

The New Year.

The frosty night wind hurries on
The strangers' lagging feet,
And, for a moment, in the hush
The Old and New Year meet;
And one goes back to God again,
And one stays on for joy or pain.

And he who stays looks for thy face
And finds thee in the night,
And with swift arms encircles thee,
And claims thee his by right;
And no one else can come so near
To thee as he, the Stranger Year.

He will abide his time with thee—
His own till death do part;
Therefore receive him tenderly
And take him to thy heart,
Not grudgingly, as one who must,
But generously with love and trust.

Be not afraid to give thyself
Into his guiding hands;
For he will lead through day or dark,
To rough or pleasant lands,
And he will give thee fight or rest,
The shine or shade, as shall be best.

Respond to every word of his
With faith that does not fear;
Another speaks to thee through him,
For God is in the Year;
Oh, love him, for he comes to bless
Thy life with good and happiness.
—Marianne Farningham.

Alfred the Great.

A THOUSAND years ago, a royal lady, in one of the rush-strewn halls of her rude English palace, one day read aloud to her children from a written book of Saxon poetry.

One of that group was a boy named Alfred, who eagerly listened to the stories his mother read. Holding out the book in her hand, she promised to give it to whichever of her sons should first learn to read.

Though twelve years of age, and the son of a king, Alfred had not yet been taught to read. Such, however, was his desire to gain the prize, that he at once set to work to master his letters.

Steadily persevering in his task, while his brothers were at play, he was ere long able to read the book, and with great joy he received it as his reward. That boy afterwards became King of England. He is known as Alfred the Great.

At the age of twenty-three he became king. During the greater part of his reign, he was engaged in fierce struggles with the Danes and other Northmen, who invaded the eastern counties of England.

In 878 these invaders arrived in such large numbers, that the people fled before them. Deserted by his subjects, Alfred was obliged to hide himself from his enemies. Disguised as a common soldier, he took refuge in the humble cottage of a cow-herd.

One day, while sitting polishing his bow and pointing his arrows, the peasant's wife set him to watch some cakes she had put before the fire to bake. Returning shortly afterwards, she found him lost in thought, and the cakes burning on the hearth. Scolding him for his supposed carelessness, she

told him that he was good at eating cakes, but bad at turning them.

The good woman was very much alarmed when she afterwards learned that she had scolded her king; but Alfred rewarded both her and her husband for their kindness to him in his time of need.

Having again collected his followers, Alfred determined to attack the Danes. Disguised as a harper, he visited their camp. The soldiers crowded around him, and were delighted with his playing and singing. He saw all the defences of the camp; and, from the leader's talk with his friends, he found out all his plans.

Two days afterwards, Alfred and his little army attacked the Danes with such force that they swept all before them, and Alfred was once more the master of his kingdom.

Alfred was always very kind to the poor, and he set aside an eighth of his income to supply their wants. On one occasion, when he had been defeated by his enemies, he retired to a castle in an out-of-the-way place.

Here a beggar called, and asked for alms. On inquiry, the king was told that his followers were away endeavouring to obtain a supply of food, and that there was but one loaf in the castle.

Taking the loaf in his hand, the king broke it in two, and gave the beggar one of the halves, saying that not one of his people should starve while he had a crust to divide with them.

A THING to be thankful for is that God so sifts our prayers that only the right ones are answered. If all the foolish ones were granted we should have unspeakable suffering.

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