

the property, and the man who has the swiftest horse comes to the first and largest part, and so each after the other, until it is all taken; and he gets the least part who runs to the property nearest the town. Then each rides away with the property, and may keep it all; and therefore, swift horses are there uncommonly dear.

There is also among the Esthonians, a power of producing cold, and therefore, the dead lie there so long and decay not, because they bring the cold upon them; and if a man sets two vats full of ale or of water, they cause that either shall be frozen over whether it be summer or winter.

Now, here we have the first tales of travellers that are told in the English tongue; the beginning of our great literature of travel and exploration.

But this is not the most important work that Alfred did for our literature. We owe to him, chiefly, the beginnings of English history. Before King Alfred's time, there had been kept, in the monasteries (the only place where books were safe, or men had time and skill to write them in those days of war and plunder) brief records of the chief events of each year. Sometimes there was only a line or two, telling of the death of one king, or the coming of another. Sometimes there would be a longer passage, describing a battle. In some years there would be no entry at all. But from Alfred's time the narratives began to be much fuller and more interesting. There is no doubt that the king encouraged the writers to write better and more at length, and it may be that he even wrote some parts himself. This work is called the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. It went on and on after the death of King Alfred down to the reign of Henry II; and very often, if it were not for the Chronicle, no one would know what had happened in certain years, and some of our early history could never have been written.

You remember how much of Alfred's reign was taken up by the struggle against the Danes. The Chronicle contains a long account of these wars, and I have chosen for you to read a passage about the fighting in the year that Alfred came to the throne. It is written in English, but not in English that you could read without a good deal of study. I have changed it as little as possible, so that you could see for yourselves how simply the story is told.

871. In this year came the Danish host to Reading in the land of the West-Saxons, and about the third night two earls rode up. They met the leader Athelwulf, at Englefield, and he fought with them, and won the victory. After four nights Ethelred the King, and Alfred his brother, led the great army to Reading, and fought with the host; and there was much slaughter on either hand, and Ethel-

wulf, the chief, was slain, and the Danes had possession of the field.

And after four nights Ethelred the king, and Alfred his brother, fought with the host at Ashdown. And they (the Danish army) were in two bands; in the one were Bagsac and Halfdene, the heathen kings, and in the other were the earls. And then king Ethelred fought with the King's band and there King Bagsac was slain; and Alfred, his brother, fought with the earls' band, and there was slain Earl Sidrac the elder, Earl Sidrac the younger, Earl Osbern, and Earl Frene, and Earl Harold; and both bands of the host were put to flight, and many thousands were slain; and the fighting continued until night.

And after fourteen nights, Ethelred the king and Alfred his brother, fought with the host at Basing, and there the Danes won the victory.

And about two months after, Ethelred the king and Alfred his brother fought with the Danish host at Newton, and they were in two bands, and they put them both to flight; and late in the day they won the victory; and there was great slaughter on either hand; and the Danes had possession of the field; and there was Heahmund the bishop slain, and many godly men. And after this fight came a great summer army.

And afterwards, after Easter, died Ethelred the king; and he had reigned five years; and his body lies at Wimbourne.

Then came Alfred his brother to the throne of the West-Saxons. And after about a month, Alfred the king, with all the little army, fought with the host at Wilton, and late in the day they put them to flight, and the Danes had possession of the field.

And in this year there were nine battles fought with the Danes in the kingdom south of the Thames, besides that Alfred, the king's brother, and single chiefs and thanes, often rode raids that no one numbered; and in this year there were slain nine earls, and one king. And in this year the West Saxons made peace with the host."

In the year 901 there is this short record of the king's death:

901. In this year departed Alfred, the son of Ethelwulf, six nights before the feast of All Saints. He was king over all England except that part which was under the Danes; and he held that kingdom a year and a half less than thirty winters. And then came Edward, his son, to the kingdom."

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not only our earliest English prose; it is also the earliest prose history in any Teutonic language. It is worth remembering that England was the first of the nations of modern Europe to write her own story in her own tongue.

"Now, Johnny," asked the gentleman who had kindly consented to teach the class, "what does this story of Jonah and the whale teach us?" "It teaches us," said Johnny, "That you can not keep a good man down."