

Agnes Strickland



*Tales from
English History.
For Children*

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PREFACE.

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History, which may be regarded as an inexhaustible treasury of entertainment and information, containing as it does the records of past ages, and of every important event connected with the rise and fall of nations, and abounding with incidents of such extraordinary interest, that the pages of few works of fiction can offer any thing so attractive, is seldom presented to the youthful reader in an agreeable form.

A barren chronology of monarchical successions, bloody wars, and dry political intrigues, comprise, generally speaking, the contents of the historical works prepared for the use of schools, from which the reluctant student turns with weariness and distaste.

Such volumes resemble the charts in which navigators delineate the barren ranges of hills that form the leading features of a country, while the soft undulations of the fertile valleys, the verdant groves, flowery plains, and pleasant streams, are absent from the picture.

It is the object of the present work to offer to the Young a series of moral and instructive tales, each founded on some striking authentic fact in the annals of English History, in which royal or distinguished children were engaged; and in which it is the Author's wish to convey, in a pleasing form, useful and entertaining information illustrative of the manners, customs, and costume of the era connected with the events of every story; to which is also added, an Historical Summary, which the Author recommends to the

attention of the juvenile reader, as containing many interesting particulars not generally to be met with in abridged histories.



Guthred, the Widow's Slave.

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A STORY OF THE TIMES OF ALFRED THE GREAT.

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Will it be credited by the youthful reader, that in this now free and happy land, slaves were once bought and sold with as little remorse as cattle are in the present day transferred from one master to another? Strange and revolting as it must appear to every lover of his country, such was once the existing practice, not only in the remote ages when the darkness of heathen barbarism overshadowed the British islands, but even in the reign of the benevolent and enlightened Alfred, under whose auspices law and justice were established in forms so pure and equitable, that many of his institutions have been handed down to us from our ancestors as the noblest legacy in their power to bestow.

Civilization, it is true, made a great progress during the era of this accomplished monarch, but he had so many difficulties to contend with, and so many prejudices to overcome, that it is not to be wondered if some abuses remained unreformed, and, among others, this inhuman traffic.

There were few occupiers of land in those days who were not possessed of thralls, or domestic slaves, who were distinguished from the hired servants by the degrading badge of an iron collar, on which was inscribed the name of the hapless bondman, with the notification that he was the

purchased or the born thrall, whichever it might happen to be, of such a person, of such a place.

The tale I am about to relate, which is founded on an authentic historical fact of this nature, is an illustrative sketch of the manners and customs of the Anglo Saxons and Danes, during that glorious period of our annals, the age of Alfred the Great, in whose reign its events took place.

One bright autumnal morning about eleven o'clock, the hour at which our Saxon ancestors usually took their principal meal, just as the family and serving-folk of the Saxon franklin,^[1] Selwood, were seating themselves at the well covered board, a loud barking from the watch dogs that guarded the homestead, answered by the low, but more angry growling of the household curs under the table, announced the approach of strangers.

^[1] A Saxon freeholder, or gentleman, who was possessed of one or more hydes of land. A hyde contains 100 acres.

Selwood, who was beginning to carve for his household, paused to listen, and grasped his huge knife with a firmer hold, as though he meditated using it as a weapon of defence in case of approaching danger. His serving-folk, who, according to the custom of those days, sat at the same table with their master, but below the salt, started from their seats on the rough oaken benches that surrounded the lower end of the board, laid hands on scythes, flails, or reaping hooks, and exclaimed in alarm, 'The Danes be upon us!'

So contiguous indeed was the town of Whittingham, near which the farm and homestead of Selwood were situated, to the Danelagh, or Danish colony, that had established itself

in great power in Northumberland, that perpetual fear existed in the minds of the franklin and his household, lest their dangerous neighbours should at any time think proper to break the hollow truce then subsisting between the Saxons and Danes, and pay him one of their predatory visits.

The Danish settlements were, in fact, neither more nor less than so many formidable hordes of rapacious banditti, always ready to give and take offence, and on the look-out for plunder. They were a cruel, faithless race, in whose promises no reliance could be placed, and whose only occupation consisted in rapine and deeds of blood.

The industrious habits and peaceful employments of the Saxons, who, having become naturalized to the soil, had abandoned the warlike manners of their fierce ancestors for the useful pursuits of the shepherd and the husbandman, were sorely interrupted by the incursions and ravages of the 'black strangers,' as the invading Danes were emphatically styled, from the sable hue of the vessels which brought this unwelcome swarm of northern robbers to the shores of England, where they first arrived in the reign of Egbert, and from that time contrived to obtain a footing in the country, and, being yearly reinforced with fresh bands of adventurers from the coasts of Denmark and Norway, they continued to gain strength, and at length establishing themselves, side by side as it were, of the Saxons, rendered themselves the terror of the peacefully disposed, and the scourge of the whole country. 'They are always before us,' says the Saxon chronicler; 'we always see the horizon reddened with flame, we always hear the tramp of war.'

At the period of Alfred's accession to the throne, nine pitched battles were fought in one year, between the English and the Danes, besides skirmishes and private conflicts innumerable. Sometimes the Danes were defeated, but after each reverse they appeared to redouble their activity, and actually increased in power. 'If thirty thousand are slain in one day' said the despairing Saxons, 'there will be double that number in the field to-morrow.' Sometimes, when the Saxons found themselves unable to cope with their formidable opponents, they were unwise enough to endeavour to purchase a shameful peace with gold; but the bribe was no sooner in the possession of the greedy barbarians, than they violated the dear-bought treaty, and committed all sorts of violence, for the sake of extorting fresh sums of money.

The appearance of a Danish holda, or chief, approaching the homestead of Selwood, though only attended by a boy of tender years, who was leading a brace of wolf-hounds in a leash, was sufficient to spread dismay through the dwelling.

There was an immediate consultation between Selwood and his wife, Winifred, as to whether they should treat the unwelcome visitor as an enemy, by refusing him admittance into the homestead, which doubtless he approached in the quality of a spy, or, as he came in a peaceful guise, choose the alternative of conciliating his friendship, by receiving him as a guest. 'He is a stranger, and as it is meal time it would be churlish to deny him entrance,' said Selwood, 'albeit, I would with greater pleasure invite a wolf to be my dinner guest.'

'The wolf would be the less dangerous visitor of the two, I trow,' said the careful Winifred, pocketing, as she spoke, the silver ladle, with which she was preparing to help herself from the bowl of plum porridge which stood before her.

Swindreda, her niece, was in the very act of whisking away the porridge also, muttering as she did so, 'that she had never taken the trouble of compounding such a dainty dish to tickle the palate of a Danish raven, for whom swine's flesh and barley broth were more than good enough,' when the holda, whose quick eye had caught the manoeuvre as he entered, called out, 'Holla there, maiden! is it your Saxon fashion to remove the best part of the cheer when a stranger surprises you at your meals? Now, that is the very dish whereof I mean to eat.' So saying, he snatched it from her hand, and, placing himself at the seat of honour at the table, he took a horn spoon from one of the serving men, and devoured the contents of the bowl in a trice, with the exception of a small portion, which he left at the bottom of the vessel, and handed over his shoulder with a patronizing air to his youthful attendant, who stood behind his stool, still holding the hounds in leash.

Guthred, for so the Danish chief called the boy, received this mark of favour with a sullen and reluctant air, and maintained a proud, cold demeanour, to the astonishment of the Saxon servants, who knew, from the iron collar, and other unequivocal badges of slavery about his person, that the boy was in a more degraded condition than themselves, being the purchased thrall or slave of Ricsig the Dane.

Ricsig appeared by no means an unkind master, for he took some pains to supply both the cravings of his hounds,

and the probable wants of his young slave, with the choicest provisions on the franklin's table, without paying the slightest attention to the feelings of the indignant host and mortified household; but it was thus that the insolent northmen conducted themselves when they entered the dwellings of the peaceful Saxons, who very seldom ventured to remonstrate with their unwelcome guests, lest they should draw upon themselves a still more formidable visitation in the shape of fire and sword, taking it for granted, that where one Dane made himself visible, ten more at least were lurking within call, in readiness to espouse any quarrel in which he might involve himself. It was this apprehension that withheld Selwood and his men from expelling the insolent intruder, who, after astonishing all parties with his voracity, laid hands on a curiously carved drinking horn, which Swindreda, in her anxiety to secure the plum porridge, had forgotten to remove, and calling for metheglin, emptied and replenished it so often with this heavy beverage, that he soon got into high good humour, and after bestowing great commendations on the beauty of the horn, he, instead of taking possession of it by sticking it into his girdle, beside his battle axe, as too many of his countrymen in such case would have done, actually offered to purchase it of Selwood.

'It is the horn of my fathers,' said the Saxon, 'and if I sell it to thee, it shall be for nought less than gold.'

'Gold,' echoed the Dane scornfully, 'dost think I am a Saxon monk, to carry coined pieces in my girdle? My wealth,' added he, significantly grasping the handle of his battle axe, 'is in the purses of my enemies.'

'That is to say,' rejoined Selwood, 'that you mean to carry off my cunningly-wrought drinking horn, as a reward for my hospitality to thee and thy thrall.'

'Said I not that I would purchase it of thee?' demanded Ricsig.

'Ay, but what art thou willing to give me in exchange?' said the franklin.

'Thou shall choose whether thou wilt have my hound, Snath; his fleet-footed companion, Wildbrach; or my thrall, Guthred,' replied the holda; 'all three have displeased me this morning: the two first led me hither on a false track of deer, and the latter hath perversely refused to eat of the food which I flung him even now from my own trencher; so choose between them, for the horn is now more precious in my sight than either.'

Selwood's judgment was assisted in making his election by a hint from the most prudent of housewives, the thrifty Winifred, who whispered in his ears, 'Curs have we more than plenty, master mine, for they only encourage the serving folk in idle pastimes, and serve as a cloak to conceal their wastery when the oaten cakes wax mouldy or the meat is too fat for their liking; but we are in need of a boy to tend the swine and sheep, and to do many other things, so choose the young thrall, who is a stout healthy lad, and, if discreetly trained, will do us worthy service both in and out of doors.'

No sooner had Selwood signified his choice to Ricsig, than the barter was completed by the Dane taking the boy by the collar, and transferring him to his new master in these words:

'I, Ricsig, give to thee, Selwood, Guthred my slave, to be thy thrall for ever.' Then tucking the drinking horn into his belt, he strode out of the Saxon homestead, whistling to his dogs to follow.

Guthred flung himself on the ground and wept.

'Nay, cheer up, my dainty bird,' said Winifred compassionately, 'thou wilt have no cause to lament thy change of masters, I promise, if thou wilt be a dutiful and pains-taking slave.'

Guthred redoubled his tears, and at length sobbed audibly.

'Thou didst not seem so loving to thy Danish master that thou shouldst bewail a separation from him thus passionately,' observed Swindreda.

'Loving to him!' echoed the boy indignantly, his large dark eyes flashing through his streaming tears as he spoke, 'loving unto a Dane,—to my born foe?'

'Why then, thou shouldst rejoice in thy change of thralldom,' said Winifred.

'It is for my thralldom that I weep,' replied Guthred, 'for I was free born, and am no more disposed to serve a Saxon churl than to be the slave of a Danish robber.'

'High words do oft proceed from an empty stomach,' observed his new master, sternly; 'but I counsel thee, boy, to stint thy perverse prating, which can answer no other purpose than to bring the thong across thy shoulders.'

'Thy women folk pestered me with questions, or I had only wept in silence,' replied Guthred scornfully.

'Women folk, indeed!' cried Swindreda, giving him a smart box on the ears. 'I'll teach thee to use more respectful

language of thy betters, and let thee know, withal, that it is not the business of a thrall to weep, but to work.'

'It is well for thee that thou art a woman, though an ill-favoured one, or I had returned thy hard blow with usury,' retorted Guthred, clenching his hand.

Swindreda was preparing to inflict summary vengeance on the imprudent railer, but Winifred humanely interposed to prevent the visitation of her wrathful displeasure, by sending her to feed the poultry, while she herself proceeded to instruct the newly-purchased slave in some of the household duties which he would be required to perform.

On the following day, Selwood ordered his shepherd, his neatherd, swineherd, and woodcutter, to put him in the way of becoming a useful assistant in their several vocations, but Guthred was sullen and refractory with the men, and rebellious to the women; the authority of both was, of course, enforced by harsh measures, and the young thrall was compelled to yield reluctant obedience after repeated chastisements; thus entailing upon himself severe personal sufferings in addition to the hardships of servitude.

His foreign accent and complexion, so different from that of his Saxon masters, had obtained for Guthred the name of the Son of the Stranger, a designation by no means likely to improve his condition among the Saxon serfs and ceorls, who had suffered too deeply from the aggressions of the Danes to be disposed to regard any foreigner with favourable eyes. Guthred was exposed to many taunts from the serving folk, on account of his persisting in wearing his dark hair, flowing on his shoulders, in its natural length, and rich luxuriance of spiral ringlets. Long hair was only worn by

persons of noble or royal birth; and though Guthred had refused to declare his birth and lineage, he assumed this envied distinction, to the infinite displeasure of his associates in labour, who had more than once seized upon him, and forcibly shorn these aristocratical honours from the proud head of the youthful slave; and when their mistress interposed her authority to prevent a repetition of the outrage, they vented their spleen in addressing him by the title of 'high and mighty thane,' whenever they required him to perform the most servile offices.

Guthred once smiled in scorn at the insult, and told his tormentors, 'that, like ignorant churls as they were, they addressed him by a title far below that which was his due.'

But this intimation drew upon him a torrent of such bitter mockery, that from that time forward he preserved a contemptuous silence when assailed by the taunts of the serfs.

The long weary winter, the hardest time of bondage that Guthred had yet sustained, passed away, and the sweet season of spring once more clothed the Northumbrian fields with verdure, and enamelled the pastures with flowers. It was some relief to the persecuted thrall of Selwood, when he was separated from the rude churls, and employed in the solitary office of keeping the sheep on the extensive downs, heath-clad hills, or pleasant meads; but, lovely as these scenes were, the sick heart of the young exile fondly yearned after the wild and rugged scenery of the far distant land of his fathers, whose eternal forests of sombre pines and chains of barren mountains, he preferred to the oaken glades, and the verdant hills and dales of the fertile island of

the west, of which he had become an unwilling denizen. The land was indeed fair; but to him who has neither sympathies nor companionship, the most smiling landscape becomes a dreary desert.

Had Guthred ever felt the divine influence of religion he might have supported his early sorrows with resignation; for, though companionless, he would have known that he was not alone, that he was upheld by the everlasting arm of his Father and his God, and would have learned in every dispensation, however afflicting, to recognise his hand; but he had been born in a heathen land, and the light of Christianity had never dawned on his benighted mind. Selwood and his household, indeed, were, nominally speaking, Christians; but their creed and practice were so corrupted, and interwoven with pagan superstitions and idolatries, that they were scarcely in less darkness than the young heathen, whose aversion to their mode of worship excited their anger and contempt.

Guthred only disliked their mode of worship because it was theirs, for he had never deigned to examine into the nature of their belief; from his own he drew no consolation; it was made up of shadowy recollections of gigantic idols, before whose images he had been taught by his father to bow the knee in the depth of gloomy groves. His remembrance recalled their terrific forms, but of their attributes he retained no idea, though he was occasionally wont to invoke them as the avengers of his wrongs, when injured by his Danish or Saxon task-masters.

One day, when a war of words between him and Swindreda had ended in his stubborn refusal to draw water

at her behest, and a severe corporeal punishment from the franklin had compelled him to submission, he proceeded to the sheepfold with a swelling heart, and throwing himself upon the ground, called aloud upon Thor and Woden to bring destruction upon Selwood and his whole household.

He paused, partly exhausted by the violence of his transport of fury, and partly, perhaps, from a sort of undefined expectation of receiving an answer to his vengeful invocation. It came; but neither in the uproar of the elements, nor the rush of the chariot wheels of the destroyer careering through the air; but in the soft low voice of compassionate expostulation. He raised his face from the earth, and perceived a stranger beside him, whose majestic form and mild countenance impressed him with the idea that he was a being of a different order from the rude and savage men with whom he had been accustomed to associate.

'Unhappy boy!' said the stranger, 'upon whom hast thou called?'

'On the gods of my fathers,' replied Guthred. 'Those whom mine own people worshipped within the strong circles of their power, and on whose rough hewn altars my father was wont to pour forth the blood of his slaughtered foes.'

The stranger shuddered. 'Alas, poor child!' said he, 'and canst thou believe that such inhuman sacrifices could be acceptable to the beneficent Creator of this beautiful world, which he has formed for the happiness and delight, of his creatures, whom he has commanded to love one another, and to worship him in the beauty of holiness, not with polluted hands and bloody rites?'

Guthred looked perplexed, for the language of the stranger was incomprehensible to him. At length he said, 'It was to Thor and Woden these sacrifices were offered by my father. To them the savour of blood is sweet, for they are called the Destroyer and the Avenger. Oh that they would bring fire and sword upon the homestead of Selwood the Saxon!'

'Thy guilty prayer is such as might indeed be expected from the lips of a benighted worshipper of the powers of evil,' replied the stranger; 'but know, my son, that in offering homage to Thor and Woden you are acting in direct rebellion to the Lord and Giver of Life, and the Supreme Ruler of the Universe, and are provoking his wrath to visit you with those maledictions which you impiously call down upon your enemies.'

'I cannot be more wretched than I am,' replied Guthred, 'nor suffer greater reverses: for I, who was born a prince, am now the slave of slaves.' He bowed his face once more upon the earth, and lifting up his voice, wept aloud.

The stranger allowed his passionate grief to vent itself, without interruption, for some moments, and then drawing Guthred to him, he addressed him in words of sympathy and encouragement.

The soothing tones, and language of compassion and tenderness, were new to the ears of the youthful slave; but they made their way to his heart, and melted the obdurate pride which had always prompted him to oppose violence to violence, and to return wrong for wrong, and with the confiding frankness of childhood, he flung himself into the

arms of his unknown comforter, and wetted his bosom with his tears.

'You say you were born a prince,' observed the stranger, after a pause. 'Whence come you?'

'From the land of the dark forest and the snow-clad mountain,' replied Guthred, with a flushing cheek and kindling eye, from Lethra^[2], where my father, Hardacanute, was a king and a warrior; and I, his heir, was brought up on the knees of the valiant, served by the hands of the noble, and lulled to sleep by the songs of the bards, who told of the deeds of my great forefather, the mighty Odin, whose coal-black eye and raven hair, they said, resembled mine. But Halfdane and Hubba, the fierce sons of Regner Lodbrok, came, like a wintry torrent, spreading woe and desolation through my native Lethra, and having slain my sire, and burned his cities, they bore me, a helpless sorrowing child, from the place of my birth and the kingdom I should have inherited, to their own detested land of Denmark, where Halfdane, the eldest of the fierce brethren, the same who now awes the trembling Northumbrian Saxons with the terror of his name, this Halfdane, I say, exchanged me with his hunting companion, Ricsig, for a wolf-hound, and Ricsig, in his turn, trucked me away to Selwood the Saxon, for a paltry drinking horn, as though I had been a thing of nought, a senseless utensil, or a beast of the field.'

^[2] Lethra, a province of ancient Sweden.—Palgrave.

'And how have you been treated in the household of the Saxon franklin?' demanded the stranger.

'With hard words and harder blows have I been driven forth to the performance of vile offices,' returned Guthred

indignantly. 'A hewer of wood and a drawer of water have I been to sordid household queans, and a drudge in field and fold to the base churls who served my Saxon master, and with their injurious usage increased the bitterness of a prince's bondage. Pity have I had from no one save from thyself,' added he, in a softened tone, on perceiving the kindly drops which the tale of his sorrows had drawn from the benign eyes of the stranger. 'And who art thou that weapest for the woes of an alien and a slave? Surely thou belongest not to the race of the unfeeling Saxon, or the savage Dane!'

'My name is Eadred,' replied the stranger, 'and though of Saxon lineage, I am not, I trust, unfeeling, but the servant of One who is the friend of the friendless; who hath, in His divine wisdom, for some good purpose, doubtless, brought thee hither, and hath sent me to thee with tidings of comfort.'

In reply to Guthred's eager inquiries, Eadred proceeded to reveal to him that God, of whose name and attributes he had hitherto remained in profound ignorance.

Guthred listened patiently, for the manners of the eloquent speaker had that mild persuasive charm which appeals resistlessly to every heart. He listened attentively, for the subject was one of powerful interest, conveyed as it was, in the impressive, but sublime simplicity of truth. He listened with delight, for the pure doctrines of Christianity were glad tidings to the desolate, heart-broken captive, to whom they offered better hopes of happiness in a future state of existence than the savage pleasure of quaffing mead and beer from the skulls of slaughtered foes, at the

joyless valhalla, or heaven, of Scandinavian mythology; and Guthred, the lineal descendant of the renowned Odin, who was honored as one of the mightiest of the northern divinities, became a convert to the Christian faith.

Eadred frequently sought his young friend in the lonely pastures, where he kept the franklin's sheep, for the purpose of imparting to his powerful but uncultivated mind, the advantages of that learning which he was ably qualified to communicate; for Eadred was a Saxon monk of distinguished talents and eminent acquirements, who resided in a neighboring convent, and employed himself in works of mercy and charity, and experienced a pure delight in diffusing the light of knowledge and religion, in succoring the distressed, and comforting the sorrowful. As his pupil, the hitherto fierce and intractable Guthred, became mild, reflective, and intelligent, the hours that he had been accustomed to waste in vain repining, listless insanity, or stormy bursts of passion, were now employed in study or heavenward meditation, which enabled him to correct the defects of his character, and to endure with resignation and fortitude the toil and persecution he occasionally had to bear. He no longer regretted the loss of power and dominion, for his mind was to him a kingdom, and the intercourses he enjoyed with the pious and accomplished Eadred, he would not have resigned for all the riches the world could bestow.

Books were then rare possessions, confined to the libraries of convents, and but seldom to be met with in the cabinets of monarchs, yet Guthred, through the favor of his learned friend, was seldom without a roll of illuminated MS.

in his bosom, wherewith to beguile his solitary hours, and sweeten the labors of the day. Nor were his studies confined to book-learning alone; he became an observer of the face of nature, and the characters of his fellow men.

'Knowledge is power,' Lord Bacon in later times has said, and the enslaved Guthred, the servant of servants, as he, in the bitterness of his soul had aptly styled himself, acquired with his growing wisdom such influence over the minds of those around him, that he became as it were the oracle of the household and neighborhood. His sayings were quoted, his advice solicited, and his judgment appealed to, in all cases where parties were at issue or difficulties occurred.

Like the captive Hebrew in the house of the Egyptian lord, every thing appeared to prosper with him. The flocks and herds of Selwood increased, and his crops were more abundant; plenty was without, and peace within the dwelling, where the master mind of the young slave, as he approached to manhood, manifested its superiority over the ignorant serfs and ceorls, by the improvements he suggested, and the good order he contributed to establish and maintain. But these days of tranquillity were not to last. The growing wealth of Selwood excited the cupidity of the Danish hordes in the neighborhood, who, taking advantage of a dispute among themselves, in which they pretended that the inhabitants of Whitingham had interfered, poured down upon the devoted Saxons, plundered their dwellings, drove away their flocks and herds, and put every man to the sword who dared to offer resistance to their lawless rapacity.

When Guthred, who had been sent by his master on a message of trust to receive a sum of money from the monks

of Lindisfairne for a drove of fat bullocks, returned to Whitingham, he found the homestead in ashes, the lands harried, the flocks and herds gone, and his mistress sitting on her ruined hearthstone, weeping over the mangled corpse of the murdered franklin, her husband; deserted by serfs and thralls, they having taken advantage of her calamity to provide for their own interests; and even abandoned by her niece and sole relative, Swindreda, that damsel having taken a fancy to one of the Danish plunderers, with whom she departed to the Danelagh.

It was then that Guthred found occasion for the exercise of those principles of Christian benevolence, which had been inculcated by the pious Eadred. That beloved friend was indeed lost to him, for the convent had been plundered and burned by the ferocious Danes, and no trace of the monks or their peaceful and useful occupations remained; but the precepts of Eadred remained indelibly impressed on the tablets of Guthred's heart, whose first impulse was to bestow such consolation and assistance as it was in his power to offer to the broken-hearted widow.

Poor Winifred, who had not expected to receive that sympathy and succour from the foreign thrall which had been denied by those from whom she had most reason to expect it, lifted up her voice, and blessed him with the blessing of the widow and the destitute.

When Guthred had consigned the bleeding remains of his murdered master to a grave, which he dug for him beneath the umbrage of one of the noble elms that had formerly overshadowed the low-roofed but pleasant dwelling, he conducted his sorrowing mistress to a miserable shieling, or

cottage, that had escaped the general conflagration which had consumed house, barns, and cattle sheds; but, notwithstanding all his care and consideration, Winifred must have perished of want, had it not been for the sum which Guthred had received from the monks of Lindisfairne for his deceased master, and which he now, with scrupulous fidelity, delivered to the astonished widow.

'Keep it, my son,' said she, 'and use it for our mutual benefit; surely it will be safer in thy hands than in mine, and will prosper under thy management.'

Guthred applied this little store with such prudence and success, and used such unremitting personal exertions, in improving the widow's mite, that, by degrees, her desolate dwelling began to wear an air of comfort, and at length she found herself the mistress of a productive little farm, with kine, sheep, swine, and poultry, sufficient for her use.

Guthred, who found a sweet satisfaction in administering to her comforts, was repaid a thousand fold by the tender affection with which he was regarded by the grateful widow, who was to him as a mother.

Northumbria continued the theatre of petty intestine wars, not only between its rival population of Saxons and Danes, but of fierce dissensions among the Danes themselves, who, since the death of Halfdane, their leader, and the overthrow and slaughter of his brother Hubba (the sons of Regner Ladbok, and chief governors of the Danelagh), had not been able to agree among themselves respecting the choice of a successor to the sovereign authority, not one of the royal line of Odin remaining among their hordes.

But the wars and rumors of wars, which spread desolation, bloodshed, and terror, through country and town of this unfortunate district, disquieted not the humble cottage where the widowed Winifred and her thrall, Guthred, found shelter and contentment. There were moments, perhaps, when Guthred felt disposed to regret that his talents and acquirements had no nobler sphere for their exercise than the occupations of a shepherd or husbandman; but then the reflection that he was engaged in the virtuous performance of the duties of that state to which it had pleased his heavenly Father to call him, checked the rebellious suggestions of ambition and discontent, and he returned to his toils with the pious conviction, that, if it were the will of God that the hand that ought to have wielded a sceptre should be doomed to guide a plough in an obscure corner of a foreign land, it was right that it should be so. But other things were in store for the royal orphan, who had been prepared in the school of adversity for a better inheritance than that which was his birthright.

One morning, on returning from the field to break fast, he found Winifred attired in her best black kirtle, surcoat, and hood, and busily engaged in smoothing, with an iron, the plaits and coarse embroidery on the back and shoulders of his sabbath super-tunic, which garment was made of coarse home-spun white linen, precisely similar in all respects to the long open frocks worn in the present day by wagoners. 'How now, my good mother,' said Guthred with a smile, for by that endearing name he had long been accustomed to address her, 'what makes you so full of business with my