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KING ALFRED THE GREAT.

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II.



IN order to restore civilization, it was necessary above all things to reform the Church. "I have often thought," says Alfred, "what wise men there were once among the English people, both clergy and laymen, and

what blessed times those were when the people were governed by kings who obeyed God and His gospels, and how they maintained peace, virtue and good order at home, and even extended them beyond their country; how they prospered in battle as well as in wisdom, and how zealous the clergy were in teaching and learning, and in all their sacred duties; and how people came from foreign countries to seek for instruction; whereas now, when we desire it, we can only obtain it from abroad." It is clear that the king, unlike the literary devotees of Scandinavian paganism, looked upon Christianity as the root of the greatness, and even of the military force, of the nation.

In order to restore the Church, again, it was necessary above all things to refound the monasteries. Afterwards—society having become settled, religion being established,

and the Church herself having acquired fatal wealth—these brotherhoods sank into torpor and corruption; but while the Church was still a missionary in a spiritual and material wilderness, waging a death-struggle with heathenism and barbarism, they were the indispensable engines of the holy war. The re-foundation of monasteries, therefore, was one of Alfred's first cares; and he did not fail, in token of his pious gratitude, to build at Athelney a house of God which was far holier than the memorial abbey afterwards built by the Norman Conqueror at Battle. The revival of monasticism among the English, however, was probably no easy task; for their domestic and somewhat material nature never was well suited to monastic life.

The monastery schools, the germs, as has been already said, of our modern universities and colleges, were the king's main organs in restoring education; but he had also a school in his palace for the children of the nobility and the royal household. It was not only clerical education that he desired to promote. His wish was "that all the free-born youth of his people, who possessed the means, might persevere in learning so long as they had no other work to occupy them, until they could perfectly read the English scriptures; while such as de-