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2 April 2012

Athelstan the Glorious, forgotten builder of a nation

by **Jane Clements**

The story of golden-haired Athelstan is the stuff of legends. By the time of his death in 939, at the comparatively young age of 43, he had not only ruled the kingdom of Wessex with wisdom and justice but had fought and negotiated his way to becoming the first to be justifiably called king of all the English. Fulfilling the dream of his renowned grandfather Alfred ‘the Great’, he united successfully into one kingdom all Angles, Saxons and Danes from the Tamar in the south west, to Hadrian’s Wall in the north, establishing law, order and bureaucratic government for all ‘English’ folk. Along the way, his approach to kingship was based on factors that are valued in British society today. These include a strong sense of the rule of just law, tempered with mercy, a monarchy that was visible to the people, the promotion of arts, culture and learning, and an effective and well-ordered defence strategy. They also involve the placing of England at the heart of European affairs and influence, and the building of a society based not on homogeneity, but on a shared vision of a united future.

The accolades of his contemporaries are impressive: the Annals of Ulster described Athelstan as ‘the roof tree of honour of the western world’. Writing in the late 1100s William of Malmesbury held him to be ‘remembered by the English as the most learned of all their rulers before the Norman Conquest...His years, though few, were full of glory.’ Yet his achievements are not prominent today in the national consciousness. Although the vision he realised was that of his more famous grandfather, he was nonetheless extremely significant in his own right; where Alfred laid the foundations for a united England, it was Athelstan who threw up a mighty edifice - with considerable style.

The Wessex dynasty, founded by Cerdic in the 500s and centred on Winchester, was a strong and inspired one. Alfred, king of Wessex, had begun the visionary enterprise of a kingdom of England during the 800s, famously fighting Danish incursions into the middle and southern regions of the country. A major lynch-pin of his success was the moral annexation of the strategic kingdom of Mercia, largely achieved by marrying his daughter Aethelflaed to the Lord of Mercia. In fact, she was the one with the stomach for war and diplomacy, while her husband was more than content to owe

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allegiance to Alfred and do as he was told. Alfred's son, Edward was also a natural leader and more-than-competent soldier; warriorship ran in the blood.

Below: Depiction of Athelstan from a 14th century manuscript.



Edward is described in various sources as having taken a wife who bore him a daughter, Eadgitha, and a son, Athelstan, but then died in childbirth. Perhaps it made sense politically for Edward to concede that they had never been properly married and then to wed Aelfflaed, the daughter of a prominent earl whose support was strategic to Wessex. Whatever the facts of the matter, this meant that Athelstan's legitimacy was always in doubt, officially at least, and it may have coloured his perceptions of his own role, possibly even explaining why he never

married. However, there is no question that Athelstan was accepted as an honoured member of the household.

Perhaps partly because of this question mark, Edward sent Athelstan as a youth to live with his aunt Aethelflaed in Mercia, where he learnt the art of warfare and demonstrated his aptitude in battles and skirmishes in the north against the Danes and their allies. Significantly, Athelstan inherited his grandfather Alfred's love of scholarship and also like Alfred was devout in his Christian observance. On Alfred's death, Edward became king and Athelstan was groomed for future leadership.

Edward's reign was consumed by war against the Danes from all sides, and fortifying strategic towns such as Buckingham and Towcester. A major advantage for the Saxons was English morale, while the Danes were often disunited and without strong leadership. By the time both Edward and Aethelflaed died, they had consolidated their hold on a huge region from the Fens in the East, Tamworth in the north and Hereford in the west.

Athelstan was thirty years old when Edward died; the Witenagemot, the king's councillors, elected him king. This was challenged, however, on the grounds of his dubious legitimacy, and a plot to replace him by his step-brother was uncovered. Athelstan showed characteristic mercy by sending the ring leader on a pilgrimage to

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Rome to ask the Pope for his guidance on the matter; the plotter conveniently dropped dead on arrival; a spectacle of regal clemency followed by divine retribution.

Athelstan's coronation was a more elaborate affair than those of his predecessors, while following the tradition of his father. It took place at the royal site of Kingston with the Archbishop of Canterbury officiating and included the ceremonial manumission or freeing of a man sold into slavery for debt. Part of the royal ceremony took place at the 'coronation stone' inside the church and part outside in the market place, in public view. Poems were spoken in his honour and hymns sung. The sources suggest that Athelstan was specifically groomed for kingship; if so, he was the first of the dynasty to be tutored in law-making and scholarship to this end, as well as strategy and warfare. The manner of his coronation also suggests that he or his advisers were not insensible to the need to engage the respect and approbation of his subjects.

An uneasy truce with the Norsemen of York, shored up by the marriage of Eadgitha to their ruler Sihtric, broke down after Sihtric's death. His successor Anlaf was supported by the Irish Norsemen, who set sail to claim Northumbria in 927. Losing no time, Athelstan marched up to meet them and the Norsemen were routed. On 4th July, the northern rulers met Athelstan at Eamont in Cumbria to pledge allegiance to the English king: Constantine of Alba, Owen of Strathclyde and Ealdred of Bamburgh. Several Welsh kings also paid homage on that occasion. Not only did the rulers acknowledge Athelstan's supremacy, but they also agreed to promote Christianity and suppress paganism. This completed the three main steps to the creation of an English kingdom: the supremacy of Wessex in southern England, the submission of Mercia and now the submission of Northumbria. The agreement at Eamont did not put an end to the conflict by any means and the following year the Irish Norsemen under Olaf's uncle, Guthfrith, attacked York. When Guthfrith was captured, Athelstan again showed his preference for mercy; Guthfrith enjoyed several days of lavish hospitality before being sent home to Ireland.

Athelstan then turned his attention westwards. He summoned the rulers of Dyfed, Gwynedd, Morganwg, Gwent and Brycheiniog to meet at Hereford. As a result of the meeting, the Welshmen agreed to pay a huge sum in gold, silver, oxen, hounds and hawks. The size of the tribute was unprecedented. The River Wye was agreed as the border between Welsh lands and the kingdom of the English. To the south was the kingdom of the 'west welsh', the Cornish people. The Cornish had supported Danish attacks in the past and the Danes had a base in the Scilly Isles and Athelstan marched through Cornwall, destroying the Danish fortifications, building churches, freeing slaves and establishing monasteries. Re-organising the six tribes of the Cornish along the lines of the Saxon 'hundred' model, he also established an auxiliary bishopric to that at Crediton in a new seat at St Germans, just across the Tamar; the first occupant

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of the seat was an indigenous Briton rather than a Saxon. By these means, Cornwall was established as an autonomous, though subjugated, ally, with every reason to resist further Danish or other foreign advances. Athelstan did, however, insist that no native Britons were to reside on the east side of the Tamar, possibly to prevent them being used as cover for Danish advances.

By acting in such ways, Athelstan proved himself to be more than a warrior, or even an empire builder. Rather than wanting to expand his kingdom for reasons of power or personal gain, he appears to have genuinely wanted a stable and ordered realm which would be strong against attack and enable its inhabitants to live peacefully and fruitfully. Only fifty years before, King Alfred had faced his darkest days, besieged by the might of the Danes and with the West Saxon land reduced to a few square miles of marsh around Athelney. Now rulers from the continent made the journey to England to give honour to his grandson, and scholars and clerics came to teach and study, both at court and in monasteries and private houses. Foreign princes were sent to be educated at Athelstan's court; prominent among them was Hakon, son of Harald Fairhair of Norway who brought with him the gift of a Viking ship with gilded shields and purple sails.

Athelstan cemented these relationships by marrying his half-sisters to Hugh, Duke of the Franks, Otto, eldest son of the Holy Roman Emperor, and Henry 'the Fowler', first Saxon king of the Germans. Otto gave him the Spear of Destiny, the lance that was said to have pierced the side of Christ and which had come into the possession of Charlemagne. Meanwhile Henry also presented Athelstan with a gift to mark his betrothal: the sword of Constantine the Great, reputedly containing nails from the Holy Cross, obtained by his British mother St Helen from Jerusalem, set in crystal. These were symbolic gifts and significant alliances; remarkable for the time and for what they said of Athelstan, a king who defended the rights of family and allies internationally, including Hakon of Norway, Alan of Brittany and his nephew Louis, the usurped heir to the throne of the west Franks. The accolades bestowed on him from all sides were numerous, even allowing for the customary hyperbole of the time.

In terms of law-making, Athelstan issued six main codes, based on tithing, the administration of justice and appropriate penalties; for example, he ruled that no man under fifteen was to be hanged. He also established procedures intended to prevent local corruption and tyranny by powerful families. In one royal document, he described underhand practices as "odious with the gall-shaped bitterness of lamentable corruption".¹ Under his sovereignty, large households and trading families, especially in London, organised themselves into groups of 'tithings and hundreds' with responsibility to maintain the peace and bring wrongdoers to justice.

¹ Whitelock, D (1955): 934, June- land grant to the church in York
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Alfred and his descendants had established a strategic network of burhs, sometimes called 'ports', where tolls and taxes could be paid. Athelstan regulated the coinage at such places, decreeing where and how coins were to be minted. All coins minted were of standard weight, with the name of their town of origin clearly shown. Central England was divided into 'shires', although the term took some time to come into popular use. By Athelstan's death, the many Danish settlers within England regarded Athelstan as their true and rightful ruler. This period was, for those not on the borders, largely civilised and peaceful.



Left: A silver penny minted by Burdel of Norwich c935

Despite these achievements, there were still those who questioned Athelstan's right to rule, or were driven by more selfish goals. Edwin, Athelstan's half-brother, was again involved in a plot to oust him. Athelstan ordered that he be put into a boat and set adrift 'at God's mercy'. According to some accounts which exist, his servant who accompanied him reported that Edwin leapt overboard and drowned; others accused Athelstan of ensuring his death. Whatever the truth of the matter, Athelstan undertook years of penance for Edwin's death.

The following year Athelstan was forced to travel to the north. Details are sketchy but it seems that Constantine of Alba had refused tribute and, more worryingly for Athelstan, Guthfrith's son Olaf was reported to have gathered a large fleet in Ireland and to be sailing up the west coast of Scotland. Athelstan stopped at Chester-le-Street, shrine of the English saint Cuthbert, to pray for victory in the campaign. On his way, he gathered support from vassals and allies, and the fleet sailed to Caithness. While there was opposition and destruction, particularly in Cumbria, and at Caithness, Olaf returned home without having engaged Athelstan's forces in battle. At a formal ceremony, Constantine and Owain of Cumbria were restored as tributaries in a pan-British coalition. In gratitude, Athelstan lavished gifts on the shrine of St Cuthbert and adopted him as his patron saint (see illustration on the next page).

However, the peace was short-lived. Three years later, Olaf and Constantine rose again against Athelstan. Athelstan put together as large a force as he could muster. The sources for what happened next are mostly poetic and adulatory in tone and cannot therefore be relied on for historic accuracy. Among the sources is the remarkable Saga of Egil Skallagrimsson, an Icelandic mercenary who had fallen foul of Norwegian rulers. Together with his brother, he fought for Athelstan and developed an unlikely fondness for the end-rhyming verse of the style found in Latin hymns.

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All sources are clear, however, that the full might of the Irish Norse, Cumbrians, Northumbrians, North Welsh, Vikings and Scots combined together against the West Saxon and Mercian forces under Athelstan. A Welsh cleric in Dyfed expressed the hope that ‘the stewards of Cirencester will shed bitter tears...as an end to their taxes they will know death’. The forces gathered over the summer, despite Olaf’s fleet being harried by foul weather; the plan was to cause havoc by raiding and looting on the edges of the English land, followed by two simultaneous attacks, from the north and the west. Athelstan took his time to gather both intelligence and forces, although those bearing the brunt of the skirmishes railed against this delay. However, late in the autumn of 937, Athelstan and his brother Edmund, leading the West Saxons and Mercians, met the allied armies at a place named Brunanburh; the precise site is unknown but was probably just to the south of the Humber.

Below: Frontispiece of Bede’s Life of St Cuthbert, showing Athelstan giving the book to St Cuthbert’s shrine at Chester-le-Street in 937.



Accounts of the battle suggest that it began before dawn; the Bishop of Sherborne and his forces, arriving late, pitched their tents in the wrong place and were massacred. It appears that Athelstan divided his forces between him and his half-brother Edmund, to attack on two flanks, including the cavalry of sturdy English ponies to break the notorious ‘shield wall’. Losses in the battle were heavy on both sides; among the casualties were five kings of the allied forces, earls, jarls, bishops, two of Athelstan’s nephews and the brother of Egil Skallagrimsson. However, all the sources are agreed that the men of Wessex and Mercia emerged victorious, while the opposing forces were scattered, demoralised and severely

reduced. Owain of Cumbria was slain. What remained of the Irish Norse fleet limped home and Constantine abdicated his throne, to be replaced by his cousin Malcolm, and retired to a monastery. Although Scandinavian onslaughts did not end here, and would not do so until Harold’s battle at Stamford Bridge in 1066, this was a significant victory and a major step in the formation of English nationhood. Athelstan and his remaining forces returned south in triumph; the threat from the north was over.

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Athelstan died at Gloucester in 939 and was buried at Malmesbury. He never married and clearly regarded his brothers and their sons as the rightful heirs. He was followed by Edmund who was another son of Edward, but by his third wife. Like Alfred, Athelstan was religiously devout and greatly influenced by the Cluniac reform. This new monastic rule coming from the monastery of Cluny in Burgundy emphasised both art and social justice, such as care of the poor. Concerned to be a just ruler, Athelstan was scholarly and cultured, promoting the arts, music, poetry and church liturgy. He owned extensive collections of rare and sacred objects, and made significant donations to monasteries and churches. Sir Frank Stenton² assesses Athelstan's achievements as, in particular, having played an outstanding and sustained role in European affairs. Furthermore, 'Athelstan's influence in contemporary Europe rested on his position as heir of the one western kingdom which had emerged in greater strength from the Danish wars.'

In this way, Athelstan built on the legacy of his father and grandfather to create a unified kingdom which valued the arts, scholarship, justice and engagement in European affairs, while remaining ferociously independent. It was also a kingdom based not on one ethnic or cultural group or tradition, but on subjects with a variety of origins. The 'Great Battle' of Brunanburh, as the chroniclers described it, not only fulfilled Alfred's ambition of a land 'of all the English', but did much to build a sense of a national identity among the Angles, Saxons, Danes and others who owed allegiance to the same illustrious and much celebrated king,

Dr Jane Clements, apart from indulging a passion for medieval history, works in interfaith relations and lives in Oxfordshire (www.fodip.org)

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The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles [Note: there are numerous manuscripts, translations and editions. The most accessible is the edition by Savage, A, published by Heinemann in 1983.]
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² Stenton, F M (1971) *Anglo-Saxon England*,
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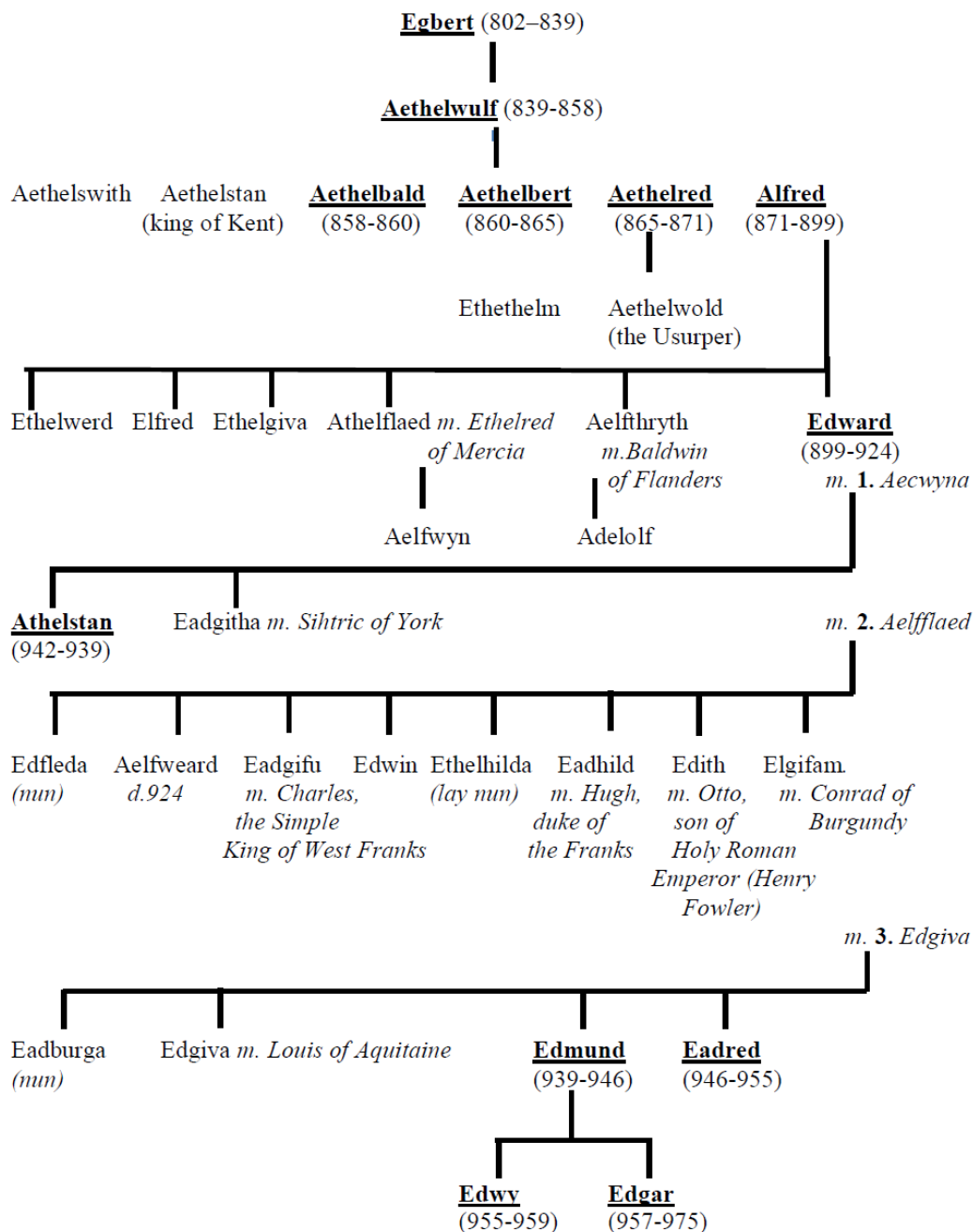
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Winterbottom and R. M. Thomson, Oxford University Press, 2002 [Note that Athelstan's tomb is in Malmesbury Abbey]

Three appendices are provided: the family tree of the West Saxons and, as scholarly resources, the accounts of Athelstan in *Holinshed's Chronicles* from the Tudor period and Percy Enderbie from the time of the restored Stuarts.

Appendix I

THE HOUSE OF THE WEST SAXONS



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Appendix II

This is the notice on Athelstan – ‘Adelstane’ – in *Holinshed's Chronicles*, the 1587 edition, as reprinted in 1807.

HOLINSHED'S
CHRONICLES
OF
ENGLAND, SCOTLAND,
AND
IRELAND.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. I.
ENGLAND.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON; F. C. AND J. RIVINGTON; T. PAYNE; WILKIE
AND ROBINSON; LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME;
CADELL AND DAVIES; AND J. MAWMAN.

1807.

bert 18 yéeres, Brethwin thrée yéeres, Lambert 27 yéeres, Adelard 13 yéeres, Wilfred 28 yéeres, Theologildus or Pleogildus 3 yéeres, Celutus or Chelutus 10 yéeres. Then succéded Aldred, of whome king Edward received the crowne, and he was predecessor to Pleimond. A litle before the death of king Edward, Sithrike the king of Northumberland killed his brother Nigellus, and then king Reinold conquered the citie of Yorke.

Hen. Hunt.

Adelstane succeedeth his father Edward in the kingdome, Alfred practising by treason to keepe him from the gouvernement, sanke downe suddenlie as he was taking his oth for his purgation; the cause why Alfred opposed himselfe against Adelstane, whose praise is notable, what he did to satisfie the expectation of his people, ladie Beatrice king Edwards daughter maried to Sithrike a Danish gouvernor of the Northumbers, by whose meanes Edwin king Edwards brother was drowned, practises of treason, the ladie Beatrice strangelic put to death by hir stepsons for being of counsell to poison hir husband Sithrike, hir death reuenged upon the tormentors by hir father king Edward, and how chronographers varie in the report of this historie.

THE XIX. CHAPTER.

ADELSTAN.
M. iii. West.
Will. Malmes.
924.

Alfred striueth
in vaine to
kéepe Adel-
stane from the
gouernment.
Wil. Malm.
See more hereof
in the acts and
monuments set
fourth by
M. Fox, vol. 1.
leafe 195.

Anno 925.
Simon Dun.
Polydor.

Wil. Malm.

ADELSTANE the eldest sonne of king Edward began his reigne ouer the more part of all England, the yéere of our Lord 924, which was in the 6 yere of the emperour Henrie the first, in the 31 yéere of the reigne of Charles surnamed Simplex king of France, thrée moneths after the burning of Pauie, & about the 22 or 23 yéere of Constantine the third, king of Scotland. This Adelstane was crowned and consecrated king at Kingstone vpon Thames, of Aldelme the archbishop of Canturburie, who succéded Pleimond. He was the 24 king in number from Cerdicus or Cerdike the first king of the Westsaxons. There were in the beginning some that set themselues against him, as one Alfred a noble man, which practised by treason to haue kept him from the gouvernement: but he was apprehended yer he could bring his purpose to passe, and sent to Rome there to trie himselfe gilty or not gilty. And as he tooke his oth for his purgation before the altar of saint Peter, he suddenlie fell downe to the earth, so that his seruants tooke him vp, and bare him into the English schoole or hospitall, where the third night after he died.

Pope Iohn the tenth sent vnto king Adelstane, to know if he would that his bodie should be laid in christian buriall or not. The king at the contemplation of Alfreds friends and kinsfolks, signified to the pope that he was contented that his bodie should be interred amongst other christians. His lands being forfeited were giuen by the king vnto God and saint Peter. The cause that moued Alfred and other his complices against the king, was (as some haue alledged) his bastardie. But whether that allegation were true or but a slander, this is certeine, that except that steine of his honor, there was nothing in this Adelstane worthie of blame: so that he darkened all the glorious fame of his predecessors, both in vertuous conditions and victorious triumphs. Such difference is there to haue that in thy selfe wherein to excell, rather than to stand vpon the woorthinesse of thine ancestors, sith that can not rightlie be called a mans owne.

After that king Adelstane was established in the estate, he indeuored himselfe to answer the expectation of his people, which hoped for great wealth to insue by his noble and prudent gouernance. First therfore meaning to prouide for the suertie of his countrie, he concluded a peace with Sithrike king of the Northumbers, vnto whome (as ye haue heard) he gaue one of his sisters named Editha in mariage. Sithrike liued not past one yéere after he had so maried hir. And then Adelstane brought the prouince of the Northumbers vnto his subiection, expelling one Aldulph out of the same that rebelled against him. There be that

write,

write, that Godfrie and Aulafe the sonnes of Sithrike succéding their father in the gouernement of Northumberland, by practising to mooue warre against king Adelstane, occasioned him to inuade their countrie, and to chase them out of the same, so that Aulafe fled into Ireland, & Godfrie into Scotland: but other write, that Godfrie was the father of Reignold which wan Yorke, after that Sithrike had slaine his brother Nigellus, as before is mentioned.

H. Hunt.

¶ The Scottish chronicles varie in report of these matters from the English writers: whose chronicles affirme, that in the life time of king Edward, his daughter Beatrice was giuen in mariage to Sithrike, the gouernor of the Danes in Northumberland, with condition that if anie male were procreated in that mariage, the same should inherit the dominions of king Edward after his decease. King Edward had a brother (as they say) named Edwin, a iolie gentleman, and of great estimation amongst the Englishmen. He by Sithrikes procurement was sent into Flanders in a ship that leaked, and so was drowned, to the great reioising of all the Danes, least if he had suruiued his brother, he would haue made some businesse for the crowne.

Hæc. Boetius.
The Scottish writers varie from our English authors. Beatrice daughter to K. Edward as the Scottish writers say. Edwin was not brother to K. Edward but son to him. Adelstane flieth the realme.

About the same time Adelstane a base sonne of K. Edward fled the realme, for doubt to be made away by some like traitorous practise of the Danes. Shortlie after, king Edward vnderstanding that Sithrike went about some mischiefe toward him, persuaded his daughter to poison hir husband the said Sithrike. Then Aulafe or Aualassus, and Godfrie the sonnes of Sithrike, finding out by diligent examination, that Beatrice was of counsell in poisoning hir husband, they caused hir to be apprehended and put to death on this wise. She was set naked vpon a smithes cold anuill or stithie, and therewith hard rosted eggs being taken out of the hot imbers were put vnder hir armpits, and hir armes fast bound to hir bodie with a cord, and so in that state she remained till hir life passed from hir. King Edward in reuenge of his daughters death mooued warre against the two brethren, Aulafe and Godfrie, and in battell finallie vanquished them, but was slaine in the same battell himselfe.

Beatrice put to death by hir stepsons.

Thus haue the Scottish chronicles recorded of these matters, as an induction to the warres which followed betwixt the Scots and Danes as confederates against king Adelstane: but the truth thereof we leaue to the readers owne iudgement. For in our English writers we find no such matter, but that a daughter of king Edward named Edgitha or Editha, after hir fathers deceasse was by hir brother king Adelstane, about the first yeere of his reigne, giuen in mariage (as before ye haue heard) vnto the foresaid Sithrike king of Northumberland, that was descended of the Danish bloud, who for the loue of the yoong ladie, renounced his heathenish religion and became a christian; but shortlie after, forsaking both his wife and the christian faith, he set vp againe the worshipping of idols, and within a while after, as an apostata miserablie ended his life. Whervpon the yoong ladie, hir virginie being preserued, and hir bodie vndefiled (as they write) passed the residue of hir daies at Polleswoorth in Warwikeshire, spending hir time (as the same writers affirme) in fasting, watching, praieng, and dooing of almesdeedes, and so at length departed out of this world. Thus our writers differ from the Scottish historie, both in name and maner of end as concerning the daughter of king Edward that was coupled in mariage with Sithrike.

Editha a virgine.

Adelstane

Adelstane subdueth Constantine king of Scots, Howell king of Wales, and Wulfertb king of Northwales, the Scots possesse a great part of the north countries, Adelstane conquereth the Scots for aiding Godfrie his enimie; a miracle declaring that the Scots ought to obey the king of England; king Adelstane banisbeth his brother Edwin, he is for a conspiracie drowned in the sea, Adelstane repenteth him of his rigour (in respect of that misfortune) against his brother; Aulafe sometimes king of Northumberland inuadeth England, he disguiseth himselfe like a minstrell and surueieth the English campe unsuspected, he is discovered after his departure, he assaileth the English campe, Adelstane being comforted with a miracle discomfiteth his enimies, he maketh them of Northwales his tributaries, he subdueth the Cornishmen, his death; the description of his person, his vertues, of what abbeis & monasteries he was founder, his estimation in forren realmes, what pretious presents were sent him from other princes, and how he bestowed them; a remembrance of Guy the erle of Warwike.

THE XX. CHAPTER.

Wil. Malm.
Matth. West.
The noble
saieng of king
Adelstane.
926.

AFTER that king Adelstane had subdued them of Northumberland, he was aduertised, that not onelie Constantine king of Scots, but also Huduale or Howell K. of Wales went about a priue conspiracie against him. Herevpon with all conuenient speed assembling his power, he went against them, and with like good fortune subdued them both, and also Vimer or Wulfertb K. of Northwales, so that they were constrained to submit themselues vnto him, who shortlie after moued with pitie in considering their sudden fall, restored them all three to their former estates, but so as they should acknowledge themselues to gouerne vnder him, pronouncing withall this notable saieng, that More honorable it was to make a king, than to be a king.

Polydor.
934.

Ye must vnderstand, that (as it appeareth in the Scotish chronicles) the Scotishmen in time of wars that the Danes gaue the English nation, got a part of Cumberland and other the north countries into their possession, and so by reason of their néere adioining vnto the confines of the English kings, there chanced occasions of warre betwixt them, as well in the daies of king Edward, as of this Adelstane his sonne, although in déed the Danes held the more part of the north countries, till that this Adelstane conquered the same out of their hands, and ioined it vnto other of his dominions, constreining as well the Danes (of whome the more part of the inhabitants then consisted) as also the Englishmen, to obey him as their king and gouernour. Godfrie (as is said) being fled to the Scots, did so much preuaile there by earnest sute made to king Constantine, that he got a power of men, and entring with the same into Northumberland, besiged the citie of Duresine, soliciting the citizens to receiue him, which they would gladlie haue doone, if they had not perceiued how he was not of power able to resist the puissance of king Adelstane: and therefore doubting to be punished for their offenses if they reuolted, they kept the enimies out. King Adelstane being sore moued against the king of Scots, that thus aided his enimies, raised an armie, and went northward, purposing to reuenge that iniurie.

Ran. Higd.
Sim. Dun.
The Scots sub-
dued.

At his comming into Yorkshire, he turned out of the way, to visit the place where saint Iohn of Beuerlie was buried, and there offered his knife, promising that if he returned with victorie, he would redéeme the same with a woorthie price: and so proceeded and went forwards on his iournie, and entring Scotland, wasted the countrie by land vnto Dunfoader and Wertermore, and his nauie by sea destroyed the coasts alongst the shore, euen to Catnesse, and so he brought the king of Scots and other his enimies to subiection at his pleasure, constreining the same K. of Scots to deliuer him his son in hostage.

A token shewed miraculously tha, the Scots ought to be subiect to the kings of England.

It is said, that being in his iournie néere vnto the towne of Dunbar, he praied vnto God, that at the instance of saint Iohn of Beuerlie, it would please him to grant, that he might shew some open token, whereby it should appeare to all them that then liued, and should hercafter succéed, that the Scots ought to be subiect vnto the kings of England. Herewith, the

the king with his sword smote vpon a great stone standing néere to the castle of Dunbar, and with the stroke, there appeared a clift in the same stone to the length of an elme, which remained to be shewed as a witnesse of that thing manie yeares after. At his comming backe to Beuerlie, he redéemed his knife with a large price, as before he had promised.

After this was Edwin the kings brother accused of some conspiracie by him begun against the king, wherevpon he was banished the land, and sent out in an old rotten vessell without rower or mariner, onelie accompanied with one esquier, so that being lanchéd forth from the shore, through despaire Edwin leapt into the sea, and drowned himselfe, but the esquier that was with him recouered his bodie, and brought it to land at Withsand besides Canturburie. But Iames Maier in the annales of Flanders saieth, that he was drowned by fortune of the seas in a small vessell, and being cast vp into a créeke on the coast of Picardie, was found by Adolfe earle of Bullongne that was his coosin germane, and honorablie buried by the same Adolfe in the church of Bertine. In consideration of which déed of pietie and dutie of mindfull consanguinitie, the king of England both hartilie thanked earle Adolfe, and bestowed great gifts vpon the church where his brother was thus buried. For verelie king Adelstane after his displeasure was asswaged, and hearing of this miserable end of his brother, sore repented himselfe of his rigour so extended towards him, in so much that he could neuer abide the man that had giuen the information against him, which was his cupbearer, so that on a time as the said cupbearer serued him at the table, and came towards him with a cup of wine, one of his feet chanced to slide, but he recouered himselfe with the helpe of the other foot, saing, "One brother yet hath holpen & succored the other:" which words cost him his life. For the king remembering that by his accusation he had lost his brother that might haue béene an aid to him, caused this said cupbearer to be straight put to death.

*Wyl. Malin.
Matt. Westm.
934.*

Repentance too late.

In this meane while, Aulafe the sonne of Sitherike, late king of Northumberland (who is also named by writers to be king of the Irishmen, and of manie Ilands) assembled a great power of Danes, Irishmen, Scots, and other people of the out Iles, and imbarcked them in 615 ships and craiers, with the which he arriued in the mouth of Humber, and there comming on land, began to inuade the countrie. This Aulafe had married the daughter of Constantine king of Scots, by whose procurement, notwithstanding his late submission, Aulafe tooke in hand this iournie. King Adelstane aduertised of his enemies arriual, gathered his people, and with all conuenient spéed hastéd towards them, and approching néerer vnto them, pitcht downe his field at a place called by some Brimesburie, by others Brimesford, and also Brunaubright, and by the Scottish writers Browningfield.

Wil. Malin.

937.

Simon Dun.

*Hen. Hunt.
Wyl. Malin.*

When knowledge hereof was had in the enemies campe, Aulafe enterprised a maruelous exploit, for taking with him an harpe, he came into the English campe, offering himselfe disguised as a minstrell, to shew some part of his cunning in musicke vpon his instrument: and so being suffered to passe from tent to tent, and admitted also to plaie afore the king, surueied the whole state and order of the armie. This doone, he returned, meaning by a cammisado to set vpon the kings tent. But one that had serued as a souldier sometime vnder Aulafe, chanced by marking his demeanour to know him, and after he was gone, vttered to the king what he knew. The king séemed to be displeaséd, in that he had not told him so much before Aulafs departure: but in excusing himselfe, the souldier said: "Ye must remember (if it like your grace) that the same faith which I haue giuen vnto you, I sometime owght vnto Aulafe, therefore if I should haue betraied him now, you might well stand in doubt least I should hereafter doo the like to you: but if you will follow mine aduise, remoue your tent, least happilie he assaile you vnwares." The king did so, and as it chanced in the night following, Aulafe came to assaile the English campe, and by fortune comming to the place where the kings tent stood before, he found a bishop lodged, which with his companie was come the same day to the armie, and had pitcht vp his tent in that place from whence the king was remoued: and so was the same bishop, and most part of his men there skaine, which slaughter executed, Aulafe passed forward, and came to the

*Math. West.
Hector Buet.
Ran. Higd.
Aulafe disguised, cometh to view the English camp.*

Aulafe assaileth the English campe.

Ran. Higd. the kings tent, who in this meane time, by reason of the alarum raised, was got vp, and taking to him his sword in that sudden fright, by chance it fell out of the scabbard, so that he could not find it, but calling to God and S. Aldelme (as saith Polychron.) his sword was restored to the scabbard againe. The king comforted with that miracle, boldlie preased forth vpon his enimies, and so valiantlie resisted them, that in the end he put them to flight, and chased them all that morning and day following, so that he slue of them an huge number. Some haue written, that Constantine king of Scots was slaine at this ouerthrow, and fiue other small kings or rulers, with 12 dukes, and welnéere all the armie of those strange nations which Aulafe had gathered together. But the Scottish chronicles affirme, that Constantine was not there himselfe, but sent his sonne Malcolme, which yet escaped sore hurt and wounded from the battell, as in the same chronicles ye may see more at large.

W. Malm.
The enimies discomfited.

Ran. Higd. When K. Adelstane had thus vanquished his enimies in the north parties of England, he went against them of Northwales, whose rulers and princes he caused to come before him at Hereford, and there handled them in such sort, that they couenanted to pay him yeerlie in lieu of a tribute 20 pounds of gold, 300 pounds of siluer, and 25 head of neate, with hawks and hownds a certeine number. After this, he subdued the Cornishmen: and whereas till those daies they inhabited the citie of Excester, mingled amongst the Englishmen, so that the one nation was as strong within that citie as the other, he rid them quite out of the same, and repaired the walles, and fortified them with ditches and turrets as the maner then was, and so remoued the Cornish men further into the west parts of the countrie, that he made Tamer water to be the confines betwene the Englishmen and them. Finallie the noble prince king Adelstane departed out of this world, the 26 day of October, after he had reigned the tearme of 16 yeares. His bodie was buried at Malmesburie.

Tribute.
The Cornish men subdued.

Excester repaired.
940.

Simon Dun.
The decease of king Adelstane.

The description of king Adelstane.

Wolstan archbishop of Yorke.
His estimation in foraine realmes.

Harding.

He was of such a stature, as exceeded not the common sort of men, stooping somewhat, and yellowe haired, for his valiancie ioined with courtesie beloued of all men, yet sharpe against rebels, and of inuincible constancie: his great deuotion toward the church appeared in the building, adorning & indowing of monasteries and abbeis. He built one at Wilton within the diocese of Salisburie, and an other at Michelnie in Summersetshire. But besides these foundations, there were few famous monasteries within this land, but that he adorned the same either with some new peece of building, iewels, bookes, or portion of lands. He had in excéeding fauour Wolstan archbishop of Yorke that liued in his daies, for whose sake he greatlie enriched that bishoprike. His fame spread ouer all the parties of Europe, so that sundrie princes thought themselues happie if they might haue his friendship, either by affinitie or otherwise: by meanes whereof, he bestowed his sisters so highlie in mariage as before ye haue heard. He receiued manie noble and rich presents from diuers princes, as from Hugh king of France, horses and sundrie rich iewels, with certeine reliques: as Constantines sword, in the hilt whereof was set one of the nailes wherewith Christ was fastened to the crosse, the speare of Charles the great, which was thought to be the same wherewith the side of our sauieur was pearced, the banner of saint Maurice, with a part of the holie crosse, and likewise a part of the thorned crowne: yet Mandeuile saw the one halfe of this crowne in France, and the other at Constantinople, almost 400 yeares after this time, as he writeth. Of these iewels king Adelstane gaue part to the abbie of saint Swithon at Winchester, and part to the abbie of Malmesburie. Moreouer, the king of Norwaie sent vnto him a goodlie ship of fine woorkmanship, with gilt sterne and purple sailes, furnished round about the decke within with a rowe of gilt pauses. ¶ In the daies of this Adelstane reigned that right worthie Guy earle of Warwike, who (as some writers haue recorded) fought with a mightie giant of the Danes in a singular combat, and vanquished him.

Edmund

Edmund succeedeth Adelstane in the kingdome, the Danes of Northumberland rebell against him, a peace concluded betwene Aulafe their king and king Edmund upon conditions, Aulafe dieth, another of that name succeedeth him; king Edmund subdueth the Danes, and compelleth them to receiue the christian faith, Reinold and Aulafe are baptised, they violate their feultie vowed to king Edmund, they are put to perpetuall exile; why king Edmund wasted all Northumberland, caused the eies of king Dunmails sonnes to be put out, and assigned the said countrie to Malcolme king of Scots; the Scottish chroniclers error in peruerting the time & order of the English kings, king Edmunds lawes, by what misfortune he came to his end, how his death was foreshewed to Dunstane in a vision, a tale of the vertue of the crosse, Dunstane reproueth duke Elstane, his dreame, and how the interpretation thereof came to passe.

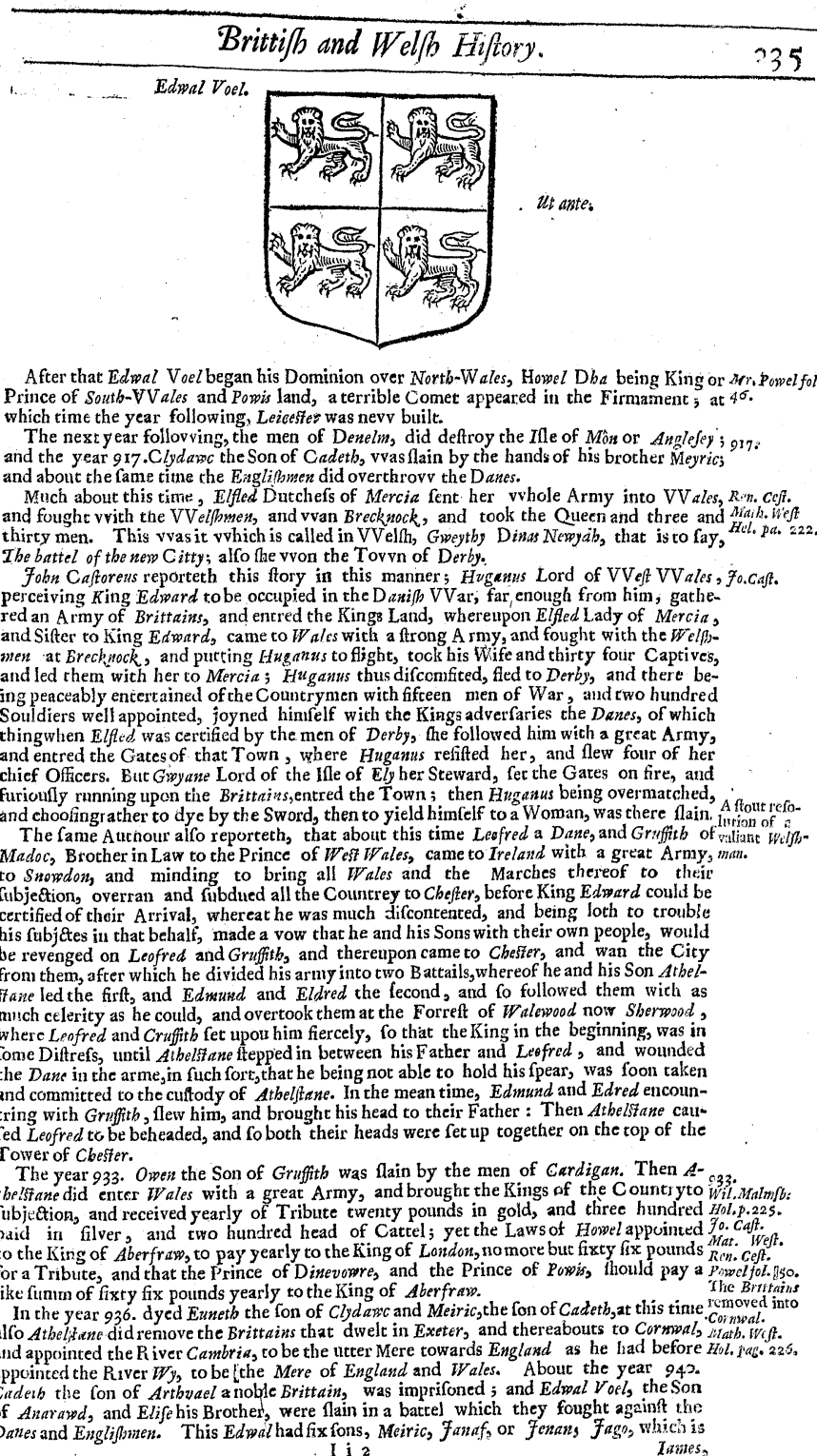
THE XXJ. CHAPTER.

AFTER that Adelstane was departed this life, without leauing issue behind to succéed EDMUND. him in the kingdome, his brother Edmund, sonne of Edward the elder, borne of his last wife Edgiue, tooke vpon him the gouernement of this land, and began his reigne in the yeare of our Lord 940, which was in the fift yeare of the emperor Otho the 1, in the 13th of Lewes surnamed Transmarinus king of France, and about the 38 yeare of Constantine ^{*Hil. Matm.*} 940. the third king of Scotland. The Danes of Northumberland rebelled against this Edmund, ^{*Simon Dun.*}

[...]

Appendix III

A Welsh perspective on Athelstan is provided by Percy Enderbie in *Cambria Triumphans or Brittain in its Perfect Lustre*, 1661 (final three paragraphs)



[ENDS]