

CHAPTER IX.

Edward succeeds Alfred.—Ethelfleda.—Athelstan.—Annexation of Northumbria.—Athelstan's continental influence.—Battle of Brunan-burh.—Code of Athelstan.—His death.—Edmund.—His Accession and Murder.—Dunstan.—Accession of Edred.—The Church under Edred.—His death.—Edwy.—His Coronation Feast.—Edwy and Elgiva.—Edwy's Death.

ALFRED, as we have seen, married at a very early age; and as he was fifty-two when he died, his eldest son, Edward, was probably about thirty when he was called to the throne by the choice of the witan. The chronicle of Ethelward says—"He was elected by the nobles, and crowned with the royal crown on Whitsunday, one hundred years having elapsed since his great grandfather, Egbert, had gained his present territories." At the battle of Farnham, in 893, Edward was at the head of the forces which overtook the Danes, and compelled their retreat from the interior. He was then a father; for Malmesbury records that Alfred was affectionately attached to Athelstan, the son of Edward, and dedicated him, as it were, to war and dominion, by bestowing on the beautiful boy a scarlet cloak, a diamond-studded belt, and a Saxon sword in a golden scabbard. But, chosen as he was by the general voice, and marked out for rule as the companion in arms of his father, Edward found that the title to the throne was contested. In the case of Alfred, the lineal succession was set aside; for his elder brother, Ethelred, had left children. His son, Ethelwold, on the election of Edward, disputed his title; seized upon some royal houses; and finally fled to Northumbria, where the Danes chose him as supreme king. A civil war now ensued, which lasted, with various fortunes, for four years. But Ethelwold at length fell in a great fight in East Anglia, which he had invaded and laid waste. His death put an end to this unnatural contention; and Edward, the next year, concluded a treaty with the Danes.

King Edward possessed the indomitable vigor of his father, however he might be wanting in those qualities which raised Alfred so high above the mere warrior. There was another of Alfred's

children, who had the same energy of character; and who cherished the same resolve to consolidate the realm of England under one dominant authority. That ally of Edward in this difficult labor was his sister, Ethelfleda. She was the wife of Ethelred, the friend of Alfred, who held under him the rule of Mercia. He died in 912. His widow was not superseded by an ealdorman, or subking. She was "the Lady of Mercia;" and wisely and bravely did she govern. There was perfect accord between the king and the sovereign lady. Ethelfleda erected fortresses to protect her territory, at Bridgenorth, Stamford, Tamworth, Warwick; while Edward fortified Hertford and Witham. These fortresses became the seats of trade, and gradually grew into importance as boroughs. They were of superior construction to the old earthworks; for one of the chroniclers says they were built of stone. It has been observed that there was, "a few years later, a perfectly similar systematical establishment of towns or fortresses in Germany, under the emperor Henry the First."* Such fortresses are not only indications of a state of warfare; but show, also, that there was an important class of the community growing up, that could no longer safely abide in the small villages; or clustered round the house of the noble, or the church of the bishop. The country was gradually becoming less exclusively agricultural. In the laws of Edward it is enacted that "every man have his warrantor; and that no man buy out of port, but have the portreeve's witness." This clearly applies to the commerce of towns, where all dealings were to be within the gate. But active as well as defensive warfare was still necessary. In 911, Rollo, the great sea-king, obtained the cession of that duchy of France to which the Northmen gave their name. This conquest, from which such great results were to ensue in the lapse of centuries, offered, at first, encouragement to new attacks upon Saxon England. Though the Danish settlers were, for the most part, Christian, their pagan countrymen continued to penetrate into the interior from the coasts of East Anglia and Northumbria; and the old contest, in which the settler and the pirate were united against Wessex and Mercia, was still going on. The Welsh, too, appeared again in revolt. Edward and Ethelfleda were unwearyed in their resistance to the powers which assailed them in so many directions; and they were ultimately successful. They became assailants, too, of the territories which had been subdued by the Northmen. The Danes of East Anglia swore alle-

* Lappenberg, vol. ii, p. 91.

giance to Edward, who had possessed himself of Colchester, and had repaired the Roman walls; and Ethelfleda compelled the Danish garrisons of Derby and Leicester to surrender, and the Danes of York to submit to her authority. Finally all the island acknowledged the son of Alfred as lord and protector. The heroic lady of Mercia died at Tamworth about the year 920; and Edward died in 924. Their lives were a perpetual struggle,—first to maintain the integrity of their dominions; and, secondly, to establish a more perfect security by their extension. Upon the death of Ethelfleda, Edward annexed Mercia to Wessex, disregarding the claims of her daughter. This was an act of despotism—the expedient policy of Wessex for a century and a quarter. What we call ambition might have been, as far as the individual rulers were concerned, the great sustaining cause of that policy; but, at the same time, it would have been impossible for the country to have made any progress in the establishment of law and of religion, any successful prosecution of the industrial arts, if divided into hostile tribes, under the government of many petty rulers. This struggle for the concentration of authority went on, more or less, under the Germanic kings, for nearly a century and a half after the death of Edward; and was not completed even by the Norman conquest. Whatever was the tyranny of the Norman kings, their preponderating power was ultimately a blessing to England. It crushed the rivalries of turbulent chieftains, and extinguished the hostilities of adverse races, of the British, and Saxon, and Danish stocks. But, mighty as was that power, it never rooted out the Saxon laws and language, or bowed the Saxon spirit into a dishonourable slavery. It is for this cause that the periods of wild wars, and rude enactments, when England was shaping itself into a kingdom, have still an interest for us; and that we cannot properly enter into the broader pathways of modern history without traversing the thickets which encompass them.

Athelstan, the son of Edward, has been held to be illegitimate. The belief is inconsistent with the relation of the attachment of Alfred to his grandson, and of his apparent dedication of him to the kingly office. The early chroniclers have a strange admixture of fancy with fact, the poetic infusion not only reflecting the superstitions of their age, but expressing the traditional reverence of history for its heroes. Thus, the mother of Athelstan, a shepherd's daughter, sees in a dream a glorious moon shining out of her body to light all England. The dream is reported; and the

humble maiden becoming the first love of Alfred's son, the moon is Athelstan. Edward named this, his eldest son, as his successor. The next son, Ethelward, died soon after his father. The other sons were under age. Athelstan was crowned at Kingston, in 924.* It appears that his succession, though sanctioned by the witan, met with opposition; and a conspiracy was formed to depose him and put out his eyes. The leader of this sedition is called, by Malmesbury, one Elfred; and the same chronicler quotes a remarkable grant to the Abbey of Malmesbury, by Athelstan, of certain possessions which had accrued to him upon the death of Elfred. In this document the king says, "He was the jealous rival both of my happiness and of my life, and consented to the wickedness of my enemies, who, on my father's decease, had not God in his mercy delivered me, wished to put out my eyes in the city of Winchester." The grant goes on to say, that Elfred was sent to Rome to defend himself by oath before Pope John; but at the instant he was sworn he fell down, and died three nights after. As connected with this conspiracy of Elfred, though erroneously so in point of time, tradition has associated the fate of Athelstan's younger brother, Edwin. Seduced into the revolt against the king, he was exposed, say the legends, in a rotten boat, with one attendant, his armour-bearer; and, driven out to sea, without oar or rudder, threw himself overboard in wild despair. The faithful follower of Edwin brought his body to land; and the remorse of Athelstan was only alleviated by seven years' penance. Malmesbury says he found the tale, as he found the dream of the shepherd's daughter, in old ballads. The monkish romancers told a similar story of the wife of Offa; and the same interesting fable will always speak to the heart in the *Custance* of Chaucer, and the *Prospero* of Shakspeare. Henry of Huntingdon does not receive the story of Malmesbury's old ballad. He says, "By a stroke of adverse fortune, Athelstan lost his brother Edwin, the etheling, a young prince of great energy and high promise, who was unhappily drowned at sea." †

The reign of Athelstan was spread over the short term of fifteen years, but it was the culminating point of the glory and power of Saxon England. "The terror of his name," according

* The ancient chapel at Kingston, in which some of the Saxon kings were held to have been crowned, was standing late in the last century.

† The Saxon Chronicler gives the date of his death as 933, eight years after Athelstan's accession.

to Malmesbury, left him the undisputed dominion of the island, with the exception of Northumbria. The Danish chieftain of that district, Sihtric, acknowledged Athelstan's supremacy and received his sister in marriage. The alliance was soon dissolved. The history which bears the name of Matthew of Westminster records that the Dane, who had embraced Christianity, renounced his wife and his faith at the same time (A.D. 926). Athelstan was preparing to revenge the injury, when Sihtric died, or was murdered. His sons Guthfric and Anlaf fled, when Athelstan led an army into Northumbria. The vigorous Saxon annexed the Northumbrian kingdom to his dominions. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives a pithy summary of the events of this year: "And Sihtric perished; and King Athelstan obtained the kingdom of the Northumbrians; And he ruled all the kings who were on this island: first, Huwal, king of the West-Welsh; * and Constantine, king of the Scots; and Uwen, king of the Guentian people; † and Ealdred, son of Ealdulf, of Bamborough; and they confirmed the peace by pledge, and by oaths, at the place called Eamot, on the fourth of the Ides of July; and they renounced all idolatry, and after that submitted to him in peace." Guthfric returned the next year in arms to claim the Northumbrian kingdom; but he was subdued by Athelstan, and, making his submission, was received in kindness. He soon joined the piratical bands of his countrymen.

The power which Athelstan had thus won by his sword, he appears to have retained in peace for about ten years. During this period, and in the few subsequent years of his life, his position as the supreme ruler of a great and independent kingdom gave him an European influence, which appears most remarkable at a time when we are little accustomed to consider as one of international amity. Athelstan was the protector and defender of deposed and exiled princes. When the Normans expelled the Duke of Brittany from his dominions, Athelstan welcomed and educated his son Alan; who finally drove out the Normans with the Saxon's aid. Haco, the son of the King of Norway, was also welcomed and educated in England, and was assisted by Athelstan in obtaining his throne. Louis IV. of France, in his earlier years, had sought refuge with his maternal uncle, Athelstan, and hence he was called "D'outremer," "from beyond the sea," during the usurpation of Rudolph. Summoned to the throne from his English exile, he was finally protected in his dominion by the English king. The states

* People of Cornwall.

† People of Monmouthshire.

of France sent deputies to Athelstan, on the death of Rudolph, who took the oath of allegiance to Louis in the presence of Athelstan and his queen; and when the rule of the young Frank was disturbed by his great vassals, another treaty of alliance between the countries was entered into. Daniel, the French historian, has this comment on the event: "This is the first example which we have in our history, not only of an offensive league between France and England, but it is also the first treaty by which these two kingdoms concerned themselves about each other's welfare. Until this event the two nations considered themselves as two worlds, which had no connexion but that of commerce to maintain, and had no interest to cultivate either friendship or enmity in other concerns." * Athelstan had a difficult policy to pursue. Hugh, who married Athelstan's sister, Edgiva (then dead), was one of the great vassals who was opposed to Louis IV.; and the German king, Otho, who had married Elgiva, another sister, had invaded the French dominions. But Athelstan held firmly to the interests of his nephew. The position of England and France at this period was certainly a memorable one. Centuries were to elapse before an alliance could be formed between them as independent nations. The Norman princes ruled England as a province. Their successors claimed France as an inheritance. For nine hundred years since the league with Athelstan, the two nations have, for the most part, "considered themselves as two worlds;" have maintained little "commerce;" have cultivated small "friendship" in external concerns. A common danger and a common interest have produced a mighty change in our days. May the friendship be preserved when the danger is past!

The continental alliances of Athelstan, and especially the marriages of his sisters, are indications of a genius for state-craft, such as we scarcely expect in those times. In the personal character of the Saxon we trace "the pride of kings," and the barbaric pomp of self-asserting power. William of Malmesbury saw the tomb of Athelstan opened, a century and a half after his death; and he describes his flaxen hair "beautifully wreathed with golden threads." The kings who sought his alliance approached him with presents, such as would propitiate his love of magnificent display. Norway sent him a ship with golden beak, and purple sail, and gilded shields. Hugh, the great Duke of the Franks, demanded his sister in marriage, with "presents such as might gratify the most boundless avarice"—perfumes, jewels, diadems, caparisoned

* Quoted in Turner, book vi. chap. ii.

horses, the sword of Constantine the Great, and the spear of Charlemagne. There is no distinct record that Athelstan was corrupted by this homage; but it is certain that the extension of his power produced the inevitable consequence that waits upon successful ambition—the confederacy of the weak against the strong. A league against him was formed by the under-kings of Scotland and Cumberland in 934. Athelstan was prompt in his measures. He marched into Scotland with a great army, and his fleet ravaged the coast as far as Caithness. Anlaf, the son of Guthfric the Dane, had married a daughter of Constantine of Scotland; and the re-establishment of the Northumbrian kingdom was the great object to be attained by the union of all who had felt the power, and were humiliated by the magnificence, of their Saxon lord. The Danes, the Scots, and the Welsh appeared in arms. Anlaf, who had obtained dominion in Ireland and the western isles, with upwards of six hundred ships, entered the Humber. All the North was in insurrection. All the South and East went forth to uphold the integrity of the kingdom. The army of Athelstan was encamped on the Scottish borders of Northumberland, according to Camden. The king commanded, with Edmund his brother; and the chancellor Turketul led the Londoners to the fight. The chroniclers tell the same romantic story, with variations, that they told of Alfred. Anlaf, the Dane, enters the camp of Athelstan as a harper. He plays before the king, and takes a money-reward. But he scorns to retain the price of a hireling's service, and buries the present which he received. A soldier, who had formerly served under Anlaf, knew the supposed harper, and communicated his knowledge to the king, who was indignant that he had not been seized. The honest soldier declared that he should have scorned to betray his former leader, but he warned Athelstan to shift his position. The king followed the timely advice; and when Anlaf attacked the camp at night, he found other victims. Two days after was fought the great battle of Brunan-burh, by which the confederacy against the Saxon power was completely overthrown. Of this decisive conflict Milton says, "They fought with Athelstan at a place called Wendune; others term it Brunanburg, others Bruneford; which Ingulph places beyond Humber; Camden in Glendale of Northumberland, on the Scottish borders—the bloodiest fight, say authors, that ever this island saw. To describe which, the Saxon annalist, wont to be sober and succinct, whether the same or another writer, now labouring under the weight of his argument, and overcharged, runs

on a sudden into such extravagant fancies and metaphors as bear him quite beyond the scope of being understood."* It is remarkable that a great poet did not see that the "extravagant fancies and metaphors" were part of "the earliest of the few metrical materials for English history;" † and were of singular value as illustrations of the spirit in which the Saxon ballads were composed. In later times, the ode on the battle of Brunan-burh has moved the heart "more than with a trumpet," as Sidney was moved by "the old song of Percy and Douglas." We present it entire. ‡

"Here Athelstan, king, of earls the lord, of beorns § the bracelet-giver, and eke his brother, Edmund Etheling, won life-long glory in battle, with edges of swords, near Brunan-burh.

"They clove the board-wall, || they hewed the war-lindens. ¶ Offspring of Edward they, in battle oft, 'gainst every foe the land defended—its hoards, and its homes. Such was their noble natures, derived from their fathers. The foe they crushed; the Scottish people and the shipmen fated fell.

"The field reek'd with warriors' blood, since the sun was up at morning-tide. The mighty planet, God's candle bright, the eternal Lord's, glided o'er grounds, till the noble creature sank to her settle.** There lay many a warrior by javelins strewed; northern men, shot over shields; also Scots, weary and war-sad.

"West-Saxons onwards, in bands, throughout the day, pursued the foot-steps of the loathed nations. They hewed the fugitives behind, amain, with swords mill-sharp. Mercians refused not the hard hand-play to any heroes who, with Anlaf, over the ocean in the ship's bosom, this land sought, fated to the fight.

"Five lay on the battle-stead, †† youthful kings by swords in slumber laid; so seven eke of Anlaf's earls; shipmen and Scots of the army countless.

"There was made to flee the North-men's chieftain; by need constrained to the ship's prow with a little band. The bark drove afloat. The king, out-going on the fallow flood, †† his life preserved.

* History of England, book v.

† Mackintosh.

‡ Milton's "History of England" was published in 1670. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was first printed in 1644, with a Latin translation. In that translation the peculiar expressions of the ode are necessarily lost in amplifications and expletives. We can easily understand that the Latin being read to the blind poet, he saw little merit beyond "extravagant fancies and metaphors."

§ Men fierce as bears: beorn is a title of honour, which has been translated "baron."

|| The wooden wall of shields.

¶ The linden spears.

** Set-gang is sun-setting.

†† Place, homestead.

‡‡ The term, as applied to land, has reference to colour. So the brown sea.

So there, also, Constantine, hoary warrior, came by flight to his north country. He had no cause to exult in the communion of swords.

"Here was his kindred band of friends o'erthrown on the folkstead, in battle slain; and his son he left on the slaughter-place, mangled with wounds, young in the fight. He the grizly-haired beorn, the old deceiver, had no cause to boast of the bill-clashing; nor had Anlaf any more, with the remnant of their armies.

"They had no cause to exult that they in war's works the better men were in the battle-stead, at the conflict of banners, the meeting of spears, the concourse of men, the traffic of weapons—that they on the slaughter-field with Edward's offspring played.

"The North-men departed in their nailed barks; bloody relic of darts o'er the deep water, Dublin to seek,—again to seek Ireland, shamed in mind.

"So too the brothers, both together, king and Etheling, their country sought, the West-Saxons' land, in war exulting.

"They left behind them, the corse to devour, the fallow kite, and the swart raven with horned beak, and the dusky vulture, and the white-tailed heron:—the corse to enjoy came the greedy war-hawk, and the grey beast, the wolf of the wood.

"Carnage greater has not been in this island ever yet, never before this, of people slain by edges of swords. So books us tell; books of old writers; since from the east hither Angles and Saxons came to land,—since o'er the broad seas mighty war-smiths sought Britain, the Welsh overcame, and earls most bold this earth obtained."*

The terrors of that "slaughter-place" left Athelstan in peace for his few remaining years. He promulgated a code of laws, as his father and grandfather had done. They are conceived in a spirit of justice, according to the opinions and manners of the age. In the payment of tithes, the king claims no exemption for his "own goods; both of live stock and of the year's earthly fruits;" and he calls upon his bishops and ealdormen to do the like. He commands his reeves "that ye entirely feed one poor Englishman, if ye have him, or that ye find another;" and that "ye redeem one 'wite-

* The translation of the "Monumenta Historica Britannica" is more imbued with the spirit of the original than any with which we are acquainted. The poem, as there presented in the Saxon rhythm, has a corresponding translation line by line; but as no translation can give a metrical notion of the original, we have run it on in paragraphs, making some inversions here and there to aid the reader.

theow' (penal slave). We understand this to apply to those reeves who had the charge of the king's manors; on which it was probable that there was abundance, and that none, or very few, of the unfree were in the condition of "a poor Englishman." It has been hastily assumed that the whole land was so flourishing, that poverty was not readily to be found. The criminal laws were severe; but they had some discrimination. No thief was to be spared; but his age must exceed twelve years. We do not, now, put children under twelve to death, but we punish them, and then leave them to perish. The bishops and reeves, and guildmen of the City of London ordered that "no thief be spared over twelve pence, and no person over twelve years;" but, with these limitations, they entered into a compact which rendered the escape of the plunderer almost impossible. They formed themselves into an association, common enough even at this day, for the prosecution of felons. Each member of the Guild contributed fourpence a-year for the common use; the money was held by a committee of ten men, who had to decide "what they shall disburse when aught is to pay, and what they should receive when money should arise to us at our common suit." Our principle of association for public objects, and which could only exist under a condition of individual freedom, may thus be distinctly traced to the modes in which our ancestors defended their property, and asserted their rights, nine hundred years ago.

Athelstan died in the year 940, and was buried in the Abbey of Malmesbury. Two sons of his uncle Ethelward had fallen in the battle of Brunan-burh, and the king had ordered them to be interred in the church which he had so richly endowed. What is called the tomb of Athelstan is still shown at Malmesbury. In a visit to this interesting little town we were somewhat surprised to find how the memory of Athelstan still lingers there. Over the antiquarian conviction that the noble ruins of the abbey are Norman, rides the popular belief that the solemn porches and the lofty arches belong to the days of Athelstan. The people have extensive common-rights; and as the peasant-boy drives his herds to the rich pastures watered by the Avon, he thinks of King Athelstan, who granted these rights to his town; in whose school he learnt to read; and whose festival he annually celebrates with confiding merriment. It is the same in other towns. Beverley claimed to send members to parliament under a charter of Athelstan; and many a town in the west of England had a statue of the great

Saxon king. Some of the manuscripts of his library were preserved at Bath, up to the period of the Reformation; and the copy of the Gospels, in Latin, which he presented to the Cathedral of Canterbury, may still be seen in the British Museum. He encouraged the translation of the Bible into Saxon, as Alfred had done before him.

According to the chroniclers, Edmund the Etheling, who had fought at Brunan-burh, was only eighteen when he came to the crown. This appears somewhat unlikely. During his short reign of about six years he was twice married. But the removal of the vigorous Athelstan was the signal of fresh troubles. Anlaf was called from Ireland, and set up by the Northumbrians as their king. He concluded a successful treaty with Edmund, but soon after died. His son could not uphold the power; and the district was again reduced under the dominion of the king of Wessex. Edmund had also subdued the Britons of Cumbria; and had granted their lands to Malcolm of Scotland, under the condition of military service. The alleged right of the Scottish kings to "the earldom of Cumberland" was founded upon Edmund's grant. The extent of the homage thus claimed of the kings of the Scots by the kings of the English has been a perpetual dispute amongst that class of antiquaries who rejoice to learn what Time has forgotten, which Time revenges by forgetting what they have learned.* It is not for us to examine into the evidence afforded by these exhumations. The young warrior-king did not long enjoy his peace or enforce his fealty. The circumstances of his death, in the year 946, exhibit a scene of Saxon manners which proves how strongly the old disposition to employ physical force still prevailed. The king is celebrating the festival of Saint Augustin, in his hall at Pucklechurch in Gloucestershire. An outlaw whom he had banished dares to take his seat amongst the guests. The wine-cup goes round; but Edmund discovers the intruder, and commands his removal. Upon the man's resistance, the enraged prince rushes at him; seizes him by the hair, and dashes him to the ground. At the same instant the outlaw draws a dagger, and plunges it into the breast of the ill-fated Edmund. The king instantly died; and the assassin was cut to pieces by the beholders of the sudden affray.

It is half a century since Alfred established the Saxon kingdom. His son and his grandson have valiantly fought to uphold it. A rule of another character, more mighty than the sword, is growing

* The point of the well-known epigram upon Thomas Hearne.

into form. It has humble beginnings. At the court of Athelstan was a precocious youth of a noble race, who had been educated at the monastery of Glastonbury. His acquirements were far above those of his time; and he made pretensions to supernatural communications. His musical skill, and his other various accomplishments, rendered him a favourite; but his boasted visions, and his superior talents and knowledge, caused him to be regarded as a sorcerer. This youth was Dunstan; for thirty years the real governor of England. Driven from the favour of Athelstan under the rude belief which denounced arts called magical as the greatest of crimes, he was forced into another mode of life. The seductions of the court were to be exchanged for the severities of the cloister. The contest was a hard one. Dunstan was passionately in love with a maiden suited to him in rank. His uncle Athelm was Archbishop of Canterbury; and to him the attachment was confided. The stern prelate saw that the great talents of his relative would open a career of ambition to him, by which the Church would be powerfully upheld. The dictates of our common nature were represented as unholy feelings. Threats and blandishments were opposed to the strong will of the young man, who could only see misery in the monastic system. Illness came; and the enfeebled mind was bowed to submission. Then Dunstan renounced the world, in the monkish sense of renunciation. But he was bent upon subduing the world far more completely by the cowl than by the spear. In the ardour which some call insanity, and others genius, he spurned the tame privations of the ordinary cell; and by the side of the church of Glastonbury he lived in a wretched hut, or cave, in which he could not stand upright. As his groans under the self-inflicted scourge broke the midnight silence, the rumour went forth that he was struggling with the evil one. The saintly monk soon had votaries. A noble lady poured her fortune into his lap. Crowds came to gaze upon him when he emerged from his den to do the service of the altar. His harp sometimes sounded in the intervals of his prayers and penances; and the tap of his hammer at his forge showed that he was engaged in some smith's work of utility or ornament. Out of that miserable hut came the sagacious ruler of two kings, and the tyrannous oppressor of a third. Under Edmund, Dunstan was simple Abbot of Glastonbury. It was a proud step over the heads of his brethren who held their easy way, untempted by any fiend, and not at all covetous of saintly honours through bodily mortifications. But the

Abbot of Glastonbury, with all his chartered power—"as well in causes known as unknown,—in small as in great, and even in those which are above and under the earth,—on dry land and on the water; on woods and on plains;"*—this Abbot was a humble man compared with the greatness to which a boundless ambition might aspire. The narrative of his career is, for some time, the history of England.

Edred, the brother of Edmund, succeeded to the throne, after the fatal blow of the outlaw. Edmund left two very young sons, Edwy and Edgar. Edred was of feeble constitution and of a confiding temper. His first adviser was the Chancellor Turketul, who had fought at the battle of Brunan-burh. In a few years the statesman devoted himself to religion, and became Abbot of Croyland. He appears to have been a just, as well as a brave man; for before his resignation of his civil office, he proclaimed to the citizens of London that he was anxious to leave no debt undischarged, and to make threefold reparation to any person who had sustained injury at his hands. Dunstan now became the chief director of the public affairs of the country. He was, in the words of one of his biographers "*Rex et Regis Imperator*," King and ruler of the King. He was the keeper of his treasures. He was, most probably, the director of his wars. During this reign, Northumbria, which had revolted, was finally subdued; and Edred, having devastated the land, changed its form of government, and reduced it from a kingdom to an earldom. The sickly king styled himself the sovereign of "the fourfold empire of the Anglo-Saxons, and Northumbrians, Pagans, and Britons." From this title we learn that some of the dominions were held under Danish chieftains, who were still unconverted, and were denominated Pagans. Edred died in 956.

The great Abbot of Glastonbury is stated to have refused the see of Winchester, which was offered to him by Edred. His domination was perhaps better secured by his comparatively humble position. He was planning a real revolution—the establishment of the monastic rule in England, and the concurrent supremacy of the papal power. The celibacy of the clergy was the leading principle to be contended for, in making the Church Romish instead of national. Although the strict canons of the Anglo-Church did not recognise a married priesthood, the law of celibacy had never been rigidly enforced, especially amongst the parochial clergy. Their marriages were discountenanced; they were admonished or threat-

* These words are in the charter to Dunstan, as given in William of Malmesbury.

ened. But the law of nature was triumphant over the decrees of councils; and the English priests were not forced into those immoralities which were the result of this ordinance in other countries. Mr. Kemble says, "we have an almost unbroken chain of evidence to show that, in spite of the exhortations of the bishops, and the legislation of the witan, those at least of the clergy who were not bound to a cœnobitical order did contract marriage, and openly avow the families which were its issue."* The monastic establishments of England were numerous before the time of Dunstan. But it is tolerably certain that the monks were not subjected to the very strict rule of their founder Saint Benedict. The conventual churches were, in many cases, served by what we call seculars. These priests lived in detached houses; and we may conceive that they, sometimes, were not patterns of self-denial. It was the mission of Dunstan to reform what he considered, and perhaps in many cases justly, as abuses. In some respects his character has been subjected to unnecessary odium, through the coarse appreciation of his monkish admirers, who have held him up as the saintly instrument of the divine judgments against the most wicked of mankind. During his long administration he raised the power of the regulars, or monks, to an unprecedented height; and the extravagant chroniclers, who looked back with ignorant admiration upon what he, and his coadjutors, had done for their order, have caused historians to regard him, whom Milton calls "a strenuous bishop," as a dangerous impostor and a tyrannous fanatic. In modern times, his actions have been examined with much uncandid criticism, whether adulatory or deprecatory. We believe that, however unscrupulous in the exercise of his strong will, he laboured with an honest purpose for the elevation of the Church: but that in his exclusive devotion to that object, he brought about the ruin and degradation of the kingdom.

Edwy, called the Fair, succeeded to the crown of his uncle by the voice of the witan. The boy-king who was sixteen, or at most eighteen, years of age at his accession has been stigmatised by the monastic writers as the most weak, profligate, and tyrannous of unwise rulers. Henry of Huntingdon, supported by others who had not the prejudices of the cloister, says, "This king wore the diadem not unworthily; but after a prosperous and becoming commencement of his reign, its happy promise was cut short by a premature death." In the destruction of that happy promise, and in that premature

* Saxons in England, vol. ii. p. 443.

death, we have a tragedy over which many eyes have wept. The participation of Dunstan in that tragedy has made his name hateful with all by whom the piteous tale of "Edwy and Elgiva" has been received with undoubting faith. Disputed as the popular belief has been by polemical writers, the poetical aspect of the story will always supersede the fanatical. The one is natural and consistent; the other is unnatural and disingenuous. Nor is the evidence, taken altogether, insufficient to rebut the calumnies with which the lives of these poor victims of an unscrupulous policy have been overshadowed. We have carefully examined that evidence, and we shall tell the story as we collect it out of many contradictory narratives, most of them defiled by the prurient scandals of those who, in blackening Edwy and his beloved one, endeavour to justify their oppressors.*

The coronation of the young king followed quickly after his accession. His witan had taken the oath of allegiance to him, and before the altar he had himself taken the oath to his subjects. The coronation feast succeeds. The king sits at the banquet surrounded by timid friends and suspicious enemies. He has taken the oath that he will hold God's Church, and all the Christian people of his realm, in true peace.† But at that banquet there are ministers of God's Church who bear towards each other the most deadly hostility. "He despised the advice of his counsellors," says Malmesbury. The counsellors that he found in possession of power were Dunstan and his friends, the leaders of one great party. Edwy, who is accused of having considered Edred an usurper, fell into the hands of the leaders of another party. At this coronation feast the king retired early. As was the invariable custom at these Saxon banquets, there was excessive use of wine, and the passions of men were proportionately excited. The assembly murmured, with some reason, at the absence of the king. Dunstan and another went forth, and bursting into Edwy's privy chamber, found him in the company of Elgiva and her mother Ethelgiva. The abbot seized the youth, and forcibly dragged him back to the hall. It has been called an act of sudden passion. To us it appears an act of the most profound policy. The authority of the monk was

* Those who are curious to inform themselves upon the controverted points of these passages of history should, after reading Dr. Lingard's statements in his "History of England," and "Antiquities of the Anglo Church," refer to Mr. Allen's articles in the Edinburgh Review, vols. xxv. and xlii.

† See the oath administered to Ethelbert, in Kemble's "Saxons in England," vol. ii. p. 36.

fottering; and he, for this reason, asserted his power before the assembled people. Dr. Lingard says of Dunstan, "As the treasurer of Edred, and the executor of his last testament, he had disappointed the rapacity of the prince." That rapacity consisted in demanding from the abbot of Glastonbury an account of his stewardship. "The king all along had entertained suspicions of Dunstan because he had been entrusted with the custody of the royal treasures."* Labouring under suspicion—perhaps reproached at that coronation feast, where even bishops might be inebriated without offence to public opinion,—the bold minister of Edred seized upon a slight violation of propriety on the part of Edwy, to insult and degrade him. Dunstan was banished; and the king threw himself into the hands of the party who were opposed to the great abbot's authority. He chose his side, perhaps, indiscreetly. A strong party of the aristocracy, a fanatical and, therefore, influential party of the clergy, combined against him. In such contests there is little moderation; and Christian charity is trodden under foot by what is called Christian zeal. Edwy's new counsellors advised strong measures against their opponents; and their opponents revenged themselves by loading the king and his female friends with obloquy, such as Tacitus more justly bestowed upon the frightful profligacy of his time. Edwy met the scandal as alone it could be met. Elgiva became his wife. No monkish abuse can rail away the fact, that in a document of undoubted authority—an agreement for the exchange of lands between Bishop Byrthelm and Abbot Ethelwold,—the following entry appears:—"And this was by leave of King Eadwig; and these are the witnesses: Ælgyfu, the king's wife, and Æthelgyfu, the king's wife's mother; Bishop Ælfsige, Bishop Oswulf, Bishop Coenwald; Byrthnoth, the ealdorman; Ælfheah, the king's dapifer; Eadric, his brother."† Mr. Kemble says, "This, then, was not a thing done in a corner, and the testimony is conclusive that Ælgyfu was Eadwig's queen."

The imputations against Elgiva thus signally failed. But there was something more terrible in reserve than the dirt which Dunstan and his adherents threw at her and her mother. A plot was got up to separate the young queen from her husband, under the plea

* Lingard: "History." Third edition. This note, from Wallingford, was subsequently omitted, after Mr. Allen had pointed out that Wallingford says, that on account of that suspicion the property of Dunstan was sequestered.

† The document occurs in two manuscripts in the British Museum. See Kemble, vol. ii. p. 410.

that the marriage was within the forbidden degrees. They were "to gesybbe,"—too nearly related. There was no solemn act of separation. Upon the banishment of Dunstan there was soon a revolt against the authority of Edwy. Odo, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was a Dane. His influence in Northumbria was very great, and he instigated a general rising in that old settlement of the Danes. In a very short time Edwy had to divide his dominion with his brother Edgar, who was set up, not as a sub-ruler, but as a sole king. The rebellious subject came to Edwy and his queen with the terrible powers of the Church. Their marriage had been acquiesced in by prelates and nobles. Their consanguinity was probably of the slightest kind. But Odo was resolved to exercise his tyranny; as it was long exercised by ambitious popes and rapacious prelates, who would tear loving hearts asunder, or give them dispensation, as best suited their cold and calculating natures. Odo knew how to destroy Edwy through his affections, and thus remove the great obstacle to the projects of the monastic leaders. He dragged Elgiva from her husband. There is here some confusion in the narrative of the sad sequel of the violence. A lady was forcibly sent to Ireland, after being disfigured by hot searing irons; she escaped back to England; was seized by the adherents of the party opposed to Edwy, and was put to a cruel death. It is pretended that the victim was the mistress and not the wife of Edwy; and that the mistress was Ethelgiva. Dr. Lingard has constructed his narrative of these events upon a principle which exhibits little of the impartiality of the historian's office, and his cold notice of the crimes of the churchmen is scarcely indicative of the humanity of the Christian. "At Gloucester she (Ethelgiva) fell into the hands of the pursuers, who with their swords divided the sinews of her legs, a cruel but *not unusual mode of punishment in that age*. After lingering in great torments for a few days she expired." We may believe, if the apologists of Odo so desire it, that two crimes were committed,—that the mother of the queen was hamstrung; and that the queen met some unknown death in forced seclusion. Of Elgiva we hear no more. The lady who died under "the not unusual mode of punishment" met her fate at Gloucester. There, also, died Edwy, after a reign of four years. Whether he was murdered, or whether he died of a broken heart, we are not satisfactorily informed. It is sufficient for the monastic chroniclers to date the triumph of the Benedictine order in England from the "miserable end," as they honestly call it, of him

whom they designate as "the wanton youth." We believe with Mr. Henry Taylor, that "the success of the monastic faction in decrying him with the people was not so complete as the merely political events of his reign might lead us to suppose;" and that his name ('Eadwig') having been supplanted by its diminutive, 'Edwy,' seems to indicate a sentiment of tenderness and pity as popularly connected with him from the first.*

* Preface to the beautiful historical drama of "Edwin the Fair."

It is the duty of the historian however difficult it may be to endeavor to represent actions in substance as they were, and in the language as they are now known to be. The words which he puts into the mouth of his characters are not as a rule those which they would have used in the actual scene, but such as will best convey to the reader the sense of the scene, and the nature of the characters. It is in this sense that I have written the preface to the drama of "Edwin the Fair."

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There is an excessive eagerness which more distinctly shows the forcible nature of the contest, and the mode in which it was carried on than the attribution to Dunstan of miraculous powers. About that time indeed, when the Archbishop was not yet fifty, against married prelates and secular canons with the single weapons of his strong will and his cast ability; but all errors and seductions of opposition were to be called in to follow his cause in the eyes of the people whether cast or struck. The records of history will not bear the name of Dunstan and his miracles.