

## **ALFRED**

<sup>871</sup>. THIS PRINCE gave very early marks of those great virtues and shining talents, by which, during the most difficult times, he saved his country from utter ruin and subversion. Ethelwolf, his father, the year after his return with Alfred from Rome, had again sent the young prince thither with a numerous retinue; and a report being spread of the king's death, the pope, Leo III. gave Alfred the royal unction;<sup>a</sup> whether prognosticating his future greatness from the appearances of his pregnant genius, or willing to pretend even in that age, to the right of conferring kingdoms. Alfred, on his return home, became every day more the object of his father's affections; but being indulged in all youthful pleasures, he was much neglected in his education; and he had already reached his twelfth year, when he was yet totally ignorant of the lowest elements of literature. His genius was first roused by the recital of Saxon poems, in which the queen took delight; and this species of erudition, which is sometimes able to make a considerable progress even among barbarians, expanded those noble and elevated sentiments, which he had received from nature.<sup>b</sup> Encouraged by the queen, and stimulated by his own ardent inclination, he soon learned to read those compositions; and proceeded thence to acquire the knowledge of the Latin tongue, in which he met with authors, that better prompted his heroic spirit, and directed his generous views. Absorbed in these elegant pursuits, he regarded his accession to royalty rather as an object of regret than of triumph;<sup>i</sup> but being called to the throne, in preference to his brother's children, as well by the will of his father, a circumstance which had great authority with the Anglo-Saxons;<sup>k</sup> as by the vows of the whole nation and the urgency of public affairs, he shook off his literary indolence, and exerted himself in the defence of his people. He had scarcely buried his brother, when he was obliged to take the field, in order to oppose the Danes, who had seized Wilton, and were exercising their usual ravages on the countries around. He marched against them with the few troops, which he could assemble on a sudden; and giving them battle, gained at first an advantage, but by his pursuing the victory too far, the superiority of the enemy's numbers prevailed, and recovered them the day. Their loss, however, in the action was so considerable, that, fearing Alfred would receive daily reinforcement from his subjects, they were content to stipulate for a safe retreat, and promised to depart the kingdom. For that purpose they were conducted to London, and allowed to take up winter-quarters there; but, careless of their engagements, they immediately set themselves to the committing of spoil on the neighbouring country. Burrhed, king of Mercia, in whose territories London was situated, made a new stipulation with them, and engaged them, by presents of money, to remove to Lindesey in Lincolnshire; a country which they had already reduced to ruin

and desolation. Finding therefore no object in that place, either for their rapine or violence, they suddenly turned back upon Mercia, in a quarter where they expected to find it without defence; and fixing their station at Repton in Derbyshire, they laid the whole country desolate with fire and sword. Burrhed, despairing of success against an enemy, whom no force could resist, and no treaties bind, abandoned his kingdom, and flying to Rome, took shelter in a cloyster.<sup>1</sup> He was brother-in-law to Alfred, and the last who bore the title of King in Mercia.

The West-Saxons were now the only remaining power in England; and though supported by the vigour and abilities of Alfred, they were unable to sustain the efforts of those ravagers, who from all quarters invaded them. 875. A new swarm of Danes came over this year under three princes, Guthrum, Oscitel, and Amund; and having first joined their countrymen at Repton, they soon found the necessity of separating, in order to provide for their subsistence. Part of them, under the command of Haldene, their chieftain,<sup>m</sup> marched into Northumberland, where they fixed their quarters; part of them took quarters at Cambridge, whence they dislodged in the ensuing summer, and seized Wereham, in the county of Dorset, the very center of Alfred's dominions. That prince so straitened them in these quarters, that they were content to come to a treaty with him, and stipulated to depart his country. Alfred, well acquainted with their usual perfidy, obliged them to swear upon the holy reliques to the observance of the treaty;<sup>n</sup> not that he expected they would pay any veneration to the reliques; but he hoped, that, if they now violated this oath, their impiety would infallibly draw down upon them the vengeance of heaven. But the Danes, little apprehensive of the danger, suddenly, without seeking any pretence, fell upon Alfred's army; and having put it to rout, marched westward, and took possession of Exeter. The prince collected new forces; and exerted such vigour, that he fought in one year eight battles with the enemy,<sup>o</sup> and reduced them to the utmost extremity. He hearkened however to new proposals of peace; and was satisfied to stipulate with them, that they would settle somewhere in England,<sup>p</sup> and would not permit the entrance of more ravagers into the kingdom. But while he was expecting the execution of this treaty, which it seemed the interest of the Danes themselves to fulfil, he heard that another body had landed, and having collected all the scattered troops of their countrymen, had surprized Chippenham, then a considerable town, and were exercising their usual ravages all around them.

This last incident quite broke the spirit of the Saxons, and reduced them to despair. Finding that, after all the miserable havoc, which they had undergone in their persons and in their property; after all the vigorous actions, which they had exerted in their own defence; a new band, equally greedy of

spoil and slaughter, had disembarked among them; they believed themselves abandoned by heaven to destruction, and delivered over to those swarms of robbers, which the fertile north thus incessantly poured forth against them. Some left their country, and retired into Wales or fled beyond sea: Others submitted to the conquerors, in hopes of appeasing their fury by a servile obedience:<sup>a</sup> And every man's attention being now engrossed in concern for his own preservation, no one would hearken to the exhortations of the King, who summoned them to make, under his conduct, one effort more in defence of their prince, their country, and their liberties. Alfred himself was obliged to relinquish the ensigns of his dignity, to dismiss his servants, and to seek shelter, in the meanest disguises, from the pursuit and fury of his enemies. He concealed himself under a peasant's habit, and lived some time in the house of a neat-herd, who had been entrusted with the care of some of his cows.<sup>b</sup> There passed here an incident, which has been recorded by all the historians, and was long preserved by popular tradition; though it contains nothing memorable in itself, except so far as every circumstance is interesting, which attends so much virtue and dignity, reduced to such distress. The wife of the neat-herd was ignorant of the condition of her royal guest; and observing him one day busy by the fire-side in trimming his bow and arrows, she desired him to take care of some cakes, which were toasting, while she was employed elsewhere in other domestic affairs. But Alfred, whose thoughts were otherwise engaged, neglected this injunction; and the good woman, on her return, finding her cakes all burnt, rated the king very severely, and upbraided him, that he always seemed very well pleased to eat her warm cakes, though he was thus negligent in toasting them.<sup>c</sup>

By degrees, Alfred, as he found the search of the enemy become more remiss, collected some of his retainers, and retired into the center of a bog, formed by the stagnating waters of the Thone and Parret, in Somersetshire. He here found two acres of firm ground; and building a habitation on them, rendered himself secure by its fortifications, and still more by the unknown and inaccessible roads which led to it, and by the forests and morasses, with which it was every way environed. This place he called Aethelingay, or the Isle of Nobles;<sup>d</sup> and it now bears the name of Athelney. He thence made frequent and unexpected sallies upon the Danes, who often felt the vigour of his arm, but knew not from what quarter the blow came. He subsisted himself and his followers by the plunder which he acquired; he procured them consolation by revenge; and from small successes, he opened their minds to hope, that, notwithstanding his present low condition, more important victories might at length attend his valour.

Alfred lay here concealed, but not unactive, during a twelve-month; when the news of a prosperous event reached his ears, and called him to the field. Hubba, the Dane, having spread devastation, fire, and slaughter, over Wales, had landed in Devonshire from twenty-three vessels, and laid siege to the castle of Kinwith, a place situated near the mouth of the small river Tau. Oddune, earl of Devonshire, with his followers, had taken shelter there; and being ill supplied with provisions, and even with water, he determined, by some vigorous blow, to prevent the necessity of submitting to the barbarous enemy. He made a sudden sally on the Danes before sun-rising; and taking them unprepared, he put them to rout, pursued them with great slaughter, killed Hubba himself, and got possession of the famous *Reafen*, or enchanted standard, in which the Danes put great confidence.<sup>u</sup> It contained the figure of a raven, which had been inwoven by the three sisters of Hinguar and Hubba, with many magical incantations, and which, by its different movements, prognosticated, as the Danes believed, the good or bad success of any enterprize.<sup>w</sup>

When Alfred observed this symptom of successful resistance in his subjects, he left his retreat; but before he would assemble them in arms, or urge them to any attempt, which, if unfortunate, might, in their present despondency, prove fatal, he resolved to inspect, himself, the situation of the enemy, and to judge of the probability of success. For this purpose he entered their camp under the disguise of a harper, and passed unsuspected through every quarter. He so entertained them with his music and facetious humours, that he met with a welcome reception; and was even introduced to the tent of Guthrum, their prince, where he remained some days.<sup>x</sup> He remarked the supine security of the Danes, their contempt of the English, their negligence in foraging and plundering, and their dissolute wasting of what they gained by rapine and violence. Encouraged by these favourable appearances, he secretly sent emissaries to the most considerable of his subjects, and summoned them to a rendezvous, attended by their warlike followers, at Brixton, on the borders of Selwood forest.<sup>y</sup> The English, who had hoped to put an end to their calamities by servile submission, now found the insolence and rapine of the conqueror more intolerable than all past fatigues and dangers; and, at the appointed day, they joyfully resorted to their prince. On his appearance, they received him with shouts of applause;<sup>z</sup> and could not satiate their eyes with the sight of this beloved monarch, whom they had long regarded as dead, and who now with voice and looks expressing his confidence of success, called them to liberty and to vengeance. He instantly conducted them to Eddington, where the Danes were encamped: and taking advantage of his previous knowledge of the place, he directed his attack against the most unguarded quarter of the enemy. The Danes, surprised to see an army of English, whom they considered as totally subdued, and still more astonished to hear that Alfred

was at their head, made but a faint resistance, notwithstanding their superiority of number; and were soon put to flight with great slaughter. The remainder of the routed army, with their prince, was besieged by Alfred in a fortified camp, to which they fled; but being reduced to extremity by want and hunger, they had recourse to the clemency of the victor, and offered to submit on any conditions. The king, no less generous than brave, gave them their lives; and even formed a scheme for converting them, from mortal enemies, into faithful subjects and confederates. He knew, that the kingdoms of East-Anglia and Northumberland were totally desolated by the frequent inroads of the Danes; and he now purposed to re-people them by settling there Guthrum and his followers. He hoped that the new planters would at last betake themselves to industry, when, by reason of his resistance, and the exhausted condition of the country, they could no longer subsist by plunder; and that they might serve him as a rampart against any future incursions of their countrymen. But before he ratified these mild conditions with the Danes, he required, that they should give him one pledge of their submission, and of their inclination to incorporate with the English, by declaring their conversion to Christianity.<sup>a</sup> Guthrum, and his army had no aversion to the proposal; and, without much instruction or argument or conference, they were all admitted to baptism. The king answered for Guthrum at the font, gave him the name of Athelstan, and received him as his adopted son.<sup>b</sup>

880. The success of this expedient seemed to correspond to Alfred's hopes: The greater part of the Danes settled peaceably in their new quarters: Some smaller bodies of the same nation, which were dispersed in Mercia, were distributed into the five cities of Darby, Leicester, Stamford, Lincoln, and Nottingham, and were thence called the Fif or Five-Burgers. The more turbulent and unquiet made an expedition into France under the command of Hastings;<sup>c</sup> and except by a short incursion of Danes, who sailed up the Thames and landed at Fulham, but suddenly retreated to their ships, on finding the country in a posture of defence, Alfred was not for some years infested by the inroads of those barbarians.<sup>d</sup>

The king employed this interval of tranquillity in restoring order to the state, which had been shaken by so many violent convulsions; in establishing civil and military institutions; in composing the minds of men to industry and justice; and in providing against the return of like calamities. He was, more properly than his grandfather Egbert, the sole monarch of the English, (for so the Saxons were now universally called) because the kingdom of Mercia was at last incorporated in his state, and was governed by Ethelbert, his brother-in-law, who bore the title of Earl: and though the Danes, who peopled East-Anglia and Northumberland, were for some time ruled immediately by their own princes, they all acknowledged a

subordination to Alfred, and submitted to his superior authority. As equality among subjects is the great source of concord, Alfred gave the same laws to the Danes and English, and put them entirely on a like footing in the administration both of civil and criminal justice. The fine for the murder of a Dane was the same with that for the murder of an Englishman; the great symbol of equality in those ages.

The king, after rebuilding the ruined cities, particularly London,<sup>e</sup> which had been destroyed by the Danes in the reign of Ethelwolf, established a regular militia for the defence of the kingdom. He ordained that all his people should be armed and registered; he assigned them a regular rotation of duty; he distributed part into the castles and fortresses, which he built at proper places;<sup>f</sup> he required another part to take the field on any alarm, and to assemble at stated places of rendezvous; and he left a sufficient number at home, who were employed in the cultivation of the land, and who afterwards took their turn in military service.<sup>g</sup> The whole kingdom was like one great garrison; and the Danes could no sooner appear in one place, than a sufficient number was assembled to oppose them, without leaving the other quarters defenceless or disarmed.<sup>h</sup>

But Alfred, sensible that the proper method of opposing an enemy, who made incursions by sea, was to meet them on their own element, took care to provide himself with a naval force,<sup>i</sup> which, though the most natural defence of an island, had hitherto been totally neglected by the English. He increased the shipping of his kingdom both in number and strength, and trained his subjects in the practice as well of sailing, as of naval action. He distributed his armed vessels in proper stations around the island, and was sure to meet the Danish ships either before or after they had landed their troops, and to pursue them in all their incursions. Though the Danes might suddenly, by surprize, disembark on the coast, which was generally become desolate by their frequent ravages, they were encountered by the English fleet in their retreat and escaped not, as formerly, by abandoning their booty, but paid, by their total destruction, the penalty of the disorders which they had committed.

In this manner, Alfred repelled several inroads of these pyratrical Danes, and maintained his kingdom, during some years, in safety and tranquillity. A fleet of a hundred and twenty ships of war was stationed upon the coast; and being provided with warlike engines, as well as with expert seamen, both Frisians and English, (for Alfred supplied the defects of his own subjects by engaging able foreigners in his service) maintained a superiority over those smaller bands,<sup>893</sup> with which England had so often been infested.<sup>k</sup> But at last Hastings the famous Danish chief, having ravaged all the provinces of France, both along the sea coast and the Loire



and Seine, and being obliged to quit that country, more by the desolation which he himself had occasioned, than by the resistance of the inhabitants, appeared off the coast of Kent with a fleet of 330 sail. The greater part of the enemy disembarked in the Rother, and seized the fort of Apuldore. Hastings himself, commanding a fleet of eighty sail, entered the Thames, and fortifying Milton in Kent, began to spread his forces over the country, and to commit the most destructive ravages. But Alfred, on the first alarm of this descent, flew to the defence of his people, at the head of a select band of soldiers, whom he always kept about his person;<sup>1</sup> and gathering to him the armed militia from all quarters, appeared in the field with a force superior to the enemy. All straggling parties, whom necessity or love of plunder had drawn to a distance from their chief encampment, were cut off by the English;<sup>2</sup> and these pyrates, instead of increasing their spoil, found themselves cooped up in their fortifications, and obliged to subsist by the plunder which they had brought from France. Tired of this situation, which must in the end prove ruinous to them, the Danes at Apuldore rose suddenly from their encampment, with an intention of marching towards the Thames, and passing over into Essex: But they escaped not the vigilance of Alfred, who encountered them at Farnham, put them to rout,<sup>3</sup> seized all their horses and baggage, and chased the runaways on board their ships, which carried them up the Colne to Mersey in Essex, where they entrenched themselves. Hastings, at the same time, and probably by concert, made a like movement; and deserting Milton, took possession of Bamflete, near the Isle of Canvey in the same county;<sup>4</sup> where he hastily threw up fortifications for his defence against the power of Alfred.

Unfortunately for the English, Guthrum, prince of the East-Anglian Danes, was now dead; as was also Guthred, whom the king had appointed governor of the Northumbrians; and those restless tribes, being no longer restrained by the authority of their princes, and being encouraged by the appearance of so great a body of their countrymen, broke into rebellion, shook off the authority of Alfred, and yielding to their inveterate habits of war and depredation,<sup>5</sup> embarked on board two hundred and forty vessels, and appeared before Exeter in the west of England. Alfred lost not a moment in opposing this new enemy. Having left some forces at London to make head against Hastings and the other Danes, he marched suddenly to the west;<sup>6</sup> and falling on the rebels before they were aware, pursued them to their ships with great slaughter. These ravagers, sailing next to Sussex, began to plunder the country near Chichester; but the order which Alfred had every where established, sufficed here, without his presence, for the defence of the place; and the rebels, meeting with a new repulse, in which many of them were killed, and some of their ships taken,<sup>7</sup> were obliged to put again to sea, and were discouraged from attempting any other enterprize.

Meanwhile, the Danish invaders in Essex, having united their force under the command of Hastings, advanced into the inland country, and made spoil of all around them; but soon had reason to repent of their temerity. The English army, left in London, assisted by a body of the citizens, attacked the enemy's entrenchments at Bamflete, overpowered the garrison, and having done great execution upon them, carried off the wife and two sons of Hastings.<sup>s</sup> Alfred generously spared these captives; and even restored them to Hastings,<sup>t</sup> on condition that he should depart the kingdom.

But though the king had thus honourably rid himself of this dangerous enemy, he had not entirely subdued or expelled the invaders. The pyratival Danes willingly followed in an excursion any prosperous leader, who gave them hopes of booty; but were not so easily induced to relinquish their enterprize, or submit to return, baffled and without plunder, into their native country. Great numbers of them, after the departure of Hastings, seized and fortified Shobury at the mouth of the Thames; and having left a garrison there, they marched along the river, till they came to Boddington in the county of Gloucester, where, being reinforced by some Welsh, they threw up entrenchments, and prepared for their defence. The king here surrounded them with the whole force of his dominions;<sup>u</sup> and as he had now a certain prospect of victory, he resolved to trust nothing to chance, but rather to master his enemies by famine than assault. They were reduced to such extremities, that, having eaten their own horses, and having many of them perished with hunger,<sup>w</sup> they made a desperate sally upon the English; and though the greater number fell in the action, a considerable body made their escape.<sup>x</sup> These roved about for some time in England, still pursued by the vigilance of Alfred; they attacked Leicester with success, defended themselves in Hartford, and then fled to Quatford, where they were finally broken and subdued. The small remains of them either dispersed themselves among their countrymen in Northumberland and East-Anglia,<sup>y</sup> or had recourse again to the sea, where they exercised piracy, under the command of Sigefert, a Northumbrian. This free-booter, well acquainted with Alfred's naval preparations, had framed vessels of a new construction, higher, and longer, and swifter, than those of the English: But the king soon discovered his superior skill, by building vessels still higher, and longer, and swifter, than those of the Northumbrians; and falling upon them, while they were exercising their ravages in the west, he took twenty of their ships; and having tried all the prisoners at Winchester, he hanged them as pyrates, the common enemies of mankind.

The well-timed severity of this execution, together with the excellent posture of defence established every where, restored full tranquillity in England, and provided for the future security of the government. The East-Anglian and Northumbrian Danes, on the first appearance of Alfred upon their frontiers,



made anew the most humble submissions to him; and he thought it prudent to take them under his immediate government, without establishing over them a viceroy of their own nation.<sup>z</sup> The Welsh also acknowledged his authority; and this great prince had now, by prudence and justice and valour, established his sovereignty over all the southern parts of the island, from the English channel to the frontiers of Scotland;<sup>901</sup> when he died, in the vigour of his age and the full strength of his faculties, after a glorious reign of twenty-nine years and a half;<sup>a</sup> in which he deservedly attained the appellation of Alfred the Great, and the title of Founder of the English monarchy.

The merit of this prince, both in private and public life, may with advantage be set in opposition to that of any monarch or citizen, which the annals of any age or any nation can present to us. He seems indeed to be the model of that perfect character, which, under the denomination of a sage or wise man, philosophers have been fond of delineating, rather as a fiction of their imagination, than in hopes of ever seeing it really existing. So happily were all his virtues tempered together; so justly were they blended; and so powerfully did each prevent the other from exceeding its proper boundaries! He knew how to reconcile the most enterprizing spirit with the coolest moderation; the most obstinate perseverance with the easiest flexibility; the most severe justice with the gentlest lenity; the greatest vigour in commanding with the most perfect affability of deportment;<sup>b</sup> the highest capacity and inclination for science, with the most shining talents for action. His civil and his military virtues are almost equally the objects of our admiration; excepting only, that the former, being more rare among princes, as well as more useful, seem chiefly to challenge our applause. Nature also, as if desirous that so bright a production of her skill should be set in the fairest light, had bestowed on him every bodily accomplishment, vigour of limbs, dignity of shape and air, with a pleasing, engaging, and open countenance.<sup>c</sup> Fortune alone, by throwing him into that barbarous age, deprived him of historians worthy to transmit his fame to posterity; and we wish to see him delineated in more lively colours, and with more particular strokes, that we may at least perceive some of those small specks and blemishes, from which, as a man, it is impossible he could be entirely exempted.

But we should give but an imperfect idea of Alfred's merit, were we to confine our narration to his military exploits, and were not more particular in our account of his institutions for the execution of justice, and of his zeal for the encouragement of arts and sciences.

After Alfred had subdued and had settled or expelled the Danes, he found the kingdom in the most wretched condition;

desolated by the ravages of those barbarians, and thrown into disorders, which were calculated to perpetuate its misery. Though the great armies of the Danes were broken, the country was full of straggling troops of that nation, who, being accustomed to live by plunder, were become incapable of industry, and who, from the natural ferocity of their manners, indulged themselves in committing violence, even beyond what was requisite to supply their necessities. The English themselves, reduced to the most extreme indigence by these continued depredations, had shaken off all bands of government; and those who had been plundered to-day, betook themselves next day to a like disorderly life, and from despair joined the robbers in pillaging and ruining their fellow citizens. These were the evils, for which it was necessary that the vigilance and activity of Alfred should provide a remedy.

That he might render the execution of justice strict and regular, he divided all England into counties; these counties he subdivided into hundreds; and the hundreds into tithings. Every house-holder was answerable for the behaviour of his family and slaves, and even of his guests, if they lived above three days in his house. Ten neighbouring house-holders were formed into one corporation, who, under the name of a tithing, decennary, or fribourg, were answerable for each other's conduct, and over whom one person, called a tythingman, headbourg, or borsholder, was appointed to preside. Every man was punished as an outlaw, who did not register himself in some tything. And no man could change his habitation, without a warrant or certificate from the borsholder of the tything, to which he formerly belonged.

When any person in any tything or decennary was guilty of a crime, the borsholder was summoned to answer for him; and if he were not willing to be surety for his appearance and his clearing himself, the criminal was committed to prison, and there detained till his trial. If he fled, either before or after finding sureties, the borsholder and decennary became liable to enquiry, and were exposed to the penalties of law. Thirty-one days were allowed them for producing the criminal; and if that time elapsed without their being able to find him, the borsholder, with two other members of the decennary, was obliged to appear, and together with three chief members of the three neighbouring decennaries (making twelve in all) to swear that his decennary was free from all privy both of the crime committed, and of the escape of the criminal. If the borsholder could not find such a number to answer for their innocence, the decennary was compelled by fine to make satisfaction to the king, according to the degree of the offence.<sup>d</sup> By this institution every man was obliged from his own interest to keep a watchful eye over the conduct of his neighbours; and was in a manner surety for the behaviour of those who were placed under the division, to which he

belonged: Whence these decennaries received the name of frank-pledges.

Such a regular distribution of the people, with such a strict confinement in their habitation, may not be necessary in times, when men are more enured to obedience and justice; and it might perhaps be regarded as destructive of liberty and commerce in a polished state; but it was well calculated to reduce that fierce and licentious people under the salutary restraint of law and government. But Alfred took care to temper these rigours by other institutions favourable to the freedom of the citizens; and nothing could be more popular and liberal than his plan for the administration of justice. The borsholder summoned together his whole decennary to assist him in deciding any lesser difference, which occurred among the members of this small community. In affairs of greater moment, in appeals from the decennary, or in controversies arising between members of different decennaries, the cause was brought before the hundred, Which consisted of ten decennaries, or a hundred families of freemen, and which was regularly assembled once in four weeks, for the deciding of causes.<sup>e</sup> Their method of decision deserves to be noted, as being the origin of juries; an institution, admirable in itself, and the best calculated for the preservation of liberty and the administration of justice, that ever was devised by the wit of man. Twelve freeholders were chosen; who, having sworn, together with the hundreder or presiding magistrate of that division, to administer impartial justice,<sup>f</sup> proceeded to the examination of that cause, which was submitted to their jurisdiction. And beside these monthly meetings of the hundred, there was an annual meeting, appointed for a more general inspection of the police of the district; for the enquiry into crimes, the correction of abuses in magistrates, and the obliging of every person to shew the decennary in which he was registered. The people, in imitation of their ancestors, the ancient Germans, assembled there in arms, whence a hundred was sometimes called a wapen-take, and its court served both for the support of military discipline, and for the administration of civil justice.<sup>g</sup>

The next superior court to that of the hundred was the county-court, which met twice a year, after Michaelmas and Easter, and consisted of the freeholders of the county, who possessed an equal vote in the decision of causes. The bishop presided in this court, together with the alderman; and the proper object of the court was the receiving of appeals from the hundreds and decennaries, and the deciding of such controversies as arose between men of different hundreds. Formerly, the alderman possessed both the civil and military authority; but Alfred, sensible that this conjunction of powers rendered the nobility dangerous and independant, appointed also a sheriff in each county; who enjoyed a co-ordinate authority with the former in the judicial function.<sup>h</sup> His office also empowered him

to guard the rights of the crown in the county, and to levy the fines imposed; which in that age formed no contemptible part of the public revenue.

There lay an appeal, in default of justice, from all these courts to the king himself in council; and as the people, sensible of the equity and great talents of Alfred, placed their chief confidence in him, he was soon overwhelmed with appeals from all parts of England. He was indefatigable in the dispatch of these causes;<sup>i</sup> but finding that his time must be entirely engrossed by this branch of duty, he resolved to obviate the inconvenience, by correcting the ignorance or corruption of the inferior magistrates, from which it arose.<sup>k</sup> He took care to have his nobility instructed in letters and the laws:<sup>l</sup> He chose the earls and sheriffs from among the men most celebrated for probity and knowledge: He punished severely all malversation in office:<sup>m</sup> And he removed all the earls, whom he found unequal to the trust;<sup>n</sup> allowing only some of the more elderly to serve by a deputy, till their death should make room for more worthy successors.

The better to guide the magistrates in the administration of justice, Alfred framed a body of laws; which, though now lost, served long as the basis of English jurisprudence, and is generally deemed the origin of what is denominated the COMMON LAW. He appointed regular meetings of the states of England twice a year in London;<sup>o</sup> a city which he himself had repaired and beautified, and which he thus rendered the capital of the kingdom. The similarity of these institutions to the customs of the ancient Germans, to the practice of the other northern conquerors, and to the Saxon laws during the Heptarchy, prevents us from regarding Alfred as the sole author of this plan of government; and leads us rather to think, that, like a wise man, he contented himself with reforming, extending, and executing the institutions, which he found previously established. But on the whole, such success attended his legislation, that every thing bore suddenly a new face in England: Robberies and iniquities of all kinds were repressed by the punishment or reformation of the criminals.<sup>p</sup> And so exact was the general police, that Alfred, it is said, hung up, by way of bravado, golden bracelets near the highways; and no man dared to touch them.<sup>q</sup> Yet amidst these rigours of justice, this great prince preserved the most sacred regard to the liberty of his people; and it is a memorable sentiment preserved in his will, that it was just the English should for ever remain as free as their own thoughts.<sup>r</sup>

As good morals and knowledge are almost inseparable, in every age, though not in every individual; the care of Alfred for the encouragement of learning among his subjects was another useful branch of his legislation, and tended to reclaim the English from their former dissolute and ferocious manners:

But the King was guided in this pursuit, less by political views, than by his natural bent and propensity towards letters. When he came to the throne, he found the nation sunk into the grossest ignorance and barbarism, proceeding from the continued disorders in the government, and from the ravages of the Danes: The monasteries were destroyed, the monks butchered or dispersed, their libraries burnt; and thus the only feats of erudition in those ages were totally subverted. Alfred himself complains, that on his accession he knew not one person, south of the Thames, who could so much as interpret the Latin service; and very few in the northern parts, who had reached even that pitch of education. But this prince invited over the most celebrated scholars from all parts of Europe; he established schools every where for the instruction of his people; he founded, at least repaired the university of Oxford, and endowed it with many privileges, revenues and immunities; he enjoined by law all freeholders possessed of two hydes<sup>s</sup> of land or more to send their children to school for their instruction; he gave preferment both in church and state to such only as had made some proficiency in knowledge: And by all these expedients he had the satisfaction, before his death, to see a great change in the face of affairs; and in a work of his, which is still extant, he congratulates himself on the progress which learning, under his patronage, had already made in England.

But the most effectual expedient, employed by Alfred, for the encouragement of learning, was his own example, and the constant assiduity, with which, notwithstanding the multiplicity and urgency of his affairs, he employed himself in the pursuits of knowledge. He usually divided his time into three equal portions: One was employed in sleep, and the refecation of his body by diet and exercise; another in the dispatch of business; a third in study and devotion: And that he might more exactly measure the hours, he made use of burning tapers of equal length, which he fixed in lanthorns;<sup>t</sup> an expedient suited to that rude age, when the geometry of dialling and the mechanism of clocks and watches were totally unknown. And by such a regular distribution of his time, though he often laboured under great bodily infirmities,<sup>u</sup> this martial hero, who fought in person fifty-six battles by sea and land,<sup>w</sup> was able, during a life of no extraordinary length, to acquire more knowledge, and even to compose more books, than most studious men, though blest with the greatest leisure and application, have, in more fortunate ages, made the object of their uninterrupted industry.

Sensible, that the people, at all times, especially when their understandings are obstructed by ignorance and bad education, are not much susceptible of speculative instruction, Alfred endeavoured to convey his morality by apologues, parables, stories, apophthegms, couched in poetry; and besides propagating among his subjects, former compositions

of that kind, which he found in the Saxon tongue,<sup>x</sup> he exercised his genius in inventing works of a like nature,<sup>y</sup> as well as in translating from the Greek the elegant fables of Aesop. He also gave Saxon translations of Orosius's and Bede's histories; and of Boethius concerning the consolation of philosophy.<sup>z</sup> And he deemed it nowise derogatory from his other great characters of sovereign, legislator, warrior, and politician, thus to lead the way to his people in the pursuits of literature.

Meanwhile, this prince was not negligent in encouraging the vulgar and mechanical arts, which have a more sensible, though not a closer connexion with the interests of society. He invited, from all quarters, industrious foreigners to re-people his country, which had been desolated by the ravages of the Danes.<sup>a</sup> He introduced and encouraged manufactures of all kinds; and no inventor or improver of any ingenious art did he suffer to go unrewarded.<sup>b</sup> He prompted men of activity to betake themselves to navigation, to push commerce into the most remote countries, and to acquire riches by propagating industry among their fellow-citizens. He set apart a seventh portion of his own revenue for maintaining a number of workmen, whom he constantly employed in rebuilding the ruined cities, castles, palaces, and monasteries.<sup>c</sup> Even the elegancies of life were brought to him from the Mediterranean and the Indies;<sup>d</sup> and his subjects, by seeing those productions of the peaceful arts, were taught to respect the virtues of justice and industry, from which alone they could arise. Both living and dead, Alfred was regarded, by foreigners, no less than by his own subjects, as the greatest prince after Charlemagne that had appeared in Europe during several ages, and as one of the wisest and best that had ever adorned the annals of any nation.

Alfred had, by his wife, Ethelswitha, daughter of a Mercian earl, three sons and three daughters. The eldest son, Edmund, died without issue, in his father's lifetime. The third, Ethelward, inherited his father's passion for letters, and lived a private life. The second, Edward, succeeded to his power; and passes by the appellation of Edward the Elder, being the first of that name who sat on the English throne.