

In the following pages we shall tell the story of Alfred's life in fewer words than those of his friend, Bishop Asser, but before doing so it will be well to give a brief survey of the state of England before Alfred came into the world.

THE BEGINNING OF "ENGLE-LAND."

In the year 449 a horde of sea-pirates landed on the coast of Kent and attacked the Britons, who defended their shores from the fierce invaders. Shortly afterwards other fleets of pirates from the same parts swept down upon the shores of Britain. They were strong, fair-haired, blue-eyed men, and they came across the sea from the country we now call Germany. They belonged to three great tribes or nations, called Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Foot by foot the Britons were beaten back, until, after many years of fighting, the Angles and Saxons became masters of the whole of Britain except Wales, Cornwall and Strathelyde, in which the descendants of the early Britons still live.

When the Angles and Saxons had conquered the country, they abandoned their sea-faring life and devoted themselves to clearing the forests, tilling the ground, and building towns. Gradually the island came to be called England, or the land of the Angles. For a long time, however, the country was divided into a number of different kingdoms—such as Sussex (the kingdom of the *South Saxons*), Wessex (the kingdom of the *West Saxons*), Northumbria (the kingdom *North of the Humber*), and so on. These kingdoms were nearly always at war with one another, and sometimes one became more powerful,