

DUNSTAN: England's First Patron Saint.

CHAPTER 1

The Background: Anglo Celtic Britain 410-909

When Dunstan was born around AD 909, the English, or Anglo Saxons as they sometimes called themselves, were already an old nation. Germanic peoples had been settled in Britain by the Romans as early as the 4th Century, prisoners of war and mercenaries who were intended to stiffen native resistance both to pirates of their own race and to the Picts and Irish (then called, confusingly, Scots) who were constantly harrying the Roman province. By 410 the hard pressed imperial government, under the Emperor Honorius, had no choice but to authorise the civil authorities in Britain to look to their own defence. This "Rescript of Honorius" as it is called was in effect a grant of independence which brought to an end nearly four centuries of rule from Rome.

Newly independent Britain still thought of itself as a "Roman" community, a part of western civilisation and of catholic Christendom. But it was also a Celtic country. In the north and west, in the old Roman military zone, native kingdoms were growing up which, while they were not hostile to Roman ideas and whose nobles for centuries claimed Roman titles, looked back to the culture of the pre-Roman Iron Age. In many ways they had more in common with the Irish and Picts, whose Iron Age traditions were unbroken, whom they were meant to keep at bay, than with the educated, Latin-speaking citizens of lowland Britain, who farmed the villa estates and still maintained the somewhat dwindling towns, the "28 Cities" of which Gildas writes.

On Britain's eastern and southern seaboard, from the Humber to the Solent, lay the area known as the Saxon Shore. This was where the Germanic immigrants, of various tribal origins but known by the catch-all term of Saxons, were mainly concentrated. Romano-British industry catered for their needs by producing pottery and military equipment, such as sword harnesses, but in the styles of the "barbarian" Germanic world. Some of their settlements have been excavated, including a large one at Mucking in Essex, one of a chain which guarded the sea-approaches to London. Britain was a representation in miniature of the Roman Empire itself, threatened by the contradictions of its own society and by enemies both within and without.

The spark came around the year 450. Three new mercenary leaders, Hengest, his brother Horsa and his son, Oric Oisc (Oric the god-like) beached their longships on the gravel of Thanet, in Kent. This landing came to be remembered above all others as the "Advent of the Saxons". Employed against the Picts and Scots Hengest, who was claimed to be a great, great grandson of the high god Woden himself, soon became the leader of a Germanic revolt against the British state whose ferocity spread from sea to sea. Fifty years of warfare followed, in which fortune favoured now one side, now

another, until the British won a crushing victory at the siege of Badon Hill, around the year 500. Gildas the Wise, a Briton whose account of these times has come down to us, tells us that he was born in the year of this battle but fails to name the victorious commander. Later tradition, however, accorded that honour to Arthur.

Half a century of peace followed but Britain had been permanently changed. Linguistically, as place names and personal names overwhelmingly show, in eastern Britain from Yorkshire's East Riding round to Hampshire a Low-German dialect had replaced both British and Latin. Christianity had virtually disappeared, replaced by the heathen Germanic religion, as witnessed by place names commemorating its holy places and by numerous heathen cemeteries. Roman towns, including London, lay either semi-derelict for centuries or were abandoned all together. All traces of Roman law and civil tradition had vanished, replaced by little Anglo Saxon kingdoms ruled under Germanic tribal custom. Attempts have been made, especially since the First World War, to minimise these changes and to maintain that, beneath the surface, a British population continued its life much as before, the only real change being in the fashions of its landlords. Comparisons with other parts of the western Roman world which also suffered barbarian incursions at this time, however, give this idea the lie: England had been born and was, as it was to remain, a Germanic nation.

In the still Celtic west there had also been change. The old British language was undergoing the metamorphosis from which it emerged as Welsh, with its south western dialect, Cornish. Pressure of population caused by the influx of refugees from eastern Britain resulted in British migration to parts of what are now Spain and France. The most important of these British colonies (called Little Britain in distinction from Great Britain) survives as Brittany, whose language is also a dialect of Welsh. Although some Roman-style civil titles remained, authority now lay with princes of the neo-Celtic kingdoms. Gildas, who looked back to the old Roman order, disapproved and called them tyrants. A large part of his tract "On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain" is concerned with denunciations of their conduct.

Whilst the English had been colonising the east, Irish settlers had made deep incursions into the West Country and Wales where a semi-Irish kingdom, under an Irish dynasty, grew up in Dyfed. In Argyll the Irish kingdom of Dal Riata had been founded which was eventually to become the nucleus of "Scotland" as an historic kingdom.

The British Church too had seen change. The Roman style of church government by Bishops based in towns had lost much importance as town life declined and Bishops were attached to the little royal courts. The native Celtic Church which evolved was led by the monasteries of which Glastonbury, where Gildas may have stayed for a time, seems to have been among the earliest. This, and its relative isolation from the European mainstream, gave the Celtic Church its distinctive character which led eventually to differences with Rome on matters of custom; but Celtic Christianity, about

which much nonsense has been written, was never a sort of proto-protestantism or other than a part of Catholic Christianity.

It was a missionary church: in the north Ninian preached to the southern Picts. The 6th Century was the great age of the Welsh saints, who entrenched the faith among the Cambrian mountains. Ireland, too, received the gospel in large measure as a result of missionary effort from Britain: writing a century before Gildas, St. Patrick is our second contemporary voice. In his "Confession" he describes his abduction from home by Irish pirates and his life in Ireland as a slave. He writes movingly of his difficulties and his mission in Ireland in a way which takes us to the heart of his age. His importance here is that a belief arose, certainly before Dunstan's time, that he was buried at Glastonbury. For this reason many Irish "pilgrims" came, with their books, and established the school where Dunstan was educated. The truth of the matter is complicated by the puzzle of Patrick's career itself. A slightly earlier missionary to Ireland, one Palladius, sent by the Pope in 431, may also have been remembered under the name of Patrick. Certainly the Irish remembered a Patrick senior, as well as our Patrick junior, author of the "Confession". Manuscripts of Dunstan's earliest biography differ as to which Patrick was supposedly buried at Glastonbury. The most we can say is that Patrick junior very probably came from somewhere in the Severn region and that the Glastonbury monastery was quite possibly linked in some way with the Irish mission. Perhaps it was its home base.

One field of missionary endeavour which the British church denied itself, however, was that of heathen England. Collaboration with the Saxon enemy was the worst of crimes in Welsh eyes and when St. Augustine sought Welsh co-operation with his papal mission around 600 it was refused. Looking back on this failure of Christian charity a century later, the English church historian the Venerable Beda regarded it as the sin in punishment for which the Welsh had been deprived of most of their lands. The Irish, however, held no anti-English bias. Their missionaries, working from Iona and Lindisfarne, played a major role in the eventual conversion of England.

The English were now the rising power within Britain. The later 6th century saw renewed English expansion into the west. By the end of the 7th century the northern English of Northumbria controlled all the country between the Humber and the Forth except for the Welsh kingdom of Strathclyde in the Clyde valley. Between the Humber and the Thames lay Mercia. South of the Thames lay the kingdom of Wessex, where Dunstan was to be born and to whose royal family he was related.

The origins of Wessex are obscure. The name seems originally to have applied to the Germanic settlers of the upper Thames valley, in series with the Middle and East Saxons further down stream. The English writers who in later centuries compiled the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle knew also of the activities of one Cerdic, who had landed near Southampton and fought his way northwards to the Winchester area. This group were called the Gewissae, a name which survived in Welsh as a general term for the

west country English. The relationships between these two groups and their leaders are hopelessly muddled. We are dealing with the region where the British victory of Badon Hill must be placed and these western settlers must have suffered worst from its effects. Wessex north of the Thames was conquered by the Mercians during the 7th Century which may also have obscured the Thames valley traditions. However that may be it was with the dynasty of Winchester, claiming descent from the Old Gods through Cerdic, that the fate of Wessex and of England lay.

Their heartland comprised Hampshire and Wiltshire with a western frontier for years lying at Selwood, Coit Mawr, the Great Forest as the Welsh called it. The Saxon victory at Beandun in 614 possibly led the way to an advance along the Dorset coast towards Exeter. In 658 the West Saxon victory at Penselwood was followed by the English occupation of Somerset, including the ancient British monastery of Glastonbury, but the West Saxon court was by now Christian and in this secondary phase of English advance wholesale displacement of populations did not occur. In Selwoodshire, the lands west of the wood, Welshmen lived alongside the English for centuries. The Saxon king Ine (688-728) honoured the monastery at Glastonbury and built a new stone church dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul to the east of the wooden Old Church of St. Mary. He may originally have wished to be buried there but in the end he retired to Rome, where he died.

Despite local feuds with the Welsh, and between the Saxon kingdoms of the Heptarchy, the eighth century was on the whole a period of peace both in the English and Celtic worlds. But in 793 an event occurred which shook all the British Isles: the great monastery of Lindisfarne, shrine of St. Cuthbert, was sacked by heathen Scandinavian pirates. Two years later, Iona also was sacked. The Viking Age had begun. Pressure of population and political difficulties at home provided motivation and improvements in ship-building had made their exploits possible, but to begin with the Vikings, close relations by blood of the English themselves, confined themselves to isolated raids on monasteries. Eventually, however, war parties began to overwinter in Britain. In the autumn of 865 came the onslaught of an organised invasion: the Great Army, as it was called, landed in East Anglia. Its leaders, Ivar the Boneless and Halfdan, were fabled in Scandinavian legend as the sons of that terrible Viking Ragnar Hairy-Trousers who had been captured and put to death in a snake pit at York by a king of Northumbria. His sons descended in vengeance. So ran the tale. The reality was grim enough. In November 866 the invaders captured York; in 869 they returned to East Anglia where they were opposed by its king. Defeated and captured, King Edmund was killed in circumstances which led to his commemoration as St. Edmund the Martyr. Late in 870 the Danes moved from Thetford to Reading. Shortly after, they were met at the Battle of Ashdown, in Berkshire, by the West Saxon king Athelred and his brother Alfred. The Saxon victory was not to last and in April 871 Athelred died and his brother, Alfred the Great, assumed the throne in the most difficult of

circumstances. He had little choice but to buy off the Viking host, which retired to London in Mercian territory.

Wessex had briefly become, in the first half of the 9th Century, the most powerful of the English kingdoms when its king, Egbert, defeated the Mercians at the battle of Ellendun in 825. This event brought to an end a century and a half of Mercian supremacy in southern England. As a result, the ancient kingdoms of Sussex, Kent and Essex were added to Wessex. For a time Egbert also ruled Mercia itself but the arrangement did not last long and the end of Egbert's reign saw Mercia and Wessex in a state of rough equality.

Now Egbert's grandson Alfred saw the destruction of the ancient Mercian kingdom. Its king, Burgred, was expelled by the Danes and went to end his life in Rome leaving his kingdom in the hands of a "foolish king's Thane" who ruled as a puppet of the Danes. The Great Army now divided its forces. In 876 Halfdan settled his half of the army, permanently, in Yorkshire. The remainder under Guthrum moved eventually to Cambridge and launched a fresh attack on Wessex. This proved unsuccessful; in 877 the Danes withdrew again into Mercian territory, again dividing their ranks. One group settled permanently in Mercia east of Watling Street. The other, under Guthrum, remained in Gloucester. In early January 878 Guthrum and his men moved south to Chippenham in their third attempt to conquer Wessex. This third visitation proved too much for the nerves of many West Saxons. Some submitted, some even fled overseas. Alfred himself withdrew into the fastness of the Somerset levels, building a fortress at Athelney at Easter 878 and using it as a guerrilla base from which to harass the Danes. In May he once more crossed Selwood and was met by the Levies of Somerset, Wiltshire and half of Hampshire. At Edington, near Westbury, Wiltshire, Alfred and his army won his decisive victory over Guthrum the Dane. Three weeks later Alfred received his defeated enemy and 30 of Guthrum's commanders at Aller, near Athelney, where Guthrum was baptised. Alfred stood as Godfather to him. The baptismal and treaty celebrations ended in a formal ceremony at Wedmore. Guthrum then left Wessex for Cirencester and after a year moved to East Anglia to make the third great Danish land settlement in England.

Alfred reigned for a further 20 years after Edington. The threat of conquest by the Great Army was ended, but other groups of Viking forces remained at large. Alfred proceeded to build fortifications throughout England south of the Thames and to build up a fleet which could engage the enemy on the high seas. In 886 Alfred was strong enough to occupy London, an act which was followed by his recognition as King by all the English not subject to the Danes. The House of Wessex was now the only one of the god-descended dynasties to survive and this ancient divine blood was still held to be crucial. The ruler of English Mercia, Athelred, styled himself merely Ealdorman, and, in the north, English Northumbria was ruled by the High Reeves of Bamburgh, the seat of the old Bernician kings; but they did not adopt the title of king.

Alfred immediately entrusted London, a Mercian town, to Ealdorman Athelred and soon after gave his daughter Athelflaed to him in marriage, thus cementing the alliance. A treaty was agreed with Guthrum by which the River Lea and Watling Street, (the modern A5) formed the boundary between English- and Danish-ruled territory.

The political situation stabilised, Alfred began to devote himself to the intellectual and spiritual welfare of his kingdom. Alfred founded a monastery at Athelney in thanksgiving for his victory, but he had to import foreign monks to serve in it. Nearby, the famous Alfred Jewel was found, which is inscribed "Alfred had me made". This may be the head of a presentation pointer given with copies of Alfred's translation of Pope Gregory's "Pastoral Care" which were sent to all his Bishops for Alfred, aged forty, had begun to learn Latin and set in motion a programme of translations of key Latin texts into English prose.

The monasteries, the universities of the early middle ages, had already been in a state of decline before the Danish invasion. The Danes had destroyed many all together. Now monastic life and the scholarship that went with it was all but extinct. In his educational programme Alfred sought the assistance of scholars from the West Midlands, which had escaped Danish ravishment and from Wales and perhaps Ireland. Asser, a Welsh priest from St. Davids, became Alfred's first biographer and Bishop of Sherborne. Plegmund, from Worcester, became Alfred's Archbishop of Canterbury. Together, Alfred and his helpers laid the foundations of English prose writing; but the time for the revival of the monasteries themselves had not yet come.

Alfred died on 26th October, 899. He was succeeded by his son Edward, known to history as the Elder. The transfer of power was not easy: a cousin, Athelwold, raised a rebellion in which he was prepared to join forces with the East Anglian Danes but he was killed in battle with Edward's men in 902. Eight years of uneasy peace followed.

CHAPTER 2

Dunstan at Glastonbury: (i) scholar and monk 909-939

For King Alfred's reign we have the biography of Bishop Asser and the near-contemporary Anglo Saxon Chronicle, but interest in the Chronicle flagged under Edward so we have few contemporary historical sources for the 10th Century. This has led to some confusion about dates. A post-1066 note inserted into the Chronicle text gives 925 as the year of Dunstan's birth. This results from a misunderstanding: the real date may be calculated to be around 909.

Several early Latin lives of Dunstan exist, the earliest from around the year 1000. It's author was a German priest who refers to himself by his initial "B". He was a refugee whom Dunstan had befriended in old age while Archbishop of Canterbury. We can therefore trust the picture "B" gives us of Dunstan the man and we can also be sure

that his account of Glastonbury, the earliest that we have, reflects Dunstan's own personal beliefs.

Dunstan's family was noble and related to the ruling House of Wessex. His father Herstan, according to "B", held lands adjoining those of Glastonbury Abbey. It is interesting, therefore, that the Beehive, or Cob Cottage, the traditional site of Dunstan's birthplace in Baltonsborough, lay just outside the famous Twelve Hides of Glastonbury which represent the early nucleus of its vast estates. The Twelve Hides boundary at Baltonsborough is linked twice with St. Dunstan in a manuscript of 1247, so the tradition seems to be an early one. Dunstan's mother, Cynethryth, was probably still alive in 929 when a woman of that name was remembered along with many of the members of Athelstan's court in the prayers of the Swiss monastery of St. Gall after a visit there by the Bishop of Worcester. Perhaps his father was already dead by this date. Dunstan had a brother, Wulfric. His uncle Athelm, his father's brother, became the first Bishop of Wells in the year of Dunstan's birth, and went on to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 923. Aelfheah (Elfege) the Bald, Bishop of Winchester, and Kinesige, Bishop of Lichfield, were also relations. It may well be that this family traced the origin of its fortunes to the days of King Alfred's refuge in the Somerset levels.

The court was often at Cheddar in those days and the site of the Saxon palace there has been located and excavated. Wells, an ancient shrine set by a spring, undoubtedly owed its elevation to the status of a bishopric to its proximity to the royal estate at Cheddar. In an ecclesiastical re-organisation in 909, King Edward created a new see, Ramsbury, out of that of Winchester, and split the old see of Sherborne, which had covered all "Selwoodshire", into three parts. Sherborne itself was reduced to the see of Dorset, while Wells became that of Somerset and a see was created for Devon and Cornwall at Crediton.

Dunstan was traditionally remembered as a slim, fair-haired child with a charm over animals. He was educated at Glastonbury Abbey, where his formal instruction would have begun at about the age of seven (i.e. around 916). "B" tells us that wandering Irish scholars or "pilgrims" had established a school there and the Abbey library was enriched by their books. The Abbey, and especially the little wooden church of St. Mary, the Old Church, was already so old that its origin was the stuff of myth. The earliest version of the legend connecting Our Lord with Glastonbury, still familiar in Blake's "Jerusalem", is provided by "B" who says, quite astonishingly, that the Old Church was not built by human hands (echoing Mark 14.58) but consecrated in heaven for the salvation of mankind. This was almost certainly Dunstan's own view.

The whole atmosphere of the ancient Celtic monastery clearly affected Dunstan deeply, as it has affected many since. After his first visit, with his father, when he wandered around the somewhat neglected old buildings, he had experienced a dream of an old man with a white beard and robe showing him around the splendid new buildings which he, Dunstan, would one day build. This brings us at once to the char-

acter of Dunstan's mind: like that other great craftsman already referred to, William Blake, Dunstan clearly lived his whole life on the edge of two worlds. Angelic and diabolic visions and glimpses of the future came to him throughout his life and what would today be called "psychic" phenomena had a tendency to occur around him. Yet "B's" account, unlike many old saints lives, does not read like utter fantasy. Rather it has the disturbingly matter-of-fact air of the better works on modern parapsychology. Later authors "improved" on these strange elements, but in "B's" account we clearly have a first hand portrait of a man of unusual, and visionary, cast of mind.

One anecdote "B" omits, perhaps because modesty prevented Dunstan from telling it widely, occurs in the second "Life" written by Adelard around 1020. It concerns an omen of Dunstan's birth. At the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, (Candlemas, February 2nd), it was the custom at Glastonbury to hold a candle lit procession. Dunstan's father and his mother, who was with child with him, took part. The candles of all the congregation were suddenly, and miraculously, extinguished. Equally miraculously, the candle of the expectant mother was re-kindled and from it all the rest, as a sign of the light which her holy child would bring. The local detail of this story makes it unlikely that it originated in Canterbury and some strange incident probably did lie at the bottom of it.

Dunstan was baptised at Old St. Marys and at some stage in his teens took the tonsure as a novice monk and server in the abbey. At this period, however, before the reforms with which he himself would later be associated, monastic life was not closely regulated, and this step would not necessarily have committed him either to monastic celibacy and discipline or to an ecclesiastical career. He was an outstanding scholar, but suffered in youth from ill health. During one bout of fever, in which he became delirious, he arose from his bed and, armed with a stick to defend himself from the phantom mad dogs which seemed to threaten him, the sleepwalker sought sanctuary in St. Marys, gaining access to the locked church from the roof by means of a convenient builders ladder. He was found peacefully asleep inside by the two custodians next morning. This incident, too, was seen with hindsight as an omen and the detail, as in many of Dunstan's visions, is explicable in terms of heathen folk belief, which was still a living force in Dunstan's day. Glastonbury Tor was early associated with Gwyn, who in Welsh legends is the counterpart of the Germanic Woden or Othin, the Wild Hunter, who with his pack of spectral hounds quartered the stormy skies in pursuit of lost souls for his quarry.

While Dunstan was pursuing his studies, the tide of affairs in England had turned in favour of the kingdom of Wessex. The system of fortifications which Alfred had set up was extended by his son and daughter, Edward and his sister Athelflaed, who after her husband's death in 911 ruled Mercia as Lady of the Mercians. In 910 at the battle of Tettenhall on the plain of Wednesfield (Woden's Field) an English army had destroyed a raiding force of the Northumbrian Danes and slain three of their kings. The

power of Danish York was broken. Edward was free to turn against the Danes of eastern England. He moved into Hertfordshire and Essex in 912. Five years of minor English successes followed and in 917 he opened a general offensive against the Danes of the Midlands. Athelflaed, leading her army in person, captured Derby. A second English army overran the Danish fort at Tempsford and killed the king of East Anglia. A third stormed Colchester. In early autumn Edward himself fortified Towcester, a show of force which led to the submission of Jarl Thurferth and the Danish army of Northampton. In November he again occupied Colchester and the Danes of East Anglia and Cambridge submitted. By January 918 only the Danish forts of Leicester, Stamford, Nottingham and Lincoln remained unsubdued. Early in the year, Leicester submitted to Athelflaed without a fight and the Yorkshire Danes offered her their allegiance in an attempt to gain her support against a new force of Irish/Norwegian Vikings who were pouring across the Irish Sea into Lancashire. Before she could act on this the warrior Lady, a queen in all but name, died at Tamworth, the ancient Mercian capital, on June 12th. The opportunity to prevent the establishment of the Norse Kingdom of York was lost. Edward's campaign against the remaining independent Danes of the East Midlands had to be broken off to make sure of his authority in Mercia. To prevent a renewal of Mercian separatism, Edward seized Tamworth. Mercia submitted to him, as did the kings of the Welsh. The Mercian Danes then submitted without a fight. For a year Alfwynn, Athelflaed's daughter, was allowed nominal rule in Mercia but in 919 she was brutally abducted to Wessex by Edward.

Edward was lord of all Britain south of the Humber, but he was forced to recognise the new Viking King of York, Raegnald, in 920. The Mercians resented his treatment of their ancient kingdom and in 924 a joint Mercian and Welsh rebellion at Chester had to be suppressed. Edward the Elder died on 17th July 924. Before the end of the year his eldest, probably illegitimate, son Athelstan had been recognised as King both by Wessex and by Mercia, where he had grown up in the care of his Aunt Athelflaed. Athelstan came to be called the Glorious and many traditions gathered about his name. He was said to have been the favourite grandson of Alfred, who had given him an imperial scarlet cloak and a Saxon sword as symbols of his future greatness. He was crowned in a grand kingmaking at Kingston-on-Thames on 4th September 925. The ceremony was performed by Dunstan's uncle, Athelm, now Archbishop of Canterbury. Dunstan himself, aged about 16 yrs was very probably present, for according to Adelard he had gone to stay with his uncle after leaving school. Archbishop Athelm introduced him to the King, who was in his early 30's. Athelstan showed him favour and it was at his splendid court, according to "B" that Dunstan first "arose".

Athelstan's court was among the most famous of all the Dark Ages. As Dean Armitage Robinson, a man not normally given to lyricism, wrote: "Athelstan's court - who shall describe that for us? We must not think of it as fixed in one place, such as Winchester. It was constantly on the move and often ... in Somerset. It was the refuge

of youthful princes from abroad. One of them was to wear the crown of France, and to be called Louis d'Outremer in memory of his exile across the sea; another was Alan, King Athelstan's godson, waiting to be old enough to fight his way back to his lost inheritance of Brittany, and a third was young Haakon of Norway, also training for a throne." (He was later remembered in the sagas as 'Athelstan's foster son' and Haakon 'the Good', who restored the heathen shrines after they were despoiled by the half-Christian Eric Bloodaxe). "Hither also came Hywell the Good, wisest of Welsh kings; and sometimes the treacherous Constantine, King of the restless Scotland. What a school of statesmanship was here: what knowledge of the wider world was opened up to an enquiring mind!"*

Athelstan was a great collector, and donor, of manuscripts, a man who, like Alfred, valued the things of the mind. He was also renowned as a collector of relics. He obtained many from Brittany. An embassy which came from Hugh the Great, Duke of the Franks, to sue for the hand of a sister of Athelstan, gave him the most magnificent relics of all: portions of the Cross and of the Crown of Thorns set in crystal, an antique cup carved with vines and corn, the Sword of Constantine, with one of the nails of Calvary set in its hilt; and a Lance, claimed to be that of Longinus, which had pierced the Lord's side. At this time a similar lance, such as was later considered one of the 'Grail Hallows,' became part of the Crown Jewels of the first German Reich and is now in Vienna.

In this splendid and slightly exotic atmosphere, the clever, imaginative, young Dunstan could only feel at home. He was already skilled as a writer and illuminator of manuscripts, at music and song and at all kinds of work with metals. He loved to listen to the heroic tales which were told as part of the entertainment of the court. On one occasion the aged armour-bearer of St. Edmund, last English king of East Anglia, told the tale of the King's last battle and capture and of his martyrdom by the Danes. Dunstan heard how King Edmund, after his capture by Ivar the Boneless in 870, had been tied up to a tree; refusing to rule as a puppet for the heathen, he had been shot with arrows while calling on the name of Christ. The Vikings ordered him to be silent but he continued to call upon the Divine Name so they attempted to silence him by cutting off his head. To their horror the severed head continued to call upon the name of Christ. The body was abandoned and the King's head was guarded by a wolf until it was found by some of the King's followers. Eventually the King's body and head were interred at Bury St. Edmunds, where the Saint was revered by both English and Danes alike. This story made a deep impression on Dunstan who was fond of retelling it as an old man, and is the source from which it comes down to us.

But even in the cosmopolitan setting of Athelstan's court. Dunstan's mind was perhaps too broad for the narrow piety of the time. Detractors claimed that he showed too much enthusiasm for the poetry of the heathens. The "Dunstan Classbook" (from which our front cover illustration is taken, and which it is thought that he once owned) contains a Latin text of Ovid's "Art of Love". He would have had ample opportunity

at court to hear the old heroic Germanic poetry, perhaps Norse as well as English, which was seeped in the mythology of the elder days. Perhaps, too, the Welsh wonder tales of the Mabinogion and the Irish cycles of gods and heroes would be known to a child of Glastonbury. But worse than this was the rumour that Dunstan dabbled in the Black Arts, the practice of which was widespread in the 10th century. Dunstan was denounced to the King by rivals at court. Sexual jealousy may also have played a part: Dunstan was attractive to, and attracted by, the ladies of the court, one of whom he had thought of marrying. Whatever the truth of the accusations, Dunstan suffered his first period of disgrace. Forced to leave the court, he was returning home alone across the moors when he was set upon by a mob of his enemies who beat him, bound him hand and foot, and threw him into a bog, leaving him for dead. It can hardly be coincidence that drowning in bogs was a savage Germanic punishment for what were felt to be crimes against morality.

Dunstan did not die however. Extracting himself from the bog he made his way to the house of a neighbour of his father's, where the farm dogs recognised the muddy, bedraggled figure. Athelm was now dead, so in his disgrace Dunstan went to stay with another uncle, Alfheah (or Alfege) the Bald, who in 934 had become Bishop of Winchester. The Bishop's nickname may have had as much to do with his monastic tonsure as with his natural condition, for at this period, when the monastic orders were at their lowest ebb in England, Alfheah was a committed monk. Dunstan's spectacular rise and fall at court, and the personality problems that had led to them, clearly called for some amendment of life, and to Bishop Alfheah the taking of full monastic vows and a career in the Church were the answer. Dunstan was not convinced however; the excitement and sophistication of the court had clearly meant a lot to him and he still yearned for his lady friend. But, again, providence intervened; perhaps as a result of his recent experience, Dunstan suffered another severe illness and deep depression, during the course of which he came to believe that his uncle was right. He made his profession as a monk of Glastonbury. He was then about 26 years old. Almost at once, paranormal events again began to occur around Dunstan. Returning late from a feast after the dedication of a new church in Winchester with his uncle the Bishop, they entered the church of St. Gregory to say Compline. A great stone inexplicably fell from the roof, crashing to the floor just touching the hair of their bowed heads. A friend of Dunstan's from Glastonbury monastery, a deacon named Wulfred, appeared to him after death and spoke with him.

Dunstan settled down to the life of a monk at Glastonbury, but his life was not empty of female company. He became close to a lady, a niece of the King and therefore also distant kin to Dunstan, named Athelfleda, a widow and a pious woman, who had a house in Glastonbury to the west of the monastery. Dunstan helped her to manage her affairs and in later life told a story about an occasion when she invited King Athelstan to visit her. The King sent servants to ascertain whether she had ample provisions for himself and his retinue. To her horror, Athelfleda discovered that her supply of mead

(the honey wine beloved in the Dark Ages) had run short. In desperation she prayed to Our Lady of Glastonbury and by miracle the supply from the barrel became inexhaustible: Athelfleda's reputation as a hostess was saved. Unfortunately, she later fell ill, and was attended by Dunstan. By now, aged thirty, he was old enough to have been ordained as a priest by Bishop Alfheah and he was able himself to administer the last sacraments to her. As she died he had a vision of a dove descending to her and she told him that this was an angel which had spoken to her.

Another holy woman figured in Dunstan's life at this time, one Athelwynn, and she took great interest in the artistic side of Dunstan's nature. He drew for her the design for a stole to embroider, and used to take his harp to her nearby home and play music to her as she worked. When he wished to rest from playing the harp, according to "B", seemed to continue to play of its own accord. The prominence of such holy women in the biography of a churchman is unusual for the times.

It is also to this period that Dunstan's famous conflict with the Devil, the event through which he has entered national folklore, probably belongs. The earliest surviving version of the story is told by Osbern of Canterbury writing around 1090. He tells that, as Dunstan was working at his forge in Glastonbury Abbey one evening, the Devil came to him in disguise and began to 'tempt' the monk with bawdy talk. Later versions add the detail that the Devil had disguised himself as a woman. Dunstan recognised the deception and, seizing red hot tongs, pinched the nose of the Devil who fled, screaming. The scholarly Bishop Stubbs wrote: "this story is so famous that one can hardly doubt that it had some foundation.... It seems not unlikely that Dunstan may have taken someone by the nose, and that the identification was an afterthought". The Devil aside, it is clear that Dunstan's parting from the World and the Flesh did not come easily.

While Dunstan was resolving his inner conflicts, the world itself was in turmoil. Soon after his accession, Athelstan entered into an alliance with Sihtric, the new Viking King of York, and gave him a sister in marriage at Tamworth early in 926. A year later Sihtric died, leaving a young son by a former wife, Olaf, as his heir. Olaf's Uncle Guthfrith, -King of the Dublin Vikings, came to his support, and Athelstan invaded Northumbria. Olaf and Guthfrith were quickly driven out and Athelstan asserted his authority in the north with a great ceremony at Eamont, in the Lake District, on the border of Northumbria and Strathclyde. On 12th July 927 the kings of Scotland and Strathclyde and the English High Reeve of Bamburgh accepted Athelstan as their lord. Constantine of Scotland had promised to deliver Guthfrith, who had sought refuge with him, to Athelstan, but the Viking escaped and besieged York. He was driven back and eventually surrendered, spent four days at Athelstan's court, and was then allowed to return to Ireland.

A rising in Cornwall followed, and other men of Welsh blood in the south-west joined in, in particular the Welsh element in Exeter. Athelstan re-fortified the city and compelled the Britons of Cornwall to accept the Tamar as their boundary. For reasons unknown, Athelstan invaded Scotland by land and sea in 934. His army reached Kincar-

dine and his fleet ravaged as far as Caithness. The King of Scots brooded vengeance, and in 937 Athelstan faced a grand alliance of his enemies. Olaf, son of Guthfrith, now King of Dublin, sailed to Britain with a large fleet. The Kings of Strathclyde and Scotland joined with him and a great invasion army marched south into the heart of England. The Viking leaders sought to restore their northern kingdom, while the Celtic people saw, at last, their chance to fulfil their ancient prophecies and destroy the power of the English in Britain for ever.

It was, indeed, the greatest threat the English monarchy had met since Alfred faced the armies of Guthrum. Athelstan and his young brother Edmund, aged 16 years, heading the levies of Wessex and Mercia, fought the invaders at a place called in Old English Brunnanburh, which probably lay near Northampton. The battle lasted most of the day and ended with the rout of the Norse and Celts, who were pursued until nightfall. They left behind them five dead Kings and seven jarls from Ireland, and a son of the Scots' King: it was a famous victory and a contemporary poem about it, in Old English, survives. It was translated by Tennyson.

CHAPTER 3

Dunstan at Glastonbury: (ii) The Abbot, 939-956

Athelstan died relatively young and was succeeded in the autumn of 939 by his brother Edmund, called the Magnificent, who was then just 18 years old. This was the signal for a new invasion by Olaf Guthfrithson, King of Dublin, who occupied York and led a great raid into the Midlands. Young Edmund met him at Leicester with an army, but before battle could be joined the Archbishops of Canterbury and York arranged a truce which ceded to Olaf all England north-east of Watling Street, King Alfred's old boundary. But the Viking triumph was short lived: Olaf Guthfrithson died the next year and was succeeded as King of York by his cousin, Olaf Sihtricson, nicknamed Cuaran, the same Olaf who had been driven out as a boy in 927. He lacked his cousin's mettle, however, and in 942 Edmund recaptured the land between Watling Street and the Humber. In 943, his own people replaced Olaf with another cousin, named Raegnald. Diplomacy now intervened. Both Olaf and Raegnald, separately, were baptised at Edmund's court. Early in 944 the two Vikings were again contesting the kingship in York but in that year Edmund was strong enough to lead an army northwards and expel them both. The next year he attacked Strathclyde and gave it -temporarily - to Malcolm, the new Scots King, who was friendly to Edmund.

Against the backcloth of these dramatic events, Dunstan was again cutting a figure in the world. On his accession, young King Edmund had recalled Dunstan to court and made him one of his chief advisors. Dunstan resolved that his behaviour at court should be impeccable and according to "B" he now lived a virtuous life, but there was that in Dunstan's personality which again excited envy and dislike. Whilst the court

was at Cheddar, his enemies once more contrived to bring about his banishment from court. Certain ambassadors from overseas - perhaps from Germany - were at court and offered to take Dunstan abroad with them; but again, providence intervened. A few days later, while Dunstan was settling his affairs, the King rode to hunt near the cliffs of Cheddar Gorge. In hot pursuit of a stag, the King was dismayed to see the terror-stricken animal leap over the cliff followed by the hounds. His own horse was out of control and seemed certain to follow. In what he thought were his last moments, Edmund wished that he might have had time for reconciliation with his friend Dunstan. At this instance, as if by a miracle, the horse managed to stop itself on the very edge of the cliff. The shaken King returned to his palace at Cheddar and summoned Dunstan to ride alone with him to Glastonbury. Taking him into the church he seated Dunstan on the Abbot's chair, saying "Be thou of this seat the lord and potent occupant, and of this church the faithful abbot".

There is uncertainty as to the exact year that Dunstan became Abbot. It may have been as early as 940, within the first 14 months of Edmund's reign. Dunstan set in motion a grand re-building scheme at Glastonbury in fulfilment of his childhood vision. He extended Ine's church of Peter and Paul to the eastward, adding side chapels and a tower. The level of the old cemetery was raised and enclosed with a wall. The workaday side of the monastery was also brought into good order and Dunstan's brother, Wulfric, was put in charge of its estates. Dunstan's Dyke at Baltonsborough, the artificial course of the Southwood stream east of Catsham, part of the Abbey's earliest drainage schemes, probably belongs to this period. Wulfric died while Dunstan was still Abbot.

Glastonbury under Dunstan became the fountain-head in England of the renewal of monastic life which was sweeping through Europe in the 10th Century, replacing lax clergy, whose monastic status could be almost nominal, with disciplined Benedictine monks dedicated to a life that combined manual labour, study and prayer. Dunstan became an effective teacher, and many pupils trained under him as Abbot themselves rose to high office in the Church. His conflicts with the supernatural continued, with more poltergeist stone-throwing, and visions of the Devil in the guise of a hound or bear, forms appropriate to the heathen god Woden.

Despite his work at Glastonbury, Dunstan remained one of the closest of Edmund's councillors, but the young King's life was tragically cut short in May 946 when he was killed at a feast in Pucklechurch, Gloucestershire, while defending his steward from a criminal who had returned from banishment. Dunstan, who clearly possessed "second sight" had had a foreboding of this disaster while riding to the feast with the King and another companion. It took the form of a vision of an evil spirit in the guise of a black man, an apparition which the companion was also able to see, which danced among the horses like some of the figures to be seen on ancient Germanic helmets.

Such was the status of Glastonbury under Dunstan that King Edmund was taken there for burial, where Dunstan himself laid him to rest.

Edmund's sons were too young to succeed, so the throne passed to his brother, Edred, who also had a strong affection for Dunstan. Edred was in bad health and leaned heavily on the support and advice of his mother, Edgifu, and of Dunstan, who became the treasurer of the royal estates and the King's chief minister. Edred certainly needed their support for trouble had again arisen in the turbulent north.

On Edred's accession, Archbishop Wulfstan the First of York, and the northern magnates pledged their loyalty. But in 947 Eric Bloodaxe, King of Norway, the most famous Viking of his day, was driven into exile by his brother Haakon the Good after a brief and violent reign. Like many Viking adventurers before him, he sailed "west over sea" and descended on Northumbria, where he was accepted as King of York. A devotee of Othin, Lord of Hosts, he also professed a nominal Christianity for political reasons; Archbishop Wulfstan supported him. Desperate situations required desperate remedies. The sick King Edred, accompanied by the peace-loving Dunstan, replied with an invasion of Northumbria during which the old minister of Rippon was burned and Edred threatened to lay Northumbria to waste. Eric's supporters abandoned him. But all was not quiet for long. In 949 Olaf Cuaran (Sihtricson) returned from Dublin. He held power in York until 952 when once more Eric Bloodaxe returned, to rule in defiance both of Dublin and of Edred.

His court at York saw the last savage splendour of the heathen Viking Age in England and was long remembered in Norse saga and poetry. He brooded revenge on his enemies in Norway; when one of them, the poet Egil, was shipwrecked in the Humber he was brought before the King who allowed him to redeem his life with the famous poem of praise, which has survived, called the "Head-Ransom", in which Egil declares "I bear 'Othin's mead' to the land of the English ..." "Othin's mead" signified both the old heathen poetry, and the hallucinogenic potions with which the soldiers of the war-god, the "Bearshirts" and "Wolfhides", drugged themselves before battle.

Eric's last reign was of but two years. In 954 diplomacy seemingly triumphed over arms; the Northumbrians again expelled Eric, and Edred took over the kingdom of Northumbria. Eric waited in the wings, but later in the same year was treacherously slain (in a battle in which five kings also died) by a certain Maccus, probably a son of Olaf Cuaran, at Stainmoor (on the present A66, beyond Scot's Corner). His widowed Queen, Gunnhild, commissioned a poem which describes the entry of his soul into Valhalla, to be welcomed by Othin and the Volsung heroes.

Aided by Dunstan and the Queen Mother, Edred, sick though he was, had lived to see the completion of King Alfred's work: never again could a pirate leader carve out a kingdom for himself in England. But his illness finally overcame him in November 955, while he was at Frome, having sent for Dunstan. The Abbot, while hurrying to his side, knew by "second sight" that the King was already dead. Dunstan buried him at the Old Minster at Winchester.

CHAPTER 4
Dunstan the Archbishop: 956-988

Edred had no sons and the succession reverted to his brother Edmund's children, Edwy, who was 15 or 16 years, and Edgar, who was about 12 years old when Edred died. Edwy was extremely good looking and because of this had received the nickname Edwy Allfair.

Edwy was accepted as King by Wessex, Mercia and Northumbria, and the Coronation was held at Kingston soon after Epiphany, 956. The reign began badly both for Dunstan and for the country: at the great feast which followed, attended by all the important men of the kingdom, it was noted that the young King had slipped away. His absence was prolonged and constituted an affront to all the company. Concerned, Odda the Good, Archbishop of Canterbury, requested Dunstan and his kinsman Kinsige, Bishop of Lichfield, to go and find out what had happened. To their dismay the Abbot and the Bishop found the King enjoying a private party in the chamber of a woman named Athelgifu and her daughter Alfgifu (the names mean "noble gift" and "elf gift"). The crown had been thrown aside and lay unheeded on the floor. Political leaders have fallen for less in modern times, but Dunstan tried to put the best face possible on things. It was only after a struggle, however, that he and the Bishop were able to replace the crown on the boy's head and drag him bodily away from the embraces of the two women, who were both contending for the role of queen.

The relationship was not broken, however, and the King soon married the younger of the two, Alfgifu; but the new Queen, and especially her mother, whom "B" regarded as the real villain and compares to Jezebell, could not forgive Dunstan for the scene on coronation day and, no doubt, for his lingering disapproval of a match which was, in biblical terms, incestuous. Dunstan's property was seized and his enemies, including some of his own pupils, spoke out against him, while his friends were persecuted. This time Dunstan had to flee the court in earnest. Crossing the sea, he took refuge under the protection of Count Arnulf of Flanders in a monastery at Ghent.

But the man who had spent his teens at the court of Athelstan, a school of European diplomacy of the first order, and who had had the opportunity to put the statecraft he had learned to effect beside Edmund and as Chief Minister to Edred in the difficult days of the northern troubles, was clearly not at a loss. It was said of Edwy that he ruled neither himself nor others well. His younger brother Edgar stayed by his side until the summer of 957, but later in that year Mercia and Northumbria rebelled and Edgar, then aged about 15 years, was accepted as their King. Dunstan was immediately recalled to the boy's side. Recent historians have been reticent about Dunstan's part in this affair, but it is plain that powerful friends of Dunstan, if not the exiled Abbot himself, must have been deeply involved. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that Dunstan engineered the whole thing.

Edwy retained power in Wessex, where he had appointed one Adlsige to fill Dunstan's place at Glastonbury. William of Malmesbury calls him a "pseudo-abbot" but, perhaps to ease his conscience, Edwy made generous gifts to Glastonbury.

King Edred had already tried twice to give Dunstan a bishops chair, but he had refused, saying that his work at Glastonbury was unfinished and that while he lived he would not leave Edred's side for the responsibility of a see. But now a role had to be found for young Edgar's mentor. He was consecrated a bishop as soon as he returned from exile by Odo of Canterbury, who the next year annulled Edwy's marriage as incestuous. The death of the Bishop of Worcester provided a convenient see for Dunstan.

In 959, the see of London fell vacant and Dunstan was given it in plurality with that of Worcester; but Odo of Canterbury, who may have had a forced reconciliation with Edwy after the dissolution of his marriage, had now himself died. Alfsige, Bishop of Winchester, succeeded him and set off for Rome to receive his Archbishop's pallium, his mantle of office, from the Pope; but while crossing the Alps in deep snow he died of exposure.

Edwy then appointed the Bishop of Wells, Byrthelm, to the see of Canterbury. The Bishop of Wells, who seems also to have held Dorset and other sees, may have been Edwy's chief minister, as Dunstan was Edgar's. But Edwy himself resolved matters when he died at the beginning of October 959. Edgar was immediately accepted as King of all England, and Dunstan was at once made Archbishop of Canterbury, replacing Byrthelm who, deprived of his archbishopric for his "incompetence in enforcing discipline" was packed off back to Wells. This seems to have been the first act in the long drama of the animosity between the Abbots of Glastonbury and the Bishops of Wells, which continued intermittently until the Reformation. Dunstan travelled to Rome to receive his pallium from the Pope as was the custom of the day.

Dunstan was now supreme head of the Church in England and virtually regent to the boy King. No one in Britain, perhaps, since Roman times had held so much temporal and spiritual power in his hands. It is to Dunstan's great glory and lasting historical importance that he did not abuse that power. Like the legendary Merlin to King Arthur, he guided the King to manhood in the paths of wisdom and moderation so that Edgar was remembered as Edgar the Peaceable, and his reign as a golden age. All Britian was to acknowledge him and he issued charters as Emperor of Albion.

It did not all happen at once. Edgar shared some of his brother's temperament and his love-life, too, led him into some scandal, but Dunstan was able to contain any damage this may have caused. Dunstan also, perhaps, acted as a check on those who were able to use the King's enthusiasm for the new monasticism to force monastic discipline onto churches that were not always willing. His main work at this period, however, seems to have been the quiet statesmanship and diplomacy which built on the end of the Norse Viking threat to create a kingdom united by consent, in which the English

peoples of Wessex and Mercia, the now half-Scandinavian population of eastern and northern England, and the Celtic peoples of the north and west could take their place without bitterness. Perhaps only a man whose mind was trained at Glastonbury, where English, Welsh, and Gaelic culture met and mingled, could have achieved this synthesis. It saw its symbolic culmination in the great ceremony of King Edgar's coronation at Bath on Whitsunday, 11th May, 973, which Dunstan stage-managed. Nothing like it had been seen in Britain before. The kingmaking ceremonies of previous rulers had included an element of ecclesiastical anointing, but remained basically acts of Germanic folk-custom. The ceremony in Bath Abbey was quite different in scale. It seems to have been modelled in part on the Imperial coronations of Otto the First, who had in 962 restored the Holy Roman Empire of Charlemagne, and his son, Otto the Second, crowned in 973. In keeping with those Welsh traditions which look back to the end of Roman times, it asserted the status of Britain, Albion, as in itself an empire, subject to none but God. The sacred character of the ceremony was emphasised by its postponement until Edgar had reached the age of 30 years, the canonical age for ordination to the priesthood.

We have eye-witness description of the coronation. The King, robed and already wearing a crown, was led in procession to the church by two bishops, each holding him by the hand. In church, the King removed his crown and prostrated himself before the altar while Dunstan led the singing of the Te Deum. The Bishops then raised the King, who took his coronation oath in the form of answers to three questions put to him by Dunstan. He swore to maintain true peace in church and kingdom, to put down all robbery and evil doing, and to temper all justice with fairness and mercy. Dunstan then led prayers for the King who was then anointed to cries of "Hail, King forever". Dunstan then placed a ring on the King's finger, buckled a sword about his waist, placed his crown on his head and pronounced blessing. Then Mass was said and the King was enthroned between Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Oswald, Archbishop of York. All was followed by a great feast.

More imperial ceremonial followed. After the coronation the King sailed with his fleet to Chester. We may perhaps imagine him sailing down the Avon to meet the main body of ships at Portishead and continuing around the Welsh coast. At Chester he was met by all the Kings of Britain including Kenneth, King of Scots, Dyfnwal, King of Strathclyde with his son Malcolm, Iago, King of Gwyneth and various other Welsh and Viking Kings. These all pledged their allegiance to Edgar, promising to be his "fellow workers by land and sea". In vivid illustration of the pledge, the Kings, acting as Edgar's oarsmen, rowed him down the River Dee from Chester Palace to the Church of St. John and back again, while Edgar himself held the rudder. The Viking Age could provide no more dramatic illustration of the allegiance of these Kings as warriors of their "emperor".

It was perhaps after this great state occasion that another event occurred that was to have great significance for future British history. In exchange for the homage of Ken-

neth, King of Scots, Edgar granted him Lothian, the land between the Tweed and the Forth, which had been English since the early 7th century. It was this act which transformed the Celtic realm of Alban, the united kingdom of Picts and Scots, into the Anglo-Celtic Scotland of historic times, a kingdom in which the English-speaking element soon became dominant.

Conciliation was also to be seen in Edgar's attitude towards the Danish people settled in eastern England. For the first time they were officially recognised as an integral part of England, but a part which was governed by its own, Danish, laws and customs; the "Danelaw" thus became a legal reality.

Edgar's reign was the high point of the Anglo-Saxon state. No other country in Europe, west of Byzantium, had achieved the unity, the degree of organisation, or the sense of national identity which England demonstrated. Edgar was seen as a "Peace King" in the mould of the legendary Kings of Germanic tradition. It is fair to attribute much of this achievement to the great churchman who had influenced him all his life and brought him to his throne. But it was not to last. Edgar died, at the age of 32 years, on 8th July, 975. Dunstan, who must have been heartbroken, buried him beside his father at Glastonbury Abbey.

Immediately a shadow fell over the realm: there were two claimants to the succession. The elder, named Edward, was about 13 years old. The other was Athelred, the son of Alfhthyrth, Edgar's second wife, whom he had married in 964. He was barely 10 years old in 975. Dunstan supported Edward, despite the vile temper for which he was notorious, and duly crowned and anointed him. But the dowager Queen and her followers were not content. On the evening of 18th March, 978, when Edward was visiting his stepmother and his half brother at Corfe, in Dorset, he was murdered by their retainers who, while handing the King a stirrup cup on his arrival, seized his hands and stabbed him to death before he could dismount. The body was buried without honour at Wareham. This crime, evil enough in itself, was especially shocking to Germanic sentiment in that it showed not only treachery by subjects to their lord, but of hosts to their guest, thus breaching the sacred code of hospitality. It was remembered as the worst crime ever committed in Britain since the English Invasions.

Dunstan was now an elderly man. His influence had already declined during the brief reign of Edward, when Alfhthyrth, the Ealdorman of Mercia, became the most influential of the King's nobles. He was opposed to the growing importance of the monasteries as land owners. Not all the nobility shared this hostility to the monasteries: in particular, Earl Bryhtnoth of Essex was remembered as a supporter of the monks. But Dunstan was identified with the monastic party and his influence was nearing its end.

Although Edward had been murdered on his behalf, Athelred was not personally implicated in the crime. Dunstan crowned him at Kingston, but although the Queen

Mother, Alfhryth, was widely regarded as the instigator of the murder, neither she nor anyone else was ever brought to justice.

In 980 Edward's body was transferred from Wareham to the convent church at Shaftesbury by Alphere of Mercia and Dunstan, as representatives of the nobility and the Church. There the body at last received proper burial and miracles were soon recorded around it, which led to the King's commemoration to this day as St Edward King and Martyr.

His brother Athelred never escaped the taint of the circumstances in which he came to his throne. He was called Athelred the Unready, which in Old English is a pun: Athelraed Unraed, 'Noble-Council, No-Council.' Bishops Stubbs writes "We may ask, but we cannot answer, who guided the state during the childhood of Athelred. The political history of Dunstan ends with his accession".

Dunstan lived a further eight years, long enough to see the renewal of Danish raids on the English coast; but he had at last retired from the cares of the world. His employments now were the monastic round of divine service and, occasionally, the handicrafts of his youth, like the making of musical instruments. He made organs that were preserved at Malmesbury and bells which were kept at Canterbury. His works of personal charity, to widows, orphans, pilgrims, and refugees, such as "B", were famous. He remained a famous teacher, too, and many flocked to hear his preaching, so that, as 'B' puts it, "All this English land was filled with his holy doctrine, shining before God and men like the sun and moon". His "gift of tears" was especially noted, which was regarded as a mark of unusual sanctity. A description of him in October 980 describes him as "commanding and venerable with his snow white hair, like an angel to look upon".

He preached his last three sermons on the Feast of the Ascension, Thursday, 17th May 988, in Canterbury Cathedral. This left him tired and after the evening meal with the other clergy he went to his bed, where he remained all Friday. On Saturday morning, 19th May, he received communion and then began to sing the words of Psalm 111, "He hath made his wonderful works to be remembered: the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, He hath given food unto them that fear Him ..." So he died. He was buried in the Cathedral Church at Canterbury.

The Viking raids intensified. A large army attacked East Anglia in 991 and Earl Bryhtnoth of Essex, who had previously defended the monasteries, confronted the invaders, who had set up camp on Northey Island in the Blackwater estuary near Malden. In an act of rash bravery and fair play, he allowed them to cross to the mainland to fight on equal terms. Bryhtnoth and his men were cut to pieces. Their courage was immortalised in "The Battle of Malden", one of the most famous of all the Old English poems. King Athelred bought off the pirates with a special tax, the "Danegeld", a practice which was frequently resorted to in time to come. Matters were made worse when Athelred ordered a massacre of Danes living in England on St. Brice's Day, 13th November 1002. The Danish population was too large for this order to have much ef-

fect, but it was long remembered, especially as a sister of King Swain Forkbeard of Denmark was among those killed. So bad did Athelred's misgovernment become that some in England were prepared to consider Swain, one of the new generation of Vikings, as a possible King.

During a Viking raid in 1011, the pirates sacked Canterbury and captured its Archbishop, Alfheah (St. Alphege), whom they butchered because he refused to be ransomed. While the Cathedral lay derelict, it was later claimed, the monks of Glastonbury secretly rescued the remains of Dunstan and took them for safety back to Glastonbury. This was denied at Canterbury and for centuries the two churches maintained rival claims to the Saint's bones.

The Viking armies were no longer simply gangs of bandits. The Kings of Denmark had built a series of huge fortresses for their own highly trained men and for the mercenaries they employed. In 1013, Swain invaded England in force. He was accepted as King by Northumbria and by the people of Danish stock in eastern England. Swain then moved south, and by the end of 1013 London surrendered and Athelred the Unready fled the country taking refuge in Normandy. Swain Forkbeard was recognised as King of England, but he died suddenly in February 1014. His army, based at Gainsborough in Lincolnshire, accepted his son Knut as their leader, but Athelred returned to England and led an expedition against them. They withdrew without battle, but Knut returned the next year with a larger army which based itself at Poole harbour in Dorset. Athelred's son, Edmund Ironside, last inheritor of the bravery of the old royal line, was now in open rebellion against his father, supported by the Danish Five Boroughs of eastern England. Knut soon subdued Wessex and a confused period of skirmishing followed. Athelred the Unready died on 23rd April 1016, and London immediately accepted Edmund Ironside as King. But many in Wessex accepted Knut, regarding his eventual victory as inevitable. Edmund marched into Wessex to establish its loyalty, but in his absence Knut besieged London, before striking out against Edmund at Panselwood. The battle was indecisive and Knut returned to London, followed by Edmund who surprised the besiegers, but English losses were so heavy that Edmund had to withdraw. The Danes eventually gave up their siege. Edmund now seemed to have the advantage. Overtaking the ravaging Vikings at Ashingdon in Essex, near Southend, he met Knut with a large army - but the English were defeated. Edmund became a fugitive, but Knut, realising that he remained a dangerous enemy, now came to terms with him. Knut was to rule all England except Wessex, which was to be Edmund's realm. However, on 30th November 1016, Edmund Ironside died and was buried at Glastonbury Abbey.

Wessex accepted Knut as its King, but times had changed since the days of Alfred. Knut was prepared to be baptised and rule within the established order of the English state. He came to be remembered as a good King, but while he ruled in England, Athelred's second son, Edward, was growing up as an exile in Normandy. The scene

was now being set for the tragedy of 1066, in which William the Conqueror was to enforce his claim to the English throne and bring the Anglo-Saxon age to its end.

CHAPTER 5

Dunstan the Saint: the Legacy, 988-1988

Dunstan was popularly recognised as a Saint from the moment he died and "through a thousand years in England he has borne the Saintly name" as a modern hymn proclaims; but the reputation attached to that name has seen its ups and downs with the centuries as the experiences of people in their own times affected the way they looked upon history. To those who lived through the last, troubled, years of the Anglo-Saxon state, Dunstan was revered as a beacon of hope, the nation's first patron saint, long before the later medieval adoption of St. George. Men prayed to Dunstan for delivery from the renewed fury of the northmen, as in this eleventh century prayer, translated from the Latin by Prof. James Carley:

"O famous confessor of Christ, O candlebearer and teacher to the English people, O good shepherd Dunstan, nourisher of all of Albion, who are healer to the various afflicted who visit your tomb, we now beseech through those holy merits which are given to you from the High Throne, that you entreat God through your prayers, that He preserve this land from enemies, and release us from the violent death of crime and lead us to eternal life. Amen."

Then came the disaster of 1066. The Normans came to lead Europe in military architecture, but in every other way they were barbarians among the English and Celtic civilisations which they damaged so much; even the Bayeaux Tapestry is English workmanship. The Normans scorned the memory of the native saints; but the darkest days of the Conquest passed and English scholars like Osbern at Canterbury and William of Malmesbury, who visited Glastonbury to study its old documents around 1129, expressed their nationalism by writing the histories of English Kings and Churches. Both wrote "Lives" of Dunstan. In keeping with the literary fashions of the times, the miraculous elements were stressed. This development continued in popular folklore. The story of Dunstan and the devil at Glastonbury was appropriated in Sussex where it was said to have taken place at Mayfield, the country residence of the Archbishops of Canterbury, where what are said to be the actual tongs are preserved. It was claimed there that when the Devil flew off in torment he landed at Tunbridge Wells and bathed his burnt nose in the mineral spring which provides the town with its medicinal waters, which still taste of sulphur to this day. At some stage the Devil came to be regarded as having taken the form of a woman, who in an attempt to seduce Dunstan made the mistake of letting him see "her" cloven hoof.

Another modern version tells that St. Dunstan was a skilled blacksmith and good at shoeing horses. One day the Devil visited the Saint and wanted his hoof repaired.

Recognising him, St. Dunstan fastened him firmly to the wall and then set about repairing the hoof so roughly that the Devil cried for mercy. The saint only let him go on the promise that he never entered a home where a horse shoe had been fixed.

Yet another legend, recorded by Eleanor Duckett, came from Devonshire and tells that "St Dunstan was the patron of brewers of beer. So keen was he for beer, they said, that he offered his own soul to the Devil if Satan would bring about a cold snap every Spring, long enough to spoil the apple blossom in Devon orchards and so end the yearly harvest of cider, a grievous competitor with Dunstan's beer. The Devil joyfully agreed, and henceforth Devon farmers always look for a frost of three days in May, from the 17th to the 19th, St. Dunstan's Day!"

The St. Dunstan of folklore has inspired a major modern novel, "Fifth Business" by the Canadian author Robertson Davies, published by Penguin Books.

Dunstan's status as patron saint of goldsmiths combined with the occult rumours, found in the earliest sources, to make him also a patron saint of alchemists, and an alchemical tract called the 'Book of Dunstan' appeared under his name in the sixteenth century. John Dee, court magician to Elizabeth I, and his associate Edward Kelley, also possessed a 'Book of Dunstan' (probably a different one), sometimes claimed to have been found with the Philosophers Stone in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.

Dunstan's fame was certainly a crucial element in the development of Glastonbury from a relatively obscure Anglo-Celtic monastery into something central to British national mythology, but this is not the place to discuss that development, about which many books have been written.

From the eleventh Century, Glastonbury and Canterbury had argued as to which possessed Dunstan's bones, but at the Reformation both tombs were destroyed. Dunstan's heir as Abbot was hanged, drawn and quartered on Glastonbury Tor and his beloved monastery itself laid waste. His only remaining visible monument is Dunstan's Dyke at Baltonsborough.

In Protestant eyes, Dunstan became an archetype of the scheming, woman-hating, bigoted, papist monk, dabbling in politics for his own ends like Wolsey, Richelieu or the Borgia popes. None of this was fair; there is no indication that Dunstan ever sought power for its own sake, rather than for the nation's. If he became a misogynist in later years, he might offer his experience of Athelgifu and of Queen Alfhryth as partial excuse; but there is no evidence that he did. Indeed there is much to suggest that he held women in high regard, especially Edred's mother, Queen Edgifu, with whom he worked closely. The view of women and of marriage in the Church of his day must be set against the background of the Viking slave trade, for which Ireland was famous, and the practice, of which we have eye witness descriptions by non-Christians, of sacrificing slave-girls at the funerals of their heathen masters. The reality of European paganism was very different from that which many nowadays like to imagine. The one or two anecdotes of cruelty associated with Dunstan in the later

lives have no foundation in the work of men who knew him at first or second hand. Yet, as late as the nineteenth century, tracts were still being published which depicted Dunstan as an "exemplar of the monkish character in its worst form," flourishing in "the dark age of priest-craft".

English Revolution of the seventeenth century, in the meantime, with its concern to evolve a new understanding of the constitution to counter the Stuart 'Divine Right of Kings,' had spurred a renewed interest in Anglo-Saxon history, which was felt to demonstrate a primitive democracy. This scholarship developed over the next two centuries to the point where a new evaluation of the Dunstan of history was possible. In 1874, Bishop Stubbs brought together and published all the surviving Latin "lives" of Dunstan, as well as contemporary letters and a long introduction, which constitutes a book in its own right and still makes fascinating reading. His new assessment of Dunstan stressed his importance as the first English prime minister, as one of the chief architects of the United Kingdom, of the English coronation and of the concept of a King who, by the oaths taken at his anointing, took on constitutional obligations to the people whom he ruled. Anglo-Saxon history was fashionable with the Victorians, who shared the seventeenth-century Parliamentary view of primitive Germanic democracy.

Then came the catastrophe of 1914-1918: a reaction had occurred in England to the Wagnerian nationalism of the Kaiser's Germany, and a young Churchill could allow himself to be photographed with the Ancient Order of Druids. Englishmen discovered, to their surprise, that they were really Celts after all. It became fashionable to write of the "myth" of the Anglo-Saxon Invasions, and it remains so in some quarters to this day. Britain's Germanic heritage fell from grace.

Another German war came and went before the Dark Ages once more aroused general interest. Then, with the optimism of the 1960s, King Arthur's Camelot was rediscovered both at South Cadbury and on Broadway. But the new history was based on scientific archaeology and on sociological and economic models in which neither politics nor personality played much part - a statistical, de-humanised history.

Now, we live in yet another climate. The legacy of the Anglo-German wars has been political and demographic change with no parallels in Britain since the Dark Ages. The loss of a world role has led to an introspection in which both Celtic nationalism and the English north/south divide, which goes deep into Anglo-Saxon history and beyond, have re-emerged. So have concerns about national sovereignty and the constitution. Perhaps the time has come to look once more at the ethnic and political roots of the nation with fresh eyes.

The Albion of Edgar - of Dunstan - a realm free and at peace amid a troubled world, of diversity in unity where Welsh, Irish and Germanic elements balanced and intermingled, where art, scholarship and concern for the things of the spirit flourished and

were valued in national life, but where political reality and statesmanship were not forgotten, is no ignoble vision to hold before our own times.

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