

IV.

THE EARLY MONASTERIES.—ALLEN.

[The religious activity of the time showed itself mainly in the planting and endowment of monastic colonies, which gradually transformed the face of the country. "In this monastic movement two strangely contrasted impulses worked together to change the very aspect of the new England and the new English society. The one was the passion for solitude, the first outcome of the religious impulse given by the conversion; a passion for communing apart with themselves and with God, which drove men into waste and woodland and desolate fen. The other was the equally new passion for social life on the part of the nation at large; the outcome of its settlement and well-doing on the conquered soil, and yet more of the influence of the new religion, coming as it did from the social civilization of the older world, and invariably drawing men together by the very form of its worship and its belief."]

It was mainly by means of the monasteries that Christianity became a great civilizing and teaching agency in England. Those who judge monastic institutions only by their later and worst days, when they had, perhaps, ceased to perform any useful function, are apt to forget the benefits which they conferred upon the people in the earlier stages of their existence. The state of England during this first Christian period was one of chronic and bloody warfare. There was no regular army, but every freeman was a soldier, and raids of one English tribe upon another were every-day occurrences; while pillaging frays on the part of the Welsh, followed by savage reprisals on the part of the English, were still more frequent. We catch glimpses, from time to time, of the unceasing strife between each folk and its neighbors, besides many hints of intestine struggles between prince and prince, or of rivalries between one petty shire and others of the same kingdom.

With such a state of affairs as this it became a matter of deep importance that there should be some one institution

where the arts of peace might be carried on in safety, where agriculture might be sure of its reward, where literature and science might be studied, and where civilizing influences might be safe from interruption or rapine. The monasteries gave an opportunity for such an ameliorating influence to spring up. They were spared, even in war, by the reverence of the people for the Church; and they became places where peaceful minds might retire for honest work and learning and thinking, away from the fierce turmoil of a still essentially barbaric and predatory community. At the same time they encouraged the development of this very type of mind by turning the reproach of cowardice, which it would have carried with it in heathen times, into an honor and a mark of holiness. Every monastery became a center of light and of struggling culture for the surrounding district. They were at once, to the early English recluse, universities and refuges, places of education, of retirement, and of peace in the midst of a jarring and discordant world.

In the Roman south many, if not all, of the monasteries seem to have been planned on the regular models; but in the north, where the Irish missionaries had borne the largest share in the work of conversion, the monasteries were irregular bodies on the Irish plan, where an abbot or abbess ruled over a mixed community of monks and nuns. Hild, a member of the Northumbrian princely family, founded such an abbey at Streonshalch (Whitby), made memorable by numbering among its members the first known English poet, Caedmon. St. John of Beverley, Bishop of Hexham, set up a similar monastery at the place with which his name is so closely associated. The Irish monks themselves founded others at Lindisfarne and elsewhere. Even in the south some Irish abbeys existed. In process of time, however, as the union with Rome grew stronger, all these houses conformed to the more regular usage, and became monasteries of the ordinary Benedictine type.

The civilizing value of the monasteries can hardly be over-rated. Secure in the peace conferred upon them by a religious sanction, the monks became the builders of schools, the drainers of marsh-land, the clearers of forest, the tillers of heath. Many of the earliest religious houses rose in the midst of what had been trackless wilds. Peterborough and Ely grew up on islands of the fen county. Crowland gathered round the cell of Guthlac in the midst of a desolate mere. Evesham occupied a glade in the wild forests of the western march. Glastonbury, an old Welsh foundation, stood on a solitary islet where the abrupt knoll of the Tor looks down upon the broad waste of the Somersetshire marshes. Beverley, as its name imports, had been a haunt of beavers before the monks began to till its fruitful dingles. In every case agriculture soon turned the wild lands into orchards and corn-fields, or drove drains through the fens which converted their marshes into meadows and pastures for the long-horned English cattle. Roman architecture, too, came with the Roman Church. We hear nothing before of stone buildings; but Eadwine erected a church of stone at York, under the direction of Paulinus; and Bishop Wilfrith, a generation later, restored and decorated it, covering the roof with lead and filling the windows with panes of glass. Masons had already been settled in Kent, though Benedict, the founder of Wearmouth and Jarrow, found it desirable to bring over others from the Franks. Metal-working had always been a special gift of the English, and their gold jewelry was well made even before the conversion, but it became still more noticeable after the monks took the craft into their own hands. Beda mentions mines of copper, iron, lead, silver, and jet. Abbot Benedict not only brought manuscripts from Rome, which were copied and imitated in his monasteries at Wearmouth and Jarrow, but he also brought over glass-blowers, who introduced the art of glass-making into England. Cuthbreht, Beda's scholar, writes to Lull, asking for workmen who

can make glass vessels. Bells appear to have been equally early introductions. Roman music, of course, accompanied the Roman liturgy. The connection established with the clergy of the continent favored the dispersion of European goods throughout England. We constantly hear of presents, consisting of skilled handicraft, passing from the civilized south to the rude and barbaric north. Wilfrith and Benedict journeyed several times to and from Rome, enlarging their own minds by intercourse with Roman society, and returning laden with works of art or manuscripts of value. Beda was acquainted with the writings of all the chief classical poets and philosophers, whom he often quotes. We can only liken the results of such intercourse to those which, in our own time, have proceeded from the opening of Japan to western ideas, or of the Hawaiian Islands to European civilization and European missionaries. The English school, which soon sprang up at Rome, and the Latin schools, which soon sprang up at York and Canterbury, are precise equivalents of the educational movements in both those countries which we see in our own day. The monks were to learn Latin and Greek "as well as they learned their own tongue," and were so to be given the key of all the literature and all the science that the world then possessed.

The monasteries thus became real manufacturing, agricultural, and literary centers on a small scale. The monks boiled down the salt of the brine-pits; they copied and illuminated manuscripts in the library; they painted pictures not without rude merit of their own; they ran rhines through the marshy moorlands; they tilled the soil with vigor and success. A new culture began to occupy the land—the culture whose fully-developed form we now see around us. But it must never be forgotten that in its origin it is wholly Roman and not at all Anglo-Saxon. Our people showed themselves singularly apt at embracing it, like the modern Polynesians, and unlike the American Indians; but

they did not invent it for themselves. Our existing culture is not home-bred at all; it is simply the inherited and widened culture of Greece and Italy.

V.

ALFRED'S EARLY YEARS.—FREEMAN.

[It was in the reign of Egberht, king of Wessex, that all the English kingdoms were united for the first time under one ruler. But the young State was no sooner formed than it was forced to face a new danger in the invasion of the Northmen or Danes. These people came from the Scandinavian kingdoms of the north of Europe, were of the same blood as the English, but were far behind them in civilization, and were still heathen. They began to land in England, to harry the country, and to carry off their spoil. At first as robbers, then as settlers, and finally as conquerors, for two centuries they occupy a large space in English history. In the midst of their invasions Alfred ascended the West-Saxon throne, and a large portion of his life was devoted to beating off their attacks.]

WE now come to our great King Alfred, the best and greatest of all our kings. We know quite enough of his history to be able to say that he really deserves to be so called, though I must warn you that, just because he left so great a name behind him, people have been fond of attributing to him things which really belonged to others. Thus you may sometimes see nearly all our laws and customs attributed to Alfred, as if he had invented them all for himself. You will sometimes hear that Alfred founded trial by jury, divided England into counties, and did all kinds of other things. Now the real truth is that the roots and beginnings of most of these things are very much older than the time of Alfred, while the particular forms in which we have them now are very much later. But people have a way of fancying that every thing must have been invented by some particular man, and, as Alfred was more famous than any body else, they hit upon

Alfred as the most likely person to have invented them. But, putting aside fables, there is quite enough to show that there have been very few kings, and very few men of any sort, so great and good as King Alfred. Perhaps the only equally good king we read of is Saint Lewis of France; and, though he was quite as good, we cannot set him down as being so great and wise as Alfred. Certainly no king ever gave himself up more thoroughly than Alfred did fully to do the duties of his office. His whole life seems to have been spent in doing all he could for the good of his people in every way. And it is wonderful in how many ways his powers showed themselves. That he was a brave warrior is in itself no particular praise in an age when almost every man was the same. But it is a great thing for a prince, so large a part of whose time was spent in fighting, to be able to say that all his wars were waged to set free his country from the most cruel enemies. And we may admire, too, the wonderful way in which he kept his mind always straight and firm, never either giving way to bad luck or being puffed up by good luck. We read of nothing like pride or cruelty or injustice of any kind either toward his own people or toward his enemies. And if he was a brave warrior, he was many other things besides. He was a lawgiver; at least he collected and arranged the laws, and caused them to be most carefully administered. He was a scholar, and wrote and translated many books for the good of his people. He encouraged trade and enterprise of all kinds, and sent men to visit distant parts of the world and bring home accounts of what they saw. And he was a thoroughly good man and a devout Christian in all relations of life. In short, one hardly knows any other character in all history so perfect, there is so much that is good in so many different ways; and, though no doubt Alfred had his faults, like other people, yet he clearly had none, at any rate in the greater part of his life, which took away at all seriously from his general goodness.

One wonders that such a man was never canonized as a saint; most certainly many people have received that name who did not deserve it nearly so well as he did.

Alfred, or, as his name should really be spelled, Ælfred, was the youngest son of King Æthelwulf, and was born at Wantage, in Berkshire, in 849. His mother was Osburh, the first, or perhaps the second, wife of Æthelwulf. She was the daughter of Oslac, the king's cup-bearer, who came of the royal house of the Jutes in Wight. Now a story is told of Alfred and his mother, which you may, perhaps, have heard already, and which is such a beautiful tale that I am really sorry to have to say that it cannot possibly be true. We are told that up to the age of twelve years Alfred was fond of hunting and other sports, but that he had not been taught any sort of learning, not so much as to read his own tongue. But he loved the old English songs; and one day his mother had a beautiful book of songs, with rich pictures and fine painted initial letters, such as you may often see in ancient books. And she said to her children, "I will give this beautiful book to the one of you who shall first be able to read it." And Alfred said, "Mother, will you really give me the book when I have learned to read it?" And Osburh said, "Yes, my son." So Alfred went and found a master, and soon learned to read. Then he came to his mother and read the songs in the beautiful book, and took the book for his own.

Now it is a great pity that so pretty a story cannot be true, and I must tell you why it cannot. Alfred was sent to Rome to the pope when he was four years old; and if the pope took him as his "bishop-son," and anointed him to be king, one cannot help thinking that he would have taught him to read, and to learn Latin. And it is quite certain that he could do both very well in after life. Still this is not quite certain proof, as he might have learned afterward. But one thing is quite certain. Alfred was not twelve years old till 861. By

that time his brothers were not children playing round their mother, but grown men and kings, and two of them, Æthelstan and Æthelbald, were dead. Moreover, in 861 Alfred's father, Æthelwulf, was dead, and his mother must have been dead also, as Æthelwulf married Judith in 856, when Alfred was only seven years old. If, then, any thing of the kind happened, it could not have been when Alfred was twelve years old, but before he was four. For in that year he went to Rome, and could never have seen his mother again, even if she were alive when he went. And for a child of four years old not to be able to read, is not so very wonderful a thing, even in our own time.*

In 871, on Æthelred's death, Alfred came to the crown, and he had at once to fight for his kingdom. The battle was at Wilton, near Salisbury, and does not seem to have been a very decisive one, as we read that the Danes were put to flight, and yet that they kept possession of the place of battle. And after the battle the Danes seem to have been tired: we read that they made peace with the West-Saxons, and there was peace, as far as Wessex was concerned, for a few years.

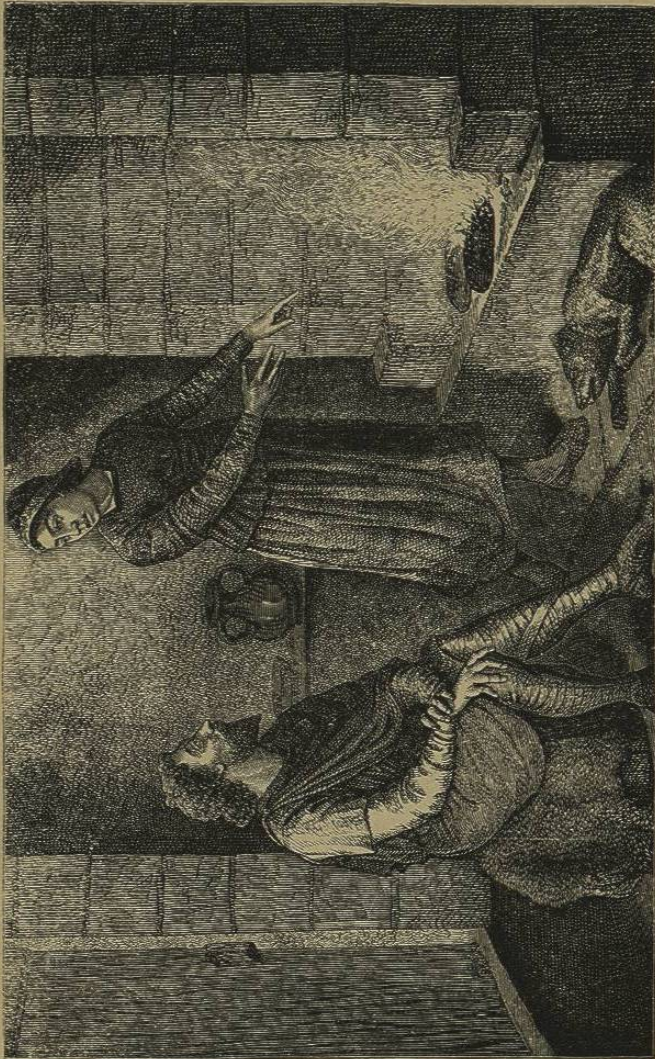
* I have seen in different books two attempts to get out of this difficulty, but I do not think either of them will do.

First, some suggest that Osburh was not dead when Æthelwulf married Judith, but that he had put her away, and that she might still have had her children about her. But of this there is no sort of proof, and when we read that a man, and especially a good man like Æthelwulf, married a second wife, we are bound to suppose that his first wife was dead, unless we have some clear proof that she was alive. And granting this, we still have the difficulty that, when Alfred was twelve years old, his brothers were not, as the story clearly implies, boys, but grown men and kings, and that some of them were dead.

Secondly, some suggest that the story really belongs, not to Alfred's mother, Osburh, but to his step-mother, Judith. Now it is really ridiculous to fancy that this young foreign girl would act as a careful mother to Æthelwulf's sons, some of whom must have been older than herself, and one of whom (Æthelbald) she was unprincipled enough to marry. Moreover, in 861 Æthelbald was already dead, and Judith had gone back into Gaul.

But they were all the while fighting and plundering and settling in other parts of Britain, and in 876 they came again into Wessex. We thus come to that part of Alfred's life which is at once the saddest and the brightest. It was the time when his luck was lowest and his spirit was highest. The army under Guthrum, the Danish king of East-Anglia, came suddenly to Wareham, in Dorsetshire. The "Chronicle" says that they "bestole"—that is, came secretly, or escaped—from the West-Saxon army, which seems to have been waiting for them. This time Alfred made peace with the Danes, and they gave him some of their chief men for hostages, and they swore to go out of the land, but they did not keep their oath. . . .

And now we come to the terrible year 878, the greatest and saddest and most glorious in all Alfred's life. In the very beginning of the year, just after Twelfth-night, the Danish host again came suddenly—"bestole," as the Chronicle says—to Chippenham. Then "they rode through the West-Saxon's land, and there sat down, and mickle of the folk over sea they drove, and of the others the most deal they rode over, all but the King Alfred; he with a little band hardly fared (went) after the woods and on the moor-fastnesses." How can I tell you this better than in the words of the Chronicle itself, only altering some words into their modern shape, that you may the better understand them? But it is quite certain that this time of utter distress lasted only a very little while, for in a few months Alfred was again at the head of an army and able to fight against the Danes. It must have been at this time that the story of the cakes happened, if it ever happened at all. The tale is quite possible, but there is no proof of it being true. It is said that Alfred went and stayed in the hut of a neatherd or swineherd of his, who knew who he was, though his wife did not know him. One day the woman set some cakes to bake, and bade the king, who was sitting by the fire mending his bow and arrows, to



Alfred in the Herdsman's Hut.

tend them. Alfred thought more of his bow and arrows than he did of the cakes, and let them burn. Then the woman ran in, and cried out: "There, don't you see the cakes on fire? Then wherefore turn them not? You're glad enough to eat them when they're piping hot!"*

It is almost more strange when we are told by some that this swineherd or neatherd afterward became Bishop of Winchester. They say that his name was Denewulf, and that the king said that, though he was in so lowly a rank, he was naturally a very wise man. So he had him taught, and at last gave him the bishopric. But it is hard to believe this, especially as Denewulf, Bishop of Winchester, became bishop the very next year.

 VI.

DUNSTAN, THE ECCLESIASTICAL STATESMAN.—GREEN.

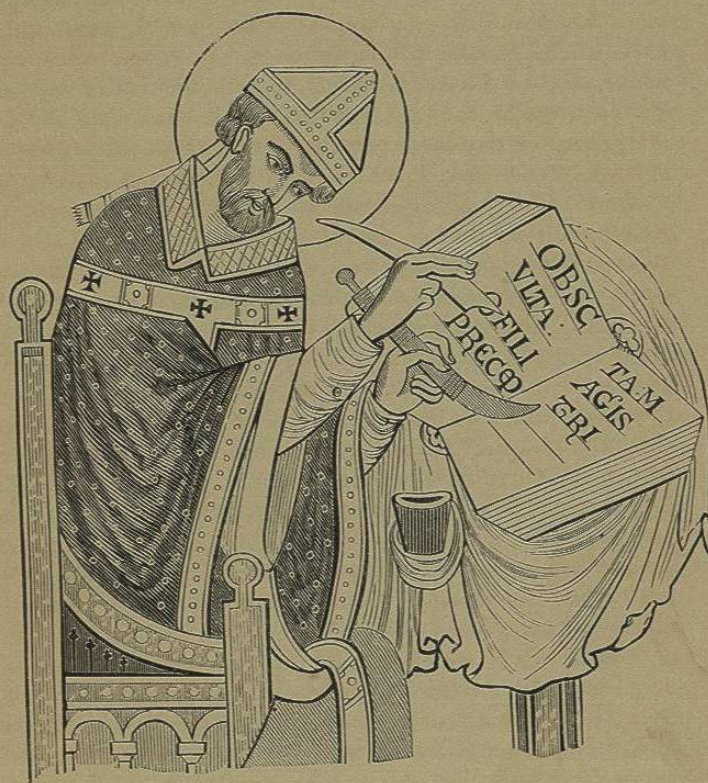
[The struggle with the Danes gave a new direction to the growth of Wessex. By the Treaty of Wedmore (878) England was divided between Alfred and the Danish leader. Wessex lost her external supremacy, but her immediate territory was largely increased. The impulse, thus given, continued under Alfred's son and grandsons, until, in the reign of Eadgar, the boundaries of Wessex became co-extensive with those of the kingdom of England. This result seems to have been largely due to the able administration of Archbishop Dunstan.]

THE completion of the West-Saxon realm was, in fact, reserved for the hands, not of a king or warrior, but of a priest. Dunstan stands first in the line of ecclesiastical statesmen, who counted among them Lanfranc and Wolsey, and ended in Laud. He is still more remarkable in himself, in his own vivid personality, after eight centuries of revolution and change. He was born in the little hamlet of Glastonbury, the home of his father, Heorstan, a man of wealth and

* The woman's speech is put into two Latin verses. Most likely the whole story comes from a ballad.

brother of the Bishop of Wells and of Winchester. It must have been in his father's hall that the fair, diminutive boy, with his scant but beautiful hair, caught his love for "the vain songs of heathendom, the trifling legends, the funeral chaunts," which afterward roused against him the charge of sorcery. Thence, too, he might have derived his passionate love of music, and his custom of carrying his harp in hand on journey or visit. Wandering scholars of Ireland had left their books in the monastery of Glastonbury, as they left them along the Rhine and the Danube; and Dunstan plunged into the study of sacred and profane letters till his brain broke down in delirium. So famous became his knowledge in the neighborhood that news of it reached the Court of Æthelstan; but his appearance there was the signal for a burst of ill-will among the courtiers. They drove him from the king's train, threw him from his horse as he passed through the marshes, and, with the wild passion of their age, trampled him under foot in the mire. The outrage ended in fever, and Dunstan rose from his sick-bed a monk. But the monastic profession was then little more than a vow of celibacy, and his devotion took no ascetic turn. His nature, in fact, was sunny, versatile, artistic, full of strong affections, and capable of inspiring others with affections as strong. Quick-witted, of tenacious memory, a ready and fluent speaker, gay and genial in address, an artist, a musician, he was at the same time an indefatigable worker at books, at building, at handicraft. As his sphere began to widen we see him followed by a train of pupils, busy with literature, writing, harping, painting, designing. One morning a lady summons him to her house to design a robe which she is embroidering, and as he bends with her maidens over their toil, his harp, hung upon the wall, sounds, without mortal touch, tones which the excited ears around frame into a joyous antiphon.

From this scholar-life Dunstan was called to a wider sphere of activity by the accession of Eadmund. But the old jeal-



St. Dunstan

ousies revived at his re-appearance at court, and, counting the game lost, Dunstan preferred again to withdraw. The king had spent the day in the chase; the red deer which he was pursuing dashed over Cheddar cliffs, and his horse only checked itself on the brink of the ravine at the moment when Eadmund, in the bitterness of death, was repenting of his injustice to Dunstan. He was at once summoned on the king's return. "Saddle your horse," said Eadmund, "and ride with me." The royal train swept over the marshes to his home; and the king, bestowing on him the kiss of peace, seated him in the abbot's chair as Abbot of Glastonbury. Dunstan became one of Eadmund's councilors, and his hand was seen in the settlement of the North. The league between Scot and Briton was finally broken up, and the fidelity of the Scots secured by their need of help in holding down their former ally. The settlement was soon troubled by the young king's death. As he feasted at Pucklechurch, in the May of 946, Leofa, a robber whom Eadmund had banished from the land, entered the hall, seated himself at the royal board, and drew sword on the cup-bearer when he bade him retire. The king sprang in wrath to his thane's aid, and seizing Leofa by the hair, flung him to the ground; but in the struggle the robber drove his dagger to Eadmund's heart. His death at once stirred fresh troubles in the North; the Danelagh rose against his brother and successor, Eadred, and some years of hard fighting were needed before it was again driven to own the English supremacy. But with its submission, in 954, the work of conquest was done. Dogged as his fight had been, the Northman at last owned himself beaten. From the moment of Eadred's final triumph all resistance came to an end. The Danelagh ceased to be a force in English politics. North might part anew from South; men of Yorkshire might again cross swords with men of Hampshire, but their strife was henceforth a local strife between men of the same people; it was a strife of

Englishmen with Englishmen, and not of Englishmen with Northmen.

The death of Eadred, in 955, handed over the realm to a child-king, his nephew, Eadwig. Eadwig was swayed by a woman of high lineage, Æthelgifu; and the quarrel between her and the older councilors of Eadred broke into open strife at the coronation feast. On the young king's insolent withdrawal to her chamber, Dunstan, at the bidding of the Witan, drew him roughly back to his seat. But the feast was no sooner ended than a sentence of outlawry drove the abbot over sea, while the triumph of Æthelgifu was crowned, in 957, by the marriage of her daughter to the king, and the spoliation of the monasteries which Dunstan had befriended. As the new queen was Eadwig's kinswoman, the religious opinion of the day regarded his marriage as incestuous, and it was followed by a revolution. At the opening of 958 Archbishop Odo parted the king from his wife by solemn sentence; while the Mercians and Northumbrians rose in revolt, proclaimed Eadwig's brother Eadgar their king, and recalled Dunstan. The death of Eadwig, a few months later, restored the unity of the realm; but his successor, Eadgar, was only a boy of fourteen, and throughout his reign the actual direction of affairs lay in the hands of Dunstan, whose elevation to the see of Canterbury set him at the head of the Church as of the State. The noblest tribute to his rule lies in the silence of our chroniclers. His work, indeed, was a work of settlement, and such a work was best done by the simple enforcement of peace. During the years of rest in which the stern hand of the Primate enforced justice and order, Northmen and Englishmen drew together into a single people. Their union was the result of no direct policy of fusion; on the contrary, Dunstan's policy preserved to the conquered Danelagh its local rights and local usages. But he recognized the men of the Danelagh as Englishmen: he employed Northmen in the royal service, and promoted them to high posts in Church

and State. For the rest he trusted to time, and time justified his trust. The fusion was marked by a memorable change in the name of the land. Slowly as the conquering tribes had learned to know themselves by the one national name of Englishmen, they learned yet more slowly to stamp their name on the land they had won. It was not till Eadgar's day that the name of Britain passed into the name of England, the land of Englishmen, England. The same vigorous rule which secured rest for the country during these years of national union, told on the growth of material prosperity. Commerce sprang into a wider life. The laws of Æthelred, which provide for the protection and regulation of foreign trade, only recognize a state of things which grew up under Eadgar. It was in Eadgar's day that London rose to commercial greatness.

VII.

CNUT, THE GREAT DANISH KING.—FREEMAN.

[On the accession of the second Æthelred, named the Unready, the Danish wars began again, and soon passed into their third phase—an attempt on the part of the King of all Denmark to subjugate the kingdom of England. The fatal policy was adopted of buying off the invaders. This led to more frequent invasions, and to ever-increasing demands for money, until at length the country was exhausted and could pay no more; while, under the enervating influences of the time, the English military system seems to have utterly broken down. The Conquest, nearly finished by Swegen, was completed by his son Cnut, who thus became King of all England. He won his success by unscrupulous means, but a great change came over him as soon as his power was firmly established.]

THIS gradual change in the disposition of Cnut makes him one of the most remarkable, and, to an Englishman, one of the most interesting, characters in history. There is no other instance—unless Rolf, in Normandy, be admitted as a forerunner on a smaller scale—of a barbarian conqueror, en-