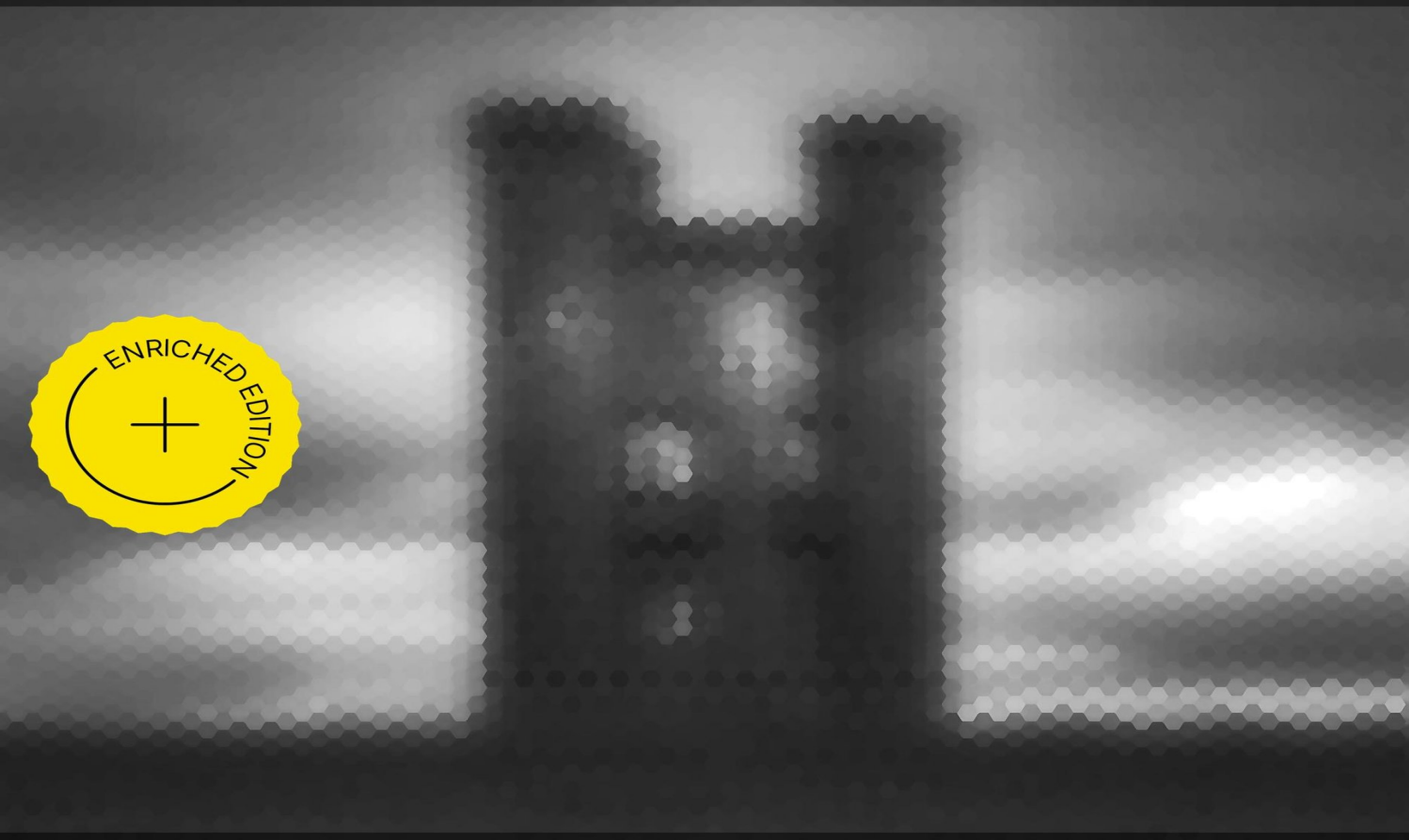
G. A. HENTY



ENRICHED EDITION

THE DRAGON AND THE RAVEN

VIKING NOVEL

G. A. Henty

The Dragon and the Raven (Viking Novel)

Enriched edition. The Days of King Alfred and the Vikings

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Karl Jennings

Published by

MUSAICUM

Books

- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook Formatting -

musaicumbooks@okpublishing.info

Edited and published by Musaicum Press, 2020
EAN 4064066386153

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Introduction

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Between the surf-lashed prows of northern raiders and the hedged fields of a threatened kingdom, The Dragon and the Raven turns the contest for a people’s survival into a capacious test of seamanship, statecraft, and steadfast character, following a youth shaped by storms of steel and counsel alike as he learns that victory depends not only on strong oars and bright blades, but on patience, adaptability, and the hard art of holding a community together when tides, tempers, and fate seem to pull everything apart, across waterways, winter camps, and battle-scarred parishes.

Written by G. A. Henty, this is a historical adventure novel set in ninth-century England as Viking incursions press hard upon the last independent Saxon realm. First published in the late nineteenth century, during the Victorian era’s flourishing of boys’ adventure fiction, it blends instructive narration with swift movement through marshes, halls, and tidal rivers. The world it portrays is anchored by the figure of King Alfred and the communities that rally to him, while Norse fleets haunt the coasts. Henty’s method joins a fictional coming-of-age story to verifiable events, inviting readers to survey strategy, geography, and custom within a perilous landscape.

At its outset, the story follows a young Saxon of ability who takes service in the struggle to defend Wessex, learning to fight on land and water while navigating the uncertainties of shifting alliances and sudden raids. The narrative moves from homesteads to royal councils to river mouths where

longships prowl, tracing how discipline, cunning, and loyalty might counter superior numbers. Battles and escapes arrive in episodes rather than single, crushing engagements, so that the reader experiences campaign life as a sequence of trials. Henty keeps the stakes clear without revealing every turn in advance, sustaining tension through changing terrain and weather.

Henty’s voice is steady and explanatory, favoring clear description over ornament and guiding younger readers through tactics, logistics, and the practicalities of ship and shield. Scenes of combat are energetic but measured, attentive to formation, tide, and timing rather than gore. Dialogue tends toward the purposeful, advancing plans and moral outlooks, while the narration pauses to sketch how a levee is raised or a vessel handled against a contrary wind. The tone is earnest and patriotic, yet it makes room for craft, prudence, and study, so that courage appears as a habit trained by knowledge as much as a burst of feeling.

Themes of leadership under duress and the formation of character run throughout, embodied in councils where endurance, not bravado, proves decisive. The novel treats faith and policy as intertwined, not to proselytize, but to illustrate how conviction shapes resolve and restraint. It values community—households, war-bands, and villages that supply food, scouts, and spirit—as the true engine of resistance. It also explores adaptation: new fortifications, riverine maneuvers, and locally built craft answer a maritime threat. These concerns unfold alongside questions of loyalty, mercy, and justice within the strains of war, giving the action a moral framework that sharpens rather than softens suspense.

For contemporary readers, the book offers a study in resilience, leadership, and civil cohesion during prolonged

crisis, themes that resonate beyond their early medieval setting. Its emphasis on preparation, intelligence-gathering, and flexible response to new forms of attack speaks to organizational challenges in any era. At the same time, it reflects Victorian assumptions that can appear partial in their portrayal of cultures in conflict, inviting critical discussion about perspective and voice in historical fiction. Approached with that awareness, the novel becomes doubly useful: a rousing narrative and a prompt to examine how stories about the past shape civic ideals today.

Read as an introduction to the age of Alfred, this novel provides a coherent path through unfamiliar names, practices, and landscapes, while leaving ample room to explore further history outside its pages. Its craft—tying a personal apprenticeship to large-scale strategy—keeps attention fixed on what it takes to preserve a common life when institutions falter. By the end, readers will have navigated estuaries and hedgerows, heard councils weigh hard choices, and watched how ingenuity can amplify limited strength. The Dragon and the Raven endures because it combines momentum with reflection, offering both adventure and a disciplined meditation on endurance and belonging.

Synopsis

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G. A. Henty’s The Dragon and the Raven, set in ninth-century England during the Danish invasions, follows a young Saxon noble who comes of age amid national crisis. Through his service to King Alfred, the narrative traces the collapse and slow reorganization of resistance across Wessex. Henty stitches documented events to an adventure arc, using battles, councils, and journeys to explore how discipline and faith might withstand chaos. The book balances logistics—mustering men, provisioning, fortifying—with personal trials, creating a panorama of endurance. The dragon and raven emblems, long associated with Saxon and Danish standards, frame the clash of cultures driving the plot.

Early chapters emphasize the pressure of swift raids, burnt homesteads, and the uncertainty of shifting truces. The protagonist trains in arms and prudence, assembling a compact band bound by local ties and loyalty to Wessex. Henty places him between village needs and royal strategy, so errands for Alfred—relaying messages, scouting borders, stiffening wavering garrisons—double as lessons in judgment. A few sharp skirmishes introduce Danish tactics and the perils of overconfidence. Counsel from churchmen and seasoned thanes refines his sense of duty, while practical concerns—harvests, stores, and refuge—show how survival depends on more than bravery alone.

As Danish armies consolidate, setbacks force Alfred to withdraw and rethink how a threatened kingdom can fight on. Henty follows the young thane through marshland

hideouts, rapid musters, and discreet negotiations that keep scattered forces connected. Intelligence gathering, surprise strikes, and strict discipline become the tools of a poorer side buying time. The story foregrounds the burden of command: punishments for pillage, the hard choice between open battle and delay, and the need to keep civilians fed. Moments of quiet planning balance the alarms, emphasizing how patience, secrecy, and morale can be as decisive as swords and shields.

A notable thread is the turn to the sea. Reflecting chronicles that credit Alfred with building larger, swifter ships, the novel depicts the fitting-out of vessels able to contest rivers and coasts. Under a dragon device, the hero learns to drill oarsmen, handle tides, and strike at supply craft flying the raven. Short, hazardous cruises show how seamanship widens strategic options, enabling rescues, interceptions, and diversions that land forces alone could not achieve. Naval clashes, tight and tactical, also test leadership under unfamiliar conditions, while the juxtaposition of banners turns each encounter into a symbolic duel between competing laws and loyalties.

Henty interleaves action with moral testing. Encounters in Danish camps and border markets reveal gradations of motive among enemies, from ruthless raiders to pragmatic settlers. The protagonist’s choices—whom to trust, when to show mercy, how to keep promises under strain—carry consequences that ripple through later campaigns. Conversations with clergy and lay leaders set Christian law against pagan custom without caricature, stressing order, oath-keeping, and restraint. The narrative pays attention to civilians, particularly women and farmers displaced by war, whose safety becomes a measure of legitimate command.

Loyalty within the hero’s band deepens through shared danger, discipline, and earned respect.

As Wessex stabilizes, organization replaces improvisation. The book highlights Alfred’s administrative reforms—burhs, musters, and a more reliable levy—while maintaining focus on the ground-level experience of patrols and marches. Coordinated movements by land and water compress Danish options and force sharper choices. The protagonist’s tactical acumen is tested in larger engagements where terrain, timing, and cohesion decide fortunes. Henty’s battle scenes are brisk rather than graphic, underscoring command signals, reserve handling, and the shock of shield-walls. Negotiations follow hard blows, and fragile peace terms emerge, pointing toward a settlement that promises breathing space without pretending that the struggle is over.

Without leaning on surprise revelations, the closing movement affirms the story’s broader concerns: how states survive invasion, how leaders earn trust, and how technology and organization reshape conflict. Henty’s narrative presents King Alfred as a figure of practical wisdom, yet it keeps attention on a younger generation learning service through risk. The dragon and raven recur as reminders that nations are sustained as much by symbols and laws as by arms. As a historical adventure for readers, the book endures for its portrayal of courage disciplined by responsibility, and for its understated claim that character can steady a battered realm.

Historical Context

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The Dragon and the Raven; or, The Days of King Alfred, published in 1886 by G. A. Henty, is set in late ninth-century Anglo-Saxon England amid sustained Viking incursions. The narrative ranges across Wessex, Mercia, and the river systems and coasts that linked them to the North Sea world. Its institutional backdrop includes the kingship of Wessex, the advisory witan, local shires and hundreds, and the Church's dioceses and monasteries. This setting frames the defense of the last independent English kingdom after the collapse of its neighbors, highlighting how geography, seafaring, and evolving military obligations shaped political survival.

By the 870s, the Great Heathen Army—recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle—had overrun much of England. Northumbria fractured in 867, East Anglia's King Edmund was killed in 869, and Mercia was divided after campaigns in the mid-870s. Viking forces wintered in fortified camps, shifting from raiding to conquest and settlement. Their pressure fell heaviest on Wessex after 870–871, when repeated battles strained its resources. The consolidation of Danish-ruled territories later known as the Danelaw created a new political map, with Scandinavian law and custom entrenched in large parts of northern and eastern England, and English resistance concentrated under the kings of Wessex.

Alfred became king of Wessex in 871 after the death of his brother, King Æthelred I, and soon faced renewed assaults. Sources such as Asser's Life of King Alfred and the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describe a crisis in 878, when a Danish force seized Chippenham and Alfred withdrew to the marshes of Athelney. That year culminated in victory at Edington, followed by Guthrum’s submission and baptism, a settlement often associated with the Treaty of Wedmore. These events stabilized Wessex and defined the strategic moment that the novel dramatizes: survival through resilience, local mobilization, and calculated counter-attacks.

Alfred’s response combined institutional reform with military innovation. He reorganized the fyrd so that part of the levy served while another portion remained to work the land, and he began a system of fortified burhs to secure communication and refuge; their later assessment appears in the Burghal Hidage. He strengthened royal justice and issued a law-code drawing on earlier West Saxon practice. Asser credits him with commissioning larger ships to counter Scandinavian fleets, an early step in English naval defense. London’s recovery and refortification in 886 further anchored Wessex’s authority and trade, shaping the political landscape the story inhabits.

Cultural and religious horizons are integral to the period. Alfred promoted learning, lamenting clerical decline and sponsoring translations into Old English of texts such as Gregory the Great’s Pastoral Care, Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, and Orosius’s history. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle began to take shape, framing events in a distinct English voice. Episcopal leadership and monastic life offered administration, literacy, and moral authority, while conflict encouraged conversions among some Scandinavian leaders. Guthrum accepted baptism and the Christian name Æthelstan after his defeat, exemplifying how diplomacy, law, and faith intersected with warfare—an intersection that

informs the novel’s themes of loyalty, instruction, and identity.

Viking military capacity drew on maritime technology and flexible organization. Longships with shallow drafts enabled riverine penetration and rapid coastal movement; crews combined sailing and rowing, striking quickly and withdrawing. Leaders associated with campaigns in England include Halfdan, Ivar the Boneless, Ubba, and Guthrum, whose forces established winter bases and extracted tribute. Archaeology and chronicles record fortified encampments and the integration of settlers into farming and market networks. This context underpins the novel’s seaborne encounters and raids, where mastery of tides, estuaries, and shipbuilding—on both Scandinavian and English sides—proves decisive in an era when mobility often outweighed fortification.

Henty wrote in late-Victorian Britain, during high imperial expansion and intense public interest in national history. The 1870 Elementary Education Act and cheap publishing broadened the audience for juvenile fiction. His historical adventures typically promote discipline, self-reliance, Protestant virtue, and patriotic service, aligning with contemporary ideals sometimes termed “muscular Christianity.” Nineteenth-century scholarship cast Alfred as a foundational English hero—patron of learning, lawgiver, and savior of the realm—an image widely popularized in schools and periodicals. The novel draws on that consensus, linking effective kingship and sea power with national survival in ways familiar to readers formed by Royal Navy preeminence.

While avoiding detailed modern analysis, it is clear the book reflects its era’s faith in orderly government, moral education, and maritime security. By dramatizing Alfred’s

resistance to invasion, it reinforces a narrative of English continuity from early medieval consolidation to nineteenth-century power. The emphasis on burhs, militia service, and shipbuilding valorizes preparedness and communal duty, echoing Victorian debates over defense and citizenship. Its portrayal of conversion, law, and clemency highlights the period’s belief that stability rests on both strength and justice. In sum, the novel mirrors dominant Victorian historiography while introducing readers to the verifiable contours of Alfredian England.

The Dragon and the Raven (Viking Novel)

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Preface

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MY DEAR LADS,

Living in the present days of peace and tranquillity it is difficult to picture the life of our ancestors in the days of King Alfred, when the whole country was for years overrun by hordes of pagan barbarians, who slaughtered, plundered, and destroyed at will. You may gain, perhaps, a fair conception of the state of things if you imagine that at the time of the great mutiny the English population of India approached that of the natives, and that the mutiny was everywhere triumphant. The wholesale massacres and outrages which would in such a case have been inflicted upon the conquered whites could be no worse than those suffered by the Saxons at the hands of the Danes. From this terrible state of subjection and suffering the Saxons were rescued by the prudence, the patience, the valour and wisdom of King Alfred. In all subsequent ages England has produced no single man who united in himself so many great qualities as did this first of great Englishmen. He was learned, wise, brave, prudent, and pious; devoted to his people, clement to his conquered enemies. He was as great in peace as in war; and yet few English boys know more than a faint outline of the events of Alfred's reign—events which have exercised an influence upon the whole future of the English people. School histories pass briefly over them; and the incident of the burned cake is that which is, of all the actions of a great and glorious reign, the most prominent in boys' minds. In this story I have tried to supply the deficiency. Fortunately in the Saxon Chronicles and in

the life of King Alfred written by his friend and counsellor Asser, we have a trustworthy account of the events and battles which first laid Wessex prostrate beneath the foot of the Danes, and finally freed England for many years from the invaders. These histories I have faithfully followed. The account of the siege of Paris is taken from a very full and detailed history of that event by the Abbe D'Abbon, who was a witness of the scenes he described.

Yours sincerely,
G. A. HENTY

Chapter I:
The Fugitives

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A low hut built of turf roughly thatched with rushes and standing on the highest spot of some slightly raised ground. It was surrounded by a tangled growth of bushes and low trees, through which a narrow and winding path gave admission to the narrow space on which the hut stood. The ground sloped rapidly. Twenty yards from the house the trees ceased, and a rank vegetation of reeds and rushes took the place of the bushes, and the ground became soft and swampy. A little further pools of stagnant water appeared among the rushes, and the path abruptly stopped at the edge of a stagnant swamp, though the passage could be followed by the eye for some distance among the tall rushes. The hut, in fact, stood on a hummock in the midst of a wide swamp where the water sometimes deepened into lakes connected by sluggish streams.

On the open spaces of water herons stalked near the margin, and great flocks of wild-fowl dotted the surface**[1q]**. Other signs of life there were none, although a sharp eye might have detected light threads of smoke curling up here and there from spots where the ground rose somewhat above the general level. These slight elevations, however, were not visible to the eye, for the herbage here grew shorter than on the lower and wetter ground, and the land apparently stretched away for a vast distance in a dead flat —a rush-covered swamp, broken only here and there by patches of bushes and low trees.

The little hut was situated in the very heart of the fen country[1], now drained and cultivated, but in the year 870 untouched by the hand of man, the haunt of wild-fowl and human fugitives. At the door of the hut stood a lad some fourteen years old. His only garment was a short sleeveless tunic girded in at the waist, his arms and legs were bare; his head was uncovered, and his hair fell in masses on his shoulders. In his hand he held a short spear, and leaning against the wall of the hut close at hand was a bow and quiver of arrows. The lad looked at the sun, which was sinking towards the horizon.

"Father is late," he said. "I trust that no harm has come to him and Egbert. He said he would return to-day without fail; he said three or four days, and this is the fourth. It is dull work here alone. You think so, Wolf, don't you, old fellow? And it is worse for you than it is for me, pent up on this hummock of ground with scarce room to stretch your limbs."

A great wolf-hound, who was lying with his head between his paws by the embers of a fire in the centre of the hut, raised his head on being addressed, and uttered a low howl indicative of his agreement with his master's opinion and his disgust at his present place of abode.

"Never mind, old fellow," the boy continued, "we sha'n't be here long, I hope, and then you shall go with me in the woods again and hunt the wolves to your heart's content." The great hound gave a lazy wag of his tail. "And now, Wolf, I must go. You lie here and guard the hut while I am away. Not that you are likely to have any strangers to call in my absence."

The dog rose and stretched himself, and followed his master down the path until it terminated at the edge of the water. Here he gave a low whimper as the lad stepped in and waded through the water; then turning he walked back

to the hut and threw himself down at the door. The boy proceeded for some thirty or forty yards through the water, then paused and pushed aside the wall of rushes which bordered the passage, and pulled out a boat which was floating among them.

It was constructed of osier rods neatly woven together into a sort of basket-work, and covered with an untanned hide with the hairy side in. It was nearly oval in shape, and resembled a great bowl some three feet and a half wide and a foot longer. A broad paddle with a long handle lay in it, and the boy, getting into it and standing erect in the middle paddled down the strip of water which a hundred yards further opened out into a broad half a mile long and four or five hundred yards wide. Beyond moving slowly away as the coracle approached them, the water-fowl paid but little heed to its appearance.

The boy paddled to the end of the broad, whence a passage, through which flowed a stream so sluggish that its current could scarce be detected, led into the next sheet of water. Across the entrance to this passage floated some bundles of light rushes. These the boy drew out one by one. Attached to each was a piece of cord which, being pulled upon, brought to the surface a large cage, constructed somewhat on the plan of a modern eel or lobster pot. They were baited by pieces of dead fish, and from them the boy extracted half a score of eels and as many fish of different kinds.

"Not a bad haul," he said as he lowered the cages to the bottom again. "Now let us see what we have got in our pen."

He paddled a short way along the broad to a point where a little lane of water ran up through the rushes. This narrowed rapidly and the lad got out from his boat into the

water, as the coracle could proceed no further between the lines of rushes. The water was knee-deep and the bottom soft and oozy. At the end of the creek it narrowed until the rushes were but a foot apart. They were bent over here, as it would seem to a superficial observer naturally; but a close examination would show that those facing each other were tied together where they crossed at a distance of a couple of feet above the water, forming a sort of tunnel. Two feet farther on this ceased, and the rushes were succeeded by lines of strong osier withies, an inch or two apart, arched over and fastened together. At this point was a sort of hanging door formed of rushes backed with osiers, and so arranged that at the slightest push from without the door lifted and enabled a wild-fowl to pass under, but dropping behind it prevented its exit. The osier tunnel widened out to a sort of inverted basket three feet in diameter.

On the surface of the creek floated some grain which had been scattered there the evening before as a bait. The lad left the creek before he got to the narrower part, and, making a small circuit in the swamp, came down upon the pen.

"Good!" he said, "I am in luck to-day; here are three fine ducks."

Bending the yielding osiers aside, he drew out the ducks one by one, wrung their necks, and passing their heads through his girdle, made his way again to the coracle. Then he scattered another handful or two of grain on the water, sparingly near the mouth of the creek, but more thickly at the entrance to the trap, and then paddled back again by the way he had come.

Almost noiselessly as he dipped the paddle in the water, the hound's quick ear had caught the sound, and he was

standing at the edge of the swamp, wagging his tail in dignified welcome as his master stepped on to dry land.

"There, Wolf, what do you think of that? A good score of eels and fish and three fine wild ducks. That means bones for you with your meal to-night—not to satisfy your hunger, you know, for they would not be of much use in that way, but to give a flavour to your supper. Now let us make the fire up and pluck the birds, for I warrant me that father and Egbert, if they return this evening, will be sharp-set. There are the cakes to bake too, so you see there is work for the next hour or two."

The sun had set now, and the flames, dancing up as the boy threw an armful of dry wood on the fire, gave the hut a more cheerful appearance. For some time the lad busied himself with preparation for supper. The three ducks were plucked in readiness for putting over the fire should they be required; cakes of coarse rye-flour were made and placed in the red ashes of the fire; and then the lad threw himself down by the side of the dog.

"No, Wolf, it is no use your looking at those ducks. I am not going to roast them if no one comes; I have got half a one left from dinner." After sitting quiet for half an hour the dog suddenly raised himself into a sitting position, with ears erect and muzzle pointed towards the door; then he gave a low whine, and his tail began to beat the ground rapidly.

"What! do you hear them, old fellow?" the boy said, leaping to his feet. "I wish my ears were as sharp as yours are, Wolf; there would be no fear then of being caught asleep. Come on, old boy, let us go and meet them."

It was some minutes after he reached the edge of the swamp before the boy could hear the sounds which the quick ears of the hound had detected. Then he heard a faint

splashing noise, and a minute or two later two figures were seen wading through the water.

"Welcome back, father," the lad cried. "I was beginning to be anxious about you, for here we are at the end of the fourth day."

"I did not name any hour, Edmund," the boy's father said, as he stepped from the water, "but I own that I did not reckon upon being so late; but in truth Egbert and I missed our way in the windings of these swamps, and should not have been back to-night had we not luckily fallen upon a man fishing, who was able to put us right. You have got some supper, I hope, for Egbert and I are as hungry as wolves, for we have had nothing since we started before sunrise."

"I have plenty to eat, father; but you will have to wait till it is cooked, for it was no use putting it over the fire until I knew that you would return; but there is a good fire, and you will not have to wait long. And how has it fared with you, and what is the news?"

"The news is bad, Edmund. The Danes are ever receiving reinforcements from Mercia, and scarce a day passes but fresh bands arrive at Thetford**[2]**, and I fear that ere long East Anglia, like Northumbria, will fall into their clutches. Nay, unless we soon make head against them they will come to occupy all the island, just as did our forefathers."

"That were shame indeed," Edmund exclaimed. "We know that the people conquered by our ancestors were unwarlike and cowardly; but it would be shame indeed were we Saxons so to be overcome by the Danes, seeing moreover that we have the help of God, being Christians, while the Danes are pagans and idolaters."

"Nevertheless, my son, for the last five years these heathen have been masters of Northumbria, have wasted

the whole country, and have plundered and destroyed the churches and monasteries. At present they have but made a beginning here in East Anglia; but if they continue to flock in they will soon overrun the whole country, instead of having, as at present, a mere foothold near the rivers except for those who have come down to Thetford. We have been among the first sufferers, seeing that our lands lie round Thetford, and hitherto I have hoped that there would be a general rising against these invaders; but the king is indolent and unwarlike, and I see that he will not arouse himself and call his ealdormen and thanes together for a united effort until it is too late. Already from the north the Danes are flocking down into Mercia, and although the advent of the West Saxons to the aid of the King of Mercia forced them to retreat for a while, I doubt not that they will soon pour down again."

"'Tis a pity, father, that the Saxons are not all under one leading; then we might surely defend England against the Danes. If the people did but rise and fall upon each band of Northmen as they arrived they would get no footing among us."

"Yes," the father replied, "it is the unhappy divisions between the Saxon kingdoms which have enabled the Danes to get so firm a footing in the land. Our only hope now lies in the West Saxons. Until lately they were at feud with Mercia; but the royal families are now related by marriage, seeing that the King of Mercia is wedded to a West Saxon princess, and that Alfred, the West Saxon king's brother and heir to the throne, has lately espoused one of the royal blood of Mercia. The fact that they marched at the call of the King of Mercia and drove the Danes from Nottingham shows that the West Saxon princes are alive to the common danger of the country, and if they are but

joined heartily by our people of East Anglia and the Mercians, they may yet succeed in checking the progress of these heathen. And now, Edmund, as we see no hope of any general effort to drive the Danes off our coasts, 'tis useless for us to lurk here longer. I propose to-morrow, then, to journey north into Lincolnshire, to the Abbey of Croyland, where, as you know, my brother Theodore is the abbot; there we can rest in peace for a time, and watch the progress of events. If we hear that the people of these parts are aroused from their lethargy, we will come back and fight for our home and lands; if not, I will no longer stay in East Anglia, which I see is destined to fall piecemeal into the hands of the Danes; but we will journey down to Somerset, and I will pray King Ethelbert to assign me lands there, and to take me as his thane."

While they had been thus talking Egbert had been broiling the eels and wild ducks over the fire. He was a freeman, and a distant relation of Edmund's father, Eldred, who was an ealdorman**[3]** in West Norfolk, his lands lying beyond Thetford, and upon whom, therefore, the first brunt of the Danish invasion from Mercia had fallen. He had made a stout resistance, and assembling his people had given battle to the invaders. These, however, were too strong and numerous, and his force having been scattered and dispersed, he had sought refuge with Egbert and his son in the fen country. Here he had remained for two months in hopes that some general effort would be made to drive back the Danes; but being now convinced that at present the Angles were too disunited to join in a common effort, he determined to retire for a while from the scene.

"I suppose, father," Edmund said, "you will leave your treasures buried here?"

"Yes," his father replied; "we have no means of transporting them, and we can at any time return and fetch them. We must dig up the big chest and take such garments as we may need, and the personal ornaments of our rank; but the rest, with the gold and silver vessels, can remain here till we need them."

Gold and silver vessels seem little in accordance with the primitive mode of life prevailing in the ninth century. The Saxon civilization was indeed a mixed one. Their mode of life was primitive, their dwellings, with the exception of the religious houses and the abodes of a few of the great nobles, simple in the extreme; but they possessed vessels of gold and silver, armlets, necklaces, and ornaments of the same metals, rich and brightly coloured dresses, and elaborate bed furniture while their tables and household utensils were of the roughest kind, and their floors strewn with rushes. When they invaded and conquered England they found existing the civilization introduced by the Romans, which was far in advance of their own; much of this they adopted. The introduction of Christianity further advanced them in the scale.

The prelates and monks from Rome brought with them a high degree of civilization, and this to no small extent the Saxons imitated and borrowed. The church was held in much honour, great wealth and possessions were bestowed upon it, and the bishops and abbots possessed large temporal as well as spiritual power, and bore a prominent part in the councils of the kingdoms. But even in the handsome and well-built monasteries, with their stately services and handsome vestments, learning was at the lowest ebb—so low, indeed, that when Prince Alfred desired to learn Latin he could find no one in his father's dominions capable of teaching him, and his studies were for a long

14 An older/alternate spelling of Valhalla from Norse mythology, the hall where slain warriors were believed to be received by Odin; specifics of such afterlife beliefs varied across regions and sources.

15 In Anglo-Saxon England, ealdormen were senior royal officials who governed large districts (roughly earldoms), raising forces, administering justice and acting for the king; their role is roughly comparable to later earls or regional governors.

16 Halliards (more commonly spelled halyards) are ropes used on sailing ships to hoist and lower sails or spars, a standard term in traditional ship rigging.

17 A jarl was a Norse noble title in the Viking Age, denoting a chieftain or regional leader (roughly equivalent to the later English 'earl') who might command war-parties and govern territory in Scandinavia.

18 A 'boom' here means a river barrier made of logs, beams, or chains lashed together to block or obstruct ships and control navigation, a common defensive naval measure in medieval waterways.

19 Cressets were iron baskets or fixtures holding burning pitch, tar, or oil used as portable lights; at sea or on shore they provided visible illumination and could be seen for considerable distances.

20 An ealdorman was a high-ranking Anglo-Saxon royal official or noble—often governing a shire or district on the king’s behalf—so 'Ealdorman Edmund' identifies Edmund as a senior Saxon leader under King Alfred (9th century context).

21 Mead is an alcoholic drink made by fermenting honey with water (sometimes with added herbs or spices), commonly consumed in medieval northern Europe and often associated with feasting and ceremonial toasts.

22 An augury is a practice of divination or interpreting omens to predict future events; in the text it refers generally to seeking a sign (here by a conflict) about the likely success of an expedition.

23 Woden is the Old English form of the chief Germanic god more commonly known by the Norse name Odin, worshipped in early medieval Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian paganism and associated with war, wisdom, and fate.

24 "the Dragon" in the story is the name of Edmund's ship, described as being laid up in a hiding-place; naming and hiding vessels was a common element in narratives of medieval seafaring and raids.

25 Athelney is a real island in the marshes of Somerset that served as King Alfred's refuge and base in the late 9th century; historically Alfred fortified it and used it to rally forces against the Danes.

26 'Ealdorman' was an Anglo-Saxon noble title roughly equivalent to an earl or provincial governor; 'Ealdorman Edmund of Sherborne' in the text denotes a local nobleman of Sherborne serving Alfred (exact historical identity in this fictional account may be uncertain).

27 Egbertesstan is named in the narrative as a rendezvous east of the Selwood forest and is given here as 'now called Brixton'; the place is traditionally associated with a

meeting-site in the Somerset/Wiltshire area, though precise modern identification is not certain.

28 An Anglo-Saxon assembly of the king's leading nobles and senior clergy that advised the ruler, made laws, and settled important disputes; the institution (also called the witan) functioned in England roughly from the 7th through the 11th centuries.

29 A white linen cloth placed on the head during the baptismal rite in early medieval Christian practice; the book pairs this with the 'chrism' or ceremony of loosing/removal and anointing, practices that varied by region and period.

30 A medieval term for seafarers from Scandinavia—commonly called Vikings—who conducted raids, trade, and settlement across Europe from about the late 8th to the 11th century.

31 Refers to Eudes (also known as Odo), a historical Count of Paris who is recorded as defending the city against Viking attacks; he is notably associated with the defence of Paris during the major siege of 885–886 AD.

32 Containers made from animal hides or bladders used to hold wine or water; in the passage they are employed as improvised flotation devices, a practice attested in historical sources.

33 Ships fitted with large wooden siege-towers or platforms built on their decks so attackers could approach and scale city walls from the water; such vessels were used in medieval riverine or coastal assaults.

34 A type of medieval siege engine or catapult designed to hurl stones, heavy missiles, or fire-projectiles at fortifications; 'mangonel' is a general term for such throwing machines used in siege warfare.

35 ‘Jarl’ is a Norse title for a chieftain or noble (roughly equivalent to an earl); in the chapter ‘Jarl Siegbert’ is presented as a Danish (Northman) leader who lies wounded and whose daughter is taken.

36 This phrase most likely refers to Charles the Fat, a Carolingian ruler who held the imperial title and reigned in the late ninth century (approximately 881–888), though the text does not give precise dates.

37 The Ardennes is a large, historically heavily forested region in western Europe that in medieval times stretched across parts of what are now eastern France, southern Belgium, Luxembourg, and western Germany; authors often describe it as a vast forest difficult to traverse.

38 The Maas is the river more commonly known in English as the Meuse, rising in northeastern France and flowing through Belgium and the Netherlands toward the North Sea; its course and estuary have been important for transport since medieval times.

39 The 'poop' is the raised structure at the stern (rear) of a ship and the 'forecastle' (often contracted to 'fo'c'sle' or 'forecastle') is the raised part at the bow (front); on medieval galleys these decks provided shelter, working platforms, and positions for lookouts or defenders.

40 A Scandinavian (Danish) leader in the story; the name was borne by several historical Viking commanders. For