

NYE BILL

COMIC

HISTORY OF

ENGLAND

Bill Nye

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HEREIN WILL BE FOUND A RECITAL OF THE MANY EVENTFUL EVENTS WHICH TRANSPIRED IN ENGLAND FROM THE DRUIDS TO HENRY VIII. THE AUTHOR DOES NOT FEEL IT INCUMBENT ON HIM TO PRESERVE MORE THAN THE DATES AND FACTS, AND THESE ARE CORRECT, BUT THE LIGHTS AND SHADES OF THE VARIOUS PICTURES AND THE ORNAMENTAL WORDS FURNISHED TO ADORN THE CHARACTERS AND EVENTS ARE THE SOLE INVENTION OF THIS HISTORIAN.

[Illustration: KING RICHARD TRAVELING INCOG. THROUGH GERMANY.]

PREFACE

The readers of this volume will share our regret that the preface cannot be written by Mr. Nye, who would have introduced his volume with a characteristically appropriate and humorous foreword in perfect harmony with the succeeding narrative.

We need only say that this work is in the author's best vein, and will prove not only amusing, but instructive as well; for the events, successions, dates, etc., are correct, and the trend of actual facts is adhered to. Of course, these facts are "embellished," as Mr. Nye would say, by his fancy, and the leading historical characters are made to play in fantastic *rôles*. Underneath all, however, a shrewd knowledge of human nature is betrayed, which unmasks motives and reveals the true inwardness of men and events with a humorous fidelity.

The unfortunate illness to which Mr. Nye finally succumbed prevented the completion of his history beyond the marriage of Henry VIII. to Anne Boleyn.

[Illustration: LANDING OF WILLIAM, PRINCE OF ORANGE, AT TORBAY (1688).]

CHAPTER I. INVASION OF CAESAR: THE DISCOVERY OF TIN AND CONSEQUENT ENLIGHTENMENT OF BRITAIN

[Illustration: BUST OF CAESAR.]

From the glad whinny of the first unicorn down to the tip end of the nineteenth century, the history of Great Britain has been dear to her descendants in every land, 'neath every sky.

But to write a truthful and honest history of any country the historian should, that he may avoid overpraise and silly and mawkish sentiment, reside in a foreign country, or be so situated that he may put on a false moustache and get away as soon as the advance copies have been sent to the printers.

The writer of these pages, though of British descent, will, in what he may say, guard carefully against permitting that fact to swerve him for one swift moment from the right.

England even before Christ, as now, was a sort of money centre, and thither came the Phoenicians and the Carthaginians for their tin.

[Illustration: THE DISCOVERY OF TIN IN BRITAIN.]

[Illustration: CAESAR CROSSING THE CHANNEL.]

These early Britons were suitable only to act as ancestors. Aside from that, they had no good points. They dwelt in mud huts thatched with straw. They had no currency and no ventilation,—no drafts, in other words. Their boats were made of wicker-work plastered with clay. Their swords were made of tin alloyed with copper, and after a brief skirmish, the entire army had to fall back and straighten its blades.

They also had short spears made with a rawhide string attached, so that the deadly weapon could be jerked back again. To spear an enemy with one of these harpoons, and then, after playing him for half an hour or so, to land him and finish him up with a tin sword, constituted one of the most reliable boons peculiar to that strange people.

[Illustration: CAESAR TREATING WITH THE BRITONS.]

Caesar first came to Great Britain on account of a bilious attack. On the way across the channel a violent storm came up. The great emperor and pantata believed he was drowning, so that in an instant's time everything throughout his whole lifetime recurred to him as he went down,—especially his breakfast.

Purchasing a four-in-hand of docked unicorns, and much improved in health, he returned to Rome.

Agriculture had a pretty hard start among these people, and where now the glorious fields of splendid pale and billowy oatmeal may be seen interspersed with every kind of domestic and imported fertilizer in cunning little hillocks just bursting forth into fragrance by the roadside, then the vast island was a quaking swamp or covered by impervious forests of gigantic trees, up which with coarse and shameless glee would scamper the nobility.

(Excuse the rhythm into which I may now and then drop as the plot develops.—AUTHOR.)

Caesar later on made more invasions: one of them for the purpose of returning his team and flogging a Druid with whom he had disagreed religiously on a former trip. (He had also bought his team of the Druid.)

The Druids were the sheriffs, priests, judges, chiefs of police, plumbers, and justices of the peace.

[Illustration: PLOUGHING 51 B.C.]

They practically ran the place, and no one could be a Druid who could not pass a civil service examination.

[Illustration: DRUID SACRIFICES.]

They believed in human sacrifice, and often of a bright spring morning could have been seen going out behind the bush to sacrifice some one who disagreed with them on some religious point or other.

The Druids largely lived in the woods in summer and in debt during the winter. They worshipped almost everything that had been left out overnight, and their motto was, "Never do anything unless you feel like it very much indeed."

Caesar was a broad man from a religious point of view, and favored bringing the Druids before the grand jury. For uttering such sentiments as these the Druids declared his life to be forfeit, and set one of their number to settle also with him after morning services the question as to the matter of immersion and sound money.

Religious questions were even then as hotly discussed as in later times, and Caesar could not enjoy society very much for five or six days.

[Illustration: MONUMENT OF AGRICULTURE, OR ANCIENT SCARECROW.]

At Stonehenge there are still relics of a stone temple which the Druids used as a place of idolatrous worship and assassination. On Giblet Day people came for many miles to see the exercises and carry home a few cutlets of intimate friends.

After this Rome sent over various great Federal appointees to soften and refine the people. Among them came General Agricola with a new kind of seed-corn and kindness in his heart.

[Illustration: AGRICOLA ENCOURAGES AGRICULTURE.]

He taught the barefooted Briton to go out to the pump every evening and bathe his chapped and soil-kissed feet and wipe them on the grass before retiring, thus introducing one of the refinements of Rome in this cold and barbaric clime.

Along about the beginning of the Christian "Erie," says an elderly Englishman, the Queen Boadicea got so disgusted with the Romans who carried on there in England just as they had been in the habit of doing at home,—cutting up like a hallowe'en party in its junior year,—that she got her Britons together, had a steel dress made to fight in comfortably and not tight under the arms, then she said, "Is there any one here who hath a culverin with him?" One was soon found and fired. This by the Romans was regarded as an opening of hostilities. Her fire was returned with great eagerness, and victory was won in the city of London over the Romans, who had taunted the queen several times with being seven years behind the beginning of the Christian Era in the matter of clothes.

[Illustration: ROMAN COAT OF ARMS.]

Boadicea won victories by the score, and it is said that under the besom of her wrath seventy thousand Roman warriors kissed the dust. As she waved her sceptre in token of victory the hat-pin came out of her crown, and wildly throwing the "old hot thing" at the Roman general, she missed him and unhorsed her own chaperon.

Disgusted with war and the cooking they were having at the time, she burst into tears just on the eve of a general victory over the Romans and poisoned herself.

[Illustration: DEATH OF BOADICEA.]

N.B.—Many thanks are due to the author, Mr. A. Barber, for the use of his works entitled "Half-Hours with Crowned Heads" and "Thoughts on Shaving Dead People on Whom One Has Never Called," cloth, gilt top.

I notice an error in the artist's work which will be apparent to any one of moderate intelligence, and especially to the Englishman,—viz., that the tin discovered by the Phoenicians is in the form of cans, etc., formerly having contained tinned meats, fruits, etc. This book, I fear, will be sharply criticised in England if any inaccuracy be permitted to creep in, even through the illustrations. It is disagreeable to fall out thus early with one's artist, but the writer knows too well, and the sting yet burns and rankles in his soul where pierced the poisoned dart of an English clergyman two years ago. The writer had spoken of Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain for the purpose of replenishing the Roman stock of umbrellas, top-coats, and "loydies," when the clergyman said, politely but very

firmly, "that England then had no top-coats or umbrellas." The writer would not have cared, had there not been others present.

CHAPTER II.

THE VARIOUS ROMAN YOKES: THEIR GROWTH, DEGENERATION, AND FINAL ELIMINATION

Agricola no doubt made the Roman yoke easier upon the necks of the conquered people, and suggested the rotation of crops. He also invaded Caledonia and captured quite a number of Scotchmen, whom he took home and domesticated.

Afterwards, in 121 A.D., the emperor Hadrian was compelled to build a wall to keep out the still unconquered Caledonians. This is called the "Picts' Wall," and a portion of it still exists. Later, in 208 A.D., Severus built a solid wall of stone along this line, and for seventy years there was peace between the two nations.

Towards the end of the third century Carausius, who was appointed to the thankless task of destroying the Saxon pirates, shook off his allegiance to the emperor Diocletian, joined the pirates and turned out Diocletian, usurping the business management of Britain for some years. But, alas! he was soon assassinated by one of his own officers before he could call for help, and the assassin succeeded him. In those days assassination and inauguration seemed to go hand-in-hand.

[Illustration: ASSASSINATION OF CARAUSIUS.]

After Constantius, who died 306 A.D., came Constantine the Great, his son by a British princess.

Under Constantine peace again reigned, but the Irish, who desired to free Ireland even if they had to go abroad and neglect their business for that purpose, used to invade Constantine's territory, getting him up at all hours of the night and demanding that he should free Ireland.

These men were then called Picts, hence the expression "picked men."

They annoyed Constantine by coming over and trying to introduce Home Rule into the home of the total stranger.

The Scots also made turbulent times by harassing Constantine and seeking to introduce their ultra-religious belief at the muzzle of the crossgun.

Trouble now came in the latter part of the fourth century A.D., caused by the return of the regular Roman army, which went back to Rome to defend the Imperial City from the Goths who sought to "stable their stock in the palace of the Caesars," as the historian so tersely puts it.

[Illustration: THE PICTS INCULCATING HOME RULE PRINCIPLES.]

In 418 A.D., the Roman forces came up to London for the summer, and repelled the Scots and Picts, but soon returned to Rome, leaving the provincial people of London with disdain. Many of the Roman officers while in Britain had their clothes made in Rome, and some even had their linen returned every thirty days and washed in the Tiber.

[Illustration: IRRITABILITY OF THE BARBARIAN.]

In 446 A.D., the Britons were extremely unhappy. "The barbarians throw us into the sea and the sea returns us to the barbarians," they ejaculated in their petition to the conquering Romans. But the latter were too busy fighting the Huns to send troops, and in desperation the Britons formed an alliance with Hengist and Horsa, two Saxon travelling men who, in 449 A.D., landed on the island of Thanet, and thus ended the Roman dominion over Britain.

[Illustration: LANDING OF HENGIST AND HORSA.]

The Saxons were at that time a coarse people. They did not allow etiquette to interfere with their methods of taking refreshment, and, though it pains the historian at all times to speak unkindly of his ancestors who have now passed on to their reward, he is compelled to admit that as a people the Saxons may be truly characterized as a great National Appetite.

During the palmy days when Rome superintended the collecting of customs and regulated the formation of corporations, the mining and smelting of iron were extensively carried on and the "walking delegate" was invented. The accompanying illustration shows an ancient strike.

[Illustration: DISCOMFORTS OF THE EARLY LABOR AGITATOR.]

Rome no doubt did much for England, for at that time the Imperial City had 384 streets, 56,567 palaces, 80 golden statues, 2785 bronze statues of former emperors and officers, 41 theatres, 2291 prisons, and 2300 perfumery stores. She was in the full flood of her prosperity, and had about 4,000,000 inhabitants.

In those days a Roman Senator could not live on less than \$80,000 per year, and Marcus Antonius, who owed \$1,500,000 on his inaugural, March 15, paid it up March 17, and afterwards cleared \$720,000,000. This he did by the strictest economy, which he managed to have attended to by the peasantry.

Even a literary man in Rome could amass property, and Seneca died worth \$12,000,000. Those were the flush times in Rome, and England no doubt was greatly benefited thereby; but, alas! "money matters became scarce," and the poor Briton was forced to associate with the delirium tremens and massive digestion of the Saxon, who floated in a vast ocean of lard and wassail during his waking hours and slept with the cunning little piglets at night. His earthen floors were carpeted with straw and frescoed with bones.

Let us not swell with pride as we refer to our ancestors, whose lives were marked by an eternal combat between malignant alcoholism and trichinosis. Many a Saxon would have filled a drunkard's grave, but wobbled so in his gait that he walked past it and missed it.

[Illustration: THE SAXON IDEA OF HEAVEN.]

To drink from the skulls of their dead enemies was a part of their religion, and there were no heretics among them.¹

Christianity was introduced into Britain during the second century, and later under Diocletian the Christians were greatly persecuted. Christianity did not come from Rome, it is said, but from Gaul. Among the martyrs in those early days was St. Alban, who had been converted by a fugitive priest. The story of his life and death is familiar.

The Bible had been translated, and in 314 A.D. Britain had three Bishops, viz., of London, Lincoln, and York.

¹ The artist has very ably shown here a devoted little band of Saxons holding services in a basement. In referring to it as "abasement," not the slightest idea of casting contumely or obloquy on our ancestors is intended by the humble writer of pungent but sometimes unpalatable truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVENT OF THE ANGLES: CAUSES WHICH LED TO THE REHABILITATION OF BRITAIN ON NEW LINES

With the landing of Hengist and Horsa English history really begins, for Caesar's capture of the British Isles was of slight importance viewed in the light of fast-receding centuries. There is little to-day in the English character to remind one of Caesar, who was a volatile and epileptic emperor with massive and complicated features.

The rich warm blood of the Roman does not mantle in the cheek of the Englishman of the present century to any marked degree. The Englishman, aping the reserve and hauteur of Boston, Massachusetts, is, in fact, the diametrical antipode of the impulsive, warm-hearted, and garlic-imbued Roman who revels in assassination and gold ear-bobs.

The beautiful daughter of Hengist formed an alliance with Vortigern, the royal foreman of Great Britain,—a plain man who was very popular in the alcoholic set and generally subject to violent lucid intervals which lasted until after breakfast; but the Saxons broke these up, it is said, and Rowena encouraged him in his efforts to become his own worst enemy, and after two or three patent-pails-full of wassail would get him to give her another county or two, until soon the Briton saw that the Saxon had a mortgage on the throne, and after it was too late, he said that immigration should have been restricted.

[Illustration: ROWENA CAPTIVATES VORTIGERN.]

Kent became the first Saxon kingdom, and remained a powerful state for over a century.

More Saxons now came, and brought with them yet other Saxons with yet more children, dogs, vodka, and thirst. The breath of a Saxon in a cucumber-patch would make a peck of pickles per moment.

The Angles now came also and registered at the leading hotels. They were destined to introduce the hyphen on English soil, and plant the orchards on whose ancestral branches should ultimately hang the Anglo-Saxon race, the progenitors of the eminent aristocracy of America.

Let the haughty, purse-proud American—in whose warm life current one may trace the unmistakable strains of bichloride of gold and trichinae—pause for one moment to gaze at the coarse features and bloodshot eyes of his ancestors, who sat up at nights drenching their souls in a style of nepenthe that it is said would remove moths, tan, freckles, and political disabilities.

[Illustration: ETHELBERT, KING OF KENT, PROCLAIMED "BRETWALDA."]

The seven states known as the Saxon Heptarchy were formed in the sixth and seventh centuries, and the rulers of these states were called "Bretwaldas," or Britain-wielders. Ethelbert, King of Kent, was Bretwalda for fifty years, and liked it first-rate.

[Illustration: AUGUSTINE KINDLY RECEIVED BY ETHELBERT, KING OF KENT.]

A very good picture is given here showing the coronation of Ethelbert, copied from an old tin-type now in the possession of an aged and somewhat childish family in Philadelphia who descended from Ethelbert and have made no effort to conceal it.

Here also the artist has shown us a graphic picture of Ethelbert supported by his celebrated ingrowing moustache receiving Augustine. They both seem pleased to form each other's acquaintance, and the greeting is a specially appetizing one to the true lover of Art for Art's sake.

For over one hundred and fifty years the British made a stubborn resistance to the encroachments of these coarse people, but it was ineffectual. Their prowess, along with a massive appetite and other hand baggage, soon overran the land of Albion. Everywhere the rude warriors

of northern Europe wiped the dressing from their coarse red whiskers on the snowy table-cloth of the Briton.

[Illustration: THEY WIPED THEIR COARSE RED WHISKERS ON THE SNOWY TABLE-CLOTH.]

In West Wales, or Dumnonia, was the home of King Arthur, so justly celebrated in song and story. Arthur was more interesting to the poet than the historian, and probably as a champion of human rights and a higher civilization should stand in that great galaxy occupied by Santa Claus and Jack the Giant-Killer.

The Danes or Jutes joined the Angles also at this time, and with the Saxons spread terror, anarchy, and common drunks all over Albion. Those who still claim that the Angles were right Angles are certainly ignorant of English history. They were obtuse Angles, and when bedtime came and they tried to walk a crack, the historian, in a spirit of mischief, exclaims that they were mostly a pack of Isosceles Try Angles, but this doubtless is mere badinage.

They were all savages, and their religion was entirely unfit for publication. Socially they were coarse and repulsive. Slaves did the housework, and serfs each morning changed the straw bedding of the lord and drove the pigs out of the boudoir. The pig was the great social middle class between the serf and the nobility: for the serf slept with the pig by day, and the pig slept with the nobility at night.

And yet they were courageous to a degree (the Saxons, not the pigs). They were fearless navigators and reckless warriors. Armed with their rude meat-axes and one or two Excalibars, they would take something in the way of a tonic and march right up to the mouth of the great Thomas catapult, or fall in the moat with a courage that knew not, recked not of danger.

Christianity was first preached in Great Britain in 597 A.D., at the suggestion of Gregory, afterwards Pope, who by chance saw some Anglican youths exposed for sale in Rome. They were fine-looking fellows, and the good man pitied their benighted land. Thus the Roman religion was introduced into England, and was first to turn the savage heart towards God.

[Illustration: EGBERT GAINS A GREAT VICTORY OVER THE FRENCH INVADERS.]

Augustine was very kindly received by Ethelbert, and invited up to the house. Augustine met with great success, for the king experienced religion and was baptized, after which many of his subjects repented and accepted salvation on learning that it was free. As many as ten thousand in one day were converted, and Augustine was made Archbishop of Canterbury. On a small island in the Thames he built a church dedicated to St. Peter, where now is Westminster Abbey, a prosperous sanctuary entirely out of debt.

The history of the Heptarchy is one of murder, arson, rapine, assault and battery, breach of the peace, petty larceny, and the embezzlement of the enemy's wife.

In 827, Egbert, King of Wessex and Duke of Shandygaff, conquered all his foes and became absolute ruler of England (Land of the Angles). Taking charge of this angular kingdom, he established thus the mighty country which now rules the world in some respects, and which is so greatly improved socially since those days.

Two distinguished scholars flourished in the eighth century, Bede and Alcuin. They at once attracted attention by being able to read coarse print at sight. Bede wrote the Ecclesiastical History of the Angles. It is out of print now. Alcuin was a native of York, and with the aid of a lump of chalk and the side of a vacant barn could figure up things and add like everything. Students flocked to him from all over the country, and matriculated by the dozen. If he took a fancy to a student, he would take him away privately and show him how to read.

The first literary man of note was a monk of Whitby named Caedmon, who wrote poems on biblical subjects when he did not have to monk. His works were greatly like those of Milton, and especially like "Paradise Lost," it is said.

Gildas was the first historian of Britain, and the scathing remarks made about his fellow-countrymen have never been approached by the most merciless of modern historians.

The book was highly interesting, and it is a wonder that some enterprising American publisher has not appropriated it, as the author is now extremely dead.

[Illustration: A DISCIPLE OF THE LIQUID RELIGION PRACTISED BY THE SAXON.]

CHAPTER IV. THE INFLUX OF THE DANES: FACTS SHOWING CONCLUSIVELY THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE BRITON OF TO-DAY

And now, having led the eager student up to the year 827 A.D., let us take him forward from the foundation of the English monarchy to the days of William the Conqueror, 1066.

Egbert, one of the kings of Wessex, reigned practically over Roman Britain when the country was invaded by the Northmen (Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes), who treated the Anglo-Saxon as the Anglo-Saxon had formerly treated the poor Briton.

These Northmen were rather coarse people, and even put the Anglo-Saxons to the blush sometimes. They exercised vigorously, and thus their appetites were sharp enough to cut a hair. They at first came in the capacity of pirates,—sliding stealthily into isolated coast settlements on Saturday evening and eating up the Sunday victuals, capturing the girls of the Bible-class and sailing away. But later they came as conquerors, and boarded with the peasantry permanently.

Egbert formed an alliance with his old enemies, the Welsh, and gained a great victory over the Northmen; but when he died and left Ethelwolf, his son, in charge of the throne, he made a great mistake. Ethelwolf was a poor king, "being given more to religious exercises than reigning," says the historian. He would often exhibit his piety in order to draw attention away from His Royal Incompetency. He was not the first or last to smother the call to duty under the cry of Hallelujah. Like the little steamer engine with the big whistle, when he whistled the boat stopped. He did not have a boiler big enough to push the great ship of state and shout Amen at the same time.

Ethelwolf defeated the enemy in one great battle, but too late to prevent a hold-up upon the island of Thanet, and afterwards at Shippey, near London, where the enemy settled himself.

Yet Ethelwolf made a pilgrimage to Rome with Alfred, then six years old (A.D. 855). He was gone a year, during which time very little reigning was done at home, and the Northmen kept making treaties and coming over in larger droves.

Ethelwolf visited Charles the Bald of France at this time, and married his daughter Judith incidentally. Ethelwolf's eldest son died during the king's absence, and was succeeded as eldest son by Ethelbald (heir-apparent, though he had no hair apparent), who did not recognize the old gentleman or allow him to be seated on his own throne when he came back; but Ethelwolf gave the naughty Ethelbald the western half of the kingdom rather than have trouble. But Baldy died, and was succeeded by Ethelbert, who died six years later, and Ethelred, in 866, took charge till 871, when he died of a wound received in battle and closed out the Ethel business to Alfred.

The Danes had meantime rifled the country with their cross-guns and killed Edmund, the good king of East Anglia, who was afterwards canonized, though gunpowder had not then been invented.

Alfred was not only a godly king, but had a good education, and was a great admirer of Dickens and Thackeray. (This is put in as a titbit for the critic.)

He preferred literature to the plaudits of the nobility and the sedentary life on a big white-oak throne. On the night before his coronation his pillow was wet with tears.

And in the midst of it all here came the Danes wearing heavy woollen clothes and introducing their justly celebrated style of honest sweat.

Alfred fought as many as eight battles with them in one year. They agreed at last to accept such portions of the country as were assigned them, but they were never known to abide by any treaty, and they put the red man of America to shame as prevaricators.

Thus, by 878, the wretched Saxons were at their wit's end, and have never been able to take a joke since at less than thirty days.

Some fled to Wales and perished miserably trying to pronounce the names of their new post-office addresses.

[Illustration: ALFRED, DISGUISED AS A GLEEMAN, IS INTRODUCED TO GUTHRUN.]

Here Alfred's true greatness stood him in good stead. He secured a number of reliable retainers and camped in the swamps of Somersetshire, where he made his head-quarters on account of its inaccessibility, and then he made raids on the Danes. Of course he had to live roughly, and must deny himself his upright piano for his country's good.

In order to obtain a more thorough knowledge of the Danes and their number, he disguised himself as a harper, or portable orchestra, and visited the Danish camp, where he was introduced to Guthrun and was invited to a banquet, where he told several new anecdotes, and spoke in such a humorous way that the army was sorry to see him go away, and still sorrier when, a few days later, armed *cap-a-pie*, he mopped up the greensward with his enemy and secured the best of terms from him.

While *incog.*, Alfred stopped at a hut, where he was asked to turn the pancakes as they required it; but in the absence of the hostess he got to thinking of esoteric subjects, or something profound, and allowed the cakes to burn. The housewife returned in time to express her sentiments and a large box to his address as shown in the picture.

[Illustration: ALFRED LETTING THE CAKES BURN.]

He now converted Guthrun and had him immersed, which took first-rate, and other Danes got immersed. Thus the national antagonism to water was overcome, and to-day the English who are descended from the Danes are not appalled at the sight of water.

As a result of Guthrun's conversion, the Danes agreed to a permanent settlement along the exposed portion of Great Britain, by which they became unconsciously a living rampart between the Saxons and other incursionists.

Now peace began to reign up to 893, and Alfred improved the time by rebuilding the desolated cities,—London especially, which had become a sight to behold. A new stock-law, requiring the peasantry to shut up their unicorns during certain seasons of the year and keep them out of the crops, also protecting them from sportsmen while shedding their horns in spring, or moulting, it is said, was passed, but the English historians are such great jokers that the writer has had much difficulty in culling the facts and eliminating the persiflage from these writings.

Alfred the Great only survived his last victory over the Danes, at Kent, a few years, when he died greatly lamented. He was a brave soldier, a successful all-around monarch, and a progressive citizen in an age of beastly ignorance, crime, superstition, self-indulgence, and pathetic stupidity.

[Illustration: ALFRED ESTABLISHED SCHOOLS.]

He translated several books for the people, established or repaired the University of Oxford, and originated the idea, adopted by the Japanese a thousand years later, of borrowing the scholars of other nations, and cheerfully adopting the improvements of other countries, instead of following the hide-bound and stupid conservatism and ignorance bequeathed by father to son, as a result of blind and offensive pride, which is sometimes called patriotism.

[Illustration: KING ALFRED TRANSLATED SEVERAL BOOKS.]

CHAPTER V. THE TROUBLOUS MIDDLE AGES: DEMONSTRATING A SHORT REIGN FOR THOSE WHO TRAVEL AT A ROYAL GAIT

The Ethels now made an effort to regain the throne from Edward the Elder. Ethelwold, a nephew of Edward, united the Danes under his own banner, and relations were strained between the leaders until 905, when Ethelwold was slain. Even then the restless Danes and frontier settlers were a source of annoyance until about 925, when Edward died; but at his death he was the undisputed king of all Britain, and all the various sub-monarchs and associate rulers gave up their claims to him. He was assisted in his affairs of state by his widowed sister, Ethelfleda. Edward the Elder had his father's ability as a ruler, but was not so great as a scholar or *littérateur*. He had not the unfaltering devotion to study nor the earnest methods which made Alfred great. Alfred not only divided up his time into eight-hour shifts,—one for rest, meals, and recreation, one for the affairs of state, and one for study and devotion,—but he invented the candle with a scale on it as a time-piece, and many a subject came to the throne at regular periods to set his candle by the royal lights.

[Illustration: CAME TO THE THRONE AT REGULAR PERIODS TO SET THEIR CANDLES BY THE ROYAL LIGHT.]

Think of those days when the Sergeant-at-Arms of Congress could not turn back the clock in order to assist an appropriation at the close of the session, but when the light went out the session closed.

Athelstan succeeded his father, Edward the Presiding Elder, and resembled him a good deal by defeating the Welsh, Scots, and Danes. In those days agriculture, trade, and manufacturing were diversions during the summer months; but the regular business of life was warfare with the Danes, Scots, and Welsh.

These foes of England could live easily for years on oatmeal, sour milk, and cod's heads, while the fighting clothes of a whole regiment would have been a scant wardrobe for the Greek Slave, and after two centuries of almost uninterrupted carnage their war debt was only a trifle over eight dollars.

Edmund, the brother of Ethelstan, at the age of eighteen, succeeded his brother on the throne.

One evening, while a little hilarity was going on in the royal apartments, Edmund noticed among the guests a robber named Leolf, who had not been invited. Probably he was a pickpocket; and as a royal robber hated anybody who dropped below grand larceny, the king ordered his retainers to put him out.

But the retainers shrank from the undertaking, therefore Edmund sprang from the throne like a tiger and buried his talons in the robber's tresses. There was a mixture of feet, legs, teeth, and features for a moment, and when peace was restored King Edmund had a watch-pocket full of blood, and the robber chieftain was wiping his stabber on one of the royal tidies.

[Illustration: EDMUND THROWING LEOLF OUT.]

Edred now succeeded the deceased Edmund, his brother, and with a heavy heart took up the eternal job of fighting the Danes. Edred set up a sort of provincial government over Northumberland, the refractory district, and sent a governor and garrison there to see that the Danes paid attention to what he said. St. Dunstan had considerable influence over Edred, and was promoted a great deal by the king, who died in the year 955.

He was succeeded by Edwy the Fair, who was opposed by another Ethel. Between the Ethels and the Welsh and Danes, there was little time left in England for golf or high tea, and Edwy's reign was short and full of trouble.

He had trouble with St. Dunstan, charging him with the embezzlement of church funds, and compelled him to leave the country. This was in retaliation for St. Dunstan's overbearing order to the king. One evening, when a banquet was given him in honor of his coronation, the king excused himself when the speeches got rather corky, and went into the sitting-room to have a chat with his wife, Elgiva, of whom he was very fond, and her mother. St. Dunstan, who had still to make a speech on Foreign Missions with a yard or so of statistics, insisted on Edwy's return. An open outbreak was the result. The Church fell upon the King with a loud, annual report, and when the débris was cleared away, a little round-shouldered grave in the churchyard held all that was mortal of the king. His wife was cruelly and fatally assassinated, and Edgar, his brother, began to reign. This was in the year 959, and in what is now called the Middle Ages.

Edgar was called the Pacific. He paid off the church debt, made Dunstan Archbishop of Canterbury, helped reform the church, and, though but sixteen years of age when he removed all explosives from the throne and seated himself there, he showed that he had a massive scope, and his subjects looked forward to much anticipation.

He sailed around the island every year to show the Danes how prosperous he was, and made speeches which displayed his education.

His coronation took place thirteen years after his accession to the throne, owing to the fact, as given out by some of the more modern historians, that the crown was at Mr. Isaac Inestein's all this time, whereas the throne, which was bought on the instalment plan, had been redeemed.

Pictures of the crown worn by Edgar will convince the reader that its redemption was no slight task, while the mortgage on the throne was a mere bagatelle.

[Illustration: EDGAR SURMOUNTED BY HIS CROWN.]

[Illustration: EDGAR CAUSES HIS BARGE TO BE ROWED BY EIGHT KINGS.]

A bright idea of Edgar's was to ride in a row-boat pulled by eight kings under the old *régime*.

Personally, Edgar was reputed to be exceedingly licentious; but the historian wisely says these stories may have been the invention of his enemies. Greatness is certain to make of itself a target for the mud of its own generation, and no one who rose above the level of his surroundings ever failed to receive the fragrant attentions of those who had not succeeded in rising. All history is fraught also with the bitterness and jealousy of the historian except this one. No bitterness can creep into this history.

Edgar, it is said, assassinated the husband of Elfrida in order that he might marry her. It is also said that he broke into a convent and carried off a nun; but doubtless if these stories were traced to their very foundations, politics would account for them both.

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