attending mass. The priest was celebrating mass, his hands raised in the act of consecration, the people on their knees. Suddenly a noise of horses' hoofs and the tramp of men was heard outside.

"What is it—who can it be?" they exclaimed, forgetting where they were in their terror.

Rising hurriedly to their feet, they tried to make for the doors, but were confronted by a band of Danes. The leader, a giant in size, pushed them aside and strode up to where the priest stood motionless at the altar, his hands still raised in prayer. One stab from the Danish dagger and he fell dead at the foot of the altar. Some of the congregation managed to escape but the Danes, who had barred the doors with their stalwart forms, murdered most of them.

No church was sacred from these Norsemen, who cared nothing for Christianity, for they worshipped Woden and Thor, as the Anglo-Saxons had done in their earlier days.

Of all the vikings Ragnar Lodbrog was the fiercest. He had built two of the biggest ships the vikings had

ever seen, and filled them with fighting men eager as himself for plunder and adventure. Before he started, his wife Aslauga had come down to the seashore to see his wonderful vessels. He had talked over his plans with her with great pride, and expected a word of

Viking Boat

admiration. But he noticed an expression of doubt on her face, as she looked at the boats critically.

"They are too unwieldy—you will not be able to manage them. The smaller boats are best and safest," she said.

She was right, for he was unable to navigate the ships and they were wrecked on the shore of Deira (part of Northumbria) after Ragnar and his men had landed. The dreaded news was quickly brought to Ella, King of Deira:

"The Danes are come!"

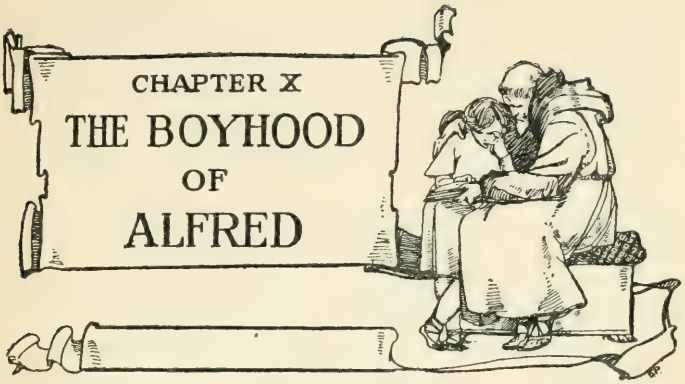
Ella hastily summoned all his fighting men, and the danger they were in fired them with valour.

It was a terrible moment for Ragnar, for he saw his means of retreat cut off, and was obliged to make ready for instant battle with the people of the country.

Soon the Northumbrians and Danes met in battle. Ragnar was clad in a robe which his beloved Aslauga had given him—the one tender spot in this barbaric soul was his love for her. Four times the Danes broke through the ranks of Ella, but at last Ragnar was taken prisoner, and many of his comrades lay dead. Ella, in fierce resentment, shut him in a dungeon, full of poisonous snakes, and there he died in agony. His death song is one of the oldest pieces of northern literature. In it he boasts:

"Fifty and one times have I
Call'd the people to the appointed battles
By the warning spear messenger.
Little do I believe that of men
There will be any
King, more famous than ourself.
When young I grasped and reddened my spear.
The Æsir must invite us;
I will die without a groan.
We desire this end.
The Disir goddesses invite me home;
As if from the hall of him rejoicing in spoils,
From Odin, sent to me.
Glad shall I with the Asæ
Drink ale in my lofty seat
The hours of my life glide away,
But laughing I will die."[32]

Viking Sword

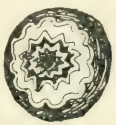


# CHAPTER X
# THE BOYHOOD OF ALFRED

"IN the year of our Lord's incarnation, 849, was born Alfred, king of the Anglo-Saxons, at the royal village of Wantage in Berkshire, which county has its name from the wood of Berroc, where the box tree grows most abundantly."

These are the opening words of the "Life of Alfred," written by his intimate friend, Asser of St David's.

Alfred was the fifth and youngest son of Ethelwulf, the King of the West Saxons, who fought the Danes at Ockley. His mother was Osburga, "a religious woman noble by birth and by nature," the daughter of the king's cup-bearer. He was his father's favourite child, and he seems to have been set apart from his earliest years for a special destiny. When he was a little lad of four he was sent to Rome to be consecrated by the Pope, Leo IV., who honoured him by being his godfather. None of Ethelwulf's other sons had made this journey, and they were very angry with their father for thus



Bead

showing his partiality. The eldest son, Ethelbald, especially, was furious. If any one of them were to make the difficult journey and be set apart from the others it should assuredly be the first-born. He let the grievance rankle in his mind and talked it over with the counsellors of his father. Some of them urged him to rebel and to set up as a rival king. The wiser advised him not to take the grievance to heart too much, but to remember rather that, as he was heir to the kingdom, Alfred's consecration would make no difference to his claim to the throne. But he was too angry to listen to such counsel and, encouraged by certain of the thegns who had private grudges against Ethelwulf, he headed a rebellion against his father. The king, sad at heart to think that his own son had risen against him, and unwilling to see civil war in Wessex, after much anxious thought, decided to share the kingdom with him.

Anglo-Saxon Pendants (Kent)

In due time Alfred returned home. It had been a wonderful journey by sea and land, though he was too young to appreciate all he saw. But his childish eyes had gazed with eager wonder on the snow-clad Alps, and his childish soul had absorbed something of the grandeur of the greatest city of the world in all the splendour of its early days.

He took up the ordinary life of a child of the time, though he was more thoughtful than many children of his age. He loved beyond everything to hear his mother or his nurse recite to him the old Saxon poems, which took the place of nursery rhymes in those days.

He would beg to be told again and again some of the

Alfred the Great and the book

riddles of Cynewulf, a poet who lived about a hundred years before his time.

His mother noticed that her little boy was more interested in her stories than his elder brothers had been. They soon grew weary and would scamper off gaily when she released them. One day Osburga called her sons to her room. She was sitting there with a very beautiful book in her hands. The boys looked at it with eager interest. Alfred's eyes opened wide with curiosity—this was a book. He had seen one before but he had never been allowed to touch one. He stood by his mother's side fascinated by the illuminated initial letter which she pointed out to him. It was a Saxon book of poetry and in it were written the very songs he had loved her to sing to him.

" Whichever of you shall soonest learn to read this volume," she said, " shall have it for his own."

Alfred looked at her, as though he could hardly believe her words.

" Will you really give the book to one of us, to the one that can first read it to you ? "

" Indeed I will, Alfred."

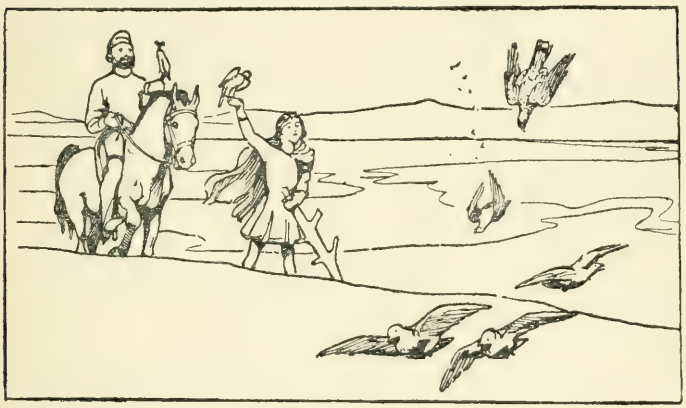
In that moment he made up his mind. However hard it was to learn to read—he would learn. But who would teach him ? So few people cared for book learning, and many of the monks even could not read the services which they repeated in church. At last he found a master and spent all his spare time with him. One day the teacher handed him a page of writing to see how he could get on alone. Alfred was puzzled for a moment ; hitherto he had had the master's guiding finger to point to every word. But to his great delight, once started, he found he could read perfectly.

" I will go to my mother now," he said.

He rushed into her room. His excitement was so great that he shouted as he entered, " I can read! I can read! Mother, may I have the book? "

She took the volume from the shelf where it lay and bid him come and read to her. He did not hesitate at a single syllable.

" It is yours, Alfred. I am proud that you should have earned it so quickly."



Hawking

This book of Saxon poetry was ever one of his most cherished possessions. He had another volume as well, a Book of Hours, which contained the seven services of the Church. He always took this about with him and it especially comforted him when he grew to be a man and had many trials to face. Alfred all his life regretted that when he was a boy he could not find sufficient teachers, for he loved study.

But other occupations were thought more important

in those days. Alfred would be out hunting from the early morning, and he delighted in the chase, for he had all a boy's love of adventure. He was fond of hawking and especially fond of riding. He grew to be a fearless horseman. But although he loved the outdoor life, perhaps at heart he loved learning better than anything else in the world.

His father died when he was only eleven, and Alfred was left to the care of his stepmother. He felt very desolate without his parents, who had been so especially fond of him. His father had been a noble king, and in his will he provided that " one poor man in ten, either native or foreigner, should be supplied with meat, drink and clothing, by his successors, until the day of judgment, supposing, however, that the country should still be inhabited both by men and cattle, and should not become deserted."

Each of Alfred's brothers in turn came to the throne —first the rebellious Ethelbald, who had, as we have already seen, a share of the kingdom, and then, three years after, Ethelbert, who had been reigning in Kent, Surrey and Sussex. Ethelbert, after a short reign of six years, died, leaving only Ethelred, the third brother, between Alfred and the throne. During these years Alfred was growing out of boyhood into manhood. He had not yet taken a personal part in any of the skirmishes with the Danes, but when Ethelred came to the throne he began to take his share as a leader of his people.

When he was twenty his young man's fancy turned to thoughts of love. He had been much attracted by a fair Saxon girl of noble birth, Ethelwitha, the daughter of Ethelred, a Mercian nobleman. When all the necessary

arrangements had been made he went to her home for his marriage. A great number of guests were invited. The feasting and rejoicing went on far into the night and began again next day. Alfred was very happy with his bride, he forgot for a moment all the unrest in Wessex, and gave himself up to entertaining and being entertained. There was sound of jesting and laughter, when suddenly he, till then the gayest of the gay, moaned with pain. The guests, silent at once, crowded round him. He looked terribly ill — it seemed as though he were going to faint.

"An ill omen," whispered one, as he saw the young man's ghastly face.

Saxon Feast (from a MS.)

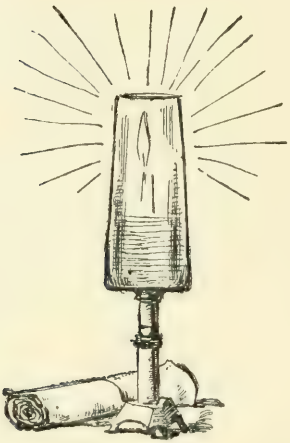
"The wine is poisoned," said another, looking suspiciously round.

"'Tis an evil spirit."

"Nay, 'tis the devil himself, who hates all good men."

It was in truth the unexpected return of a painful malady from which he had suffered from his boyhood, and which was to trouble him for long years. The pain was sometimes so intense that he would fall into despair; he would throw himself before the altar and entreat God to remove this terrible affliction from him. Above all things he dreaded that it should break out in some disfiguring skin disease that would make him contemptible. One day he was riding in a lonely part of Cornwall, brooding over his trouble,

when he passed the chapel of St Guerya. He dismounted wearily and entered, and there, in the sweet silence of the little church, he entreated for God's mercy and for health and strength. We are glad to read that from that time he was much relieved of the pain that he had suffered.



CHAPTER XI

# EDMUND KING & MARTYR

THE Danes, who had been warring in Northumbria, wished for fresh fields of conquest. Their roving spirit was never long content with one place or one neighbourhood.

The King of East Anglia was Edmund, who had inherited the throne when he was but fifteen years old. It is said that he had been brought up as a child at Nuremberg in Saxony. When he first came to England he landed at Hunstanton, and fell down on his knees and asked for God's help in the task that was before him. He was a man of deep religious feeling, but quite unsuited to be the ruler of a kingdom in those stirring times. "It will be our turn next," his thegns would say to him, when they were discussing the raids of the pirates. But Edmund made no preparations in case of need. He felt that he was secure in his little kingdom, for it was nearly all surrounded with water, the sea on the east and south, and long stretches of marshland to the north and west.

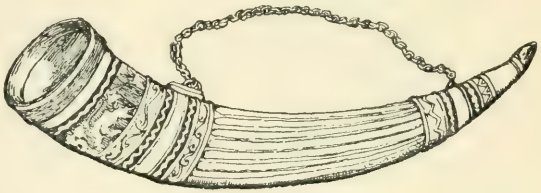
At last he was obliged to recognise that the kingdom

was in danger. It was in the spring of 870 when a Danish fleet sailed for the coast of East Anglia and landed with twenty thousand men. Their leaders were Ingwar and Ubba. They met Edmund's army at Thetford, and there was a fierce fight in which many of the bravest East Anglians were killed. Edmund seems to have accepted this as a defeat, though the result was left undecided, and he retired to Hoxne. It was evident that the Danish leaders utterly despised him, for Ingwar sent him a message demanding his instant submission, the division of his wealth and his renunciation of Christianity.

Danish Warrior

Edmund listened to the insolent request in silence. He seemed not to have heard it, and the messenger became angry.

"Who are you," he said, "to dare to withstand our power! The storm of the ocean deters us not, but serves us instead of oars. Neither the loud roarings of the sky nor its darting lightnings have ever injured us. Submit then, with your subjects, to a master whom even the elements obey."



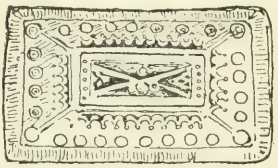
Horn of Ulphus

Edmund had not the courage immediately to defy Ingwar. He wanted time to take counsel with one of his bishops. But he did not choose his adviser wisely, for the bishop urged peace at any price.

"I cannot betray my people," said the king, who had a strong sense of responsibility though he felt unequal to the struggle.

"It will be best for you and them to submit," urged the bishop.

"Would surrender save my people from the cruelty of the Danes?"



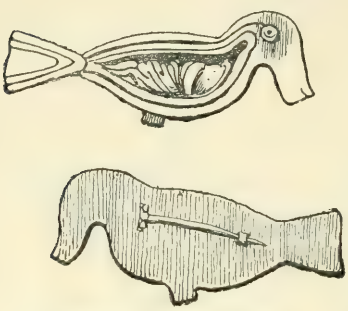
Bronze Plate (Faversham)

The bishop hesitated. It was difficult to say, for the vikings did not regard any promise as sacred. Edmund spoke again; he had made up his mind.

"I cannot; I will not survive my faithful subjects. I will not abandon my people. I will die for my country rather than forsake it. Bid the envoy come to me."

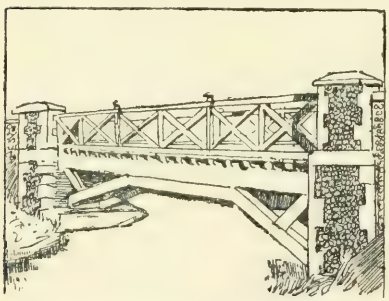
The messenger re-entered, his haughty glance falling

as he looked at Edmund. There was a bright light in the king's eyes, a quiet dignity in his bearing, his countenance was illumined by a great resolve. He looked the man full in the face as he spoke.



Danish Brooch (I. of W.)

"Stained as you are with the blood of my people, you deserve death; but I will imitate the example of Him I venerate, and not pollute my hands with your blood. Tell your commander I am neither terrified by his threats nor deluded by his promises. Let his boundless cupidity take and consume my treasures. Destroy me if you will—my spirit shall fly to heaven from its prison. Never for the love of temporal life will I submit to a pagan leader, preferring rather to be a standard-bearer in the pavilions of the King Eternal."



Bridge at Hoxne under which King Edmund lay hid

The Danish leaders were furious at this message. They marched to Hoxne to take him. Scarcely a blow was struck on either side. The king concealed himself all day under the arch of a bridge, where at last he was discovered by a newly married couple, who noticed the gleam of his spear mirrored

Martyrdom of King Edmund

in the water. For their betrayal Edmund pronounced a curse on all the newly wed who should pass over that bridge on the day of their marriage. The memory of the curse lingered for many a long year, and wedding parties would go miles out of their way rather than cross over the fated spot.

A band of Ingwar's followers were on the look out for

The finding of the head of King Edmund

him. He was taken from his hiding-place and brought to their leader, his body bleeding from their savage lashes. A lust of cruelty was upon the fierce Dane as he looked at his enemy.

"Tie him to yonder tree and lash him again," he said, "we will teach him we are masters."

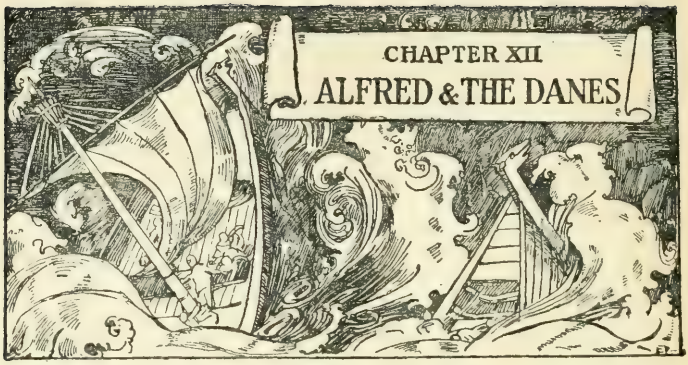
When the cruel order had been obeyed, the king prayed for death, for he was faint from loss of blood.

"Aim your arrows at him," commanded Ingwar.

There, like St Sebastian before him, Edmund stood and awaited his fate. The soldiers stood erect with bows drawn, their eager, hardened faces showing no pity for the anguish of the king. Their arrows sped through the air, and Edmund's head fell on his breast, but he still groaned in agony.

" It is enough," said Ingwar, " bring me an axe," and with that he struck off the king's head and threw it into the bushes. Edmund's friends searched in vain for it, and it was not till forty days after his death that it was found between the paws of a wolf. It was said that through a miracle the tongue of the dead man spoke and attracted the searchers by calling out, "Here I am." To this day the sleepy little town of Bury St Edmunds, which bears the name of the martyred king, has for its crest the king's head held in the paws of a wolf.

The tree to which the king was bound stood for many a century, and when at last it withered, and had to be cut down, there was found an iron arrow-head embedded in the oak at about the height of a man.

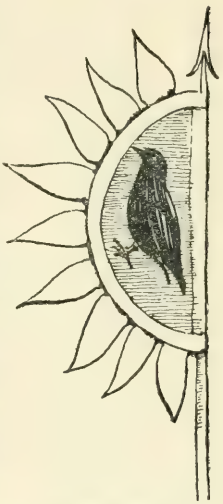



THE martyrdom of Edmund, which put East Anglia into the hands of the Danes, gave them fresh energy in their attacks. Wessex was still unsubdued, and they began to turn their attention to the dauntless little kingdom. Ethelred and Alfred heard of their plans, and immediately began to make preparations. Every man capable of fighting was ready to come forward to protect his country. The Danes were never short of men, for fresh bands would come over to take part in the struggle, and to replace those who had been slain in battle.

The Danes and the men of Wessex met at Ash Tree Hill. The Danes were first in the field and chose the better position upon the height. They divided their army into two parts. The larger half was commanded by their two kings, Bagsac and Halfdene, the smaller portion by the earls. Ethelred and Alfred noticed this manœuvre, and decided to adopt it themselves. "We too must divide," Ethelred said to his brother. "I will fight the larger force under the kings. You will lead the men against the second division."

All was now ready and Ethelred went to his tent to pray for victory to the God of Battles. His priest was with him, reading the office. The sound of many voices was in the air, the murmured confidences of men who knew not whether they would ever meet again. But Ethelred, all unconscious, prayed on. Messengers came to urge him to make haste. "I will not come till the priest has finished the mass," he said.

Alfred, knowing that such delay might be fatal, for the Danes, protected by a screen of brushwood, were already hurling their darts at the English,[1] gave the signal for attack. He himself took his brother's place and rushed at the head of his troops up the hill.



Danish Flag

The great banner of the Raven, which the Danes always carried with them, was floating in the air. It had been woven, so went the tradition, by three princesses in a single day, and was a banner of fate. Alfred had heard the legend, and looked towards the waving flag. Would he see a live crow flying across it, the signal of victory for the Danes, or would he see the bird hanging down motionless, the portent of defeat?

Half way up the hill the only object in view was a little stunted thorn-tree, and at this point the armies

[1] The Anglo-Saxon tribes may henceforth be properly referred to as "English." After 400 years of occupation the Angles, Saxons and Jutes had been merged into one people.

met. The Danes rushed down from their height, the English rushed up to meet them. As the warriors closed upon each other in hand-to-hand combat the spears glittered in the air, the darts did their deadly work. The moans of the dying mingled with the cries of exultation as Ethelred came on the scene. Placing himself at the head of his men, and urging them forward, he pressed up the hill to where, a fine warlike figure, King Bagsac, fought in the forefront. It was fit that king should strive with king. They closed in deadly struggle and Bagsac fell wounded. His followers quickly dragged him out of the press, and left him. As he lay dying he too gazed towards the Banner of the Raven. Were his eyes becoming dim with the mist of death? He seemed to see the bird with drooping head above it. He had wished for no better death than to die in the hour of victory; he was to die in the hour of defeat. He moved himself slightly to take a last look at his comrades, and then his warrior soul sped, so he fully believed, to Valhalla—the hall of Woden—to which none were admitted but those who fell in battle.

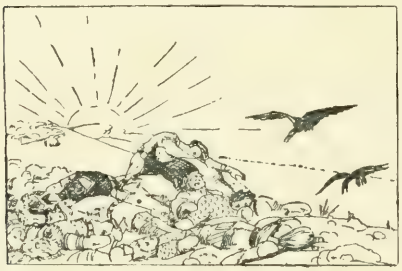
The day was wearing to evening, but still the fight went on. The Danes had had heavy losses, and at last, broken and defeated, they took to flight. Alfred and his men followed in hot pursuit. They rode on through the night, killing any of the enemy who lagged behind. Some of the horses stumbled and fell dead, leaving the pursuers exhausted on the road, but still the leaders went on. They wanted to punish this pagan foe who was the cause of such untold misery. The dawn broke over the horizon and still the Danes sped on in panic flight, and the men of Wessex pursued. At last the remnant of the army

Ash Tree Hill

that had set out reached the Danish stronghold, and Alfred and his followers returned.

The sun, as it rose over the peaceful "Hill of the Ash," shone on a ghastly sight—a field of prostrate men, some trampled under foot so as to be unrecognisable, some armless and headless, some calm as if asleep, and all dead. Over a thousand brave men fell that day (870 A.D.).

The year after this memorable encounter Ethelred died and Alfred became the first man in the kingdom. There were great rejoicings among the people, for they had seen that he was a gallant youth, wise and warlike, but there was little time for festivities. Alfred felt this new responsibility heavy upon him. The fate of Wessex was in the balance. Would it become a Danish province, as Mercia had done, or could he save it for his people?



The end of the battle

Before he had been a month on the throne the attacks of the Danes were renewed. Alfred and his followers met them at Wilton in Wiltshire, but though his gallant little band fought nobly they were hopelessly outnumbered. At first the victory seemed to be theirs, the enemy fled in confusion, but this was only a stratagem, and whilst the English were breathing a prayer of thankfulness, the Danes returned to the attack. A fresh struggle ensued and Alfred was

beaten, and he and his followers had to fly for their lives.

It had been a terrible year for the heroic people of Wessex; eight pitched battles had been fought and many skirmishes had taken place. The beautiful country was ruined: corn had not been sown, the burned houses had not been rebuilt, and the people longed for peace. It was a bitter blow for Alfred, but realising that they must have a little breathing time, he sent for the Danish leaders and promised to pay them a large sum of money on condition that they left him and his people alone. The Danes swore solemn oaths and went off in very good spirits. They were a little tired of Wessex by this time and sailed in their ships to the east coast of Northumberland, where they began their plundering expeditions again.

Still it troubled them that Wessex alone was unsubdued, and very soon they settled to attack it once more. They found a suitable little village, Wareham, bounded on two sides by rivers, up which their boats could sail, and from here they sent out fresh expeditions against Alfred. He was worn with perpetual illness, weary from the incessant struggle, sick at heart at not being able to rid his kingdom of the invaders. What was he to do? Again he offered money. He thoroughly distrusted the Danes, but his people must have time to recover a little from their losses.

At a solemn meeting between the Danish leaders and the English chiefs Alfred chose from among the Danes the men he thought most worthy to act as hostages, men whose lives would be forfeit should the Danes again attack Wessex. His priests brought in a beautiful casket the relics of the early saints of the Church, and

Alfred called upon the pagan commanders to swear a sacred oath, each with his hand on it. They did so readily, doubtless thinking little of the inviolability of such a promise. And then he called upon them to take the most solemn oath known to the northern people. On an altar was placed the sacred bracelet, smeared in the blood of animals which had been sacrificed to their gods. In deep tones the Danes swore to abide by the terms of the contract, and then, having called upon the God of the Christians, and the gods of the pagans, the meeting broke up.

Saxon Warrior

But little the Danes cared for such oaths, and Alfred knew it. They sailed up and down the coast, plundering and burning as before. A deeper courage came to Alfred as the danger grew greater. He got together a fleet, and gathering all the men that he could, manned his vessels with the bravest of them. The Danes had taken to the sea at Wareham in a hundred and twenty ships, and his little fleet went out to meet them. The proud boast to the ill-starred Edmund that even the elements were favourable to the invaders was for once to be unfulfilled. It was the early spring

and storms were raging. The Danish ships were tossed to and fro, they were battered and damaged, when the Saxon fleet, attacking with the energy of despair, drove them on the rocks off Swanage. Many of their vessels sank, and the intrepid pirates, fighting to the last, went down with their ships.

But though this success gave renewed courage to the men of Wessex the Danes were gaining ground all over the country. I cannot tell you of the many disasters the English encountered, of the paralysis of despair that overtook the weakest of them as they surrendered to the pagan conquerors. Alfred, in the hour of intense despondency, did not lose heart. He was driven with his followers to winter in the marshy ground of Somerset. The men, half starved, would go on foraging expeditions, robbing the Danes if they could, or robbing their own people who had gone over to the enemy. Alfred's little band grew less and less. His devoted wife was with him in his hour of trial—but for her it seemed as if he were alone in the world. "We must give in," his followers would say to him, "it will come sooner or later; we cannot go on like this for ever. Our best men are killed, our homes are in ruins, let us give in and make what terms we can."

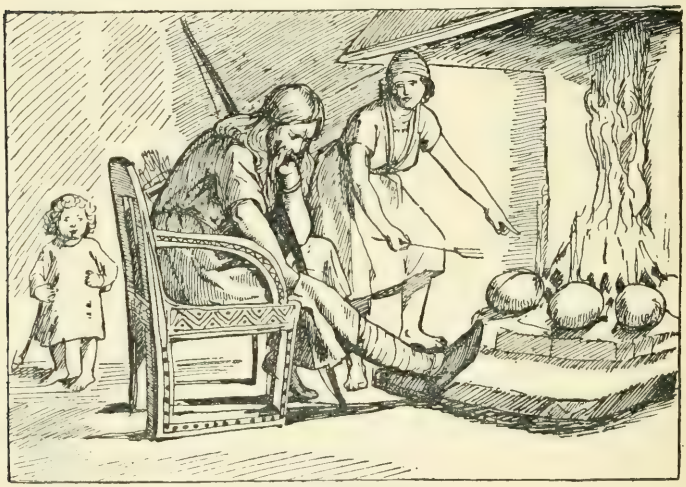
"We had better die of cold or starvation than surrender to these pagan robbers," Alfred would urge. But his people were very weary, and many deserted him.

One day he was wandering alone when a storm overtook him. Seeing a cowherd's hut he begged the woman in charge to let him rest there. He had his bow and arrows with him and sat mending them over the fire, deep in thought. The woman took him for a poor English soldier, and asked him to turn, in her absence, the cakes

which were cooking by the fire. Glad to be of any service the king promised, but his mind was far away. When the woman returned her batch of cakes were ruined. In angry tones she cried out :

" Dost thou not see the cakes are burning ? Why lazily sit and not turn them ? Ready enough wilt thou be to eat of them."

Alfred excused her irritation and left the cottage.



Alfred and the Cakes

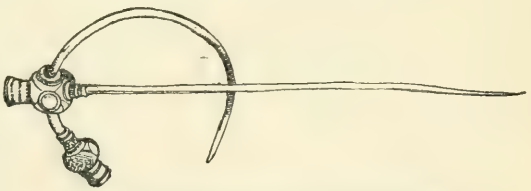
He had thought out a scheme by which he could discover the plans of the Danes. He was very fond of music, and could play the harp. In company with one of his followers, and dressed as a poor minstrel, he went out and played and sang in the Danish camp. The leader, glad to have the diversion of a little melody, invited the strangers to his tent. While Alfred was playing, the chief was discussing with his earls the next

attack to be made. They collected a few coins for Alfred, gave him some food, and then, wishing him good speed, dismissed him.

Alfred had heard enough to be of use to him. He returned to Athelney, and from there, with his faithful band of followers, he set forth to reconquer his kingdom. Legend tells that he had had a vision of St Cuthbert, who had told him that his troubles were at an end.

Saxon Fibula

Alfred immediately set to work to gather his followers round him. He sent messengers to bid the men of Wilts, Hampshire, and Somerset rally to his standard of the Golden Dragon at the stone of Egbert in Selwood Forest. Willingly and gladly they came. They had thought he was dead, but he had come again and he seemed more valiant than ever. The forest rang with the blare of trumpets as bands of men fully armed came to meet their hero-king.



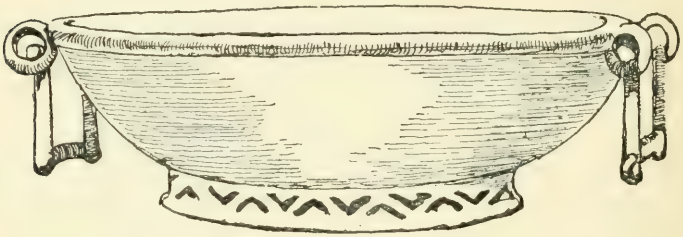
Tenth Century Silver Brooch (Cumberland)

When all was ready Alfred with his followers marched to Ethandune, and there met the Danish forces. Before the battle began, in words of burning eloquence Alfred bade his men remember that the very existence of their country was at stake. They fought as they had never fought before, their valour inspired by the knowledge of the great cause for which they were willing to lay down their lives.

The Danes under Godrum opposed them with all their force, but Alfred and his followers overcame them, and they fled.

"Bugle and battle cry are still,
The long strife's over;
Low o'er the corpse-encumbered hill
The sad stars hover."

The remnant of the Danish army fled in confusion, but Alfred pursued and laid siege to their fortress for fourteen days. At last Godrum and the Danish chiefs,



Bronze Bowl (Faversham)

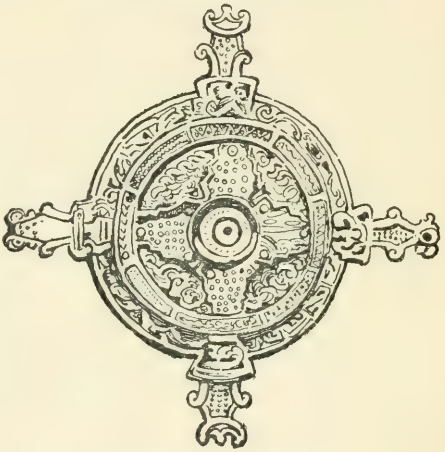
worn out by hunger, submitted to him, and in the terms of peace drawn up by Alfred there is no sign of a spirit of revenge.

Alfred saw, with a wider vision than many of his time, that the only way to have peace in England was to recognise the settlement of the Danes on English soil. But, in so far as it was possible, he wished that they should embrace Christianity. Godrum and many of his followers agreed to be baptised, and Alfred stood as his godfather. By the Treaty of Wedmore, which was afterwards signed, it was agreed that the Danes should hold all England north of Watling Street, with Alfred as overlord, but that they should evacuate

Wessex and the southern part of Mercia. Over southern England Alfred ruled supreme. He made Ethelred, the husband of his daughter Ethelfleda, Lord of the Mercians.

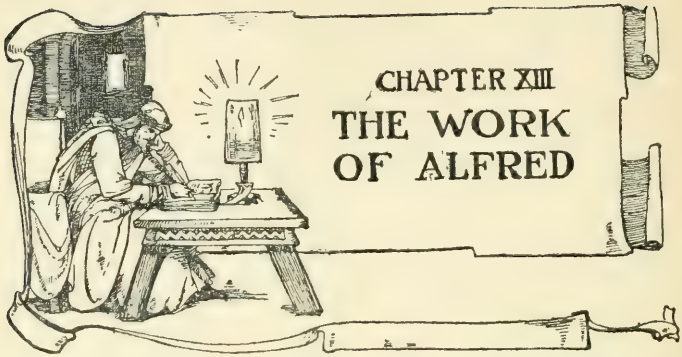
Alfred was now firmly seated on the throne of Wessex, and his position was never again in peril.

For some years bands of Danish pirates under the renowned viking, Hastings, harried the coast, but they met with little success, and in the latter years of Alfred's reign there was peace in England.



Gilt Horse-trapping

Alfred made Winchester the seat of his government. It was the chief city in England and more important even than London. It was made the capital of Wessex by Cerdic and of England by Egbert, who had ruled as overlord of all England. It was an old city even in Alfred's day and there was standing there a beautiful church, built on the site of a heathen temple, which was intended to be the burial place of kings. Alfred had restored it, and here it was, when his time came, that he was laid to rest. The beautiful cathedral which we see to-day was not begun till 1073. London was the second city of importance in the kingdom, and it was not till after the conquest that it became a formidable rival to Winchester.



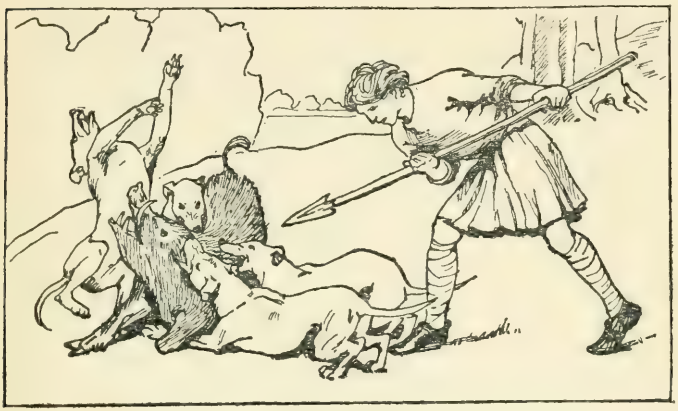
# CHAPTER XIII
# THE WORK OF ALFRED

I MUST tell you something of what Alfred did for his country in other ways than in fighting the Danes. In the few peaceful intervals he made use of every moment to educate his people in the arts of peace. He had teachers from the continent, who taught them how to work in gold and other metals, and how to build houses that were more lasting and comfortable than the simple dwellings they had been accustomed to. He did not neglect their training in sport, and encouraged them as hunters, falconers and dog-keepers.

But above all things he wished them to love learning, and he insisted on their knowing by heart the Saxon poems, and on their studying hard. We know much of Alfred, for a life was written of him by his friend Asser, Bishop of St David's. Asser tells us that "his bishops and all ecclesiastics, his earls and nobles, ministers and friends, were loved by him with wonderful affection, and their sons who were bred up in the royal household were no less dear to him than his own. He had them instructed in all kinds of good morals and among other

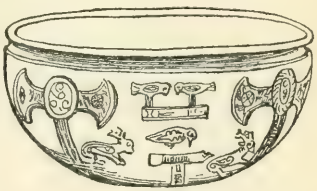
things never ceased to teach them letters day and night."

Alfred's delight in study was shown in many ways.



Boar hunting

Asser, who was one of his teachers, was reading to him one day, and Alfred was anxious to have a quotation from the book written in his Book of Hours which he always carried about with him. The little book was already so full of quotations that Asser said to him :



Saxon Bowl

" 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 Alfred.

The little book was made and was soon full of favourite quotations.

Alfred was deeply religious and attended the mass and other daily offices. He always 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; he was affable and pleasant to all, and curiously eager to investigate things unknown."

Saxon Glass Vessel

He was anxious never to waste a moment of time, and he divided his day into three periods of eight hours each, one for sleep, meals and exercise (this seems a very insufficient allowance), one for affairs of government, and one for study and devotion. Alfred might have said what another monarch said when he was dying: "I have no time to be tired, I have so much to do." Alfred had no clock by which he could tell the time and, anxious to be punctual, he had large candles made of equal length and so divided that the burning of each division marked the passing of two hours. Sometimes even with this arrangement it was difficult to tell the hour, for the wind blowing through the unglazed window would either put the candles out or make them burn more fiercely. The king was puzzled what to do, but he thought it out for himself. He had a lantern made of wood and white ox-horn, which was planed so that it was almost as transparent as glass. Every night a candle was put into this and was thus sheltered from the draught. Though glass was known to the Saxons

it was not used in the construction of houses or for the simple window of a lantern.

Alfred made many important changes in the government of the country. The incessant warfare with the Danes made him see the necessity of something like a regular army. The national militia consisted of all the able-bodied men in the country. This was known as the fyrd, and before Alfred's time the men were only compelled to serve for forty days in the year. Alfred divided the country into military districts, and every five hides (a hide was a certain number of acres of land) had to supply, feed and clothe one man for the service of the king. Every freeman was still obliged to serve in time of war, but the fyrd was divided by Alfred into two portions.

Saxon Bronze (Roman influence)

He saw how hopeless it was to have all the best men of the kingdom away at the wars, so he arranged that one half of the fighting men should remain at home and protect their own burghs and townships, and the other half should be ready for action. He also is said to have founded the navy. He built large ships and had them manned and kept at sea, constantly on the look out and ready to chase away the Danes.

Then too he reformed the laws of England. As he himself said, " I then, Alfred king, these laws together gathered, and had many of them written which our foregangers held, those that me liked. And many of them that me not liked I threw aside, with my Wise Men's thought, and no otherwise bade to hold them."

Not only did he reform the laws, but he himself administered justice, and revised the sentences of judges who had been either harsh or unjust. The punishment

meted out to unjust judges was the penalty of death, and in one year forty-four judges were hanged. They had all condemned innocent people to death or been cruelly severe, so that Alfred's severity was to protect his people, and not in a spirit of revenge.

Alfred was one of the few English author-kings. One of his most important works was the translation into English of Boethius's "Consolations of Philosophy," a book that had been written about four hundred years before his time, by Boethius, who was in the service of the King of the Goths. The book was written when Boethius was in prison and in it he imagines that Philosophy comes to see him, and talks to him, and consoles him, and tells him that all earthly things change and decay but that virtue alone remains unchangeable. Alfred's translation was not a literal one, for he added many of his own thoughts about life.

He also translated "Orosius," a book which gives much of what was known of geography at that time. It gives an account of the voyage of Ohthere, the Dane, towards the North Pole, that journey which has attracted so many adventurers throughout the ages. This is what Alfred wrote:

"Ohthere said to his lord, king Alfred, that he abode the northmost of all the Northmen. He declared that he abode on those lands northward against the West Sea. He said that that land is very long to the north, and is all waste, except in few places: the Finnas dwell scattered about; they hunt in winter, and in summer they fish in the sea. He said that on some occasion he wished to find out how long that land stretched to the north, or whether any man abode to the north of those wastes."

## THE WORK OF ALFRED

Alfred translated into English Bede's "Ecclesiastical History," from the Latin in which it was written. He made many books accessible to people which otherwise they could not have known, among others the "Pastoral Instructions of St Gregory," and extracts from the "Confessions" of St Augustine.

He was anxious to translate the whole of the Bible

The Death of Alfred

into English, and he was translating the Psalms when he died.

It is said that, when he was dying, he called for his son Edward to come and sit near, and said to him :

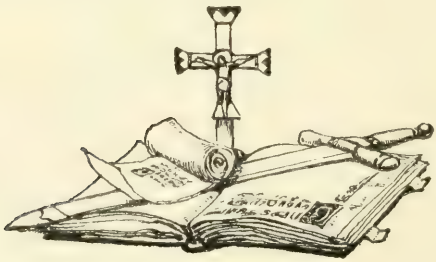
"My son, I feel that my hour is coming. My countenance is wan, my days are almost done. We now must part. I shall go to another world, and thou shalt be left alone in all my wealth. I pray thee (for thou art my dear child), strive to be a father and a lord

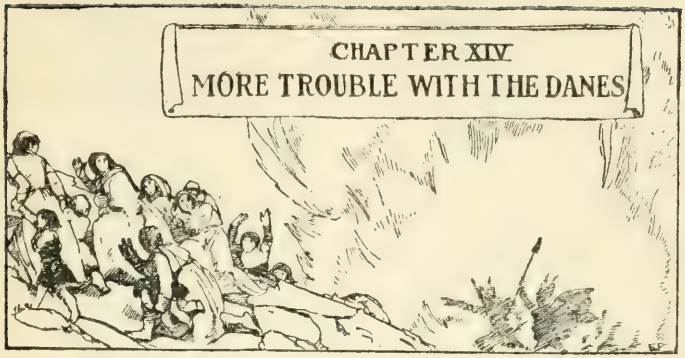
to thy people ; be thou the children's father, and the widow's friend ; comfort thou the poor, and shelter thou the weak ; and with all thy might, right that which is wrong. And, son, govern thyself by law. Then shall the Lord love thee, and God above all things shall be thy reward. Call upon Him to advise thee in all thy need, and so He shall keep thee, the better to compass that which thou wouldst." [1]

He died on the 28th October 901, at the age of fifty-three, and was buried in the monastery which he had founded at Winchester.

A fine tribute to his memory has been paid by Mr Freeman in his great book, "The History of the Norman Conquest." He says: "at once captain, law-giver, saint and scholar . . . he is the most perfect character in history."

[1] "English Worthies," by A. Davenport Adams.





## CHAPTER XIV
## MORE TROUBLE WITH THE DANES

AFTER Alfred's death his eldest son, Edward, came to the throne, and for a short time the peace that had marked the closing years of Alfred's reign was not broken. Then one day a messenger came with the tidings, "The Danes are in the North!" It was the old story. The messenger told how on his journey he had met an English girl who had escaped their clutches and was trying to find her father.

"We saw white sails," she said, "coming towards our little village on the coast. The neighbours came in to our hut. 'It is the Danes,' they cried, 'make haste to escape!' My mother gathered together a few necklaces and other valuables. She seized the baby, and I took my sister in my arms. We ran as hard as we could till we came to a thick wood where we met groups of other people flying in the same way. Some had brought nothing with them but a little bit of food. Others had packages with their household belongings. The children were shrieking with fright but the mothers could not wait to comfort them. Some half-dozen men

were with us and we managed to get a little food, but hardly enough to stop the children crying. We could see in the distance the light of burning farms and villages. We made ourselves as comfortable as we

Anglo-Saxon (Kent)

could under the trees, but it was very cold. Father was somewhere fighting, but we did not know where, and I am seeking him to tell him our village is entirely burned down and we can never go back again. We had a large field of corn just ripening and it has all been destroyed."

Bronze Work-box containing needles and thread (Saxon)

As the girl was telling the story another envoy sought an audience. He was covered with dust, travel-stained and worn, the bearer of news still more serious. "The vikings have landed on the southern coast."

Immediate action must be taken, and Edward sought counsel with his sister Ethelfleda, the Lady of the Mercians, the ruler of Mercia since the death of her husband. What plan of action would be best? Was it wise to meet them in open fight? They had had so many pitched battles, lost

The coming of the Danes

so many men, and yet the Danes came again and again. They had conquered a third of the kingdom, and were rulers in Northumbria and East Anglia.

The Danes were terrible in battle, and particularly the renowned Berserkers. These were the warriors who, on the eve of a battle, would scourge themselves till they were in a state of violent excitement. They entered the fight stripped of their chain-sarks, and howling like wild animals, and woe to any they might capture!

"It is wiser, if we can, to avoid meeting them in battle," Ethelfleda urged, "but we must protect our borders. We must build fortresses at every point where they are likely to descend upon us."

This was decided upon and instructions were given for the immediate building of the fortresses. When completed, picked soldiers were stationed in them to be on guard day and night, and these men were fully instructed as to what they were to do. They were to wait for no leader but to be ready at any moment to sally out and attack the enemy; but they were to avoid pitched battles as much as possible. Small towns grew up round the fortresses, and the men of these towns and the surrounding neighbourhood were to be prepared to assist. The men proved worthy of the trust reposed in them.

Ethelfleda gave directions for the erection of similar forts on the borders of Mercia. She had great warlike genius and she had set her mind to the task of conquering the "Five Boroughs" (the towns of Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Stamford, Nottingham), which were part of the Danish settlement in Mercia. It was galling to think that these heathen invaders had established themselves in her kingdom. First she concentrated on

Derby and laid siege to the town. The castle was assaulted, and here in the thick of the fight four of her bravest leaders fell. Ethelfleda could not pause at such a time to pay a tribute to the valiant men, but undismayed she urged her soldiers on. They fell back again and again, but her ringing voice incited them to further action, and after a hard fight the town at last surrendered.

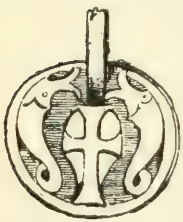
The people of Leicester were meanwhile very appre-

Ethelfleda at Derby

hensive. News of the fate of Derby had reached them and word was brought that the Lady of the Mercians was marching southward on Leicester. They knew the toll they would have to pay in the lives of their bravest men, and in the ruin of their town, should she be successful, and they immediately surrendered. Ethelfleda, while seeing all her hopes crowned with success, suddenly died, and leaving no heir to her kingdom her brother immediately annexed it. Single-handed now, without his sister's far-seeing advice, he continued working his utmost for the entire reconquest of Britain from the Danes. The

Five Boroughs had by this time all surrendered, and Edward marched northward to attack Northumbria. The fame of his exploits was so great that after he had taken Manchester, without another blow being struck, the Northumbrians and the Scots and Britons of Strathclyde acknowledged him as their overlord.

Edward did much for his country in his reign of twenty-four years (901-925). The witena-gemot met, as was customary, after his death, to deliberate upon the succession to the throne. There was none more worthy than his son Athelstan, Alfred's favourite grandson. He had been brought up by his aunt, Ethelfleda, for whom he had deep admiration. As a boy he was extremely beautiful, with flowing golden hair. His grandfather had given him a gorgeous purple vestment, a jewelled belt, and a sword with a golden sheath, when he was quite a child.



Harness Boss on Horse-trapping

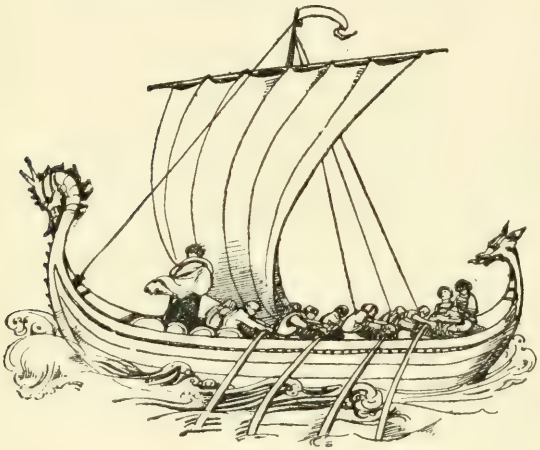
It was fitting that Athelstan should take up the struggle that his father and grandfather had waged so valiantly against the Danes. The object of his life was to subdue them and to make those of them who lived in England, and whom he could not dislodge, remain as peaceable inhabitants. But the Danes were not without resources, and they made an alliance with the Scots and Irish. Athelstan marched forth to meet them at Brunanburh, and there was fought one of the great battles of the Danish war. This is the record of his victory in the fine war-song in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, as rendered by Professor Henry Morley :

"This year King Athelstan, the Lord of Earls,
Ring-giver to the warriors, Edmund too

His brother, won in fight with edge of swords
Life-long renown at Brunanburh. The sons
Of Edward clave with the forged steel the wall
Of linden shields. The spirit of their sides
Made them defenders of the land, its wealth,
Its homes, in many a fight with many a foe.
Low lay the Scottish foes, and death-doomed fell
The shipmen ; the field streamed with warriors' blood,
When rose at morning tide the glorious star,
The sun, God's shining candle, until sank
The noble creature to its setting. There
Lay many a Northern warrior, struck with darts
Shot from above the shield and scattered wide
As fled the Scots, weary and sick of war,
Forth followed the West Saxons, in war bands
Tracking the hostile folk the live-long day.
With falchions newly ground they hewed amain
Behind the men who fled. The hard hand play
The Mercians refused to none who came
Warriors with Olave, o'er the beating waves,
And borne in the ship's bosom, came death-doomed
To battle in that land. There lay five kings
Whom on the battlefield swords put to sleep,
And they were young ; and seven of Olave's jarls,
With Scots and mariners an untold host.
Then the Prince of the Northmen fled, compelled
To seek with a small band his vessel's prow.
The bark drove from the shore, the king set sail,
And on the fallow flood preserved his life.
Then fled the hoary chief, old Constantine ;
Regaining his north country, not to boast
How falchions met.
Then in their mailed ships on the stormy sea
The Northmen went, the leavings of red darts,
Through the deep water Dublin once again,
Ireland, to seek, abased. Fame bearing went
Meanwhile to their own land, West Saxons land,
The brothers King and Atheling.
They left
The carcases behind them to be shared
By dusky coated, swart raven, horny beaked,
And the white eagle of the goodly plumes,
The greedy war hawk and grey forest wolf,
Who ate the carrion."

This magnificent victory won peace for the kingdom

throughout the rest of Athelstan's reign. Harald, King of Norway, sent him a splendid present, a ship with a golden beak and a purple sail, fenced within with golden shields. Athelstan in his turn rewarded the bringers of this gift, and friendly relations were established with Scandinavia. Harald's son, Hako, was sent to England to be educated at the court of the English king, for Norway was still a barbaric country and England was becoming civilised.



Norwegian Ship

Athelstan's thoughts now turned, as had his grandfather's before him, to governing his people well. He felt a real responsibility for the poor in his kingdom, and he ordered that each of his thegns should feed one poor Englishman, and that they should undertake every year to redeem one slave who had lost his freedom by getting into debt, or for any other cause. This enactment was really the beginning of the decline of slavery in England. The influence of Christianity helped to make men feel the iniquity of holding their fellow-creatures in bondage. Athelstan made the slaves of more importance, and he made them personally

responsible for crimes against each other. Many and many a slave was freed on the death of his master, who left instructions in his will :

> "Every vassal of his banner,
> Every self born to his manor,
> All those wronged and wretched creatures
> By his hand were freed again."

Athelstan was one of the first English kings who saw the importance of being on friendly terms with foreign countries, and he arranged suitable matches for his sisters to this end. One married Sithric the Dane, King of Northumberland, another Otto, King of the East Franks.

There is one dark stain on the character of Athelstan. It is said that when he came to the throne his brother Edwin refused to acknowledge him as king. Athelstan was very angry and ordered that his brother should be put to sea in a boat without oars. The boat drifted for some time and Edwin prayed for rescue, but at last the wind blew it out to sea, when, seeing death was inevitable, and being unable to endure the suspense, he leapt into the sea and was drowned. To the day of his death the king was full of remorse for this wicked deed.

Three peaceful years passed after Brunanburh, and then Athelstan died, and his brother Edmund came to the throne. The Danes took this opportunity to renew the struggle with greater intensity than ever. The first encounter was at Leicester. The king, accompanied by the fighting Archbishop, Wulfstan of York, and his warriors, surrounded the city. The Danes, led by Anlaf, nothing daunted, sallied out, and in the battle which followed Edmund was defeated. He

thought it wiser to make peace, and arranged that Anlaf should hold England north of Watling Street till his death. When this occurred Edmund regained the mastery of the whole of England.

Edmund's reign was to end in tragedy. At Pucklechurch, on St Augustine's Day, a feast was given, to which the king had invited many guests. It was a scene of revelry and all were eating and drinking and

Leofa stabs the King

enjoying themselves. Mead and ale and a mixed drink called pigment, made of honey, wine and spice, had been circulating freely, when in the midst of the merriment Edmund turned to his cup-bearer and said :

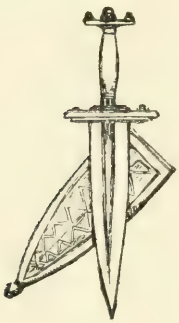
" Who is that man yonder—I seem to remember his face."

The cup-bearer hesitated a moment. " Surely it is Leofa, who was banished."

" Leofa—the robber ? "

Leofa heard and flushed with anger. Then suddenly he darted forward, his dagger unsheathed, and sprang at the king. The guests hurried to Edmund's assistance. The king in the excitement of the moment seized Leofa by the hair and flung him down, shouting, " Robber—murderer."

There was a scuffle and Leofa was stunned, but only for a moment. Recovering, he wrenched himself free from his captors, and springing at the king once more he stabbed him to death with his dagger.



# CHAPTER XV
# DUNSTAN

THROUGH all the long wars with the Danes the Church never ceased her many activities. Some of the Danes had been baptised. The bishops had often taken their place in the fighting line with the soldiers, but the monks pursued peaceful lives, teaching the children, illuminating the manuscripts, tilling the ground. But they had suffered much from the destruction of their crops by the viking bands, and a certain slackness was noticeable. They were not so eager, strenuous and active as the earlier clergy had been. They were, as a rule, married, and the necessity of looking after their families in these troubled times allowed them less time for spiritual work. They wanted a leader, a man with the sense of opportunity, able to understand the needs of the time.

Such a man was Dunstan, son of Herstan and Cynedryda, wealthy people of noble birth, related to some of the great families. He was born at Glastonbury in Somersetshire, and one of his earliest recollections was his first visit with his mother to the ancient British minster there. He looked at it with

eager, wondering eyes. Something his nurse had told him came into his mind.

"Tell me the story of it, mother."

"It is said that the early Christians wanted to find some building in which to worship. They were troubled, for they had no money to build for themselves, and they prayed that some place might be found. One morning they were walking together, and wondering what could be done, when suddenly they came on this church. 'Tis an ancient church built in Roman times, but they believed that it came as a direct answer to prayer and that it had not been raised by human hands."

Dunstan playing the Harp

The boy loved the church from that day and would often wander into it and dream of the lessons he learnt from his mother, and of the stories of that faith in which he was being brought up. There seemed nothing impossible to his childish imagination in the mystic origin of the church.

He was a beautiful boy, small in stature, straight and slight in build, with hair like spun gold, and with keen intelligence lighting his eyes. His nurse had sung to him as a baby the old heathen songs and he loved to repeat them to himself. He liked the legends of Woden and Thor; they seemed mighty heroes of a dim past. He loved music and learnt to play the harp, and as he played he would dream about a brilliant future for himself.

His father, seeing him absorbed in the beautiful sounds he was making, called to him one day.

"You care too much for music," he said; "there is much you must learn before you are a man."

"I love study," said the lad, "but I love my harp even more."

"You will never fill a great place in the world unless you have learning."

"I will work hard," Dunstan replied, the light of ambition illuminating his face.

He took his father's words to heart and began to study diligently. But he overworked himself and had a bad illness. One day when he was in a delirium he jumped out of bed. There was no one with him, for the nurse had just left the room. The boy was unconscious of what he was doing, he had had a terrible dream that wild dogs were pursuing him, and he fled out into the open country to escape. Not knowing whither he was going he reached the abbey, and finding some scaffolding against it, climbed on to the roof. At any moment he might have fallen, but he met with no accident and came down in safety. He was exhausted by now and fell asleep in the church, to awake in his right senses. People said that it was by a miracle he had been spared on that terrible night, and he never forgot to be thankful to God for his preservation.

Directly he was well again he went back to his books. At Glastonbury some Irish monks had started a school, and there he met other boys. There was hard work at school in those days as there is now, though sport was not provided as it is to-day. The boys would learn what was known of mathematics, writing, illuminating, the working of gold and silver, woodcarving and designing.

In these peaceful occupations his boyhood passed

to manhood, and he was given a place at the court of Athelstan. Amongst a semi-educated people he was so gifted that he was thought to be a magician. The king was delighted with his musical skill, but the other courtiers grew jealous and Dunstan had to leave. In Edmund's reign he came again to the court, but once more he met with the same fate. The nobles thoroughly

The Courtiers and Dunstan

disliked him ; and one day after they had forced him to leave, some of them saw him riding unattended across a stretch of marshy country.

" That's Dunstan," said one.

" Dunstan is in league with the devil," said another.

" I hate him," interrupted a third, " he bears himself at court as though he were our superior, he is vain of his knowledge."

" Let us teach him a lesson of humility," said the second speaker, who detested him even more than the others.

They galloped up to him. Dunstan faced them, unflinching, but they were too many for him. They threw

him from his horse and he fell on the boggy ground. "Magician, devil's partner!" they shouted, as seeing him there they trampled him under foot.

Dunstan was bitterly humiliated at this outrage, which showed such venomous hatred towards him. It brought back a return of the fever which had laid him low as a boy, and as he was slowly recovering he meditated much on the evil effect of life at court, and decided that he would not be a courtier but would become a monk. At first he thought he would live entirely apart from the world in absolute seclusion. He dug for himself a small cave in the ground against the wall of Glastonbury Abbey. In size it was no bigger than an ordinary dining-room table, yet he found room for a forge in it, for he was ever industrious. There was a small hole in the wall to let in light and air, and that was all.

Many curious stories were told of him while he lived in this underground dwelling. He went through great privations, and he would deny himself food and sleep and scourge himself till he cried out with pain. In such a state of mind it was small wonder that he saw visions and dreamt dreams. He told how one evening when he was working hard, hammering metal, the devil put his head in at the window and tried to tempt him back to a life of luxury. Dunstan in fury seized him by the nose with the red-hot tongs, and the devil fled, yelling with pain. The people living near heard the shrieks and were astonished. It is just possible that one of Dunstan's old enemies at court had played the part, and had received the treatment.

Dunstan did not long live in retirement, for a greater destiny awaited him. Among those who came to see

him in this retreat was Ethelgiva, a woman of fine character, who gave up her whole life to succouring the poor. She was very wealthy and she found in Dunstan a man who could help her to carry out her schemes for bettering the condition of the people. This was a time of great happiness for them both. Dunstan started a

St Dunstan in his Cell

school and many pupils came to him to learn literature and illuminating and music.

A legend of him about this time tells how one day he was suggesting the design of a robe which was to be worn by a great English lady. Her maidens were at work on it and they were startled to hear a tune issue from the harp which he had hung on the wall, though no mortal hand had touched it. His enemies thought that he had produced the sounds, but probably

it was caused by the wind blowing over the sensitive strings.

These legends help us to realise the simplicity of the people at this time. They believed that unseen spirits did actually interfere with the affairs of men, and that the devil was a very real person who might any time pay them a visit.

This peaceful, useful life went on for some time, when sorrow came to Dunstan, for death claimed Ethelgiva. She left him her wealth, which he used for the benefit of the schemes they had been planning together. This brought about a change in his life, for he decided to go again to court. Again he found himself unpopular, so much so that King Edmund almost decided to get rid of him. But one day Edmund was riding at full gallop in pursuit of a deer. The quarry, fleeing madly in terror of death, leapt over a cliff, and the king barely had time to rein in his horse on the brink of the precipice. In this moment of terror the thought of Dunstan flashed through his mind. Had he not been too ready to listen to tales against him? Had he not himself, almost unconsciously, been jealous of the greater genius of the monk? Then and there he resolved that he would do something to show his appreciation of Dunstan. He returned home and sent for him.

"Saddle your horse and ride with me," he commanded. Then he called on his retinue to accompany them and they rode forth to Glastonbury. There, where Dunstan had been born and brought up, he was to reign as abbot. The king kissed him and the reconciliation was complete.

From this time forward Dunstan is a dominant figure in the history of England. In the strong influence which he wielded he was greater than the kings whom

he served. He had much influence in the election of the king. In those days the king was elected by the witena-gemot. They always chose someone of the royal house, but not necessarily the eldest son of the ruler. No one could succeed without the consent of this council of the nation. Nowadays in England

Edmund narrowly escaped death

the succession is fixed. The nearest heir to the throne succeeds, and if there is no prince in the direct line of succession, but only a princess, she becomes queen. This was the case with Queen Victoria, who succeeded her uncle, William IV.

In the election which took place after Edmund's death, for the first time Britons, Danes and Englishmen took part. Edred (946-955), Edmund's brother, was chosen, and Dunstan became his valued councillor and

intimate friend. Edred had to wage war with the Danes in the north, but I need not go into further details of the endless struggle. It is enough to say that Edred was successful, and that Northumbria became a kingdom under him. He bore the proud title of Basileus of Britain.

Crystal Pendant

But Dunstan, masterful and ambitious, was again to taste the bitterness of disfavour. On Edred's death Edwy (955-958) came to the throne. He was quite young, and Ethelgiva, his great friend, had immense influence over him. He had secretly married her daughter, but as she was distantly connected with him the Church did not consider the marriage legal.

The day of Edwy's coronation came, a feast was prepared and all the nobles were invited. They were jealous of Ethelgiva, and ready to quarrel with her. No women were present at the banquet, and the nobles and clergy, not heeding the king's presence, began abusing Ethelgiva. At first Edwy did not hear the angry altercation that was going on, but when he did he got up in a great rage and went to his private rooms. The guests were furious. Who was this boy king that he should thus slight the most important people in his kingdom, by whose good favour he held the throne? The Archbishop of Canterbury, a venerable figure with flowing grey hair, rose.

Blue Glass Drinking Vessel (Anglo-Saxon

"He shall be summoned to our presence, he shall not thus treat his faithful people," he said.

"Who will go to him?" cried the nobles.

"Let us send Dunstan, he will bid him return to the banquet," one of their number suggested.

Dunstan and Edwy

Dunstan, more indignant than the rest, went to seek the king, whom he found resting in the apartments of Ethelgiva. Forgetting his courtly manners Dunstan marched in unannounced. Ethelgiva and her daughter were there with Edwy, who had laid aside all thought of his kingly responsibilities. His crown lay on the ground and he was enjoying himself in their company.

"I have been sent hither by your noble guests to bid you return to the feast," said Dunstan.

"I will not return," said the king. "How dare you intrude on my privacy!"

Dunstan stooped and picked up the crown. "Return," he said, "I am bidden to bring you whether you will or no."

"I will not return. Tell them I shall punish their insolence."

Dunstan did not wait for further argument. He roughly placed the crown on the king's head and with force he dragged him out of the room. Edwy resisted but Dunstan was the stronger of the two. With his crown all on one side, his dress awry, and Dunstan pulling him along, he returned to the banquet in a furious temper.

From that day he hated Dunstan, and immediately cancelled his appointment as Abbot of Glastonbury, and banished him from the kingdom. He intended a further vengeance and meant to have his eyes put out, but Dunstan fled just in time and reached Flanders.

Three years later Dunstan was recalled. Overbearing as he was, there was no man of equal capacity in the kingdom. Edwy was then dead and his son Edgar

(959-975) had come to the throne. Odo, the aged archbishop, had died, and Dunstan was made Archbishop of Canterbury.

A time of peace had come for England, and it was Edgar's good fortune that in his reign the warfare with the Danes ceased for a time. The Danish settlers were living peaceably in many of the English towns, and they were ready to acknowledge Edgar as their head. There is a story told that eight tributary kings, from Scotland, from Wales, from Ireland, and from other parts, met Edgar when he sailed with his fleet to Chester on the Dee, and did him homage. Edgar stood at the helm in a magnificent boat and the eight kings rowed him down the river.

Elfrida and her Maid

The story of Edgar's marriage with Elfrida shows the violent side of his nature. He had heard that Earl Ordgar, who lived in Devonshire, had a beautiful daughter. The king could not go in person to see her, so he sent Ethelwold, one of his thegns, to make inquiries, and to report to him if Elfrida was really surpassingly fair. When Ethelwold saw her he fell violently in love with her, and so, forgetting his duty, he went back to Edgar and told him that she was

quite nice-looking but nothing out of the common. Then Ethelwold returned to Devonshire, proposed to Elfrida, and married her. Edgar thought it strange that he should have married the lady whom he admired so little, and he became curious to see her for himself. Accordingly one day he visited his thegn's house and asked for his wife. Ethelwold was in terror, for he knew he had betrayed his trust. He went to Elfrida and told her the truth, and entreated her to make herself look as ugly as she could. But she was furious when she thought she might have been Lady of England. She called her serving maid, and with her assistance she decked herself in her grandest attire, did her hair more bewitchingly than ever, put on her finest jewels, and came thus into the king's presence. He was speechless with admiration. Rumour had indeed been true and Ethelwold had been false. In his wrath at the deception practised upon him Edgar persuaded Ethelwold to go out with him, and in a lonely wood, he stabbed him to death. A short time afterwards he married Elfrida. She was his second wife. He had one son, Edward, by his first wife, who came to the throne on his father's death (975-978).

Elfrida was always jealous of Dunstan's influence over her husband. Dunstan's unpopularity, however, was not entirely due to the enmity of Elfrida. Many of the clergy were at variance with him. Before his time they were allowed to marry, but Dunstan was anxious to establish the Benedictine rule in England, which forbade marriage, and he insisted on the clergy putting away their wives. This was a gross injustice, but in Dunstan's view it was all-important that the clergy should be unmarried, and should be able to give

up the whole of their time to the service of the Church.

An assembly of clergy and nobles was to be held at Calne in Wiltshire and the question was to be discussed in all its bearings ; Dunstan was seated on his chair at one end of the room, surrounded by his supporters. An angry altercation was going on. It was quite evident that neither side would give way.

Dunstan listened quietly for a while, then, as he saw that the general feeling was against him, he called out in a loud voice, which was heard above the growing din of heated argument :

" I confess that I am unwilling that you should conquer. I commit the cause of the Church to the decision of Christ."

As he was saying this, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us, " the oldest Witan of the English nation fell at Calne from an upper floor ; but the holy Archbishop Dunstan stood alone upon a beam, and some there were very much maimed and some did not survive."

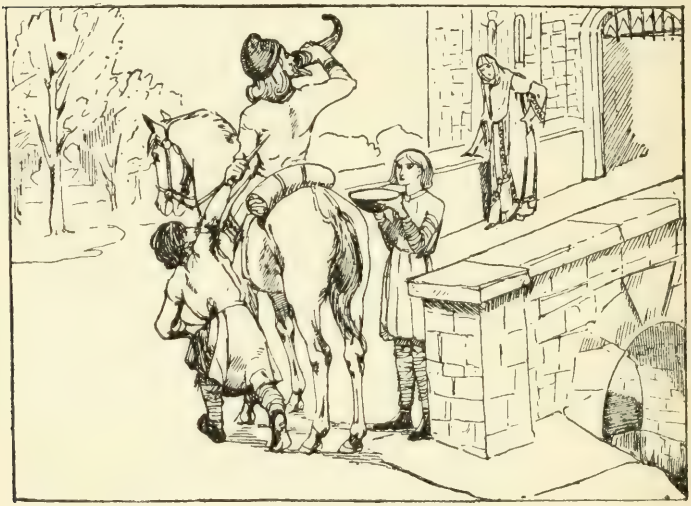
The accident was doubtless due to the crowd of men being too great a weight for the floor to bear, but his friends thought it a miracle. His enemies, however, said that as Dunstan and many of his supporters were saved, he had arranged it.

Meanwhile Elfrida was concentrating her thoughts on how to get rid of Edward, who had now come to the throne, for she wanted to put her own son in his place. One day the king was out hunting, and finding that he was not far from Corfe Castle, where his stepbrother lived, decided to visit him. He rode up to the door and was greeted warmly by Elfrida.

"Surely you will come in and rest for a while," she said.

" I came but to have a word with my brother, I will not dismount," he replied. " But I would have something to drink."

" I will order wine to be brought to you," she said, and she went into the house. A moment later a servant came out with a cup of wine. Edward raised it eagerly



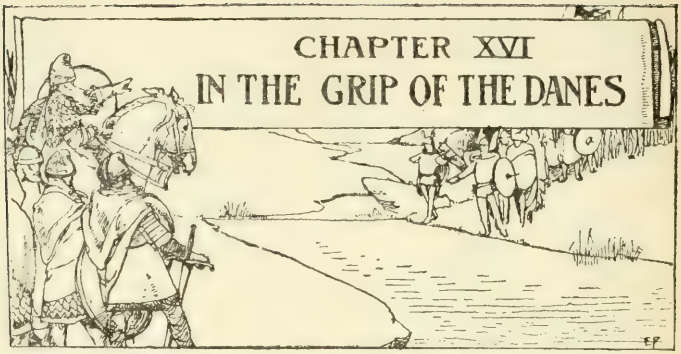
The slaying of Edward

to his lips, but as he was drinking he felt a sharp pang in the back. He had been stabbed. He spurred his horse forward. He would ride for his life. It might be it was only a slight wound after all, and he would recover if only he could get assistance. The galloping horse knew that something was wrong, the hand that held the rein had slackened, and presently the king fell forward, his foot caught in the stirrup, and his lifeless body was dragged along the ground.

Elfrida had conquered and her son, Ethelred, the Rede-less, came to the throne, a mere child of ten. She had assassinated her stepson to put her own boy in his place, a king so young that he was a tool in her hands. Dunstan's many enemies were delighted, for they now came into power. The death of Edward marked the end of his influence. He retired to Canterbury, but in his deep hatred for Elfrida he did not leave a stone unturned until he made her crime known to the people. Whatever they thought of Dunstan, and he was at that time very much disliked, she became even more detested. At last, feeling that it would be impossible for her to play the leading part she had hoped, she sought safety in a nunnery. The calm, holy life of the saintly women with whom she associated worked in her a deep penitence. She built many nunneries as retreats for those who had sinned and suffered, that they might find a refuge in which to repent.

Anglo-Saxon Bed (from a MS.)

Nine years later Dunstan died (988). He was a wise statesman, a man of great ability, but he had not the quality of taking a just estimate of others, and he made many enemies. He was a man of character, with strong qualities and grave faults, and he stands out in history as one of the great ecclesiastical statesmen to whom England in her early days owed much.



# CHAPTER XVI
# IN THE GRIP OF THE DANES

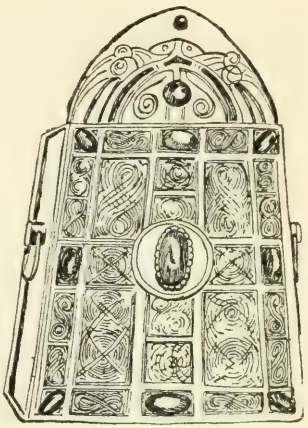
FIVE hundred years have passed since Hengest and Horsa landed at Ebbsfleet, five hundred years of constant fighting, in which the English or Saxons have hardly won and hardly kept the land which was to be known as England. The worshippers of Woden and Thor have become Christians. England has at times been seven kingdoms, three kingdoms; and one kingdom has exercised lordship over the others. But it has never been in the true sense of the word one kingdom under one king.

We must remember that it is of England only that we are thinking, and not of Wales, Scotland and Ireland, for our subject is the birth of England and the struggles it had to go through before it became a united country.

England was of little importance as a nation till it became united. The United States of America are under one president, who is elected by the people of all the states. How little this great country would count in the politics of the world if each of the separate states were independent kingdoms. The same principle made it necessary for the destiny of England that some strong

force should be brought to bear upon her which would weld the different parts into one whole. Three men did much to bring this about, Alfred, Edgar, and Cnut the Dane, and it is of Cnut that I am now going to tell you.

Ethelred, a weak child weeping for the death of his brother, had come to the throne utterly unfitted to cope with the great task of government. He is known in history as the Unready.



Shrine or Cover of the Bell of St Patrick

The vikings heard that this boy was on the throne and they felt that it was a propitious time to renew their attacks. At last they would subjugate stubborn little England and make it part of the great Danish kingdom. Sweyn, the son of the King of Denmark, was their leader, Sweyn Tjuguskeggi, to give him his full name, which means Sweyn with the forked beard. He had been baptised, but Christianity did not appeal to him. He was a fierce old pagan at heart.

One of the earliest battles of this reign was fought at Maldon in Essex. The heroic ealdorman, Byrhtnoth, worked splendidly for the defeat of the Danes. The viking leader, accustomed to the English method of paying large sums to the Danes to go away, first asked for such a payment. At this request the old Saxon song tells us Byrhtnoth upraised his buckler, he shook his slender javelin; stern and resolute he uttered these words, and gave him answer:

"'Hear, thou mariner! what this people sayeth. Instead of tribute they will bestow on you their weapons, the edge of their spears, their ancient swords and arms of war. Herald to the men of ocean! deliver to thy people a message in return; a declaration of high indignation. Say that an earl with his retainers here stands undaunted, who will defend this land, the domain of my sovereign Ethelred. I shall think you dastardly if you retire to your ships with your booty without joining in battle, since you have come so far into our land. You shall not so softly win our treasures. The point and edge shall determine between us in the grim game of war.'

Sweyn Tjuguskeggi

"The invading host began to move. They gave orders to advance, to cross the ford and lead their troops onward. Byrhtnoth meanwhile gave free permission to many of the hostile bands to gain the land unmolested.

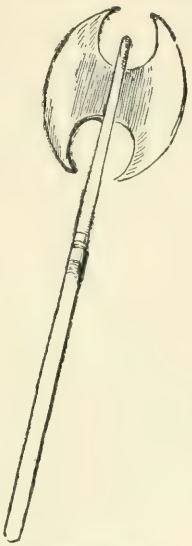
"Thus did the son of Byrhtnoth shout across the cold river, 'Warriors listen! Free space is allowed you. Come then speedily over to us.'

"It was a fierce fight that ensued.

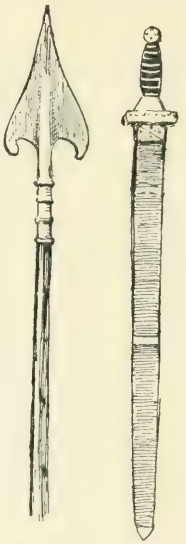
"The Danish chieftain raised his weapon with his buckler for his defence, and stepped forth against

Byrhtnoth. The sea chief then sped a southern dart which wounded the lord of the army. . . . Then one of the enemies let fly a dart from his hand, which transfixed the noble thane of Ethelred. There stood by his side a youth, not fully grown, a boy in the

Danish Spear



Danish Vipam



Danish Spear and Sword

field, who plucked it out and hurled it back. The dart passed on and transfixed him who had too surely wounded the earl. A treacherous soldier approached the English chief to plunder his gems, his vestment, his rings, and his ornamental sword. But Byrhtnoth drew from his sheath his sword, broad and brown of edge, and smote him on his corselet. Very eagerly the pirate left him when he felt the force of the chieftain's arm. But at that moment his large hilted

sword dropped to the earth. He could no longer hold his hand-glaive nor wield his weapon. Yet the hoary warrior still endeavoured to utter his commands. He bade the warlike youths, his brave companions, to march forward, but he could no longer stand firmly on his feet."

The Danes were masters of the field of battle, and Ethelred was ill advised enough to listen to the councillors, who urged him to buy off the invaders. This had been done, as you know, in Alfred's time, but now far larger tribute was asked for and paid. The tribute was called Danegeld, and £10,000 was paid after the battle of Maldon, an enormous sum if we think of how much more money was worth in those days. It was a terrible drain upon the people and a great deal of the beautiful Saxon jewellery had to be broken up and weighed in order to pay the sum.

Ethelred was terribly afraid of the Danes. They continued their plundering expeditions and he did not know what to do. One day he thought of a secret way of ridding the country of them. He sent private orders that on St Bride's Day (13th November 1002) all the Danes living in the country should be murdered.

It was a day of shame for the murderers. Many of the Danes were peaceable settlers and had lived for some time on terms of friendship with their English neighbours. Some sought sanctuary in Christian churches, but they were as ruthlessly slain as the others. Men, women and children perished on that day of slaughter. One noble woman, Gunhild, the sister of King Sweyn of Denmark, saw her husband

and child killed before her eyes. She was certain to follow them, but the fear of death was not so strong as her fierce resentment. "The English will pay a great price for this murder—for this treachery—blood

Gunhild and the Danes

stained——" The words were hardly out of her lips before she was stabbed to death.

Sweyn vowed vengeance. England should pay a heavy price, this time not in money but in the lives of their people. A barbarous spirit was abroad. The Christian English had butchered the heathen Danes. Why should the pagans not take a full revenge?

A body of Danes laid siege to Canterbury and took the town. Archbishop Alphege was made a prisoner,

and they demanded an impossible ransom for his life. Everyone was so poor in those days that the money could not be collected. The people had been forced over and over again to pay the price of peace to the Danes; they could do no more.

The viking warriors, exultant at this chance of revenge, held a great feast. They drank until they were drunk, and then, having excited themselves into a state of blind fury, sent for Alphege. He was brought in.

"Where is your ransom?" they said.

He shook his head. He saw the rage in their eyes, and knew that hope of mercy there was none. As he stood there, a dignified and pathetic figure, an attendant noticed that his lips were moving, He was praying, as his Master had done in the Garden of Gethsemane, "If this cup cannot pass from me except I drink it: thy will be done."

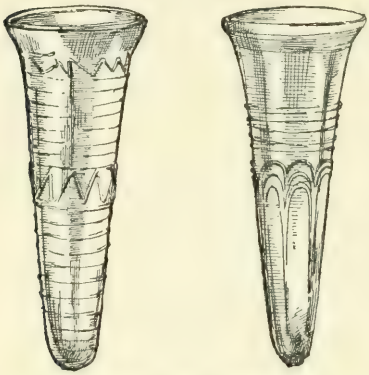
His silence infuriated them. A youth at the table took up the bone from his plate and flung it at him with force. This was the sign for attack, and almost simultaneously all took up their horrible bones and pelted him with them. He was in grievous pain, his face was bleeding from wounds, his body writhed as each fresh missile struck him. At last one of the viking soldiers, perhaps one who had in him a grain of pity, rushed on Alphege and struck him with an axe and killed him.

This was not sufficient vengeance for the terrible massacre. Sweyn attacked the north of England again and again, and gradually conquered it. At Gainsborough all England north of Watling Street submitted to him. Wessex alone remained to Ethelred, and he was not to retain that kingdom long. Town after town was cap-

Alphege and the Danes

tured by the Danes. Oxford and Winchester submitted; London alone remained faithful, but on learning that Ethelred had fled to Normandy the citizens became very alarmed and they too yielded. Wessex, the most powerful of the English kingdoms, also surrendered to the Danes.

Sweyn (1013) was now King of England, but his reign was mercifully a short one. He still remembered with bitterness the slaughter of his countrymen. In any circumstances he would have been a hard ruler; with this in his mind he was a cruel one.



Anglo-Saxon Glasses

A mightier power and a stronger man was to weld England into one kingdom under one king. The power was that of a great personality, the man was Sweyn's son Cnut. Mr J. R. Green, in his "Short History of the English People," writes of this time as "England under Foreign Kings," but we can hardly regard the Danes as foreigners, for they were nearly allied to the Anglo-Saxons in race and in speech, and they had worshipped the same gods. The Danes who settled in England easily mixed with our English people because there was no great difference of race to separate them.

On the death of Sweyn (1014) a new king was to be elected. The Danish population and a large part of the English were anxious to have Cnut as their

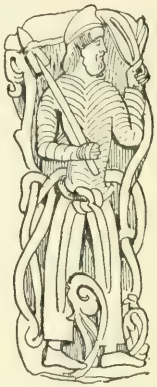
ruler. Others desired the recall of Ethelred. True he had laid a heavy burden on the country by his blunders, but the Danes were so dreaded that many people felt he was the lesser of two evils. The English leaders sent to Ethelred and offered him the crown, requiring from him certain pledges of good government. He returned to England to reign, and Cnut immediately made ready to enforce his claim with the sword. Directly he appeared with his fleet Wessex, Mercia and Northumberland surrendered to him. Ethelred's son Edmund tried to rally the country to him but in vain. London remained faithful, however, and Cnut and his men were marching southward to attack it. At this crisis Ethelred died and Edmund Ironside succeeded him. He immediately set to work to defend London. He hoped to be successful, for he did not see how Cnut could bring his fleet up the Thames, as the river at Southwark was a mere marsh. Cnut made his plans carefully. He employed a large number of men to cut a channel through the marshes, and had his boats towed up to London Bridge. Edmund courageously defended the city, until he felt that his presence would be of more use in fighting the Danes outside London.

Saxon Battle-axe

He met the Danish army at Shenstone. A brilliant June day dawned, and Edmund summoning his troops, addressed to them a few words of fiery eloquence

before the fight began. He bade them strike for their country, for their homes; he reminded them that all that they held most dear was at the mercy of these foreigners. Then sounded a blare of trumpets, a moment of silence, and the fierce onslaught of battle commenced. Edmund was seen in the thick of the fight, his sword flashed in the sun, and many a viking soldier owed his death to the English king. At one

Celtic stonework.
A Welsh Knight

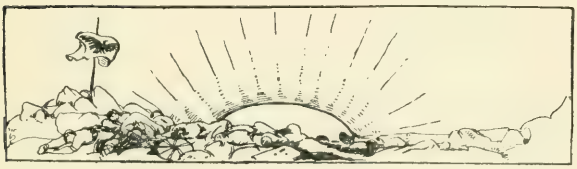


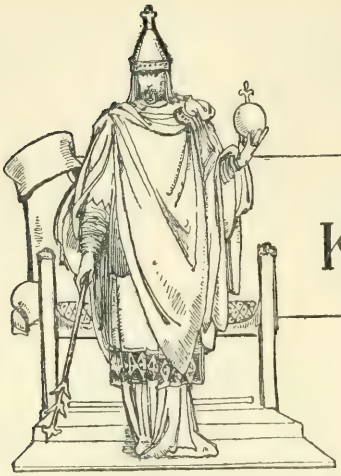
Celtic stone-carving.
A Welsh Knight

moment the English and Danish kings stood face to face, and Edmund with a powerful stroke cut Cnut's shield in two.

This battle was left undecided and both parties claimed the victory. It was not until Edmund and Cnut met again at Assandun that the issue was decided. Many of the noblest English lay dead on the field after that terrible fight. Edmund Ironside, as he saw lying there some of his most trusted friends, envied them, for they had died in battle. He was left to make some

compromise with Cnut, and the bitterness of failure was hard to bear. The two kings met and it was settled that Cnut should rule in the north of Britain, and Edmund, as a tributary king, in the south, and that he was to pay Danegeld. This arrangement did not last long, for some months afterwards Edmund was treacherously murdered, and Cnut became King of England.





# CHAPTER XVII
# KING CNUT

WE have seen that Cnut was a brave warrior, we now want to know what he was as a ruler. He was master of all England, of the north and of the south.

At first the hearts of the English sank within them when they realised that no descendant of the great Alfred was sitting on the throne. They had cause to fear Cnut. He was but twenty, exultant in his youth, a tall, powerful man, with beautiful hair falling over his shoulders, delicate features and piercing eyes. He was of the true viking breed, splendid in courage, relentless in cruelty.

He felt insecure on the throne while Edmund's children lived or remained in the kingdom, but they were young and he did not trouble about them at first. He feared a party rising, however, to support the claims of Edwy, Edmund's brother. It is said that

he offered one of his nobles a reward for Edwy's head, but the thegn would have no hand in the murder and managed to save his life, but only for a time. Cnut soon found a more unscrupulous man, who received a large sum of money for putting Edwy to death. Cnut now bethought himself that Edmund's children would soon be growing up, so he banished them from his kingdom.

Having cleared the ground of rivals he turned his attention to more praiseworthy occupations. First he looked round for a wife. He wished to establish himself firmly on the English throne, and to have sons to rule after him, though he had one son, Harold, whose mother is unknown. Curious as it may seem, his choice fell upon Emma, the widow of Ethelred the Rede-less. She was not only many years older than he was but her two sons, Alfred and Edward, were claimants to the throne. It was a strange wooing, but Emma does not seem to have been reluctant to marry the man who had usurped her husband's kingdom. She was tired of being an exile in Normandy, and she was a woman of ambition. The invitation to come to England and to reign once more as queen was eagerly welcomed, therefore. And indeed she loved Cnut far more than she had loved the unlucky Ethelred.

A strange change came over Cnut as he grew older. His character developed as he felt the great responsibility that was upon him. He was king not only of England but of Denmark, and he dreamt of being the founder of a great nation, which would weld all the northern kingdoms together. England had to pay heavy tribute to Denmark and Norway, but she had her reward in being governed by a man who had a far wider outlook

on life than many of his time. He made just laws, many of them harsh according to our ideas nowadays, but fairer to the people than the earlier ones. He considered himself as much bound by them as any of his subjects.

A story is told of how one day in a fit of anger he killed a soldier. It was an offence punishable by a fine, but none dared impose it on the king. He called a meeting of his nobles and soldiers. They assembled in a large hall, where he was seated on his throne.

Anglo-Saxon Slinger

"I struck a man dead in my wrath," he confessed. "Were I a ceorl the fine would be forty scillings; but I am king, my crime is greater for my responsibility is more. I appeal to your judgment. I repent bitterly of what I have done and I would pay the penalty."

A confused murmuring was heard in the hall. "We cannot impose a fine upon the king." Cnut's voice sounded again in tones of command.

"Withdraw and consider."

The company withdrew and discussed the situation among themselves. Some were so touched with Cnut's humility that they would impose no punishment, others considered that his love of justice would be shown in a clearer light if he paid a fine. At last they agreed that as he was his own accuser he

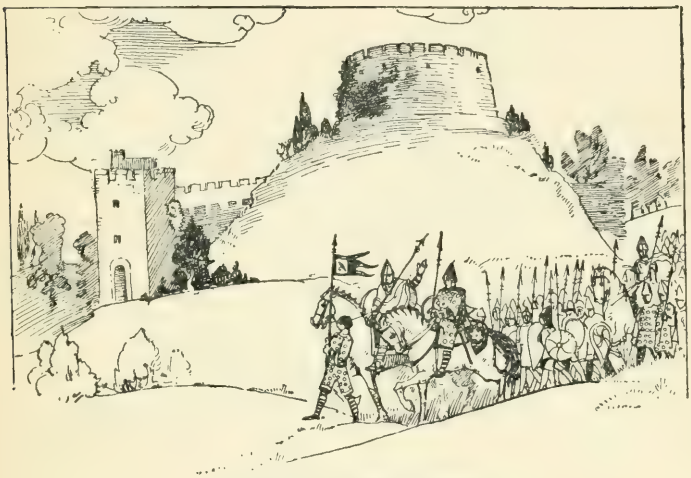
should be his own judge, and they returned to the hall.

" What is your sentence ? " asked the king.

" We wish you to impose sentence on yourself," said the spokesman.

Cnut sat silent for a few moments. Then he said in clear tones :

" Forty scillings would be the fine I should impose on



Anglo-Saxons going to Battle

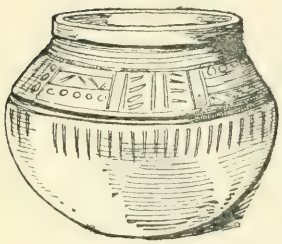
another. But as I am king I will pay nine times as much—three hundred and sixty scillings."

The crowd murmured applause, but Cnut silenced it.

" The laws we make, the laws we must obey," he said.

There were many men who admired Cnut truly for his great and noble qualities, but around him, as around all monarchs, were some who flattered him so as to get favours for themselves and their relations. He was a

man of fine character, but he belonged to a superstitious age. When his followers would whisper in his hearing, "He is a god among men: there is nothing he cannot do," a sense of elation would steal over him. He felt that in him, a Christian, ran the blood of the old heathen gods. Who could say but that the forces of nature might be subdued by him? In his wiser moments, however, he saw the folly of the adoration to which he was subjected.



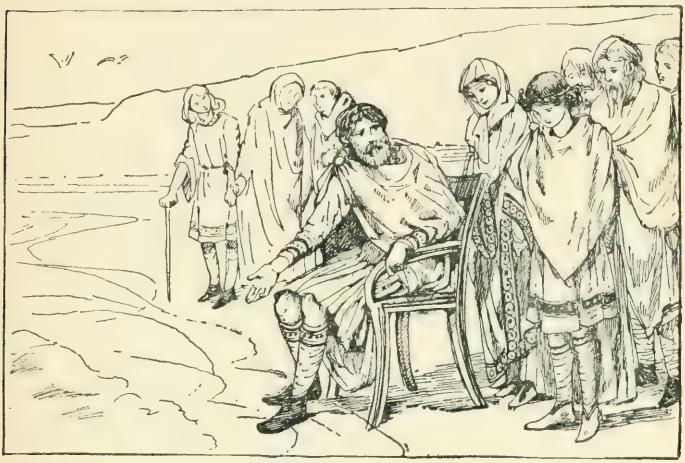
Anglo-Saxon Vase

He was a devout Christian and he held two saints in special reverence, St Edmund and St Alphege, both of whom had been done to death by the Danes. He spent his money lavishly, giving it to the churches and assisting the monasteries. He was deeply touched by music. One day as he was being rowed up the river towards Ely he heard floating on the breeze the beautiful chant of the monks at evensong. Then he joined in the singing and sang a verse which he made up on the spur of the moment:

> "The Ely monks sang clear and high
> As King Cnut was passing by.
> Row near the door and hear them sing!
> Cried to the knights Cnut the king!"

It was perhaps the contrast between the harshness of his youth and the deepening sweetness of his character as he grew older that made people think of him as something divine. He knew the limitations of man's power and he wished to teach his courtiers a lesson.

One day he took them to the edge of the sea and told them to place his chair within a few feet of the water. The tide was coming in, the little waves were breaking gently on the beach, the ripple of the pebbles drawn back by the current sounded in his ear. His gaze was fixed far out to the horizon, while thoughts of the limitless ocean, that seemed to have been there from



Cnut and his Courtiers

eternity, and of the brief life of man, passed through his mind. Then in clear tones he spoke :

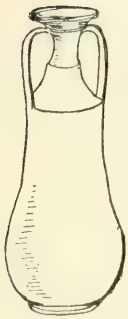
" I am thy lord, O sea ! This island against which thou dashest is mine. Stay thy waves and do not wet the feet of thy lord and master."

The sun was setting in the west, the little waves came creeping up on the beach, the salt spray wetted the king's mantle, the tide did not stay in its course. Cnut sat there till he was drenched with water. Then, seeing the tide was just on the turn, he drew back,

and standing on the dry ground, he spoke to his astonished courtiers:

"Thou seest how weak is the power of kings. Honour Him only whose everlasting laws the earth, the heavens, the sea, obey."

His mind in a flash was illumined with the thought of the littleness of man. It is said that from that day he never wore his crown but placed it on the image of the crucified Christ at Winchester.



Glass Bottle (Anglo-Saxon)

A little time after this he went on a pilgrimage to Rome. It was a journey with a twofold purpose. He wished to arrange for the marriage of his daughter Gunhild with one of the princes of Germany. He wished also to see the Pope and to make acknowledgment of his sins. When he was away he wrote a letter to his people in England which shows what a high ideal filled his soul. He describes the gifts that the Emperor Conrad had given him, gold and silver vessels and gorgeous clothing. He relates how he has discussed with the Pope the great difficulties that English pilgrims encounter who make the journey to Rome, and he concludes with a fine passage, in which he tells his people of his vow to God "to govern my life henceforth by rectitude, to rule my people and my kingdom justly and piously, to observe equal judgment everywhere; and if through the intemperance and negligence of my youth, I have done what was not just, I will endeavour, hereafter, by God's help to amend it."

This great king died at Shaftesbury on 12th November 1035.


CNUT left England at peace. He bequeathed his northern kingdom to his three sons, Sweyn, Harold and Hardicanute. Sweyn was to rule in Norway, Harold in England, and Hardicanute in Denmark. The English people were by no means satisfied with this arrangement, and many of them wished to elect Hardicanute, the son of Cnut and Emma, rather than Harold, who was illegitimate. At first the difficulty was settled by dividing the kingdom between them. But Hardicanute soon went over to his own kingdom of Denmark, and as he did not return, Harold became King of England.

His only distinction seems to have been that he was light of foot, and he was known as Harefoot in consequence. He was an unworthy man, and one of his evil deeds was considered terrible even in his own day, when human life was not valued as it is now. He was jealous of his stepbrother Alfred, Ethelred's son, for he saw in him a rival to the throne. Alfred was living in Normandy with his brother Edward, and Harold pondered how he could persuade him to come to

England. At last he had a brilliant idea. He decided to send a letter as though it came from Emma, Alfred's mother, inviting him to England. Alfred was quite taken in by the device. He came over and was met by Harold's men, and conducted with his small band of followers to Guildford. There his retinue were nearly all murdered, and Alfred, knowing he was trapped, was taken on to the Isle of Ely. A mock trial was held, and

**The body of Harold Harefoot found in the Thames**

Alfred was condemned to have his eyes put out. This brutal torture was inflicted on him, and death mercifully put an end to his suffering. It was said that Earl Godwin was a party to the crime.

We need not dwell long on the short reign of Harold, for there was no event in it that largely influenced the making of England. The king was a man of no scruples, and he despised the Christian religion. He liked to show his contempt for it by cantering past the churches, dressed for hunting, as the people went into them on Sundays. He hunted every day of the week

as well. When he died his brother Hardicanute was elected. This king was furious with Harold for taking the whole kingdom, and as he could not revenge himself in life he revenged himself in death. He dug up his

Ulfr and Godwin

brother's body and flung it into the Thames. People on the river bank noticed the floating corpse and they took a small boat and brought it to land.

"'Tis some foul play," said one.

"Nay; 'tis the body of King Harold. Who has treated him thus?"

Though he had been hated they gave him reverent reburial in the church of St Clement Danes. A church in the Strand now stands on the site where Harold was buried, and still bears the same name, reminding us of those far-away days when St Clement Danes was a country church, in a suburb of London, largely inhabited by Danes.

Hardicanute was no better than his brother. He was a savage and intemperate youth, and his death was a fitting end to his life. He drank too much at a wedding feast and died of the effects of it.

While these unworthy sons of Cnut played their small parts one man kept in view the important policy of a united England—this was Godwin.

Little is known of his parents, but it is said that they were obscure people, and that Godwin rose from a very humble position.

There is an interesting legend of his early days which is given in an old document, the Knytlinga Saga. It tells how Ulfr, a Danish chieftain who came with Cnut to England, had fought at the battle of Skorstein, and in eager pursuit of the vanquished English he lost his way in the depth of a wood. After wandering some time he met a youth taking the sheep to pasture. He asked him his name.

"Godwin," was the reply.

"Canst thou direct me to Cnut's ships?" inquired Ulfr.

"'Tis a long and dangerous journey. Our people hate the Danes. If they but knew of yesterday's defeat no Danish warrior would be safe," replied Godwin.

Ulfr drew a beautiful golden ring from his finger

and offered it. The youth looked at it for some time, and at last said :

" I will guide you to your friends but I will not accept your ring. If I succeed reward me as you please."

He then took Ulfr to his father's cottage, where they gave him of their best, and he stayed till it was dark. Then Godwin saddled two horses and brought them to the door. Ere they rode away Godwin's father, recognising the danger his son would be in should he return, anxiously begged Ulfr to use his influence to get the boy admitted into the royal household.

Ulfr promised to see to the lad's fortunes, and the two rode through the night to the Danish ships. The next morning Ulfr told Cnut how he had been aided by Godwin, and added that he intended to treat the youth as his own son. He was as good as his word, and in due course he gave him his own sister, Githa, to wife.

Whatever may have been the truth of Godwin's rise to fame he was now a very rich man, the ruler of a large part of England (Sussex, Kent and part of Wessex), and, indeed, the leading man in the kingdom. He fought well and had commanded troops with skill, but he was not a soldier at heart. He was a statesman and, like many another English statesman, was not an ecclesiastic. He was, as I have told you, suspected of having a hand in Alfred's death, and the accusation hung as a shadow over his entire life. It is probable that he knew of the plot to kill the unhappy youth and had not done anything to prevent it, but it is only fair to him to say that he swore not once but many times that he had had no hand in the crime.

Hardicanute meant to call Godwin to account for his share in this base treachery, but the earl had no intention

of having the episode investigated. He was a good judge of character, and knew how to pacify the young king. He gave him a magnificent vessel, finely gilded and rowed by eighty men equipped in armour. Each of them wore a heavy golden bracelet, which became the property of the king and amounted in value to a large

Edward the Confessor

sum of money. Thus Godwin hoped Alfred's death would be forgotten.

After Hardicanute's death there was great difficulty in deciding who should be king. The worthless sons of Cnut had sickened the people of Danish rulers, and they longed for one of the Anglo-Saxon dynasty. There was still in exile in Normandy Ethelred the Rede-less' other son, Edward. Godwin ardently espoused his cause, and he was summoned to the throne of England. At heart Edward was a monk and more fitted for

the cloistered life than to be ruler in those difficult days.

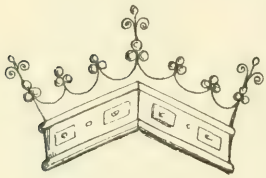
He was a strong contrast in appearance to his barbaric half-brothers. To begin with, he was a much older man when he came to the throne. His face was long and deeply lined, his hair wonderfully fair, and he had a delicate complexion. He loved to wear white, the emblem of purity, and he would often dress in a white mantle bordered with gold, and ride a white horse, when he went abroad among his people. England, though the land of his birth, was to him a land of banishment. He loved Normandy and the Norman people, and he felt a shrinking from the uncouth English thegns and ceorls over whom he was to rule. With him he brought a large Norman following, and grievous results were destined to ensue from the coming of these people.

Edith

Earl Godwin had eight children, and was very ambitious for them as well as for himself. His sons were Sweyn, Tostig, Wulfnoth, Leofwin, Gurth and Harold, and one of his daughters was Edith. Edward was unmarried, and so far as his own inclination went, had no desire for matrimony, but Godwin arranged a match between his daughter and the king, a very unhappy one, as it turned out. Edith was both beautiful and learned, and one who knew her tells how as a boy he had often seen her when "I visited my father at the

royal court. Often as I came from school she questioned me on letters and on my verse; and, willingly passing from grammar to logic, she caught me in the subtle nets of argument. I had always three or four pieces of money counted out to me by her maiden, and was sent to the royal larder for something to eat."

This match made Godwin more secure in his position as chief counsellor to the king. Edward was not a strong character, and this powerful and ambitious noble gradually took the whole government of the kingdom into his own hands. He was Earl of Wessex, his son Harold was Earl of East Anglia, and Sweyn, his eldest born, Earl of Oxford, Gloucester, Hereford, Somerset and Berks.

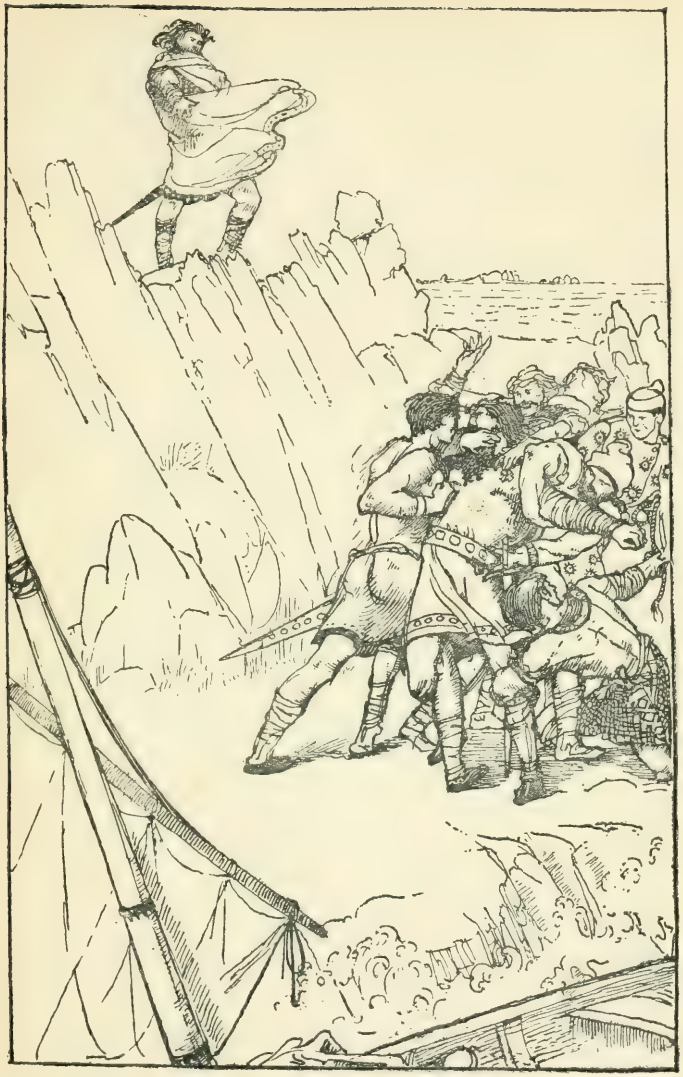


Anglo-Saxon Crown

Sweyn was a terrible man, a wild, barbarous Dane, of passionate temper, with little reverence for Christianity. He carried off the Abbess of Leominster and wanted to marry her. As she was a nun and vowed to a life of celibacy this was considered sacrilege. The people were indignant, the Church was furious. Was Sweyn thus to treat the sacred vows of these holy women? England became too hot to hold him and he fled to Flanders, a country which gave shelter to all the black sheep of Europe. The land over which he had ruled was confiscated and divided between Harold and his cousin Beorn.

Crown of Edward the Confessor

After three years in Flanders Sweyn thought it time



Sweyn and Beorn

to come back and see if he could not obtain forgiveness. Godwin pleaded his son's cause with the king, but the king was obdurate. Sweyn had not expected this rebuff, and in his wrath he vowed he would be revenged. His anger was strongest against Beorn, who shared his former earldom with Harold. He would rid himself of this one enemy at any rate.

He made friendly overtures to Beorn, and begged him to plead with the king on his behalf. Beorn was a man of generous nature and would have been glad to serve his cousin. He felt that Sweyn had already been deeply humiliated, and, though unwillingly, he consented to go with him to Sandwich, where the king was staying. He had been strongly advised not to trust Sweyn, and his heart misgave him, but he did not like to refuse. When they reached Bosham Sweyn begged him to come on board one of his vessels which was anchored there.

" I have come far enough," he replied.

Sweyn gave a signal and suddenly a dozen men rushed at Beorn and bound him hand and foot. Escape was impossible ; he was dragged to a boat and put to death.

The witena-gemot met for the purpose of deciding what should be the punishment of the murderer. With one accord they proclaimed this eldest son of the house of Godwin to be " nithing " (utterly worthless). It was the one word in the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary which branded a man for ever. The proud father bent his head with shame. Was this his first-born, this outcast, who, deserted by his followers, had to fly for his life ?

But, in spite of all, a year afterwards Godwin managed to secure his son's pardon from the king, and Sweyn returned to England and was restored to his earldom. The nobles and the people saw in this only an instance of

Godwin's almost supernatural power over the weak Edward. The foreigners at the court were especially indignant, for they knew that the influence of Godwin, wrongly exerted though it sometimes was, made for the interests of the English people and not for those of the Normans.

Godwin at last over-reached himself, and an apparently trifling incident was the cause of his downfall. The king's brother-in-law, Eustace, Count of Boulogne, came to visit England, and he arrogantly expected the townspeople of Dover to entertain his followers at the town's expense. They refused: there was a great deal of ill-feeling, which resulted in a skirmish between the count's men and the citizens, and many were killed and wounded. Eustace fled and made his way at once to Edward's court with his complaint. The king would only listen to his version of the fight. He sent for Godwin and told him to go at once and punish the townsfolk, for Dover was within his jurisdiction. Godwin very fairly insisted that the burghers should have a proper trial. He well knew what provocation they had received. The king turned on him in anger. "Go," he said, "and punish them: it is my command."

"Not without trial," said Godwin; "should they be guilty their lives and lands shall be forfeit, should they be innocent the count's men must answer for their insolence."

The king was angry. He summoned Godwin to appear before the Witan for thus disobeying his commands. All men who wield such power as Godwin have many enemies, and many are jealous of them.

He was at first proudly disdainful. Who dare

call him to account? He and his son, the hated Sweyn, brought together a considerable army. Edward, assisted by Leofric of Mercia, and the Earl of Northumberland, prepared to meet them. Leofric was a wise and just man, though jealous of the house of Godwin.

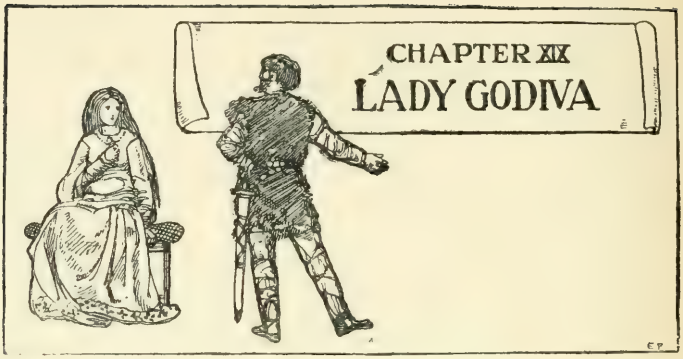
Threshing Grain

He hated the thought of more bloodshed in England, where so many of the best and bravest had met with violent deaths. He suggested a conference, and to this Godwin consented. The witena-gemot met. The remembrance that the sentence of banishment against Sweyn had been cancelled was still bitter in the minds of those present. Godwin saw that the tide of popular feeling had turned against him. He was not present

at the conference, and in his absence he and his family were declared outlaws, and given five days in which to leave the country. It was a wild and stormy night but the earl decided to sail at once for Flanders, for to be outlawed was a most serious thing, as any one upon whom such sentence was passed might be robbed, beaten, or even killed, without any protection of the law.

Edith, innocent as she was of any share in the quarrel, suffered with her family, for Edward made this excuse to rid himself of her, and sent her to a convent. Unpopular as the house of Godwin was at this time none had an ill word for her, none but the king.

At first the people were glad that Godwin had gone. He was too powerful, too self-seeking. Had he not placed his children in all the best positions in the kingdom ? But in his absence they found that, though he undoubtedly worked for his family, he worked for the English people as well. The hated Normans at court became even more powerful, and to the Norman clergy were given all the important posts in the Church.



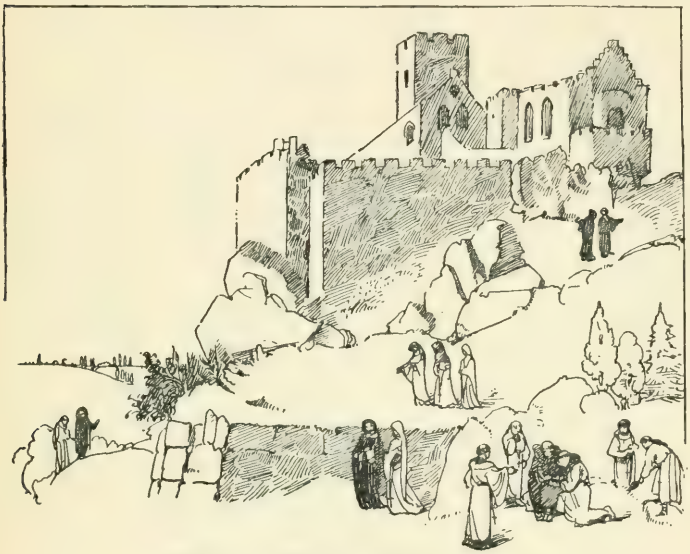

TWO noble earls shared with Godwin supreme authority in the kingdom. These were Leofric of Mercia and Siward the Stout. Leofric was in many ways a rival of Godwin's, and when that earl and his sons took up arms against Edward the Confessor, Leofric received a summons from the king to come to his help.

It is of the wife of Earl Leofric, however, that we have now to tell—the Lady Godgifu, or Godiva, as the name of the heroine of the ride through Coventry has come down to us.

All that is known of her with certainty can be told in a few words. She was a beautiful woman, with masses of glorious hair. Her one desire seems to have been to do good, and she spent her money lavishly in helping the poor and endowing monasteries. The Benedictine convent at Coventry was founded by her, and so generous was her bounty that the historian, William of Malmesbury, tells us that the very walls seemed too narrow to contain all the treasures which she

bestowed upon it. But it was not to Coventry alone that she was generous, for many other monasteries were helped by her.

The story of her ride is merely legendary, as it is not recorded in any MS. previous to 1237, when it was



**Monastery built by Edward the Confessor**

written down by Roger of Wendover. There may be some truth in it, but it is impossible to say.

The story goes that the people of Coventry were very heavily taxed by Leofric, and, as they dared not appeal to the earl, they came to Godiva and told her that they were almost starving because of the exorbitant penalties imposed on them.

"If they pay they starve," she pleaded with her husband.

" I cannot remit the tax," he answered.

" What can I do," she urged, " to help the people ? "

" You would not lift a little finger," he said, laughing, as they rode together through the pleasant country-side.

" There is nothing I would not do. I would die for them," she protested with spirit.

Lady Godiva

He smiled grimly. " Ride naked through the town of Coventry, and the people shall be free."

She did not answer but her eyes lit up with a generous resolve. He could not have asked her to do anything that at first sight seemed more impossible. But she had prayed to God to show her the way to help her people. She would not think of herself, she would ride through the town.

" You really mean it ? " she asked.

"I do not break my word," he answered with a laugh.

The sacrifice required of her was soon noised abroad, and the citizens resolved to show their appreciation of their noble lady's devotion by remaining in their houses, and closing their shutters, at the hour when she would be passing through the town.

Having made her arrangements, Godiva mounted her palfrey in the courtyard of the Hall, and letting her cloak slip from her, she rode with no covering save the glorious tresses that hung almost to her feet. So empty were the streets that she might have been riding through a city of the dead. One alone, overcome by curiosity, looked through the partly closed shutters of his window. We know him as "Peeping Tom," and, could he but see the hideous effigy of him that hangs to this day in the ancient town of Coventry, he would feel that he was richly punished.

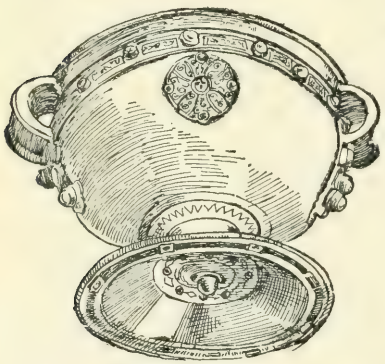
Having made a circuit of the town, Godiva returned to her lord to claim the fulfilment of his pledge. We may be sure that Leofric admired the courage of his lady, and we read that the people were freed from the heavy oppressions.

It is said, though there is but scant authority for the statement, that Godiva was the mother of Hereward. Mr Douglas C. Stedman adopts the theory in his vivid historical romance, "The Story of Hereward."

When Lady Godiva died she left a rosary of gems to be hung upon the neck of the image of the Virgin in the church at Coventry, and her body was laid to rest in one of its porches.

# CHAPTER XX
# THE RETURN OF GODWIN

EARL GODWIN was by no means content to remain in exile, and while abroad he was making elaborate plans to enable him to come back to England and rally his followers. Godwin, with Sweyn, Tostig and Gurth, were in Flanders. Harold was in Ireland, trying to get together a fleet. Godwin at last managed to secure forty ships. Harold, with a fleet of twelve, met him at Sandwich, and they sailed up the Thames to London. The people of southern England rejoiced, for Godwin was representative of the English freemen, and in their hearts they were more afraid than ever of the Norman influence. "Life or death with Godwin," the peasants shouted



**Chalice (Irish Celtic Work of Ninth Century)**

Edward the Confessor receiving Godwin's messenger

as they saw the fleet sail past their little homesteads.

Edward heard of this bold move on the part of the exiled family. He knew that in spite of his remission of the Danegelt, an iniquitous tax at first imposed by Ethelred to buy off the Danes, he was not popular. It was said that he had a dream in which he saw all the gold that he had wrung from those who could ill afford to part with it in a little heap, and over it scampered a host of demons in high glee. Edward showed no fear, however; he was ready to meet the rebellious earl in arms.

When the fleet of Godwin paused at Southwark the earl sent a messenger to Edward. The king had summoned a council of war, and was sitting with them in his palace at Westminster when the messenger arrived. There was much discussion as to whether they should receive him or not, but at last the voice of Siward the Stout prevailed. He hated the Normans. "He is our countryman," he said, "let us hear his messenger." The Normans in the assembly tried to shout him down: it was not only Earl Godwin and his mighty sons that they dreaded, but the English influence, the English spirit which they represented.

Edward, with kingly dignity, raised his hand, and hushing for a moment the angry voices of dissension, ordered that the messenger should be brought before him.

"What says thy master?" asked the chamberlain who introduced him.

"The earl has not come hither with his fleet to wage war against his own fellow-countrymen. He has come to beg of the king's mercy that he and his

sons shall be restored to their lawful possessions, and that the sentence of outlawry shall no longer run against them."

Edward, after much hesitation, consented that Godwin should be summoned to appear before the witena-gemot, to plead his own cause. The king and all the nobles were present on that occasion. The Normans dreaded the eloquence of Godwin, knowing how it could sway the assembly. And indeed they had good cause, for Godwin in a magnificent speech defended himself from the charges brought against him. After due deliberation the verdict was declared. Godwin was to be forgiven, Harold, Gurth — all the sons except Sweyn. The lawless, blood-stained Sweyn must never stand on English soil again. He had committed murder and sacrilege, and the curse of the Church was on him.

Sweyn as a Pilgrim in the Holy Land

As in this short story of the house of Godwin we shall not meet his name again I will tell you now of Sweyn's end, though it did not occur till some time later. Exiled from his family and his country, his mind turned to thoughts of his past life, and he became filled with deep remorse for his treatment of the abbess and for the treacherous murder of Beorn. His soul could find no peace, his sentence of outlawry from his kinsfolk and from the religion which he had learnt from his mother in his childhood was heavier than he could bear.

There were many such fierce souls in those days, who feared in a very literal sense eternal punishment. He decided to go on a pilgrimage to Palestine and visit the Holy Sepulchre. Reaching the Holy Land, he found in the atmosphere of the mystic East the spirit of forgiveness, and he turned his steps homeward. But his bold, roving life, subdued at last, was drawing to a close, and he died at a small village in Asia Minor.

Bronze Anglo-Saxon Pot

Godwin did not long survive his return to power. He had been failing for some time and one day, about a year later, while dining with the king, he fell in a fit and died. He was buried with great magnificence in Winchester Cathedral, and the people deeply mourned him. There is an old ballad [1] which tells the popular story of his death, but quite possibly it does the earl's memory much wrong:

"As says true history,
One day of Easter, at the great feast,
At dinner sat the king,
His counts and barons on the daïs;
Where Earl Godwin was sitting,
A servant served out the wine,
The cup of the king gently
Carrying over the pavement;
When he mounts the steps of the daïs,
His foot slips, which makes him ashamed;
He has but fallen on the ground;
But the other keeps him standing,
He holds his cup, at once rights himself,
Nor has mishap, nor hurts himself
By means of one foot which aided the other.

[1] From "La Estorie de Seint Eadward le Rei" (quoted by Luard).

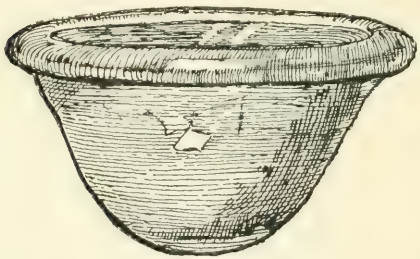
# THE RETURN OF GODWIN

Earl Godwin said to the king,
'So brings one brother to the other
Help, who was in danger.'
The king replied, who was pensive at it,
'So might mine (have helped me) had he been living,
If you earl, had permitted him.'
The earl changes and loses colour,

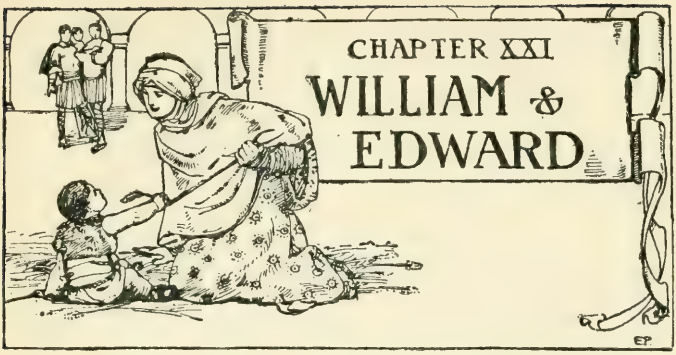
Godwin's fatal Oath

For he in truth had slain his brother ;
Of which when they had reminded him,
His heart tears him with remorse,
For he had the sin and wrong of it,
Nor could he hide it, or be silent, or play the hypocrite:
The fact makes him change colour ;
And he said, 'Ah ! king, good sire,
Much grief and anger hast thou caused me ;
Thou hast reproached me with the death of Alfred
Your brother ; for which I am not to blame :

I will prove it openly.
The mockery much troubles me.'
Now a morsel of bread he takes and lifts up,
And says, 'If I can enjoy
This morsel which thou seest me hold,
Which I will eat in the sight of you all,
That I am not to blame for this death
All at the table will see;
So I am either acquit or to blame for it.'
King Edward blesses the morsel,
And says, 'May God grant that the proof be true.'
The earl puts it in his mouth,
The morsel is fixed like a stick
In the middle of the opening of the throat
Of the traitorous felon glutton,
So that all at table see it;
Both his eyes in his head seemed to be,
His flesh blackened and became pale,
All are astonished in the hall:
He loses breath and speech
By the morsel which sticks fast.
Much power had the blessing
Which gave virtue to the morsel;
For aye was the murder proved.'



Glass Bowl



# CHAPTER XXI
# WILLIAM & EDWARD

SOME four and twenty years before Godwin's disgrace, Robert, the son of Richard the Good, Duke of Normandy, idly gazing from one of the windows of the castle at Falaise, where he lived, noticed a beautiful girl. She was laughing and chatting with her companions, and washing linen in the brook which flowed just outside the castle walls. She raised herself to stretch her limbs after stooping over the water; her bare arms flashed in the sunlight, her feet were whiter than the lilies that grew by the side of the stream. Presently she moved away. He could almost hear her bright laughter as she bade her companions good-day.

"'Tis time for father's dinner. I cannot tarry," she said, as they suggested a dance on the green grass before going home with their white burden of clothes.

"Who is yonder maiden?" asked Robert.

"Which one?" asked his companion. "There are ten to a dozen at the brook—comely and fair."

"I saw but one," said Robert musingly, "'tis the one that has left. It seems as though the sun had set."

"'Tis Arlette, the daughter of the tanner Fulbert," said his friend rather superciliously, for a tanner was considered a man of no importance.

"Fulbert. Where lives he?"

"Yonder by the beck, scarce half-a-mile from here."

"Arlette! Arlette! 'Tis music but to say her name."

Arlette

Day after day young Robert watched her, till at last he resolved to see her father.

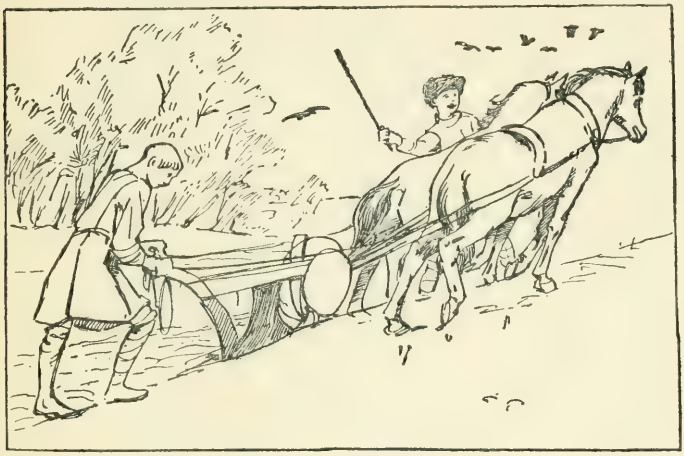
"Give me your beautiful daughter," he said. "I cannot live without her."

The father hesitated. It was a great temptation to give his daughter to the son of the powerful duke, but he knew that if he did so she would have no rights as a wife.

"I love her and I will cherish her," said Robert.

"You and yours will gain much if you give her to me."

The father consented, and that day the beautiful Arlette was taken to the castle. Robert's father died about this time and he became Duke of Normandy and was later known as Robert the Magnificent. He loved Arlette devotedly, and a son was born to them whom



Norman ploughing

they called William. It was said that as a baby of but a day old he seized the straw lying on the floor of the apartment in which he was born, and grasped it so firmly in his tiny hand that it was prophesied that he would be a great ruler, who would never let go what he had once grasped. Although the room was beautifully vaulted, and hung with tapestries, according to the custom of the times rushes or straw were the only covering for the floor.

Duke Robert had a brother, Richard, and the two

quarrelled as to who owned the Castle of Falaise. The matter was settled amicably at last and the brothers arranged to hold a banquet of reconciliation at Rouen. At this banquet Richard, after taking a deep draught of wine, was seen to be very ill, and in a few minutes he fell dead, wherefore Robert was suspected of having poisoned him. It was said that his pilgrimage to the Holy Land just after was made in deep remorse for the crime. It was a perilous journey, from which he might never come back, so before setting out he made his barons swear fealty to his little son, now only eight years old. It is supposed that Duke Robert went out of his mind when on this pilgrimage, for he recklessly flung about his treasures; he had his asses shod with silver, and indulged in other foolish extravagances. He reached Jerusalem a dying man, and his death took place shortly afterwards at Nicaea. So Arlette's son became Duke of Normandy while still a child.

William's ancestors were Danes who had established themselves in Normandy about a hundred years before he was born. They had married with the neighbouring French (or Franks), so that he was in truth half a Frenchman and half a Dane. He had much of the old viking spirit in him, strong, savage and revengeful. But he had a wonderful optimism which seemed to inspirit him at all the crises of his life.

Robert the Magnificent, William's father, was nephew to Emma, the wife of Ethelred the Rede-less. (Her second husband, as I have already told you, was Cnut.) This connection had far-reaching results, for William made it one of his claims to the English throne that Edward the Confessor was his first cousin once removed.

William of Normandy visits England

Edward, as we know, had been brought up in Normandy and loved it as he never loved his native country.

We must pass over the years of William's rule in Normandy and come to the time when he went on a visit to Edward the Confessor in England, for this, his first landing on English soil, was fraught with immense consequences to the English race. Lytton, in his fine novel of "Harold," describes him as he was when he came over. He wore a dark vest, edged with a deep band of embroidered gold, "leaving perfectly bare his firm, full throat—firm and full as a column of granite—a short jacket or manteline of fur, pendant from the shoulders, left developed in all its breadth a breast, that seemed meet to stay the march of an army; and on the left arm, curved to support the falcon (William was riding to the hunt) the vast muscles rose, round and gnarled, through the close sleeve."

He was little above middle stature, but his dignity of bearing was such that he always seemed a much taller man than he really was. His face was clean shaven—the English wore moustaches. His hair was short, thick and black, a great contrast to the fair locks of the English. While his mouth was small he had a very square jaw; he was one who showed in his whole bearing and on his countenance that he was a born leader of men.

An old chronicle tells us "William came from beyond sea with a meikle company of Frenchmen, and the king him received, and as many of his comrades as to him seemed good." It was an extraordinary thing for one prince to visit another in those days, merely for the sake of friendship, and the people suspected that William

had some scheme in his mind which brought him over

William with his Hawks

to be the guest of Edward the Confessor. The king entertained him royally, but we do not know exactly

what happened. Undoubtedly William coveted the fair land of England, and longed to change his title of Duke for that of King. There were many of his countrymen in England, many at the court of Edward. The king talked to him about the succession to the throne, for the Confessor was childless, but it is extremely doubtful whether Edward promised it to him or not. But even if he did, and this is quite possible, he had no power to dispose of the throne as if it had been a piece of jewellery. We have seen how, as king succeeded king, in every case it was necessary that the witena-gemot should be consulted. The witena-gemot at one time, as I have told, had the power of electing the king, for in an old manuscript we read that the council held in 785 directs that "lawful kings be chosen by the priests and elders of the people." As time went on their power seemed to be more that of recognition than of election.

William returned to Normandy laden with the presents which Edward had given him. There were Welsh hawks and splendid horses, a golden chain and embroidered robe, and many other things as mementoes of his first visit to England.

# CHAPTER XXII HAROLD

OF all Godwin's sons Harold, the second, was the greatest. With him was to stand or fall the fortune of the house. At the time of his father's death he was thirty-three, and the most popular man in England. Earl Godwin had settled that Harold should succeed him in the government of the West Saxons, the most important dignity, save that of king, in England. Harold's Earldom of East Anglia was given to Alfgar of Mercia.

Somewhere about this time, but the exact date is not known, an event happened which had far-reaching effects not only upon the life of Harold but upon the destinies of England. For some reason, some say by order of Edward, Harold went on a visit to Normandy. Probably he went on a pleasure expedition, for we see him in the Bayeux Tapestry starting on the expedition with dogs and hawks.

It is said that Edward, who was deeply superstitious, foretold that some disaster would result from the

journey. The Duke of Normandy had been his guest and he realised how unlikely he was to welcome Harold, a future rival for the throne of England.

The Bayeux Tapestry is the most valuable relic we have of these early days. The scenes shown are embroidered on a band of linen, which in the course of the centuries has become of a brownish colour. It was originally in a single piece, 214 feet long and 20 inches wide. So you must not think of it as a tapestry hanging from floor to ceiling, such as we see in Haddon Hall. It is embroidered in woollen thread, and tradition says that some of it is the work of Matilda, the wife of William the Conqueror. There are shown on it seventy-two scenes, which represent the conquest of England by the Normans. The series begins with Harold asking King Edward's permission to visit Normandy. The last scene of all is of the English put to flight at the battle of Senlac. This historical piece of embroidery belonged to the cathedral of Bayeux, and was used as a hanging on feast days. The tapestry can now be seen by anyone who in his travels comes to the little town of Bayeux, where it is carefully preserved.

Seal of Edward the Confessor

In one of the quaint pictures Harold is about to start. He has a hawk upon his fist, and dogs are running in front of him. To show he is going on a peaceful errand, he wears a hunting costume; if it were otherwise he would have been clad as a warrior. In another

scene he is depicted as embarking at Bosham carrying his hawk.

Harold had not proceeded far upon his voyage when a storm arose and the vessels were driven on to the coast of the country of Guy, Count of Ponthieu. There Harold and his men met with an inhospitable reception. All their belongings were taken from them

Harold embarks for France

and they were imprisoned. One of his followers managed to escape with a message to Duke William at Rouen, and the duke, who had his reasons for wishing to have Harold on friendly terms with him, arranged for his release. Thence Harold went to Rouen, and once in his power William made the most careful plans for securing his allegiance to him as future King of England. One day he spoke to Harold of his friendship for Edward the Confessor and of their early days together. He told him of Edward's promise of the

kingdom and begged for Harold's assistance. What was Harold to do ? He was in the power of the duke and he knew it. He consented, not considering a pledge forced from him in such circumstances as binding. He promised to fortify the Castle of Dover, to give his sister in marriage to one of the duke's nobles, and himself to marry William's daughter Adeliza.

Harold taking the Oath

A few days afterwards William ordered an assemblage of his nobles at Bayeux, and Harold was summoned with them. Under a cloth of gold the duke had placed a splendid casket in which, it is said, were the bones and relics of the saints.

" I desire thee before this assembly to reaffirm the oath which thou madest me," Duke William said.

Harold, taken unawares, laid his hand on the cloth of gold, and solemnly promised.

Then Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, William's half-brother,

stepped forward. He uncovered the casket, and said in stern tones:

"Harold, son of Godwin, you have sworn on the relics of our most holy saints."

Harold started back. What had he all unwittingly done? He knew how the more superstitious of the people would regard a vow made upon these relics, little as he considered himself bound by a pledge obtained by trickery.

Soon after this the earl returned to England.

Meanwhile the health of Edward was failing. He was looked upon as a saint even in his lifetime, and many legends were told of him.

One of them shows how entirely the people believed in the prophetic meaning of visions. One day the Confessor was going from the Minster Church at Winchester to the royal banqueting hall. His attendants did not speak to him for he was absorbed in his thoughts. Suddenly his face lit up with a smile, though he still seemed unaware of what was going on around him.

"What were you thinking of, my lord?" Earl Harold asked him as they sat at table.

"I seemed to see the seven sleepers of Ephesus," Edward replied, "and they turned from the right side to the left. I fear that presages evil on the earth."

Harold, a bishop and an abbot were very much struck by this episode, and they sent an envoy all the way to Constantinople, to the emperor. He had the tomb opened in the presence of the messenger and it was found that the seven sleepers had indeed changed their position—at least so the legend runs.

Edward got weaker and it was realised that he

would not for long rule over England. The people thought of him as of one who was holy beyond other men, and they felt more affection for him in his later years than ever before.

He had one great interest at this time. He had chosen a spot on which was to be reared a magnificent abbey. It was to be somewhat removed from the busy life of the town, but near enough for men and women to come and worship. This was the beginning of Westminster Abbey, which from the first was set apart for the burial and the coronation of kings. The sacred building grew apace and some days before the opening the Witan were specially summoned to meet. The king, wearing his royal apparel, met them at the court of Westminster, and they discussed the affairs of the kingdom. He looked very ill, and there were many whispered comments as to his feebleness, and heated controversy as to who should succeed him. Edward had but one longing left. He prayed that he might be present when the great abbey was dedicated to God. On the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28th December 1065), Westminster Abbey was consecrated in the presence of the Witan, but the king was not there. He sent in his place his wife, Edith, for whom in the closing years of his life he felt a tenderness he had never felt before.

English Lady with hawk

We can imagine the scene when, to the archbishop's exhortation, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory

Death of Edward the Confessor

shall come in," the beautiful building, beautiful in its simplicity of Norman arch and column, admitted a long procession of monks and clergy and all the nobility in England.

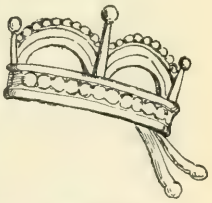
In the hearts of the men and women who knelt there for the first time was a feeling of vague unrest. The king was sinking—who should be king in his stead? So keen was the anxiety that the members of the Witan did not return to their homes. They knew they must be ready to meet again at the shortest notice.

In the Painted Room in Westminster Palace the Confessor lay dying. In an antechamber were assembled some of the great thegns, the leading clergy, and many of the king's Norman friends. By the bedside of the king was Edith, near at hand were Harold and Archbishop Stigand. Edward was unconscious, and as the onlookers listened they felt that every breath might be the last. He rallied for a short time, and gathering his ebbing strength, he uttered a woeful prophesy as to the troubles which were coming upon England. Those near him did not interrupt, though they wanted an answer to one question only: What were his wishes with regard to the succession? He lapsed into unconsciousness once more, but when he revived they made this last request: "Who shall be king in your stead?"

In the deep silence that fell on them they heard his voice for the last time, "To thee, Harold, my brother, I commit my kingdom."

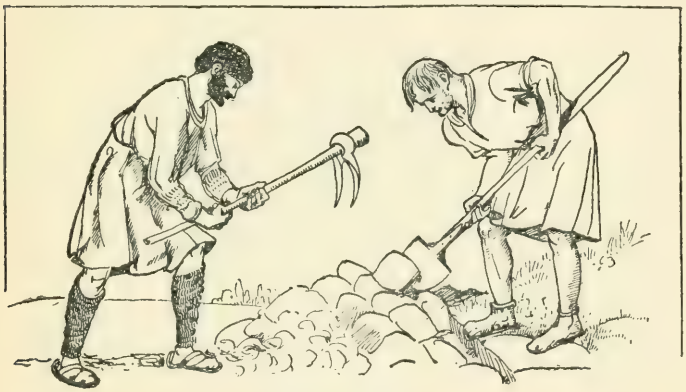
Edward was the first monarch to be laid to rest in the Abbey of Westminster. On the same spot and on the same day the Witan met to choose a successor, though the choice was a foregone conclusion. Before

all the assembly Harold was chosen, and the people shouted with delight, "Harold our King." The royal crown of England was placed on his head. The prayer of consecration was read, and Harold promised "to preserve peace to the Church of God and to all Christian people, to forbid wrong and robbery to men of every rank within his realm, to enforce justice and mercy in all his judgments, as he would that God should have mercy upon him." And all the people said "Amen."



Harold's Crown

He was king, as Mr Freeman says, "not by the mouldering titles of a worn out dynasty, not by the



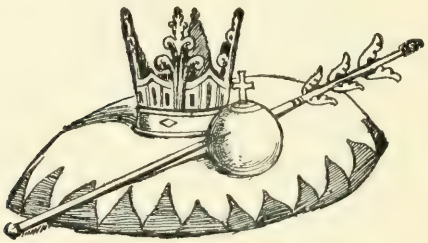
Field Labourers

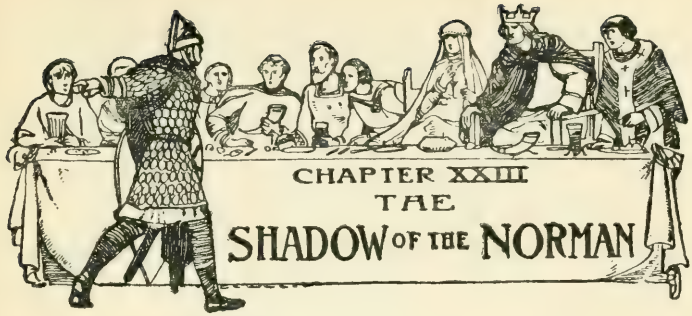
gold of the trafficker or the steel of the invader, but by the noblest title by which one man can claim to rule over his fellows, the free choice of a free people."

Harold at once set to work to govern his people well. He reformed certain laws which pressed hardly on them,

he was a good friend to the Church and gave largely to the monasteries. He set his people an example of a man single-minded for the good of his country. He was the first and last king who reigned solely because " he was the best and bravest among his people."

There was no longer any question of two rulers in the kingdom, though powerful earls held sway under him. Through the storm and stress of all the long years of cruel war, the country had learned, that if England was to hold her own among the nations of the world, her people must be united under one ruler.





## CHAPTER XXIII
## THE SHADOW OF THE NORMAN

THERE were many Normans in England at the time of Edward's death, and one of the duke's adherents immediately summoned his swiftest messenger.

"Ride as for your life to Dover, let no obstacle hinder you, take boat thence to Normandy, and seek immediate audience of the duke in Rouen. Should you not find him there follow him wherever he may be. There is not a moment to be lost. Tell him that Earl Harold who swore fealty to him has usurped the throne of England."

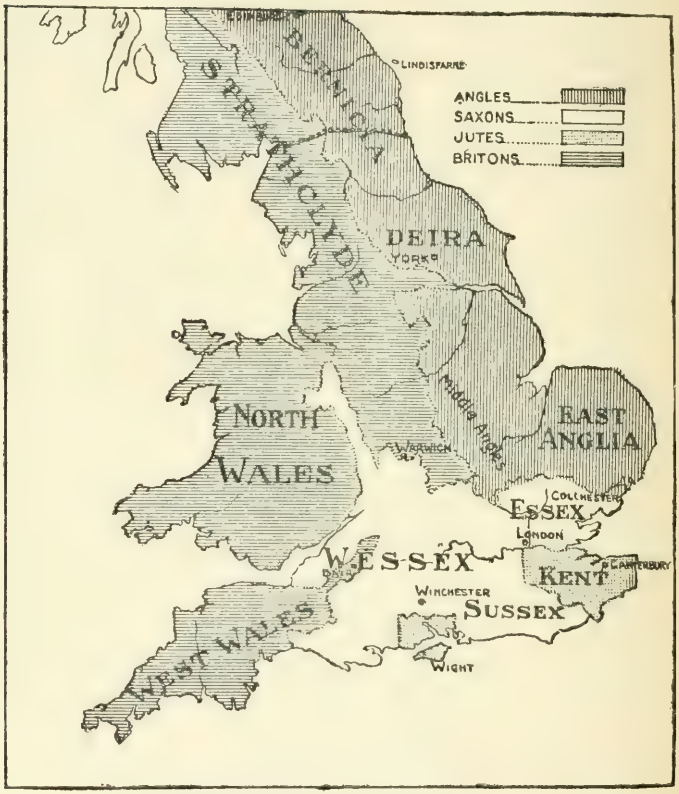
The messenger hastily got together a few necessaries for the journey and rode forth. Worn and travel-stained he reached the Norman court. He did not pause even to brush the dust from his clothing, but after a loud knocking at the castle gates, he bade the porter take him into the presence of the duke.

"Who are you that you should demand immediate audience?" asked the irate porter. "The duke is hunting to-day."

"'Tis news from England," gasped the man.

"He is somewhere in the forest," said the porter reluctantly; "he rode forth at noon."

The messenger spurred on his horse in the direction indicated, and a few minutes later he heard the sound of




England in the midst of the English Conquest

merry voices and laughter. He dismounted and tied his horse to a tree.

Above the hum of voices he heard the bold tones of William. He recognised him, for he had seen

him when he was riding with King Edward in England.

The duke was standing erect, in the act of drawing an enormous bow. The messenger in his haste pushed aside several of the courtiers who stood round.

"Who is this unmannerly fellow that thus rudely comes before us?" asked the duke.

The messenger murmured a word and the duke drew him aside.

"Edward of England is dead; Earl Harold reigns."

"Earl Harold!" The veins stood out on the duke's forehead as he uttered the words. He dropped his bow to the ground and paced up and down. His soul was possessed with anger and baffled ambition. The sudden change in him appalled his followers. They were quick to perceive the import of the tidings which had so affected him. "What will the duke do?" they said one to another. But an hour ago he had spoken with gay confidence of his future inheritance.

The Messenger from England

In the distance the silver waters of the Seine flowed peacefully to the sea. Through the leafless trees of the forest the winter's sun shone brightly. All eyes were

upon the duke. None dared approach him. He strode quickly towards the river, where, with a gesture, he commanded the boatman to ferry him across. Then he went straight to his private room in the castle and sat brooding in silence. The name of his rival was ringing in his ears. England—the silver-coasted isle—King of England! How he had worked and striven to be king. He had talked over the weak Edward and tricked the valiant Harold, only to be ignored in the end.

Duke William and Fitz-Osbern

News of the duke's despondency was taken to the chief baron, Fitz-Osbern, his half-brother. William heard the door of his room open and looked up with a scowl to wave aside the intruder.

"We know the news; 'tis useless to hide it from us. It is said in Rouen that Edward of England is dead and Harold has been chosen king."

"'Tis said in truth," replied William. "Earl Harold, who swore on the bones of the holy saints, has usurped the throne."

"Then it is no time for anger—'tis time for action."

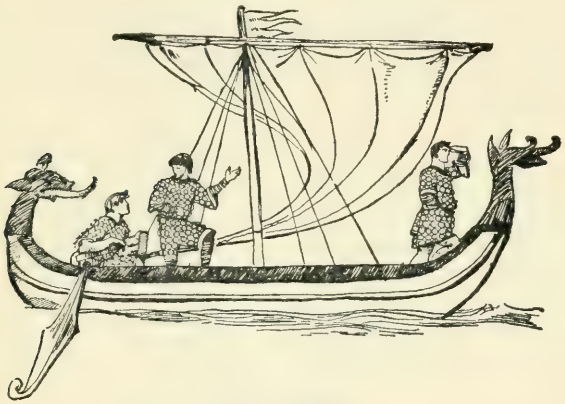
The duke's face brightened as he heard these words, "The perjurer shall be dethroned! He has sinned against Holy Church."

"England will yet be yours," went on Fitz-Osbern. "Your trusted knights will not fail you."

William roused himself, his face took on a look of stern determination. "'Tis said I will not let go what

I have once grasped. I will send to the King of England "—his lip curled as he uttered the last words— "I will say to him : 'Upon the relics of the saints didst thou swear fealty to me. Fulfil now your oath.'"

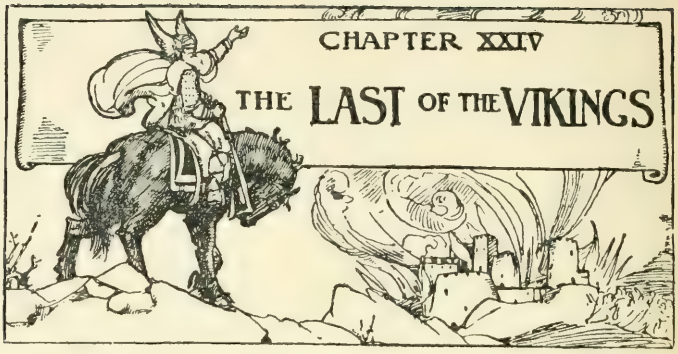
An envoy was duly sent and on his arrival at the English court he was received by Harold.



Norman Boat

"Tell the duke that the oath that I took was forced upon me, wherefore my conscience is clear. I cannot wed the duke's daughter, for Edith is my queen. I cannot send my sister to be married to a Norman duke, for she is dead. The people of England have chosen me their king. I have been anointed, the crown has been placed on my head. I cannot deny the will of my people."

Harold turned to his queen, who was with him. "It is life or death for England," he said.



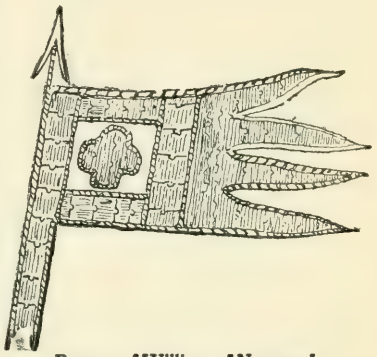

WILLIAM immediately began to make ready for the invasion of England. He did not for a moment suppose that Harold would resign in his favour, but he wished to make the most that he could of the oath that he had extorted from him, for thus he would get a religious sanction for what he was doing. He would get the approval of the Pope; he would work on the superstitions of the people and make them feel that war with England was a holy war.

He immediately ordered that ships should be built for this expedition. Other vessels were built for his great lords, who had promised to help in this way. The Bayeux Tapestry gives a representation of the trees of the forest being hewn down by enormous axes, and shipwrights making planks of the wood, and building vessels to carry over the followers of William the Norman to England.

Meanwhile another claimant to the throne had not been content to accept Harold's accession. Tostig, Harold's brother, who was always jealous of his power,

went to Norway and urged on Harold Hardrada the advisability of forcing his claim to the throne as Cnut had done.

Harold Hardrada stands out among the almost mythical heroes of Norway—a giant in stature, some said he was eight feet in height, and of fine proportions, he seemed a god among men. His beautiful golden hair hung over his shoulders, he wore the fair beard and moustache of northern nations, his eye was piercing, his spirit unconquerable. He was the last of the vikings. Had not Cnut been ruler of Norway, Denmark and England? he asked himself. Should he have less power? Tostig found him a ready listener and his assurances of the certainty of success and of the large numbers of people who would rally to him directly he landed, were hardly required to make Hardrada decide to try his luck.



Banner of William of Normandy
(Bayeux Tapestry)

On the 8th May 1066 a portent appeared in the sky; a comet that seemed all aflame shone for seven days. It was as large as a full moon. One of the most amusing illustrations in the Bayeux Tapestry is called "People wonder at a Star." Harold is seen, with his head bent in despondency, for he realises that the people take it as a sign of a coming change of ruler in England. That historical comet has been identified with Halley's comet, so named after the great astronomer.

We may feel sure that Hardrada, seeing it light up

the northern sky, was not disconcerted. It was in the days of the comet that news came to Harold that Tostig and his Norwegian ships were harrying the south coast. Harold immediately sent ships to pursue him, but Tostig escaped to the Orkneys, and there waited for Harold Hardrada, who came with a great fleet of three hundred vessels. He was so sure of success that he brought with

Duke William builds Ships

him his wife and daughters, and a great deal of his wealth. When he had left them in the Orkneys he sailed with Tostig round the coast of England and landed in Cleveland, Yorkshire. The village people looking out to sea saw in the distance this large fleet bearing down on their little settlement. They were terrified, for all men feared the ravages of the Danes, and gathering together their household belongings, they fled for their lives. The Norsemen landed without opposition, took anything they could find, set fire to the huts, and marched triumphantly on Scarborough, hoping to

find there as easy a conquest. But the citizens were of sterner stuff and they decided to defend their walled town. Hardrada did not wish to waste time in laying siege to Scarborough, and he thought of an easier plan of subduing it. He ordered his men to climb a hill that overlooked the town. They were told to collect all the

People marvel at a Star

wood they could find, make an enormous fire, and throw the burning faggots on to the houses. In a few minutes Scarborough was in flames. The people fled from their homes only to be killed in the streets by the Norsemen.

The invaders marched on to York, which capitulated, and Hardrada made his camp at Stamford Bridge. He and Tostig were in high good humour, for everything seemed to be turning out just as they had hoped. They were drinking and feasting

when Hardrada noticed a cloud of dust in the distance.

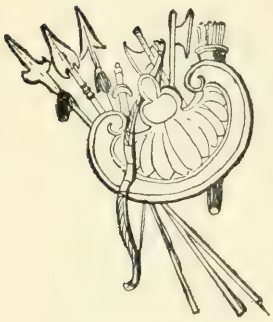
"What is it?" he asked.

"Some of the men of York seeking our protection," replied Tostig indifferently.

No sooner were the words out of his mouth than the truth flashed upon them. It was Harold and the army of Wessex.

"To arms!" cried Hardrada.

He formed his men in a circle, shield touching shield. In the centre of the circle was placed the banner of the Norsemen, The Ravager of the World. Tostig took up his position in front of his own standard of the Northumbrian Lion. Hardrada, mounted on a coal black horse, inspirited his soldiers, chanting triumphantly songs of war.



Danish Arms

Harold arranged his ranks in triangular formation, and all was ready for battle. But his warlike ardour was damped by the thought that his brother and he should thus be in arms against one another. He sent a messenger to seek out Tostig, and the envoy rode up to the enemy's ranks calling for the earl in a loud voice.

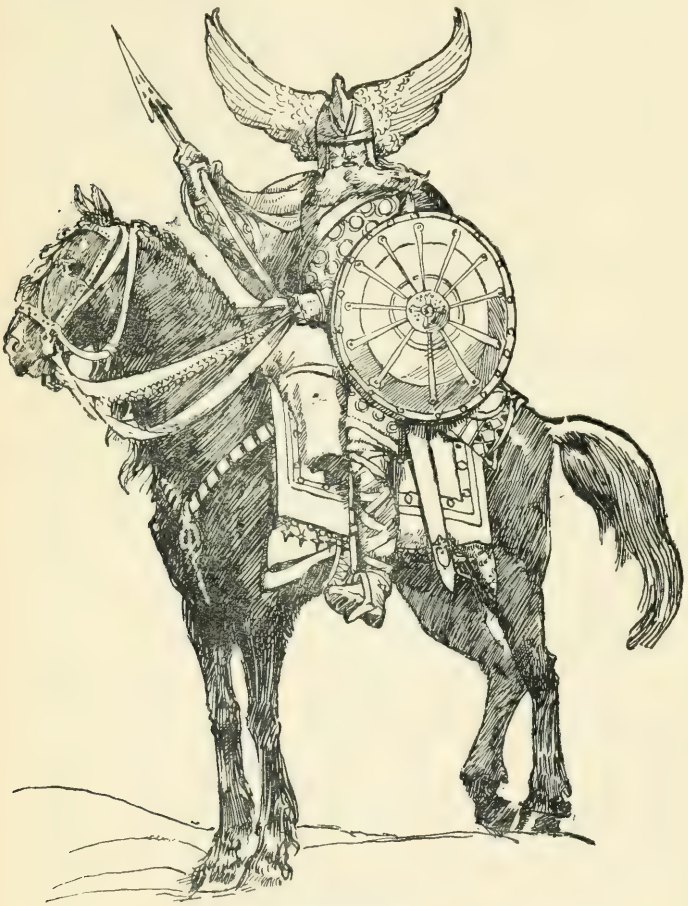
Tostig rode forward. "What message do you bring?"

"The king, thy brother, would have thee yield allegiance to him, and he will give thee back the earldom of Northumberland."

"And what shall be given to my brother in arms?"

"Seven foot of ground."

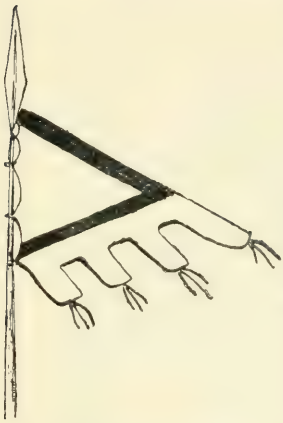
"Then let us make ready for battle. I do not betray my leader."



Harold Hardrada

The armies were drawn up on each side of the river

Derwent, where it was crossed by a wooden bridge. For some time one of the Norsemen single-handed guarded the bridge, and killed forty soldiers. At last he fell, pierced from beneath by a spear driven through the planks of the bridge. The opposing army crossed at once, and soon English and Norsemen were in hand-to-hand combat. It is but another terrible scene of slaughter like many that had gone before: dead and dying men, groans of agony mingled with the exultant cries of battle, mutilated bodies lying huddled one on top of the other, men fighting over the corpses of their comrades and trampling them under foot, the lust of battle in their eyes. Hardrada's massive figure was conspicuous above the heads of his soldiers, a mark for many an arrow. Man after man he sent to his doom, but at last the giant form was seen to swerve, an arrow pierced him through the throat and he fell. "Hardrada is dead!" A cry of joy went up from the men of Wessex, a cry of woe from those who had been led by the gallant viking. Tostig's voice was heard rallying his men, urging them to avenge the death of their king. "Victory or death!" he was in the thickest of the fight. He was deaf to a second messenger sent from his brother urging reconciliation.



Saxon Banner (Bayeux Tapestry)

"His blood be on his own head," said the warrior, as he rode back from his fruitless errand.

In a burst of sunshine Tostig was seen standing under

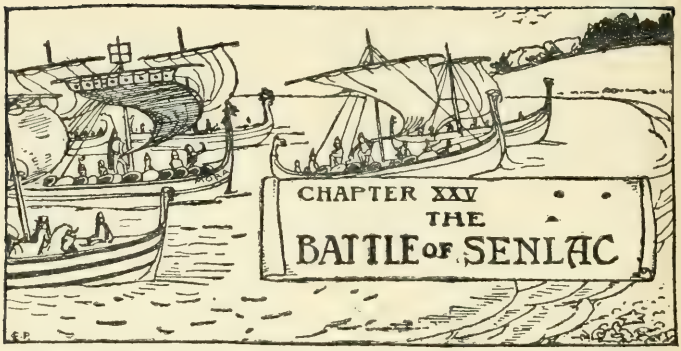
the Norse banner, The Ravager of the World. An English bowman took careful aim, the arrow reached its mark, and Tostig fell at the foot of the standard. The Norsemen knew that their cause was lost.

Thus ended the last encounter between Norse and English in England.

Harold ordered that his brother's body should be sought for. It was late in the night before the searchers found it and it was so terribly maimed that he was only recognised by a mark on his body.

Harold magnanimously allowed Olaf, Hardrada's son, the remnant of the army and the ships, to leave the island, on condition of their giving hostages, and promising never again to set foot on English soil.

When this was settled the great feast of victory was held. The king sat at the head of the table. On one side was his brother Gurth, on the other Hako, the young son of Sweyn, who was a devoted adherent of his uncle, the king. They drank great flagons of ale, they became elated with wine. They sang songs of victory and scoffed at the idea of the Normans landing in England. When the revelry was at its height a messenger entered. He could hardly hold himself up for weariness, his face was ghastly in its pallor. Waiting for no introduction, he strode up to Harold's seat and cried out, "Duke William has landed with a mighty force." An ominous silence fell on all.




WHEN last we saw Duke William he was getting ready his fleet. Meanwhile he had had some difficulty in overcoming the scruples of certain of his nobles, who were not anxious to join him in the war with England. They were only bound to aid him in his own country of Normandy, and did not wish to serve him in a war of aggression. But William, by offers of rich prizes in England, and by many underhand methods, had secured their co-operation, and an army of between six and seven thousand men was collected for the conquest.

Many delays had occurred, and it was not till the 27th September 1066 that the Normans embarked at St Valéry. The duke's ship, which we see depicted on the Bayeux Tapestry, is called the *Mora*. It was given to him by his spouse, Matilda, and in the stern of the vessel was placed an effigy of their small son, Rufus, holding aloft a banner and blowing a bugle. The night was stormy and the duke lit a lantern on his ship and commanded that all the other vessels should likewise

bear a light. The *Mora* soon outdistanced the other ships, wherefore the duke became anxious and

Norman Archer

ordered one of his sailors to the look-out. The man brought word after a time that there was nothing in

sight, and the duke then ordered anchor to be cast. After breakfast the sailor was bidden again to make observations, and this time he came back with the cheering news :

" I see a forest of spears covering the waves."

A blare of trumpets greeted the *Mora*, and, having found its leader, the mighty fleet pursued its way with a fair wind to Pevensey Bay, into which it sailed at nine o'clock in the morning. The little town of Pevensey had been built near the site of the ancient Anderida.

Harold's fleet, which had spent the summer months on the look out for the expected invasion, had vanished. During the summer the fyrd had been watching the south coast, but the men had become impatient at being kept so long from their homes, and they had only recently been disbanded. Therefore there were none to oppose the landing of the Normans. First the archers, bow in hand, with a quiverful of arrows at their side, came on shore. They were dressed in short tunics, and were ready for action had there been any to oppose them. The knights landed next, fully armed, with their long lances and double-edged swords, and they immediately mounted their war horses. Then came the carpenters with great axes in their hands. William had ordered that the ships should convey wooden castles in sections, ready for putting up on English soil. Then followed the smiths and other camp followers. Last of all came the duke. As he stepped on shore he was seen to stumble and fall.

" An ill omen ! " cried the soldiers.

" Nay," he said, holding up his hands full of sand. " By the splendour of God, I have taken possession of

England with both my hands—and what is mine is yours."

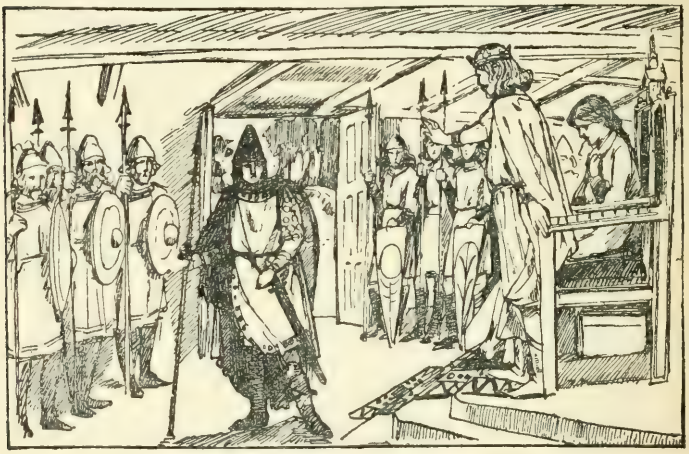
On the 29th September the army marched along the seashore in the direction of Hastings. Here one of the

Harold prays for Help in the coming Battle

wooden castles was put up. William immediately arranged for parties of the soldiers to go on plundering expeditions, for a great deal of provender was wanted to feed such an enormous body of men and horses. The country people, terrified, fled from their houses, which were set on fire by the Normans. The villagers

saved what they could and sought shelter in the churches.

News of the landing had, as you know, already reached Harold, and he was marching with all speed to London with the remnant of his valiant huscarles who had fought so gallantly at Stamford Bridge. On the way he was joined by soldiers from the midlands and



Harold indignantly refuses to surrender the Crown

southern parts of England. The men of Kent joined him, men who held it a high privilege to be allowed to strike the first blow in battle; the men of London, too, who were no less proud of having the right to be the king's body-guard.

It was the supreme hour of Harold's life. Having made all preparations for the march to Hastings he rode to Waltham accompanied by a few monks. He had founded an abbey there, and he went to pray that he might deliver England from the foreigner. In the dim

light of the Saxon church he threw himself before the altar and asked for forgiveness and help. He gazed up at the crucifix and those in the church thought they saw the figure on it bend towards him. They believed it to be an intimation to Harold that the last scene in his life was about to be played.

Duke William, more imperious than ever, now that he had safely disembarked, sent a message to the king calling upon him to surrender the crown. The duke made three proposals: first, that the dispute should be referred to the Pope, who should decide between them; failing this, that Harold should rule in England as William's vassal; or, thirdly, that the battle should be decided by single combat between the two leaders.

Saxon Warrior

Harold indignantly refused. "I will not surrender my crown, no foreigner shall come between me and my people's choice. My brave countrymen have a right to share in this struggle. It cannot be decided by single combat."

It seems certain that Harold was unwise in not delaying until he could gather together a larger body of troops. His brother Gurth urged him to remain in London, and not to take part in the encounter, for Gurth held the oath to William inviolate.

"Let me go," he begged; "I am not forsworn."

"I am the chosen of my people; I must lead them," replied his brother.

On the 11th October the English army marched out of London. All through the night they marched, for Harold hoped to be able to surprise the Norman duke as he had surprised Hardrada. When he reached the neighbourhood of Hastings he took up his position on the rising ground of Senlac, seven miles distant, to the north-east, but he did not attempt to attack that night, for the men were weary with their long tramp. All must be ready to meet the Normans as soon as possible.

If you have been to the quiet little town of Battle and seen the ruins of Battle Abbey, you will have seen there the high altar, which was placed on the very spot where Harold's standard was planted on the fatal day of Senlac.

Anglo-Norman Cap

The next day Harold spent in fortifying his position, and his arrangements were not completed till the evening of the 13th October, and the gallant sons of Godwin, Harold, Gurth and Leofwin, with Haco, the son of Sweyn, gathered together in Harold's tent to make final arrangements for the morrow. News was brought to them that the enemy greatly outnumbered them. Some ignorant spy had thought the Norman army to be mostly priests because they wore no hair on their faces and their heads were close cropped.

The Norman army spent the night in prayer and devotion. Each soldier in turn confessed and heard mass. In the *Roman de Rou*, a poem written at that time, from which much of the information here given has been taken, we read of a silver bell sounding, and of how at that sound all the soldiers came out from their huts and, kneeling lowly, were blessed by Odo of Bayeux,

as at the head of a procession of clergy, he passed through the camp.

It was far otherwise in the English camp, where was drinking and feasting and singing of merry songs. Some of the English had come with their leader from Stamford Bridge : they felt secure of victory.

The 14th October had been considered Harold's

Odo of Bayeux blessing the Norman Army

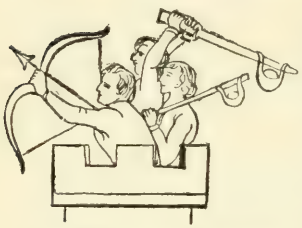
lucky day. It was his birthday, and early in the morning all was astir in both camps ; the men, refreshed by the sea breezes blowing over the downs, were eager for the battle. The duke commanded that his army should be formed into three divisions. In the front were to be the light infantry armed with arrows; behind these the heavily armed men on foot ; and behind them again the cavalry. Mounted on his magnificent charger, Bayard, the duke took up his position on a piece

of rising ground. Odo of Bayeux on a white charger, his surplice over his armour, was by his side, and behind him waved the banner consecrated by the Pope.

The soldiers cheered him lustily and one said : [1]

" You will not here see one coward ; none here will fear to die for love of you, if need be."

The duke answered, " I thank you well. For God's sake spare not ; strike hard at the beginning ; stay not to take spoil ; all the booty shall be in common, and there will be plenty for everyone. There will be no safety in asking quarter or in flight : the English will never love or spare a Norman. Felons they were, and felons they are, false they were, and false they will be. Show no weakness towards them, for they will have no pity on you. Neither the coward for running well, nor the bold man for smiting well, will be better liked by the English. You may fly to the sea but you can fly no further ; you will find neither ships nor bridge there ; there will be no sailors to receive you ; and the English will overtake you there and slay you in your shame. I have no doubt of the victory ; we are come for glory, the victory is in our hands ! "



Saxon Slingers and Bowman (from MSS.)

It was said that when the duke donned his armour he put on his hauberk the wrong way round. Again this was regarded as an evil omen, but William, ever ready of wit, would not hear of it. " It signifies," he said, " that the name of Duke shall be changed to that of King."

Harold and his soldiers were ready waiting for the

[1] Creasy's " Decisive Battles."

Norman attack. He too addressed his men, telling them they were fighting for England.

"Meanwhile the Normans," as we read in the *Roman de Rou*, "appeared advancing over the ridge of a rising ground; and the first division of their troops moved onward along the hill and across a valley. And presently another division, still larger, came in sight, close following upon the first, and they were led towards another part of the field, forming together as the first body had done. And while Harold saw and examined them, and was pointing them out to Gurth, a fresh company came in sight covering all the plain; and in the midst of them was raised the standard that came from Rome. Near it was the duke, and the best men and the greatest strength of the army were there."

The trumpets sounded. The murmur of many voices was in the air.

Taillefer, a strange, warlike figure, singing as he rode, had begged the duke's permission to be the first to engage. He rode forward throwing up his sword, catching it again, and still singing.

> "Chaunting loud the lusty strain
> Of Roland and of Charlemain,
> And the dead, who, deathless all,
> Fell at famous Roncesval."

A young English knight rode out to encounter him, and the youth fell dead, pierced by Taillefer's sword. Still singing, Taillefer challenged another, who came forth to meet him, and he, too, fell dead, but a third champion proved more than a match

for Taillefer, and he was the first Norman to fall that day.

The Normans now charged upon the English position, but to the cries of "Out, out" the English, armed with axes, drove them back. Again the Normans rushed forward, shouting "*Dex Aie!*" their battle cry, but the English defended their post well; with their lances they pierced the Norman hauberks, with their axes they hewed them down. For a moment it seemed as though the Normans were losing courage; but Odo of Bayeux, priest as he was, rode amongst them, inspiriting them. He did not strike a blow but he had weapons with which to defend himself if he were threatened. It was seen that Duke William was in difficulties, his horse had been killed under him, but calling on one of his knights to give him his steed, he remounted with all speed. The cry had gone up that the duke was dead. There was a moment of panic, and then William's voice was heard. He had thrown off his helmet, "I live, I shall never forgive a coward," he shouted.

Norman Spearsman

Finding that the assault was not succeeding as

They turned upon their pursuers

he had hoped, he decided that he must change his tactics.

Duke William was only spurred to greater endeavour by the reverses the Normans had so far suffered. He himself led the charge against the invincible English, who were beginning to give way.

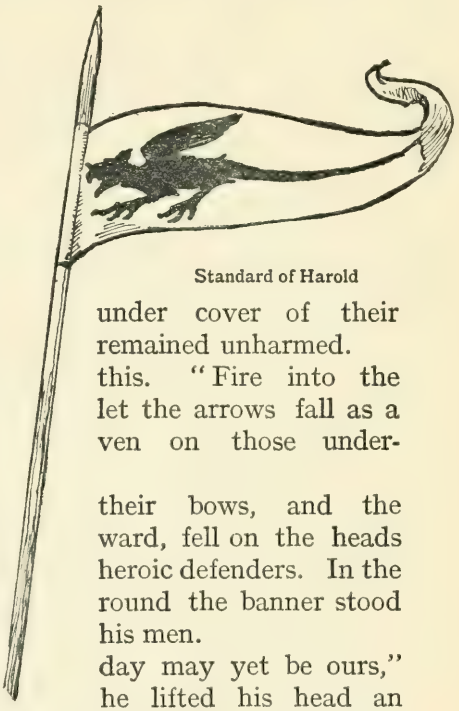
The English defended themselves well, and the duke saw he must get them to abandon their almost impregnable position, so he arranged a pretended flight. The English, forgetting the orders of their leader, could not resist following. This was the turning point in the battle. The Normans retreated slowly: the English jeered at them and cried, "Cowards, ye came hither in an evil hour, wasting our lands and seeking to seize our property, fools that ye were to come! Normandy is too far off, and you will not easily reach it. It is of little use to run back; unless you can cross the sea at a leap, or can drink it dry, your sons and daughters are lost to you."

English Slinger

But the Normans understood never a word, and little they cared. At last, having lured the greater part of the English out of their strong position, with loud shouts of "*Dex Aie! Dex Aie!*" they turned upon their pursuers, and a terrible hand-to-hand struggle followed, short but deadly. Gallant deeds were done on both sides; an English youth hewed down many of the Normans, and seemed invulnerable till a Norman baron felled him

to the ground. "*Dex Aie! Dex Aie!*" the shout went up ever louder and louder from the triumphant Norman throats, for the fortune of war had changed.

It was now three in the afternoon and the banner of Harold was still waving on the hill of Senlac, guarded by the valiant English, thinned in numbers but still undaunted. The Norman archers continued shooting flights of arrows at them, but with little effect, for under cover of their shields the English remained unharmed.



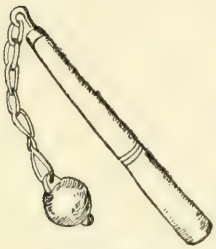
Standard of Harold

William noticed this. "Fire into the air," he cried, "and let the arrows fall as a judgment from heaven on those underneath."

The archers bent their bows, and the arrows, glancing upward, fell on the heads and faces of the heroic defenders. In the thickest of the fight round the banner stood Harold inspiriting his men. "Courage — the day may yet be ours," he cried, and even as he lifted his head an arrow flashed through the air and pierced his eye.

"Fight on!" he cried, "fight on!" though he lay on the ground in anguish. With his own hands he drew the arrow out, and broke it in two. With clenched teeth,

and subduing the cry of agony which would have risen to his lips, he raised himself, and with a last despairing cry, "Fight on!" he fell dead beneath his jewelled standard.



English Weapon

The sun had set in a deep red glow over Senlac—known also as Sanguelac, the Lake of Blood—but still the fight raged on. Gradually the enemy closed round Harold's standard, where Haco, too, was lying dead, his corpse almost touching King Harold's. The gay-hearted Leofwin was among the slain, and Gurth had already fallen on that fatal day. Night fell upon the scene of violence, the standard was beaten down, the few survivors fled before the pursuing Norman, and many another English soldier fell.

English Lady

On the very spot where the English standard had stood, William commanded his camp to be pitched, and his own banner, blessed by the Pope, waved over his tent as he sat down to a great feast.

Round him were the bodies of the slain, indistinguishable in the darkness. Many a brave Norman had fallen that day—but in his hour of triumph William had little thought of how dearly the victory had been won. In his ears rang the greeting of his generals who crowded round him—"William the Conqueror, King of England."

Edith finds the dead body of Harold

With the darkness of evening came the saddest sight of all that terrible day. Dimly discernible in the pale light of the moon the cloaked figures of

Norman Lady

women were seen bending over the dead, moving them to look at their faces, undoing their tunics to see if perchance they could recognise some mark on their person, some token which they wore; baffled and disappointed, but still searching on, lifting the heavy bodies

with a strength which they never knew they had, rejoicing when, at length, they found their loved one that they could give him Christian burial.

But the saddest figure of all was that of Edith, the well-beloved of Harold, as she moved slowly over the


Seal of William the Conqueror

stricken field. Other searchers there were looking for the body of the king, but she alone recognised him.

She beckoned to two monks from the Abbey of Waltham and reverently the body was borne away.

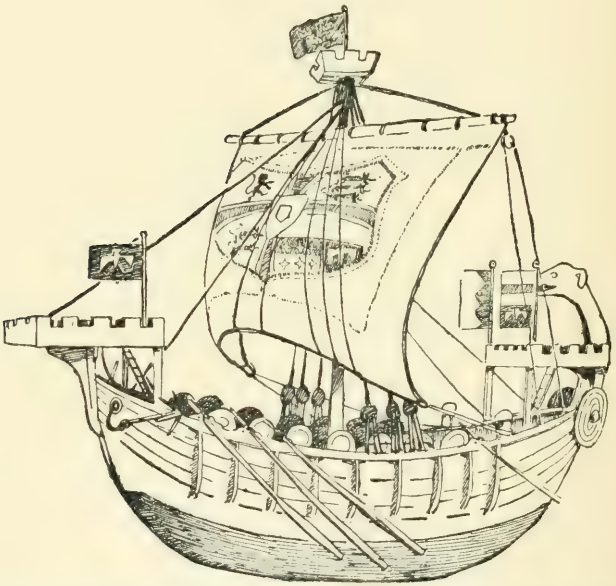
His mother, Githa, who had lost three of her sons on that woeful day, went to William and begged to be allowed to have the body of Harold, her greatest, to bury at the Abbey at Waltham.

"No," said the duke. "He shall be buried, not in consecrated church, but on the seashore, that in death he may guard the coast of that land he so vainly sought to defend."

For a time, therefore, the body of Harold was laid to rest within sound of the sea. But the story

goes that secretly one night, and reverently, it was removed to Waltham, and there, by the high altar, he was buried, with but two words inscribed upon his tomb :

**"HAROLD INFELIX."**



**Style of Ship introduced into England by William (tenth century example)**

# LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED

The following books have been especially helpful in writing this short story of "The Birth of England." I am particularly indebted to Sharon Turner's "History of the Anglo-Saxons," E. A. Freeman's "Norman Conquest," and Green's "Short History of the English People," H. A. Guerber's "Myths of the Norsemen," and Ingram's translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Also to:


"The Constitutional History of England," by Dean Stubbs.
"The Conquest of England," by J. R. Green.
"The Making of England," by J. R. Green.
"The Political History of England," Vol. I., by Thomas Hodgkin.
"Short History of Social Life in England," by M. Synge.
"Foundations of England," by Sir J. Ramsay.
"The Saxons in England," by J. Kemble.
"Anglo-Saxon Britain," by Grant Allen.
"History of Anglo-Saxons," by F. Palgrave.
"Scandinavian Britain," by W. G. Collingwood and F. York Powell.
"Dreamland in History," by Dean Spence.
"The Dawn of European Literature," by J. Earle.
"Teutonic Mythology," by V. Rydberg (translated by R. B. Anderson).
"The Chronicles of Merry England," by Anne Manning.
Bede's "Ecclesiastical History."
Bede's "Life of St Cuthbert."
"Chapters of Early English Church History," by William Bright.
"Old English History for Children," by E. A. Freeman.
"The Life of Alfred," by Reinhold Pauli.

# LIST OF BOOKS CONSULTED


Asser's "Life of Alfred," contained in "Six Old English Chronicles," all of which were useful.

"Decisive Battles," by Sir E. Creasy.

"Lives of English Worthies," by Davenport Adams.

"British Costume," by J. R. Planché.

"The Bayeux Tapestry," by F. R. Fowke.

"William the Conqueror," by F. M. Stenton.

"The Romance of Early Britain," by G. F. Scott Elliott.

"Early Christianity and Paganism," by Dean Spence.

"The Victoria County History of Kent."

"Early Britain," by Dean Church.

Souvenir Bury St Edmunds' Pageant.

"History of Anglo-Saxon Kings," by J. M. Lappenberg.

Articles on Aidan, Alfred, Edward, etc. in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.

And among works of imagination I am especially indebted to "Harold," by Bulwer Lytton.

"Hereward the Wake," by Charles Kingsley.

"Edwin the Fair," by Sir Henry Taylor.

"The Story of Hereward," by Douglas C. Stedman.


# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

A.D.

449 Landing of Hengest and Horsa in Kent.

455 Battle of Aylesford and Conquest of Kent.

477 Kingdom of Sussex founded by Ella.

491 Siege of Anderida establishes Kingdom of Sussex.

519 Kingdom of Wessex founded by Cerdic.

519 Victory of Charford establishes Kingdom of Wessex.

520 British victory of Mount Badon.

547 Kingdom of Bernicia founded.

563 St Columba founds Iona.

577 Victory of Ceawlin at Deorham.

588 Bernicia and Deira merged into one kingdom—Northumbria.

597 Coming of St Augustine.

617-633 Edwin King of Northumbria.

635 Battle of "Heaven's Field."

635 Conversion of Wessex.

651-670 Oswy King of Northumbria.

655 Penda of Mercia slain at Winwaed.

664 Synod of Whitby settles the question of the date of Easter, etc.

668 Archbishop Theodore arrives in England and organises the English Church.

685 Death of King Egfrith of Northumbria.

687 Death of St Cuthbert.

735 Death of the Venerable Bede.

758-796 Offa King of Mercia.

787 First Danish invasion.

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

A.D.

802-839 Egbert becomes King of Wessex, and is acknowledged as Bretwalda by Mercia and Northumbria.

871-901 Reign of King Alfred.

878 Battle of Ethandune.

878 Peace of Wedmore and Baptism of Guthrum.

901-925 Reign of Edward the Elder.

925-940 Reign of Athelstan.

937 Battle of Brunanburh. Athelstan acknowledged King of all Britain.

940-946 Reign of Edmund.

946-955 Reign of Edred.

955-959 Reign of Edwy.

956 Banishment of Dunstan.

958-975 Reign of Edgar.

959 Dunstan made Archbishop of Canterbury.

975-978 Reign of Edward the Martyr.

978-1016 Reign of Ethelred the Rede-less.

991 The Battle of Maldon.

994 Sweyn invades England.

1002 Massacre of the Danes on St Bride's Day.

1013 Ethelred flees to Normandy after the victories of Sweyn and Cnut.

1014 Death of Sweyn.

1016 Death of Ethelred.

1016-1035 Reign of Cnut.

1026 Cnut's Pilgrimage to Rome.

1037-1040 Reign of Harold.

1040-1042 Reign of Hardicanute.

1042-1066 Reign of Edward the Confessor

1045 Edward marries Edith, daughter of Earl Godwin.

1049 Sweyn, son of Godwin, murders Beorn.

1051 Exile of Godwin and his sons.

1052 Visit of Duke William of Normandy to England.

1052 Return of Earl Godwin and his sons.

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

A.D.

1065 Dedication of Westminster Abbey.

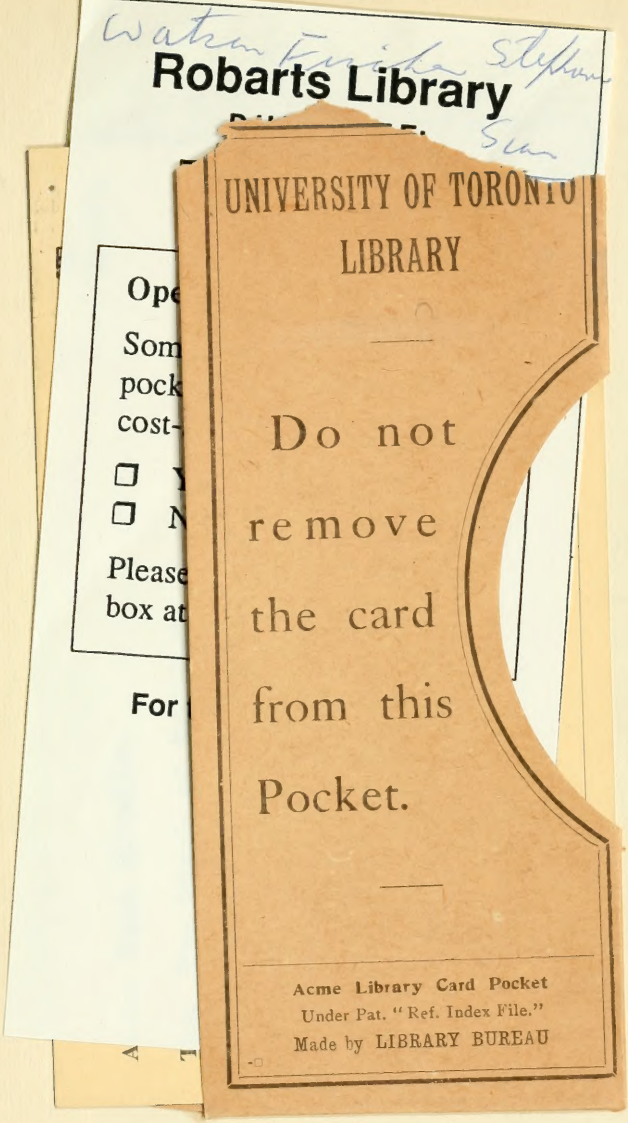
1066 Election of Harold as King of England.

1066 Invasion of Northumbria by Earl Tostig and Harold Hardrada.

1066 Battle of Stamford Bridge. Hardrada and Tostig slain.

1066 Landing of Duke William at Pevensey Bay.

1066 Battle of Senlac and death of Harold.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