

were a renewal of the fierce combat and the fierce carouse of earth.

In some legends of the Norse mythology there is a humorous element which shows freedom of spirit; while in others, such as the legend of the death of Balder, there is a pathos not uncongenial to Christianity. The Northmen were not priest-ridden. Their gods were not monstrous and overwhelming forces like the hundred-handed idols of the Hindu, but human forms, their own high qualities idealized, like the gods of the Greek, though with Scandinavian force in place of Hellenic grace.

Converted to Christianity, the Northman transferred his enthusiasm, his martial prowess, and his spirit of adventure from the service of Odin to that of Christ, and became a devotee and a crusader. But in his unconverted state he was an exterminating enemy of Christianity; and Christianity was the civilization as well as the religion of England.

Scarcely had the Saxon kingdom been united by Egbert when the barks of the Northmen appeared, filling the English Charlemagne, no doubt, with the same foreboding sorrow with which they had filled his Frankish prototype and master. In the course of the half-century which followed, the swarms of rovers constantly increased, and grew more pertinacious and daring in their attacks. Leaving their ships they took horses, extending their incursions inland, and formed in the interior of the country strongholds, into which they brought the plunder of the district. At last they in effect conquered the North and Midland, and sat up a satrap king, as the agent of their extortion.

They seem, like the Franks of Clovis, to have quartered themselves as "guests" upon the unhappy people of the land. The monasteries and the churches were

the special objects of their attacks, both as the seats of the hated religion, and as the centres of wealth; and their sword never spared a monk. Croyland, Peterborough, Hinton, and Ely, were turned to blood-stained ashes. Edmund, the Christian chief of East Anglia, found a martyrdom, of which one of the holiest and most magnificent of English abbeys was afterwards the monument. When Alfred appeared upon the scene, Wessex itself, the heritage of the house of Cerdic and the supreme kingdom, was in peril from the Pagans, who had firmly entrenched themselves at Reading, in the angle between the Thames and Kennet, and English Christianity was threatened with destruction.

A younger but a favourite child. Alfred was sent in his infancy by his father to Rome to receive the Pope's blessing. He was thus affiliated, as it were, to that Roman element, ecclesiastical and political, which, combined with the Christian and Teutonic elements, has made up English civilization. But he remained through life a true Teuton. He went a second time, in company with his father, to Rome, still a child, yet old enough, especially if he was precocious, to receive some impressions from the city of historic grandeur, ancient art, ecclesiastical order, centralized power. There is a pretty legend denoting the docility of the boy and his love of learning, or at least of the national lays; but he was also a hunter and a warrior. From his youth he had a thorn in his flesh, in the shape of a mysterious disease, perhaps epilepsy, to which monkish chroniclers have given an ascetic and miraculous turn, and this enhances our sense of the hero's moral energy in the case of Alfred, as in that of William III.

As "Crown Prince," to use the phrase of a German writer, Alfred took part with his elder brother.