THE RICE INSTITUTE

KING ALFRED IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

by

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INTRODUCTION

If we were asked to list the events concerning Alfred which are most vivid in our minds, we would doubtless name the story of the cakes, or the harper episode in the Danish camp, or perhaps his founding of Oxford University. Why should we remember these to the exclusion of such worthy acts as the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the translation of Boethius? The answer is not a difficult one to reach. It is because the writers of many centuries have popularized Alfred as the "cake-baker," the "harper," and the founder of Oxford. By the eighteenth century, these had become a part of the Alfred legend and were regarded as fact. The writers of the literature of this century contributed to this tradition through their drama and poetry, and it is interesting to note how often these popularized events appear in the writings.

Alfred did not become a subject for literature until the seventeenth century. Prior to that time he had been in the hands of the chroniclers and in folk legends, in Asser and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The eighteenth century writers had access to each of these sources in one or more forms. The sources may be said to begin with Parker's edition of Asser's life of Alfred, which appeared in 1574. Even though Asser's biography was written in Latin, the Parker work was printed in Anglo-Saxon letters "out of veneration for the antiquity of the archetype."¹ This was followed in 1602-3 by Camden's edition, with the famous interpolated passage on the founding of Oxford.² The next work was Sir John Spelman's Life of Alfred the Great, which was written during the civil war of the seventeenth century but not
published until 1678, when Obadiah Walker brought out a Latin translation of the work. Finally, Francis Wise published his edition of Asser in 1722.

Besides these there are several well-known histories which contain Alfred's life and deeds as a part of a broad survey of English history. They draw from all the previous sources for their information. These include Tindal's translation of Rapin and David Hume's History of England.

My present research is devoted exclusively to the study of Alfred as he appeared in eighteenth century literature. Before Blackmore's Alfred, An Epick Poem was published in 1723, there had been but one work of literature on Alfred, a tragi-comedy by William Drury, composed during the reign of James I. However, the investigations of the preceding century and the value of Alfred's name as a patriotic stimulus induced many writers of the eighteenth century to make him the subject of their works. The purpose of my research has been to study each of these writings individually, attempting to discover any contemporary information concerning it, and to correlate its various events with their historical source, whenever such was possible. My particular interest lay in a thorough investigation of ninth century English history, with special stress on incidents connected with the life of Alfred.

The works under consideration have value on several counts: (1) the eighteenth century marks the first extended use of the great Wessex king as a subject for literature; (2) the plays and poems familiarized the public with scenes from King Alfred's life, bringing history into a more acceptable medium and impressing it in the people's mind; (3) the writings prepared the way for the more commemorative literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially the works in celebration of
the millenium of Alfred's birth and death.

The only published book on the subject at hand is a doctor's dissertation by Louis Wardlow Miles entitled *King Alfred in Literature*. As its name implies, it represents a survey of all literary work on the subject, including the voluminous writing of the nineteenth century. Because of its broad scope, only a brief statement is possible on each composition considered. The author has attempted to evaluate each eighteenth century play or poem in a few words and offers a summary of two or three of them to exemplify the general quality and subject matter.

The plan of the present study has been to give either a resume of the action of each composition or, if the historical parallels are sufficient, to present a summary by means of these. My primary endeavor has been to seek out the historical basis for each dramatic or poetic reference and to quote the event as it was taken from the authority. The entire study serves not only eighteenth century compositions but is also of use in the study of later writings.

I have utilized the advanced Alfredian scholarship of the nineteenth century in this paper. Such books as those of Earle and Plummer serve to illustrate the excellent work done in the field during this period. In dealing with these books, it was necessary to constantly bear in mind that the writers of the eighteenth century lacked the privilege of consulting them.

Seven dramas, two masques, one epic poem, and one historical ballet comprise this study. With the exception of a few poems and a work or two which deals vaguely with the subject, the substance of this thesis is covered by an investigation of these eleven compositions. We have retained the natural division for the sake of clarity of both subject matter and notes.
Among the first of the eighteenth century writers to recognize the heroic virtues of the great West Saxon king was Sir Richard Blackmore. His work, *Alfred, An Epick Poem,* was dedicated to the "Illustrious Prince, Frederick of Hanover," the son of George II and the then Prince of Wales. Judging from the formal dedication, Blackmore intended his poem to instruct the heir-apparent through the example of Alfred, "a Prince sprung from the ancient Saxon Race of your own native land (Saxony)." In his rather lengthy Preface, the author proposes a poem in the epic tradition, aimed toward the advancement of learning and the glory of his country. He makes it emphatic that his poem is contrived and executed on the basis of the Christian religion; he declares himself at odds with that school which prefers that an epic poem be founded on the pagan scheme. With the poem *Alfred,* Blackmore attempts to illustrate and prove his theories regarding the epic. Certainly he has selected a great Christian hero, one which is well suited to the epic tradition.

The poem follows the "education of a prince" theme. By observing both the good and bad forms of government in other lands, the prospective ruler is supposed to be better qualified to rule his own kingdom. This point interested Blackmore to a greater extent than did historical accuracy within the poem.

Blackmore acknowledges his debt to "Asserius" and to "Mr. Walker," doubtless Obadiah Walker, Master of University College, Oxford. It was he who wrote comments to a Latin translation of Sir John Spelman's *Life of Alfred the Great,* which was published in 1678. For this edition, Walker wrote a dedication in which he compares Charles II to Alfred.
It is altogether possible that Blackmore drew upon this suggestion for his dedication as well as the principal theme in Alfred, An Epick Poem.

The time of the poem corresponds to Alfred's lifetime, so there is no strain at this point. The first eleven books contain no more than three incidents which, even in the broadest sense, may be termed historical. The twelfth book, however, is quite important to the present study and will be considered in detail.

In order to present the part of the poem which cannot be discussed through factual comparison, a resume of each of the first eleven books is given here. I have endeavored to be as brief as possible in this section, which is not primary to my subject.

Book I  Alfred and his former preceptor, Guithun, depart from Britain, intent upon a "grand tour" of the continent. As they are sailing from Rome to Naples, Lucifer and his devils prepare a storm which destroys the ship, and all persons aboard, except Alfred and Guithun, perish. They are cast up on the barren coast of Africa, in Numidia, where they suffer extreme thirst, hunger, and an attack by a panther. A hermit, having been informed of their need in a vision, takes them to his cell, where a long discourse ensues on the advantages of a solitary life and the best forms of civil government.

Book II  The hermit relates his story of royal intrigue, of when he was preceptor to two royal infants and of how he endeavored to form their minds and prepare them to rule. Later he became Archbishop of Navarre and then one of the Counsellors of State. Finally, a rival party conspired to remove him from office and deprive him of his life. A vision directs him to leave Spain and flee to Numidia, where he has remained for many years. The narrative ended, Alfred and Guithun take
their leave and set out for Tunisia.

Book III  Halla, King of Tunisia, receives the two Britons with kindness and entertains them at a magnificent supper. There is a lengthy discussion of poetry and learning in Britain. Alfred tells them that if he should ever wear the crown of England, he would build colleges of learning and give much encouragement to the arts and sciences. The next day Alfred inspects the Tunisian fleet and asks the rules governing marine success. That evening at supper Alfred sings an ode on divine wisdom and retires, leaving Guithun to relate his adventures.

Book IV  Guithun tells that Alfred desired to qualify himself for the government and protection of his people, should he ever succeed to the crown; he wished to observe the best models and collect the wisest maxims on civil societies. They first went to Antwerp, then to Cologne, which country was ruled by a tyrannical prince named Ranan. Alfred passed on through Germany and then to Rome, where Pope Leo anointed the young prince King of Britain. The Pope advised him on the subject of government, and the travellers took their leave, boarding a ship for Naples. It was on this trip that Lucifer's storm left them shipwrecked in Numidia.

Book V  Alfred sails from Tunisia to Parthenope, where he is received with great respect by Artolan, the ruler. Soon after his arrival, a rebellion against the king breaks out, and Alfred goes to the field of battle. As the two great armies are about to meet, Alfred rides between them and makes peace. The king reforms the court, putting persons of ability in the chief offices of state. The discarded ministers plot against Alfred's life because of his part in their removal. The chief of the hired assassins, a man who formerly had been released from prison
in Rome through Alfred's intercession, reveals the plan. The conspirators are tried and condemned but later pardoned, upon the request of Alfred.

Book VI   The Prince then makes his way to Messina, where Barlan rules. Unlike their king the people are engrossed in pleasure, vice, and idleness, which are described at length. Alfred journeys on to Centoripe, intending to proceed to Mt. Aëtna the next day. Here he is informed by an angel that Lucifer plans to cause an earthquake and mighty eruption of Aëtna in order to destroy the Prince. Alfred and Guithun flee to the hills, where they view the tragedy. God is justified in permitting this action of Lucifer by the wickedness of the people. The eruption ceases at Alfred's prayer.

Book VII   Alfred returns to the Court of Messina, and, growing less guarded, he tastes the pleasures of the palace. Albana, a noble beauty, falls in love with the young Prince, who finds it difficult not to return her feelings. Guithun convinces him that he must leave; yet, he fluctuates between passion and reason. During an attack of a dangerous fever, he repents and resolves to leave the Sicilian court. Albana is enraged and hires assassins to kill him. Mara, her maid, who secretly loves Alfred, substitutes another man in the Prince's chamber, and he is killed instead of Alfred. Albana relents but discovers too late that the assassins have done their work. She assumes that Alfred is dead and kills herself.

Book VIII   As Alfred steers for Spain, Satan raises another tempest which again drives them to the coast of Africa. The Prince and Guithun take refuge in a grove, and, as Alfred sleeps, an angel offers encouragement by showing him Heaven and Tophet. Then he is informed of
the revolutions and changes of the royal lines in England down to George
II. The angel returns him to the grove and he awakens from the vision,
which leaves a lasting impression on his mind.

Book IX  The Britons are seized as spies by Agmat's guards, who
are searching for Dalcanon, a criminal. They are taken to Agmat and
Albuzar, where the people are celebrating a festival of their god the
Sun. Albuzar orders them to worship the Sun or suffer death. They are
condemned on their refusal and led to be executed. Guithun, having
knowledge of an eclipse at this time, works the old vanishing trick,
thus winning a reprieve for Alfred and himself. Alfred then goes to
King Abel, who receives him with respect. At the revolt of one of his
provinces, Abel places Alfred in command of the army, and the young
Prince subdues the rebels. Abel, advanced in age and weary of public
cares, offers his throne to Alfred; he refuses but recommends Golan,
who is elected king.

Book X  Alfred embarks for Spain, where he learns of the death
of his father and the succession of his brother Ethelbald. He visits
important places in Spain and ultimately arrives at Navarre, where there
is a great plague among the cattle and other unfavorable conditions.
Alfred declares that these result from some great national crime and
suggests that the hermit, the king's former preceptor, be recalled from
Numidia. The hermit comes and says that the Treaty-Breakers of the
preceding reign must be punished. This accomplished, the land is
restored to health and prosperity.

Book XI  Alfred next goes to Burgundy, which country is
controlled by an avaricious king, Rod'rick. As the Prince proceeds
towards Paris, he is requested by an embassy from Navarre to return there.
The ministers who were punished have joined with the king of Toledo against the forces of Navarre. Alfred, commanding the army of the King of Navarre, puts the enemy to flight.

In these eleven books there are but three historical references of importance. The first of these, Alfred's visit to Rome, is an historical fact, but because of its use in this poem, it must be classified as fiction. In the Preface to Alfred, Blackmore writes:

It is true in Fact, confirmed by the undoubted Authority of Historians, that Alfred, when young, was sent to Rome by his Father King Ethelwolf, called by Latin writers Athulphus, and that there he was crowned King by Pope Leo the fourth.\(^5\)

Asser, referring to the same event, says:

And in that same year (853) did King Ethelwulf send his aforesaid son Alfred to Rome, and many a peer with him, full worshipfully, and many a commoner. Pope Leo held then the Apostolic See; and he it was who anointed for King this young Alfred; yea, and confirmed him also, and received him for his own son by adoption.\(^6\)

By even the earliest date that has been assigned to Alfred's birth,\(^7\) the young prince could not have been more than five years old at the time of the trip. Both Asser and the Chronicle agree in the general details, but the meager information leaves much to be wished for in regard to the meaning of the ceremony. I am inclined to agree with Plummer's view,\(^8\) that some subordinate royalty was conferred on him and not that he was anointed to succeed to the West Saxon throne. Not only was Alfred's father still living at this time, but he had three brothers, all of whom were older than himself. Sir John Spelman, on the other hand, believed that the unction which formed part of the confirmation was actually a royal anointing.\(^9\) Since Blackmore's stated authority is Walker's edition of Spelman, it is perfectly logical for the eighteenth century writer to adopt this view.
In Book III Alfred announces that if he "should ever wear the imperial Crown of Britain, he would build Colledges of Learning, and give great encouragement to Arts and Sciences." Again, Blackmore is following his later source, Walker and Spelman, who regarded Alfred as the first founder of Oxford University. Spelman did not hold with Camden's interpolation of 1602-3 and openly branded it as untrue.

The controversy began in 1564 on the occasion of a visit of Queen Elizabeth to Cambridge University. At this time, an orator asserted that, while Oxford could claim no greater antiquity than Alfred, Cambridge's foundation went back to Sigebert, a seventh century king of East Anglia. In view of the fact that none of the lives of Alfred mentioned his having founded the Oxford schools, the claim was denied by Camden in his edition of Asser's life of Alfred published in 1602-3. He stated that Alfred was not the founder but the re-founder of Oxford. The University was represented as already an ancient seat of learning in the time of Alfred. The Wessex King's contribution lay in his settling a dispute among the professors there. Camden places its foundation in the days before the Germanic invasion.

Sir John Spelman, writing half a century later, labeled the paragraph a deliberate forgery and expressed the belief that Alfred was the founder of Oxford. Blackmore chose the Spelman point of view in this reference to Alfred's plans regarding colleges, and arts and sciences.

The Camden interpolation brought forth many learned disputations, which did much to stimulate popular interest in the Alfred story during the eighteenth century. The legend of Alfred and Oxford persisted long after the controversy died, and the Wessex king continued to be named as either the founder or re-founder for three centuries.
Blackmore is correct in having King Ethelwulf succeeded by Ethelbald; the latter is succeeded by Ethelbert, who is not mentioned in Alfred, An Epick Poem. The omission is not serious, for his reign is not pertinent to the story. His death vacated the throne for Ethelred, during whose reign Alfred served in an official capacity with the title of "secundarius." This system of king and sub-king originated during the time of King Ethelwulf. The old king left the management of his kingdom in the hands of his eldest son, Ethelbald, while he made a pilgrimage to Rome in 855-6, and, on his return, Ethelwulf found his son reluctant to relinquish the reins of government. The revolt was settled by a division of land and power, with Ethelbald ruling Wessex and Ethelwulf retiring to Kent and its dependencies but retaining dominion over the whole. Virtually the same arrangement was continued by Ethelwulf's sons. Asser uses the term "secundarius" in describing Alfred's place in public affairs. It was apparently a kind of viceroyalty and was doubtless connected with Alfred's position as next in the line of succession to the West Saxon throne.

Blackmore is honest in telling the reader which parts of his poem are fact and which are invention. Besides the brief historical data just cited, the following is a continuation of Blackmore's historical inventory; these events are taken up in Book XII and are, in effect, a summary of the book.

Ethelred his Brother King of the West Saxons, was killed in an Action with the Danes;... Alfred succeeded to the Crown, and fought those invaders with great Valour and Success;... Oduno Earl of Devonshire having conquered a great Body of Danes, joined Alfred's men, and the King thus reenforced, marched to fight the Enemy, who lay encamped near Edington in Wiltshire;... before the Engagement Alfred entered their Camp disguised like a Musician with his harp in his Arms, that he might have an Opportunity of observing the Posture of the Foe,
and discovering where he might be attacked to the best Advan-
tage;... returning thence he marched his army to engage the
Dane, and entirely defeated him;... thereupon Gunter, called
likewise Gurtrumnus, the Danish King, turned Christian, and
came to Terms of Agreement with Alfred, that is, that Gunter
should possess some of the Northern Countries, dependent how-
ever on the Saxon King, and that Alfred as Sovereign should
rule the rest of the island, who at length became Master of
the Whole: thus much is real Fact, the rest invention.21

The last book passes quickly from the events of 871, when Alfred
was crowned king, to the campaign of 878. The important battles of
Wareham and Exeter are omitted in order to arrive at the decisive Saxon
victories of the year 878. The rendezvous at Selwood Forest, the min-
strel-spy episode, and Eddington are all suggested by history but
treated in a very colorless manner. Later writers, using the same
events and material, have re-created the situations in a much more
dramatic and realistic way.

However, Gunter's treaty and later life, following his conversion
to Christianity, is not presented elsewhere in as great detail as we
find here. The treaty which closed these seven years of war was known
as the Peace of Wedmore; it was ratified by Saxons and Danes in July,
878. After this, the Danes retired to Cirencester and in the next year
retired to East Anglia.22 The agreement left the whole of Wessex, with
its dependencies, and all of Mercia west of Watling to Alfred.23

The terms were favorable to both parties. In recalling the atroc-
ities of the Danes, their broken oaths and underhanded military maneu-
vers, one would expect Alfred to completely annihilate the conquered foe,
or at least to subjugate them so that further revolt would be impossible
for years to come. It is here that we may see why Alfred's name lives
in the annals of England's great kings. Not only did he prove himself
a great soldier but a statesman and Christian as well. Had he slain the
Danes in cold blood, others would have come soon to avenge their brothers. Had he forced them into slavery or some form of subjugation, revolt would have been inevitable. Instead, he offered peace — with honor and the privilege of Christian baptism to those who wished to receive it. In allowing them to remain in East Anglia — a section which, like Mercia, was largely Danish in 878 — he gave them nothing more than they already had in return for leaving his kingdom at peace.

By and large, Guthrum, known in history as Guthrum-Athelstan after his baptism at Aller, kept his word and the treaty of 878. Just how true a Christian he became, I do not know. There was one brief insurrection in East Anglia in 886, sparked by a new influx of continental Danes, which ended in further gains of territory by the West Saxons. The treaty of 886 is known as the Alfred and Guthrum Peace and should not be confused with the Peace of Wedmore.

Blackmore's *Alfred* devotes only a few lines to these events which meant so much to the ultimate union of England:

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For Amity he yields, that you command
In Peace the Middle and the Western Land:
That to the Northern Region he'll retire,
And not to Pow'r of more Extent aspire:
For these Dominions he will Homage pay,
And should new Swarms their Ensigns here display,
He will no succour to th' Invaders send,
But will the Isle against their Arms defend.  
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The first edition of Tindal's translation of Rapin's History was published in 1726. A second edition appeared in 1732, to which was added a number of footnotes. James Thomson made use of Rapin in his writing of Liberty, either in translation or the original, and we have every reason to believe that he used the same source for Alfred: a Masque, written in 1740 in collaboration with David Mallet.

Two years prior to Alfred, a Masque, Thomson wrote Edward and Eleanora, a play in which his partisan political sentiments were so ill-disguised as to cause it to be refused a license. This play, obviously intended to do honor to the Prince and Princess of Wales, succeeded in winning their favor and patronage for the author, but, at the same time, revealed Thomson's political preference. The following year, the Prince of Wales commissioned Thomson and Mallet to produce a dramatic piece as entertainment for a celebration of his wife's birthday. The masque Alfred resulted; it was performed in the gardens at Clifden, August 1, 1740. As may be expected, numerous political references may be noted, but, on the whole, it shows more patriotism than party sentiments.

The best known and most successful part of the play is the poem "Rule, Britannia," which voices the theme. D. G. Tovey writes, "The Masque, thin enough to be sure, is pretty, in spite of politics; but would perhaps be quite forgotten but that it contains "Rule, Britannia." The question of the poem's authorship remained doubtful for some time after Thomson's death. Many controversial articles grew out of the dispute, but modern scholarship agrees in Thomson's favor.

As an occasional piece, Alfred served its purpose. It was
presented before a "brilliant audience" in its initial performance and was well received. The play is remarkably historical both with regard to incidents and characters. For this reason, an unusually detailed discussion is necessary in order to display its worth from this point of view. Also, since so many parallels exist, the plot reveals itself through these, and a résumé is not needed.

The period of Alfred's life represented in the Masque is his sojourn on the Isle of Athelney. This story has retained its ancient charm, its abiding human interest throughout the passing centuries. The authors give a résumé of preceding events and present action in "The Argument:"

After the Danes had made themselves masters of Chippenham, the strongest city of Wessex; Alfred was at once abandoned by all his subjects. In this universal dejection, that monarch found himself obliged to retire into the little isle of Athelney in Somersetshire; a place then rough with woods and of difficult access. There, in the habit of a peasant, he lived unknown, for some time, in a shepherd's cottage. He is supposed to be found in this retreat by the Earl of Devon, whose castle upon the river Tau, was then besieged by the Danes. The passage is chiefly historical, as may be shown by this excerpt from the Parker Chronicle for the year 878:

In this year, in mid-winter, the army (here) stole away from them, after Twelfth Night, to Chippenham, and overrode the Wessex land and took possession of many of the folk and drove others over the sea, and of the remainder, they overrode the most, and they turned to them (the Danes) except Alfred. And he, with a small band, went with great difficulty into the woods and moor fastness; and this same year the brother of Ingwar and Healfdene came into Devonshire in Wessex with twenty-three ships, and there he was killed, and 840 of the men in his army, and the following Easter, King Alfred and a little band built a fortification at Athelney, and from this fort, he along with the nearby people of Somerset, fought against the army.

The historical Asser gives a similar account of the retirement. An interpolated passage becomes of interest here, for it appears certain
that the collaborators, through Rapin, made use of it. Archbishop Parker, writing in the sixteenth century, made several additions to the Asser manuscript in his possession from the *Annales Asserii* or *The Lives of St. Neot*, a twelfth century compilation which is considered to be of little value historically. Parker believed it to be a fuller text of the original Asser, since their entries are identical for the period 851-887. The interpolations were retained by Camden in his edition of 1602-3 and Wise in 1722, and many of them were adapted by Rapin.

It is important to bear in mind the position of eighteenth century writers who lacked the benefit of modern scientific investigation of Alfredian history. Many interpolations and legends, which now may be proved such, were accepted as history by Thomson and Mallet, as well as others. Quite often these passages have the greatest popular appeal and modern tone.

Rapin's *History* substantiates the authors' statement that Alfred was abandoned by his subjects, false though it is.

The taking of this Place (Chippenham), which was done in a few Days, struck such a Terror in the West-Saxons, as bereav'd them of all Courage to defend themselves. Some fled into Wales or beyond the Sea, whilst others ran over to the Danes, and swore Allegiance to them. In this so general a Revolt, Alfred was left alone with a few Domesticks, who out of Duty and Affection, were unwilling to abandon him in his Adversity. But as they were chargeable to him, and cou'd do him but little Service, he dismiss'd them All, that he might with the greater Ease shift for himself. In representing Alfred alone and in universal dejection, the authors of the *Masque* disagree with most other sources. Even the brief description in the Chronicle tells of the "lytel werod."

The locale of the play can easily be authenticated from Rapin and other writers. William of Malmesbury, writing in the twelfth century,
describes Athelney as "not an island of the sea, but so inaccessible from flooded swamps and marshes that it can only be approached by boat."

Lees, writing in the twentieth century, verifies the original description, saying that it is faithful even yet in the winter season, "when, in spite of dykes and drainage, the country is almost submerged by floods, and Athelney is reached from East Lying by a causeway raised above the level of the swampy fields." The eighteenth century description of Rapin supplies the details for the Thomson and Mallet version.

Such was his Distress, that he was forc'd to go and conceal himself at a Meat-herd's in the Isle of Athelney in Somersetshire. This Place was surrounded with a large Morass, through which there was but one narrow Foot-Path to the Meat-herd's Cottage, that was hid by Briars and Thorns.

A note in connection with this passage in Rapin adds information and completes the details of the scene.

Formerly call'd Athelingey (i.e.) The Island of Nobles. It lies near Taunton, where the Tone and Parret join. The firm Ground is not above two Acres.

In the play, shepherd Corin sets the scene with these words;

This island is of strength. Nature's own hand
Hath planted round a deep defense of woods,
The sounding ash, the mighty oak, each tree
A sheltering grove: and choaked up all between
With wild encumbrances of perplexing thorns
And horrid brakes. Beyond this woody verge
Two rivers broad and rapid hem us in.
Along their channel spreads the gulpy pool,
And trembling quagmire, whose deceitful green
Betrays the foot it tempts....

The locale of the play should be considered in relation to the time element. The Athelney campaign took place "at Easter," which occurred on March 23 of the year 878. This was a time when the thawing of winter
frost and the spring rains would render the island even less accessible than otherwise. During the ten weeks that he resided at or near Athelney, Alfred's stratagem was laid, the fort was erected, and his forces consolidated while he waited for favorable weather. The campaign began at Easter and continued six weeks at Athelney, before it moved on to Egbert's Stone and finally Eddington. The episode about which the play Alfred is written takes place during the period of Alfred's retirement at Athelney, just prior to March 23. As is set forth in "The Argument," the Earl of Devon is supposed to have visited Alfred in his island retreat. He then returned to his besieged castle, urged the troops to victory, and brought the Danish magic banner to Alfred. This success relieved the pressure of a two-headed foe, and spurred Alfred to action. The fort on Athelney was duly built, and the series of battles began, which led to the expulsion of the Danes from Wessex.

As one would expect in such a rural setting, there is a shepherd and a shepherdess. Strangely enough, each has either an historical or fictional counterpart on record, as do each of the persons represented in the Masque. The shepherd and his wife Emma grew out of an interpolated passage in Asser which was recorded by Rapin.

In this place the King lay conceal'd for some time, from his Friends as well as Enemies, without being so much as known by the Neat-herd's Wife, who employ'd him about her little Household Affairs.17

Rapin's note explains the meaning of "Household Affairs:"

She having one day set a Cake on the Coals, and being busied about some thing else, the Cake happen'd to be burnt; upon which she fell a scolding at the King for his Carelessness in not looking after the Cake, which she told him he cou'd eat fast enough. -- Asser.
The herdsman is first mentioned by name in William of Malmesbury, where he is called Deneuwulf; however, this record does not connect Deneuwulf with the Athelney adventure. Florence of Worcester offers the most revealing bit of information on the character of the shepherd; also, it is worth noting that the passage may be linked with Athelney.

Dumbert, Bishop of Winchester, being dead, Deneuwulf succeeded. He, if fame is to be trusted, to an advanced age was not merely unlettered, but a mere swineherd, whom King Alfred, when he fled to the woods for the violence of his enemies, lit upon as he was feeding pigs. Perceiving his good wit, he put him to school, and after he was fully instructed, created him Bishop of Winchester. The shepherd in Alfred represents all loyal peasantry, proud of its country and willing to fight even in the darkest hour. He is a man who believes no price is great enough to cause a "British" man to make known the retreat of his noble guest to the enemy. Consequently, it is not difficult to believe the preceding account of his later life.

The Earl of Devon has not one but many historical analogues. It is unreasonable to assume that Alfred was forsaken by or deprived of all his noble thanes. There were several large estates nearby, and, in all probability, the lords of the castles were members of his "lytel werod." Rapin's source for the characterization of Devon is an account of Odda, leader of the province of Devon; this account comes from Ethelwerd, the tenth century chronicler. Certain of its details are inaccurate, such as naming Healfdene as the Danish leader instead of his brother, but it is worth citing as a possibility.

In the same year came there Halfdene, brother of the tyrant Igwar, with 30 keel, to the land of the West Angles, and they beset Odda, chief leader of the province of Devon, in a certain stronghold, and lighted up the fires of war both within and without. There fell the King of the barbarians, and 80 decades with him...
The Earl of Devon represents Alfred's loyal thanes, just as Corin fills a similar post for the shepherds or peasants of Wessex.

The treatment of Eltruda (or Ealswith) as Alfred's queen is not entirely fictional, though there is little basis for a characterization of her on record. The Parker and Laud manuscripts are in agreement regarding the date of her death, which is 905, but give no earlier reference to her. Asser never mentions her name but takes notice of her in this entry:

In the year of our Lord's Incarnation 868, the twentieth of the age of Alfred, the aforesaid worshipful King Alfred, then holding but secondary rank, wooed and wed a wife from Mercia, high of birth, the daughter of Ethelred, Alderman of the Gaines, whom men call Mucill. And her mother's name was Eadburgh, of the royal blood of Mercia; whom I oftentimes saw with my own eyes for not a few years before her decease, a Venerable lady in sooth, who, after the loss of her husband, abode for many years a widow, in all chastity, even unto death.22

To know that Eltruda was the daughter of such noble and virtuous parents is of great interest, but it is singularly disappointing that Asser should tell more of Alfred's mother-in-law than of his wife.

Eltruda was the mother of two sons and three daughters, all of whom proved themselves worthy of their illustrious parentage and whose lives speak for the excellence of their maternal care and training. In her husband's will, she is bequeathed the royal "hams" at Lambourn, Wantage, and Ethandun; from this, it may be inferred that their relations were amicable and that her life was virtuous and exemplary, after the manner of her lord. She is introduced into the Masque because of dramatic interest rather than the desire to adhere strictly to historical facts.

Alfred is constructed loosely around the person of the hermit, who is, in a sense, a prophet. His position entitles him to introduce the various visions and to speak at length of their claims to greatness
in relation to England. His duty is to encourage Alfred to meet the challenge and serve England by defeating the Danes, leaving her ready for the glory which is to come. The hermit shows the dejected Alfred that "affliction is the wholesome soil of virtue" and causes the King to aspire to the greatness of the visions of rulers which he is shown. At last, the hermit is allowed the privilege of summation, following the recitation of "Rule, Britannia."

His place in the Masque is suggested by the story of St. Cuthbert in Rapin.

It is pretended that this happy change reveal'd to him in a Dream by St. Cuthbert, formerly Bishop of Lindisfarn, who appear'd to him and told him that he shou'd suddenly be rais'd to an infinitely more glorious state than that from whence he was fallen. But without insisting on these idle Tales of the Monks, who cou'd not find in their Hearts to pass over such an extraordinary Event without introducing some Apparition or Miracle, I shall relate how this great Revolution was brought about by means of a desperate Undertaking.

The apparition is present in the masque and it is transmitted to Alfred through a man of God; in both versions, the King is promised victory.

The hermit's dream, or rather vision, presents the framework for the Masque, with later history and imagination supplying the details. Because of the exalted position of the hermit and the action of Devon, Alfred's part is not that of a hero. Asser contains the St. Neot story which may account for the weakness and suffering of Alfred and all England. This is one of the "idle Tales of the Monks" which Rapin does not relate in his history.

And this trouble (the Danish wars), in such wise brought upon our King, came upon him, as we believe, not undeservedly. For in the early days of his kingship, while he was yet young, he was a slave to youthful temper. And his men and his subjects came unto him, and sought to him,
each for his own need; and they who were wronged by the authorities besought his help and protection. Yet would he not listen to them, nor pain him at all to help them but altogether made nought of them.

St. Neot reproved him, but the King continued in his former ways; the natural consequence was punishment, which took the form of the Danish invasion.

This viewpoint of Alfred originated exclusively in the St. Neot stories, few of which are now regarded as faithful representations of the Wessex king. St. Neot, supposedly the brother of Alfred, was the patron saint of the Huntingdonshire monastery of St. Neot. After the Norman Conquest, this religious house was attached to the monastery of Le Bec Hellouin in Normandy, and it continued to thrive throughout the twelfth century. The monks, desiring to exalt their patron saint, fabricated these tales connecting him with the pious Alfred. In each case, the character of the King was stained in order that the mythical saint might be glorified.

Modern scholarship is quick and emphatic in denying these stories, even though similarities exist between them and the writings which are now recognized as fact. Professor Plummer says that "the idea of Alfred's early licentiousness, or of his tyranny at the beginning of his reign, is absolutely inconsistent with authentic history.... It is pitiable that modern writers should lend even half an ear to those wretched tales, which besmirch the fair fame of our hero king, in order to exalt a phantom saint."

The Masque does not represent Alfred as a tyrant; however, the concept of his characterization is based on this theory from St. Neot. The dramatic Alfred never is allowed to come into his own, nor does he show
any great desire to do so. The Earl of Devon, who ultimately leads the loyal men of Wessex to victory at Cynuit, is more a hero than is the King. It is Devon who shows the rare wit of using a Danish disguise to elude the enemy; he is even allowed to berate the "general's rashness" in regard to military maneuvers. Throughout the play Alfred is portrayed as a dejected leader, waiting to be shown by the hermit that his forces will be victorious. The hermit’s spectral train makes Alfred appear less heroic in comparison, which, indeed, he should not be. His place in English history, based on service to his nation, should not be subordinated to any subsequent ruler for whatever reason, including the birthday of the Princess of Wales.

As has been noted, the hermit's exalted position necessitates Alfred's taking an inferior one; because such is the case, the King fails to exhibit any of the characteristics which made him great and would make him of sufficient worth to be the subject of a dramatic piece of this kind. However, since the glory of England, and not of Alfred, is the subject of the Masque, there probably were no serious objections from the spectators.

The main plot of Alfred, a Masque claims for its source a passage from Rapin dealing with a Danish defeat in which Alfred took no part. By reference to this, we are able to obtain a clearer picture of the situation as it exists in the play itself. In order to keep the series of incidents in their proper sequence, let us review the events leading up to this story: the battle of Chippenham, which took place in early January over Twelfth Night; the ten weeks of wandering in the marshes prior to Alfred's stand at Athelney; the defeat of the Danish fleet in
Devonshire, thus removing the threat of a pincer movement by the army of Guthrum and the sea-army of Hubba. This last event is the one which concerns us, and Rapin's passage is, almost beyond all doubt, the one that offered the suggestion to the authors of Alfred.

At his (Hubba's) Approach, the Earl of Devon with a Handful of brave Fellows, retir'd into Kinwith Castle to avoid the first Shock of the Danish Fury. Hubba was not long before he laid siege to the Castle, not doubting but the Garrison, being few in Number, would soon be oblig'd to surrender. The Earl of Devon, finding all the Defence he could make would be to no Purpose, laid before the Besieged the Danger they were in of falling into the Hands of their merciless Enemies, and assured them they had but one way to escape, which was, by opening themselves a Passage with their Swords thro' the Enemy's Army. He represented to them, that this Enterprise was not so rash and desperate, as they might imagine.... This Advice had such an Effect upon the Besieged, that without deliberating upon the Matter, they sallied out Sword in hand upon the Danes, and by sudden and furious Attack put them immediately in extreme Disorder.... They continued therefore to press the Danes.... and having at length entirely dispers'd them, made a great slaughter of them.

After this victory, Devon returns with the chief prize of the battle, the Raven Banner, which will be treated separately in The Magic Banner. The King is quite correct, as far as history is concerned, in calling the "pictur'd Raven" their famous magic standard. Devon's description of it is obviously based on Rapin, although the authors of the play have allowed themselves the privilege of poetic interpretation.

Several other minor parallels remain, but these will suffice to point out the close correlation between Alfred, a Masque and the Alfredian history. The piece serves to illustrate what can be done with facts by a conscientious author who applies them in an artistic manner.
The original version of the Masque was presented at the Drury Lane Theatre on March 20, 1745, and had a run of eight performances at that time. Dr. Thomas Augustine Arne had written music for this presentation, thus adding interest to the play without altering the plot. The opera, as it was then called, is said to have been acted in these performances for the benefit of Mrs. Arne.

In 1751, the Masque underwent serious revision at the hand of David Mallet, and the second Alfred: a Masque resulted. The reason for this is obvious, for the original piece is lacking in dramatic action. As a play honoring England and her royal family, Alfred was well suited; nevertheless, it is deficient in popular interest. There is no reason to assume that the play was revised in order to secure a license; the authors had no need to seek one originally since the Masque was presented privately. However, there is nothing objectionable about the play, and a license was certainly granted before the 1745 performances.

Patriotism is said to be Thomson's strongest sentiment. References to his belief in a strong navy, his pride in England's past glories, his faith in her future based on the principle of liberty are found in The Seasons and in Liberty. These precepts appear strongly in Alfred: a Masque, although we have no proof that they were contributed by Thomson exclusively. The play itself is remarkably historical, as I have endeavored to show in the preceding section. There are at least two possible reasons for such care by the authors: (1). The audience, formerly described as "brilliant," was composed of members of the royal family and the court circle; their knowledge of the Alfred story, as
well as later history, doubtless was in excess of the average public theater audience. The group might have recognized and condemned any broad divergence from history. (2). Also, either one or both authors believed that the play should follow history as closely as dramatic limitations would permit. Not only would such procedure do credit to England's history but to the deeds of Alfred as well, which need no exaggeration or fictional glorification for their appeal. We have only to read Mallet's revision of 1751 to see that he had no great respect for historical facts and no scruples about altering them as his purpose required.

This is not proposed as proof that the historical accuracy of the play originated with Thomson but is offered here to show that the original play, at least in the more important details, is historically correct.

The 1751 version is enlarged and altered in order to fit it for public acceptance. The two acts of the original were expanded into three; several personages were added, and some unseen voices; Alfred's part was converted into that of a hero, making it suitable for portrayal by David Garrick.

The advertisement, printed in the 1751 edition by Andrew Millar, is worded so cleverly that every part of value in the original play is claimed by Mallet. It is of sufficient importance, both in relation to the original and the present version, to be quoted here in full:

Having been obliged to discontinue the Duke of Marlborough's History for a few months past, till I could receive from a foreign country some papers of importance; that I might not be quite idle in the meanwhile, I read over, in order to improve, this Masque; the first draught of which had been written by the late Mr. Thomson, in conjunction with me, several years ago. But, to fit it for the stage, I found it would be necessary to new-plan the whole, as well as write the particular scenes over again; to enlarge the design, and
make Alfred, what he should have been at first, the principal figure in his own Masque. This I have done; but, according to the present arrangement of the Fable, I was obliged to reject a great deal of what I had written in the other; neither could I retain, of my friend's part, more than three or four speeches, and a part of one song. I mention this expressly; that, whatever faults are found in the present performance, they may be charged, as they ought to be, entirely to my account.

It is not difficult to compare the two plays, to see, among other things, that two songs and part of an Ode are the same; that many speeches are the same, and a large part of the plot. From this we may infer either that these were parts of the original contribution of Mallet, or that he is not being entirely accurate on the point of authorship. While maintaining a neutral stand in the matter, it is, at the same time, necessary to point out that the revision and the claims of Mallet did not take place during the lifetime of Thomson.

The Prologue of the new Alfred was composed "by a friend" and spoken by David Garrick. This is only one of several means employed to amplify Mr. Garrick's part. It is said that Mallet induced Garrick to accept the role by offering him a place in the Duke of Marlborough's History. However, despite the great actor in the role of Alfred, the play lasted but nine performances and cannot be regarded as a success.

No great knowledge of Alfradian history is necessary to understand or to appreciate the Prologue. It was written in the tradition of prologues, beseeching the audience to look with favor on the play and to excuse the author's bold use of the facts. The information set forth is general and non-technical, such as any English schoolboy might know through legend. It does not give the situation and setting, as does "The Argument" of the Thomson and Mallet version, and, other than to beg the approbation of the audience, has no definite aim nor serves any
purpose.

Each of the personages who appeared in the original play, along with a number of additional characters, appears in the cast of this version. The most important of the latter group is Edwin, a combined scout and thane to Alfred, who informs the King of the consolidation of the remaining Wessex troops. There is but slight connection between him and Odda, the Earl of Devonshire, even though the latter's name may have been modernized to Edwin. Eadwine or Aedwine occurs often in Anglo-Saxon history, but no one by this name is recorded in connection with Alfred, in any form of service. Employing a fictional character to fill a fictional role is nothing more than we should expect.

The Danish king appears in the role of the conquered, a fact which enables us to see how lightly the facts of history have been regarded. This revision, like the original Alfred: a Masque, is based on a single encounter, the fight at Cynuit Castle. The complete surrender and submission of Guthrum to Christian baptism did not occur until after the battle of Eddington. It appears that Mallet has consolidated three campaigns — Cynuit, Athelney, and the final march to Egbertesstan, Ocklea, and Eddington. Each combat has its particular dramatic appeal; by combining the three and selecting the events of significance from each, the author not only gave his audience the most in dramatic entertainment but also an over-all picture of Alfred's victory in the Danish wars. The fact that Cynuit Castle is used as the central military engagement is of no special import; any one of the other battles of the series would have served as well. Dramatic limitations required that one battle serve as representative of the entire campaign. The public was not wall
enough acquainted with the sequence of events to be critical.

According to Asser\(^9\) and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,\(^{10}\) the Danish king who surrendered at Eddington was Guthrum. The Danish king in this version is never mentioned by name but reveals a possible identity with these lines, spoken after his defeat and capture:

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But yet, my son
Lives -- and is free! lives to revenge my fall!
To wash my stains in blood -- Ha! where was he
This fatal night, when every god forsook me!
Where, where was Ivar then?\(^{11}\)
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An interpolated passage of Asser shows Ivar or Ingwar to be the brother or the three daughters of Lodbrock. Authorities agree that Lodbrock was the father of the three famous brothers\(^{12}\) -- Ivar, Healfdene, and Hubba -- whose names are more familiar in Alfredian history than that of their half-mythical father. His appearance in the history of this period is highly improbable, since he was a contemporary of Ethelwulf, Alfred's father, and is recorded in legends as meeting death in a den of serpents,\(^{13}\) or at the hand of a boatmen.\(^{14}\) Their father's death was duly avenged by Hingwar and Hubba when they invaded East Anglia and were responsible for the death of King Edmund.\(^{15}\)

A discrepancy appears evident in a speech by Devon, if we assume the Danish king is Lodbrock, the father of Ivar. After Alfred recognizes the captured Raven Banner, Devon answers:

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'Tis the same
Wrought by the sisters of the Danish king
At midnight's blackest hour....\(^{16}\)
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This is a revised form of a speech in the first *Alfred: a Masque*; the earlier lines were these:

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'Tis the same
Wrought by the sisters of the Danish king,
 Of furious Ivar, in a midnight hours...\textsuperscript{17}

The name Ivar was deleted by Mallet, since, obviously, both Ivar and his father could not be brothers of the three famous sisters who made the Raven Standard. As father to Ivar, the Danish king of the play should be the father, not brother, to the sisters. The point is probably of little importance, but it serves to illustrate Mallet's unconcerned regard for the original historical foundations of the play, which had been set with the care of a scholar.

Among the other personages who were added to the revised Alfred: a Masque are three Danes. They are identified simply as "First Dane" and "Second Dane;" a third Dane is in their company but has no speaking part. The First Dane is designated "Prince" by his companion,\textsuperscript{18} and we are ready to accept him as the son whom the Danish king calls Ivar, when the Prince announces himself as the "son of Ivar."\textsuperscript{19}

No historical assistance can be sought to relieve the confusion. Ivar, or Ingwar as Asser names him,\textsuperscript{20} had no part in the Wessex campaign of 878, although his fame was widespread in connection with Northumbria and East Anglia. An error, which began to creep into twelfth century chronicles through a misinterpretation,\textsuperscript{21} accounts for Ingwar's supposed participation in the Cynuit engagement. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry states that "Inwaeres bySur and Healfd̄enes" were in Devonshire with twenty-three ships;\textsuperscript{22} the genitive forms were evidently taken as nominative, as the full names of the Danish leaders. And so we find either Ingwar or Healfd̄ene, or both killed at Cynuit. The name of the brother of Ingwar and Healfd̄ene was first supplied by the twelfth century Norman historian, Gaimar, who called the Danish leader Ubbe and stated that he
A solution which seems possible is to look upon the Danish king as a combination of Hubba, Guthrum, and possibly Ingwar and Healfdene. Since the battle of Cynuit may be regarded as representative of the entire campaign of 878, we might also say that the Danish king is a consolidation of Danish leaders. His name matters little, for he represents no one historical person. The same may be said of the son, although his identity is of less importance; his actions in the play are entirely fictional.

The part of a shepherdess was also added, completing the list of speaking personages. Other singing shepherdesses and spirits render the several songs which Mallet wrote for this 1751 version.

By enlarging the part and elevating the position of Alfred, Mallet lessened the authority of the Earl of Devon accordingly. The author stated his purpose in the Advertisement — "to enlarge the design, and make Alfred, what he should have been at first, the principal figure in his own Masque." Mallet may have felt that, in allowing Devon the privilege of leading the Wessex man to victory over the Danes, honor and glory were taken from Alfred. To an audience or reader unfamiliar with the ninth century history of the English nation, such doubtless would seem true. The original Alfred is a man facing a crisis, seeking God's help to guide him toward a solution to his and his country's problems. In the midst of similar circumstances, Burhred of Mercia, Alfred's brother-in-law, relinquished his throne and went on a pilgrimage to Rome. Alfred, too, might have chosen this easier course but, instead, remained and solved his difficulties, with the help of God made manifest.
through the holy hermit. This Alfred is a reticent hero, but a hero none the less.

Mallet may have acquiesced to any of several good reasons for changing the original concept of Alfred: (1). The public audience, not very familiar with Alfredian history and less interested in it than in seeing a good play, was more accustomed to a hero of action. Such being the case, the Alfred of Thomson and Mallet would not have met with popular favor. (2). The role of Alfred may have been constructed to suit Garrick. With so eminent an actor, the part had to be fashioned so as to exhibit adequately his histrionic abilities. Probably the author relied on the reputation of this outstanding actor to account strongly in the play's success. (3). Mallet himself, while silently sanctioning the original characterization, might not have been in complete agreement with Thomson regarding a strictly historic Alfred. When Mallet prepared his version, he changed the concept to better suit his idea of a hero. To attempt to discover which one or more of these produced the emended Alfred is of little importance. The point is to show that the reticent king is the historical one; the hero of action, while not unhistoric, is the Alfred of the Eddington period.

The Earl of Devon's part is not only lessened by Alfred's but also by Edwin's, who brings the news of the loyal remnant to Alfred, instead of its being brought by the Earl. Devon continues to deliver the message of victory to those at Athelney, but this time he gives the glory to Alfred and claims none himself:

While behind,
Just to the fatal instant, Alfred rose,
In all his terrors; o'er the mounded camp
Tempestuous drove; from space to space along
Spred slaughter and dismay.26
This characterization of Devon is far different from the man of action called Odda, whom Ethelward identifies as the chief leader of Devonshire and obviously the model of the Thomson and Mallet personage. The victory of Cynuit, which is his by the warrant of history, is given to Alfred, reducing Devon's role to pure fiction.

The hermit's part remained substantially the same as in the 1740 Alfred; the minor changes are relative to the alteration of plot. The prophecies of England's future are revealed only through the hermit's communication of his dream to Alfred; there is no parade of succeeding English monarchs as in the original. Since it is the office of the hermit to introduce and glorify each of these visions in the original, the omission of this section diminishes the number of his speeches proportionally. As an historical person, the hermit follows the pattern suggested by St. Cuthbert, whose association with Alfredian history has already been cited.

In the revised Alfred, Eltruda arrives at Athelney with the son of the Danish king and two of his soldiers in close pursuit. The Prince reveals his sinister purposes with regard to the Queen to his soldier-companions:

'Twas she: I could not be deceived.
A lover's eye is as the eagle's sharp,
And knows his prey from far....

She must be found, this unknown fair
Who fir'd me at first view; and rages still
A fever in my youthful blood.

The incident is important because of its relationship with similar situations in later plays. This seems to be the first suggestion for the "love motif" with Elswitha as the center. It is employed with certain
variations in several of the plays yet to be considered.

Mallet's *Alfred* shows the author's lack of knowledge of or lack of interest in the period of history to which the *Masque* refers. The confusion of names and general lack of clarity was the result of incomplete revision. However, in all fairness, we must admit that this play ranks rather high in the comparison with other *Alfred* plays. Some of its poetry has value, though this may be because of its close connection with its original *Alfred*. If for no other reason, Mallet deserves credit for emphasizing the heroic virtues of Alfred and for placing them before the public in the person of David Garrick.
Another tragedy based on the Alfred story was presented two years later under the title *Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country*. It was written by "the author of *The Friendly Rivals*"¹ according to Miles, both plays are equally worthless.² This Alfred played eight performances³ and was forgotten.

Like the two preceding Alfredian dramas, this also was partially founded on Rapin's *History of England*. The author draws from the reigns of Alfred and Edward for his information, which is surprisingly historical on certain points. Here is a brief summary of the action:

**Act I** Ivar and the Danish generals make peace with Alfred in good faith; however, three Danish soldiers — Oscytel, Godrum, and Anaud — join in planning revenge for their past defeats. During the absence of Dunulf, the Neat-herd, Maliba, his wife, drives her step-daughter Egwina from their cottage at Athelney. In Winchester, Alfred gives his daughter Elfleda in marriage to Ethelred, Earl of Kent.

**Act II** After the marriage ceremony, news is brought of the Danish treachery and the death of Edmund, Alfred's eldest son. Alswitha, the Queen, and Elfleda are sent to Wareham Castle, which is taken by Godrum; the Dane attempts to win Elfleda's favor. Egwina is accepted into the service Augurtha, Lady Devon, who interprets the shepherdess' dream by predicting that one day Egwina will be queen.

**Act III** At Wareham Castle, Elfleda kills Godrum and throws his head among his astonished troops. Ethelred arrives and takes the ladies to Kinwith Castle for safety. Alfred is brought by Dunulf to Athelney, where he is introduced to Maliba simply as an old friend of her
husband. In the meanwhile, Odda meets and defeats a superior Danish force at Kinwith; he has the assistance of Ethelred and Elfleda, who is dressed in men's clothing. Hubba and Halfdane are killed and the Raven Standard captured.

Act IV Alfred, at Athelney, burns the cakes and is scolded by Maliba, according to the folk tradition. Edward, Augurtha, and Egwina enter and tell Alfred of Edward's love for Egwina. The true background of Dunulf is then revealed: he became falconer to young Prince Alfred after having lost his patrimony in East Anglia, where he was of noble blood; consequently, Egwina is a noble lady. Alfred makes plans to enter the Danish camp as a Welsh harper.

Act IV Alfred, disguised, sings songs of praise to the Danish troops. After escaping without trouble, he is met by Edward, Ethelward, and others, and the attack begins immediately. The Danes are put to rout and retire to Trurobridge Castle, where they are besieged and forced to surrender. Guthrum discovers that the Danes broke the original peace treaty and concedes to Alfred's terms of surrender and retirement. The Danish chief and twenty-nine others are baptized and become Christians; the remaining Danes keep to their heathen faith.

August first, the date of the treaty, is commemorated for the sake of liberty.

Most of the characters follow the usual order, but several persons whom we have not met previously are introduced here. Alfred's three sons and one of his three daughters have places of importance and their characterizations are based on passages from Rapin's History. Edmund in our play is the eldest son and the destined successor to his father.
It is he who leads the Wessex forces in the initial campaign in Act I. His death at the hands of the Danes is accomplished through a treacherous onslaught after a peace treaty had been signed by both powers. The death of this prince gives a new impetus to Alfred's desperate followers, who hope to avenge Edmund.

The Rapin reference to this is brief but sufficient to warrant such a characterization: "Alfred had several children by Alswitha his Queen. Some of them, particularly Edmund his eldest Son...died before him." The Asser reference gives us an opportunity to illustrate how historical information may easily be transformed into unhistorical matter. The author of Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country, in following Rapin exclusively, possibly could have been ignorant of his error. The Asser record which parallels the above notice in Rapin gives more specific information:

Thus were there born unto him sons and daughters by his wife aforesaid, to wit, Ethelfled, the eldest, next Edward, then Elgiva (Aethelgeofu), afterwards Elthryth, and finally Ethelward, besides those who were snatched away by all too early a death in infancy, amongst whose number was Edmund.

Most modern writers delete Edmund's name entirely, recording only two sons and three daughters, the ones named by Asser.

In Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country, Edward is characterized as the amorous though none the less worthy heir to the Wessex throne. His treatment is based on this information in Rapin, which describes Egwina as well:

He (Edward) had Children by three Wifes; the first, nam'd Egwina was only a Concubine, a Shepherd's daughter ... The Historian tells us, that Egwina, as she was asleep in the Fields, dreamt that the Moon shone out of her Womb so bright, that all England was enlighten'd
by the Splendor of it. Some time after, she had opportunity to relate her Dream to an old Woman that had been King Edward's Nurse. This Woman, who valued herself mightily upon her skill in interpreting Dreams, imagining there was something extraordinary in this, took Egwina home to her House, and gave her an Education not suitable to a Country Wench, but to a Person of Quality. While she was in the House of her benefactress, it happen'd that Prince Edward, before he was King, passing by the Place where his Nurse liv'd, went in to see her. He cast his eyes on Egwina, and immediately fell desperately in Love with her.  

The story of Alfred is identical with this one except in one or two instances. The statement that Egwina was the daughter of a shepherd was warrant enough to cause the author to name her the daughter of Dunulf, the neatherd. In the play Lady Devon performs the same duties for Egwina as does the old woman. The dream and its interpretation, that Egwina's son would one day be king, comes to pass, for Athelstan, her eldest son, succeeded his father Edward to the throne of England.

Florence of Worcester speaks of Egwina as "foemina noblissima," and William of Malmesbury calls her "illustris foemina." According to Earle, this is enough to discredit the story that Athelstan was the offspring of an amour of Edward and a shepherd's daughter. In the play Egwina is revealed finally as a member of a noble line in East Anglia. Probably the author of Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country chose this means to avoid casting an unfavorable light on Athelstan as one of Britian's kings.

Elfleda has more appeal for the reader than most of the other personages because the concept of her is so distinctive and vivid. She dresses in men's clothing and takes the field of battle with her husband Ethelred of Mercia; in an emergency she has the courage to cut
off the head of one of the Danes and to throw it over the balcony among his terrified comrades. Rapin again supplies the suggestion for characterization; he gives this account of her masculine attributes:

It is related of Elfleda, that having had a very hard Labour with her first Child, she took up a Resolution never to come into the like Case again, and was as good as her word. From thence-forward she wholly devoted herself to Arms, and like a true Amazon gave proofs of her courage in all the Wars her Brother had with the Danes. She was generally styl'd (not only Lady and Queen, but) King, in admiration of her Manlike and Royal Abilities.\textsuperscript{11}

During Edward's reign, the two joined forces in driving the Danes further and further northward and finally extending English dominion over the entire island.\textsuperscript{12}

The names of the three Danish captains of cavalry -- Oscytel, Godrum, and Aemul -- are drawn from this brief entry in Asser:

In the year 875...the host so often spoken of left Ripton and parted them into two bands. The one, with Healfdene, went off into the land of the Northumbrians.... And the other, with Guthrum and Oscytel and Osmund, three Heathen Kings, came into the place which is called Cambridge....\textsuperscript{13}

Their names only are historical, for their parts in the Wilton campaign of this drama are purely fictional.

The characterizations of the Danish leaders -- Ivar, Healfdene, Hubba, and Guthrum -- and those of the Wessex men -- Odda, Ethelred, and Dunulf -- are no different from the interpretations by previous and later writers. Gregour, King of the Scots, and Madoc, King of South Wales, are not mentioned in Alfredian history.

The principal military events of Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country are the fight at Wilton, the taking of Wareham Castle, the battle of Cynuit, and the victory at Eddington. According to history, these engagements cover a period of seven years, from 871 to
878, but they are treated here as the action of a single campaign.
The first two battles, those of Wilton in 871 and Wareham in 876, are
briefly mentioned and can be associated with their historical sources
in name only.

The battle at Cynuit, in which the besieged West Saxons under Odda
overcame a superior force, is obviously the background material for the
battle of the same name in the play. The events connected with the
battle of Eddington are distinctive only in the outcome. Most authors,
using Eddington as the crisis and turning point of Alfred's fortunes,
omit the historical fact that the Danes fled to a stronghold. Asser
gives the following account of this event:

Stoutly and long kept they at it; and, by God's
help, in the end he got the victory, and laid low the
Heathen with a very great slaughter, and followed hard
upon their flight, with blow on blow, even unto their
stronghold.... Before the gates of the Heathen strong¬
hold did he and all his host take camp, like men.
And when he had there tarried 14 days, the Heathen,
an-hungred, and a-cold, and a-dread, and, at last, hopeless,
became sore afraid, and begged for peace, on this troth,
that the King should name and take from them such sureties
as he would, giving them none in return.\textsuperscript{14}

Many historians, including Camden,\textsuperscript{15} have thought this fort was Bratton
Castle near Westbury in Wiltshire, where the White Horse yet stands.
The author of Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country calls it
Trubridge Castle, a name for which I have not been able to find
authority.

I must say that the play deals fairly with the Alfred story. It
emphasizes persons and incidents which were ignored by former and sub-
sequent writers; the author recognizes their dramatic worth and follows
sources rather closely. I speak only from an historical point of view,
for certainly the play is inferior in dramatic appeal and poetic value.
The tragedy of Alfred was presented for the first time on January 21, 1778 at Covent Garden. It was the last of the tragedies of John Home, the Scotch playwright whose Douglas had won him fame twenty-two years earlier. Henry Mackenzie, Home's biographer, says plainly that Alfred "did not succeed. I do not mean...to enter into any critical discussion of Mr. Home's works; but I may just say, that this tragedy is undoubtedly the weakest of his productions, and it was not surprising that it did not please the public."  

When the play was published following the stage presentation, a Preface was written to reply to the hostile criticism leveled against the play. The following statement is quoted from the Preface and may be regarded as exemplary of the criticism: "...the Hero, the Legislator, is degraded to a Lover, who enters the Danish camp, from a private, not a public motive, and acts the part of an impostor." This judgment is undoubtedly honest and just, for Mackenzie voices much the same opinion:

Indeed, had it (Alfred) possessed more merit than it did, an English audience could have hardly been pleased to see their Alfred, the pride of their country in its earliest age, the patriot and the lawgiver, melted down to the weakness of love, like the commonplace hero of an ordinary drama.

Home made answer to the critics of his day by saying that as long as there is no breach in the "great established facts of History," a poet is allowed to imagine and invent the intermediate situations as he sees fit; in this, he is controlled only by probability and consistence of character. He continues his argument by applying these principles to Alfred, asking a number of questions in an effort to show his line of reasoning.
Is it improbable to suppose that a young hero was in love? Is it inconsistency to represent that person, who was a Legislator, when advanced in years, as a lover in his youth! Does it degrade the character of a hero to suppose, that he was in love with the princess whom he afterwards married? Is it not rather injurious to his heroism to conclude, that he chose a consort whom he did not love?6

The play itself is as weak as Home's reasoning. Nicoll dismisses Alfred with a word, saying "neither subject matter nor treatment entitles it to independent consideration."7 A more analytical though perhaps prejudiced report is this letter to Home from Dr. Adam Ferguson:

Edinburgh,
February 7, 1778

My dear John,

Damn the actors that have damned the play, and think no more of it till you have time to do what may be necessary for the press, and then consider what is to be done with it. Besides the accidents you mention, I can conceive that the substitution of a love-interest for an interest of state, which the audience expected from the name of Alfred, may have baulked them; when they appeared to languish, you certainly did right to withdraw it.

.....

I am

Dear John
Most affectionately yours

Adam Ferguson.9

This letter, in part, accounts for the drama's failure, but there are numerous other reasons contributing. The general style is stilted and exaggerated;9 the lack of interest in the plot and of poetry in the dialogue are also to be counted in the unfavorable reception by the theatre audience.10 "There is an uniform mediocrity in the language, an uniform tameness and want of discrimination in the characters, sufficient, without the national feeling of the debasement of the great Alfred into the hero of a love plot, to tire, if not to disgust an audience."11

With this overwhelming knowledge of the play's inferiority, we
wonder that it ever reached the boards. Historically, the play is
disappointing also, despite Home's claims to the contrary. He has not
violated any "great established facts of History,"\textsuperscript{12} such as allowing
the death of Alfred or the defeat of the English forces at Eddington,
but this is no true accomplishment. Since the bulk of the play is with¬
out historic basis, it may not be discussed adequately by citing back¬
ground passages and source material. For this reason, I offer a brief
résumé of Alfred, according to acts:

Act I  The scene is an English camp. The events prior to the
action of this play are revealed through a conversation between the Earl
of Devonshire and an unnamed Officer. The Danes had attached the English
on Alfred's and Ethelswida's wedding day, preventing the ceremony. The
enemy believed that Alfred fell at the battle of Chippenham and that
Ethelswida perished in the flood of the Avon; in reality, both survived.
On her way to rejoin her betrothed, Ethelswida is captured by Hinguar,
the Danish king; news of this is brought to Alfred by Surrey, who,
through a deception, has gained a high place in the Danish camp. Alfred
immediately revolves the plan of entering the enemy camp in the disguise
of a British bard.

Act II  Between these acts Alfred is admitted to the Danish camp
and succeeds in winning the confidence of Hinguar. He tells the gleeman
of the beautiful captive, who has spurned his love and whose mind has
become deranged because of the loss of her lover. Alfred is permitted
to see Ethelswida on the pretext of curing her malady. She recognizes
him, and, in the few moments that they are alone, they agree to call
themselves Surrey and his sister Emma. In the meanwhile, Ronex, Hing-
uar's jealous consort confronts her husband with her knowledge regarding his love for Ethelswida. The king, fearing foul play from Ronex, establishes Erick, who is the true Surrey in disguise, as personal guard for the captive princess.

Act III  Edda, Danish attendant to Ethelswida, suspects that her lady's madness is feigned and passes her doubts on to Hinguar, who begins to see the true picture of things. He accuses Alfred of being a traitor and tells him of his plan to divorce Ronex and marry Emma, as Alfred says her name is. During an interview with Hinguar, Ethelswida, in a moment of fear, reveals her own and Alfred's identity; she agrees to marry Hinguar if Alfred is granted safe conduct to the English camp. The Danish king, in his efforts to win the heart as well as the hand of the princess, tries to tempt Alfred into peace by offering him a Danish bride. The proposal is refused.

Act IV  Ethelswida visits her betrothed and each tells the true conditions of his and her respective proposal from Hinguar. Ronex, with her right-hand man Rollo and a band of soldiers, comes seeking Ethelswida's life. The lady convinces Ronex that her jealousy is unfounded, and the Danish queen agrees to join her band with the English forces against Hinguar. In a meeting to her chiefs, Ronex announces to Alfred that one of the conditions of consolidation is their marriage. Edda informs her mistress of this, and the two plan their escape, Ethelswida does not know that the maid means to take her to Hinguar.

Act V  Just as they are leaving, Rollo gives orders to two assassins to kill Ethelswida. The English storm the camp, and Ronex is compelled to make peace with Alfred in order to receive his protection
against the wrath of her husband. The assassins return with the bloodstained robe of Ethelswida. Hinguar and Alfred meet in mortal combat, and the Danish king falls dead. When Alfred sees the bloodstained robe, he recognizes it as Ethelswida's and falls in a faint. The lady, who is not dead, returns and, believing Alfred has fallen the victim of Hinguar's sword, draws a dagger to end her own life. Alfred revives in sufficient time to prevent this act of violence and all ends well.

The characters, with the exceptions of Surrey, Ronex, and the two attendants Edda and Elisa, have basic historical counterparts, but their treatment here is decidedly fictional. The introduction of Rollo is an interesting addition to the list of stock characters in Alfredian literature. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is brief in its notice of Rollo; this single entry is recorded under the year 876: "This year Rollo overran Normandy with army." Several of the later chroniclers mention him, varying slightly in the date of his Norman conquest. The following account of his arrival in Britain is from John of Brompton and is dated 875:

And in this year Rollo, a Dane or Norwegian, by race (who afterwards, conquered Normandy, and was the first duke there), came to England with his mates, and started to harry the land. And in the battle with the English were many of his men slain, and the rest ran away.

Rollo's connection with the battle of Eddington is doubtful; no record dates his successful invasion of Normandy later than 876. Of course, he could return, as in this account from John of Wallingford; the writer does not adequately explain Rollo's transfer of loyalty:

He (Alfred) sent, moreover, messengers to Rollo, who was ever warring upon the French,...to come to his aid. And he,
because of the kindness shown him by Alfred...gave up, for that
time, the siege of Paris, whereon he was set, and crossed back
to England...15

The kindness spoken of may concern the release of Rollo after his army
was annihilated in the previous year by the English forces. Both John
of Brompton 16 and St. Neol17 tell the story of Rollo's dream of the bees
and his call to Normandy. His conversion there by the Archbishop Franco
18 and his subsequent worthy life resemble the story of Guthrum following
the surrender of the Danes at Eddington.

Rollo's name is closely associated with the romantic heroes of the
"viking age," when emphasis was placed on individual achievement. He is
typical of the invading pirates, who roamed the sea in small boats,
plundering in summer and taking winter quarters in whatever land was
nearest. Often such crews sailed up the Seine, and the French king either
fought, if he was able, or paid tribute for peace and liberty. The
Norman invasion of 876 by Rollo and his band was apparently one of coloni-
19 zation, for he remained and ruled for fifty years.

If Rollo's name was familiar to the eighteenth century theater-goer,
it was suggestive of piratical adventure and romance. Although his place
in Home's Alfred is not founded on an historical incident, his name and
fame add something of the viking spirit for the person familiar with the
story.

Hinguar's appearance as the Danish king at Eddington points to his
prominence and repute in the viking romances over the lesser known
Guthrum, the historic leader. He is known variously as Hinguar, Ivar or
Irquvar in different chronicles. His weakness of body called forth the
name "Ivar the Boneless," but his quickness of wit more than compensated
for his inferior constitution. "He is the brain of the English expeditions, a man of foxlike cunning, while his brother, Ubba or Hubba, is the typical Norman soldier, brave, strong, and persistent." Hinguar has been identified, with much probability, as the comrade of Olaf the White, the Norse king of Dublin, who raided Scotland in 870. The Irish chronicles make Ivar the brother and successor of Olaf in Ireland and Britain. Later English writers call him "the tyrant Ivar," the most cruel of pirate kings.

In the Preface to Alfred, Home claims no variance with the great established facts of history, yet, in placing Hinguar as the Danish king, he is committing just such a breach. A possible explanation of the author's choice is this: for the sake of dramatic emphasis, Alfred's antagonist must necessarily be killed at the close of the play. Since Guthrum's surrender, conversion to Christianity, and later peaceful life did not fit the requirements of his drama, Home chose a more romantic though unhistoric person. This is nothing more than a possibility, a suggestion, and no proof can be offered in its support. Whatever the reason, Hinguar serves as well as any other king in this mock history.

Edwin, Earl of Devon, may be the modernized equivalent of Odda, chief leader in the province of Devonshire. At the beginning of the play, Edwin speaks of his participation in the battle at Cynuit (Kenwith), a part which was modeled after the Edwin in Mallet's revised version of Alfred: a Masque; that is, he assisted the Wessex king, who led the victory. The Earl's place in Home's play is insignificant in comparison with the more conspicuous position of Surrey, a completely fictional personage.
We have previously shown that the historical evidence for Ealswith, or Ethelswida as she is known in the play, is scant indeed. Yet Home, in spite of his claims to historical accuracy, has violated the most important fact we have concerning Ealswith. Asser specifically states that in the year 868, Alfred "wooed and wed a wife from Mercia...." A main strain in the plot is built upon the supposition that the pair were not married but continued as betrothed lovers until after the battle of Eddington, a period of ten years. Home doubtless believed that married lovers would have less appeal for his audience. Also, and what is more important, the problem of divorcing a Christian couple on the stage would be extremely difficult to execute and would certainly draw undue criticism. Even though a divorce is not required ultimately, the plot continues toward this point, and the problem would have to be considered in order to make the story plausible. Among the Danes, the king merely had to speak the word and the divorce stood as such; an eighteenth century audience would accept this of the barbarians but not of the English.

The feigned madness of Ethelswida follows the outlines of the madness of Ophelia; the captive's utterances include disconnected thoughts of a lost lover and snatches of sad song. The act is clever enough to win belief from the Danish king but not from the perfidious maid Edda, who uses the information for personal advancement with the king.

Alfred, the lover, is obviously a facet of the king's character which the eighteenth century audience could not accept. However, this was not the only reason for the play's lack of success. We are inclined to believe that the audience would have received Alfred as a lover if the play had been of worth otherwise. Since this was only one of many faults, Home's Alfred passed on into oblivion.
The Patriot King, or Alfred and Elvida, was written in 1778, by Alexander Bicknell, when England was threatened with an invasion from the combined powers of France and Spain. Had the play been presented on the stage at that time, it would have had great effect as a patriotic stimulus, and such was surely the purpose of the author. However, Bichnell failed to win the approval of the theater managers for the drama, though it received "flattering commendation from some of the first Tragic Performers" and several of his friends. After a delay of ten years, The Patriot King was finally presented in public performance in March, 1788, at the Drury Lane theater.

Although no specific reason for the rejection of the theater managers is given in the Advertisement, a close view of the theatrical conditions of the time makes clearer the author's statement. The latter half of the eighteenth century witnessed a sharp decline of enthusiasm for plays which might be termed literature. Even though authors continued to write dramas of high quality, they compromised by inserting pageants, or processionals, or spectacles of some sort in order to increase their plays' popular appeal. Among authors, there was an ever-increasing belief "that good literature could no longer hold a place on the boards." In accounting for this apparent change in popular dramatic tastes, the enlarging of the theaters is of great importance. Because of the poor lighting and poorer acoustics in the larger houses, the louder, broader effects were the most successful; also, this explains why the pageants and processionals enjoyed such an unusual degree of popularity. Bicknell's Prologue to The Patriot King touches on the new dramatic tastes, including
the tremendous vogue of the inferior Parisian dramas:

Our Bard, tonight, through other Scenes, perchance,
The new translated Drama, warm from France, --
Or flimsy Equivoque -- or meteor Wit --
The present lighter Taste might better hit;
Disdaining such trite Modes, attempts to please
By scenic Traits, far different from these....

With such a blunt statement of his opinions, there is little need for
wonder that the theater managers rejected the play.

The title page of The Patriot King announces Bicknell as also the
author of The Life of King Alfred, a prose work which preceded the
play and accounts for the author's knowledge of the Alfredian period and
the historical accuracy of the play. I do not mean to imply that each event
represents "pure" history, as the Prologue states, but rather that the
scenes for which an historical basis may be found follow the information
with care. Of course, much of the play is unhistorical, that is, it is
formed entirely from the imagination of the author without benefit of
suggestion from the chroniclers of the Alfredian period.

The author has a noble purpose in writing The Patriot King, which
may be set forth best by these lines from the Prologue:

By scenes reviv'd, From Alfred's Halcyon Days,
(Whose well-conducted reign exceeds all Praise)
At once would fair Freedom's sacred Fire
And with Respect for Rule the Heart inspire;
Those rare Exemplars, for your guidance bring,
A patriot people, and a patriot King;

Thus may Britannia's Sons again renew
The glorious Scenes here pourtray'd to their View;
The envy'd Height ere long they may attain,
And George's rank with Alfred's happy Reign.

The play, then, was meant to inspire patriotic Englishmen through these
scenes from England's past. The threat of invasion in 1778 presented a
situation not unlike the one in the play, and the similarity probably would have rendered the piece very popular. However, in 1788, the play no longer represented an occasion but was only one of the many English history plays which did not suit the late eighteenth century dramatic tastes.

The action of the play covers a longer period of time and a greater number of historical events than do most of the Alfred plays. In point of time, The Patriot King extends from early January, when the Danes won the field at Chippenham, to the middle of May, the date of King Alfred's victory at Ethandun (Eddington). The battle of Chippenham has just been fought as the play opens, and our information concerning it is learned through speeches of the victorious Danes and the wretched West Saxons. The period of Alfred's wandering in the marshes and the Athelney sojourn are touched on very slightly, and the Devonshire victory over Hubba receives no mention at all. This does not point to an unhistorical treatment but merely places emphasis on a later campaign, that of Ethandun.

In the early years of the invasions, the Danes remained only during the summer months; not until 866 is there a record of their taking winter quarters on the islands, but thereafter it became an established policy. However, because of the severe weather, the army went into retirement during the winter months, and such came to be regarded as an unwritten military agreement by both Danes and native Englishmen. This accounts in some measure for the surprise of the West Saxons when the invaders launched the Chippenham attack in early January.

Chippenham was probably a place of some importance in Alfred's time
and the location of a royal "vill," one of the many residences of the king and his family. The "ham" had been the scene of the marriage of Alfred's sister in 853. It has been suggested that Alfred went to Chippenham for the Christmas season and was still residing there over Twelfth Night. Because the Danes retired into Mercia for the winter, Alfred may have partially disbanded the Wessex troops or at least have relaxed his accustomed vigilance. At any rate, surprise was an important force in this battle, just as it was some four months later at Ethandun.

As the situation stood, the Wessex men had no alternative but to flee to the west country with the hope of the later reorganization of troops and an offensive. The Patriot King tells the story of the flight to Athelney, the rendezvous at Egbertesstan, and the offensive which was Ethandun.

The sub-plot of the story, dealing with Haldane's attempted seduction of Elvida, Alfred's wife, is without authentic foundation. Such an invention may have added much to the play's popularity, but it seems degrading to the Alfred story and is a coarse compromise of the author. If we could accept Alfred's Christmas visit to Chippenham, we might also assume that his wife was there and was captured by the Danes. Perhaps it would be better, however, to dismiss this part of the story as being fiction and nothing more, and make no further effort to unite it with the facts of history.

The historic basis of the plot seems to be this passage from Asser; the two descriptions are remarkably close in the jubilant reunion of loyal Wessex soldiers and their king.

In the seventh week after Easter, rode he to Egbert's Stone, which is to the East of the forest called Selwood. And there met him all the whole folk of Somersetshire and
Wiltshire and all the folk of Hampshire, such as had not, through fear of the Heathen, sailed beyond seas. And when they saw the King, they were filled with joy untold, and they hailed him as one alive again from the dead; -- as, after such mighty troubles, was full meet. And there camped they one night.

And at peep of dawn did the King rouse the camp, and came to a place called Aeglea, and there one night he encamped. And next day, very early in the morning, he advanced his banners, and came to a place called Ethandun. And there against the whole Heathen host formed he firm his shield-wall, and fought a deadly fight. Stoutly and long kept they at it; and, by God's help, in the end he got the victory....

The military movements of the play, while they follow this account basically, are more concentrated and more dramatic. The place of rendezvous at Egbert's Stone is made very near to the Danish lines, not a marching distance of two days as Asser implies. Also, because of the proximity of the two camps, the one night's encampment at Ockley is disregarded; the fact that Alfred visits the Danish stronghold in the disguise of a gleeman and returns the same night is probably the reason for this apparent discrepancy. Asser does not give an account of the gleeman episode, but Bicknell could have learned of it through William of Malmesbury, who first recorded it, or any of the later chroniclers who carried on the story.

The women of the play are almost pure fiction and may be passed over with just a word. They are Elvida (Ealswith), Alfred's queen and the daughter of Ethelred of the play; Emma, daughter of Óðun, the Earl of Devon, and attendant to Elvida; Gunhilda, queen of Haldane. This Danish queen adds much of interest and spirit, and her place is indispensable to the development of plot. She exhibits the natural emotions of the rejected wife of any age or station. The author has attempted an analogy between Elvida -- as the good, Christian wife -- and Gunhilda--
the fiery, heathen queen, whose code of life allows for either love or hate, but no intermediate state. It is not unreasonable to suppose Haldane's wife in England, even in Chippenham. An Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for the year 896 records that the Danes had secured their wives in East Anglia before they set out from the stronghold. Exactly when the Danes started bringing their families to the island is not known, but, presumably it was around the time that the army began to winter there. Since the 896 entry mentions the wives in England, Gunhilda or some such Danish queen may have lived at Chippenham in 878.

The meager information that history gives concerning Elvida, or Ealswith as she is known in the Chronicle, has already been cited. Asser doubtless considered it praise enough to record that she was the daughter of Ethelred, a chief of the Gaines, and Eadburgh, of the royal-blood of Mercia. As Lees says concerning the scarcity of facts on Alfred's early life, "it mattered little when or where a ruler was born, but it mattered very much who his father was, and if he came of the true royal stock...." The same holds true for a queen. Bicknell has created a very beautiful and virtuous lady in the person of Elvida. She exemplifies noble English womanhood according to eighteenth century standards, but her characterization is too general, too vague to command any great amount of attention. The author, who possessed a well-grounded knowledge of Alfred, fashioned Elvida according to the high standards of her husband.

Emma is the fictional daughter of an historical father, the Earl of Devon, who is called Odun in The Patriot King and Odda in Ethelwerd. Her aristocratic birth and noble character well qualify her for the position of attendant or lady-in-waiting to the queen, and the eighteenth century
audience should have been well pleased with such a portrayal.

The two Danish leaders of the play, Haldane and Gothrum, are intended to be Healfdane, the brother of Ingvar and Hubba, and Guthrum, whose baptism was one of the provisions of the Peace of Wedmore. In *The Patriot King*, Haldane serves as the Danish king and commander of the "heathen" forces at Chippenham and Ethandun. For the year 876, Asser records that Halfdene, "king of those parts, shared out the whole land of the Northumbrians between himself and his men...." 20

No historical evidence shows that he took part in the surprise attack at Chippenham and the later battle of Ethandun, although it might be possible if we consider that no king's name is mentioned until after the victory of Alfred. If both Healfdene and Guthrum shared the Danish command at Ethandun, Guthrum may have been the sole surviving leader and the only Dane with whom treaty negotiations needed to be made. There is at least one record of a Danish attack being led by two kings, Bachseg and Halfdene being in joint command of a branch of the Danish army. 21

This situation, cited as an outside possibility, is not exactly identical with that of *The Patriot King*, in which Haldane is king and Gothrum is merely a Danish chief, the king's lieutenant.

The Gothrum of history is best known for his conversion to Christianity and his subsequent honorable life. However, the present play does not treat these years, but only that part of his life immediately preceding Ethandun. Gothrum of the play falls into the pattern of the Machiavellian villain, scheming against both sides for selfish reasons. This treachery forms a major portion of the plot and makes Gothrum's role one of interest and importance.
The dramatic Gothrum may have been suggested by this account from John of Wallingford; the description would characterize any Danish king, not Guthrum alone.

On them (the English) ... came a brute beast in man's shape, King Gutrugi to wit, brutal and ferocious toward each and all, who with sword and axe wrought his bestial will. Nay he spared not even such as...threw themselves at his feet. Neither old or young, boy nor girl, mother nor maiden, spared he.... For his eye spared none. And piteous was the slaughter that might be seen. This account is of the ferocity of the Danish invaders in general but doubtless the violence was sanctioned by the Danish king. Gothrum is a case of an historic person being utilized for the plot development of an imaginative writing.

Each of Alfred's Wessex chiefs represented in the play has an authentic original, although the evidence in each case is brief. Odun has been discussed in a previous section. Except for this notice in Ethelward, no record of him or his victorious bands exists; we might assume, however, that they joined Alfred at Athelney or at Egbert's Stone. Odun's title, Earl of Devon, is the eighteenth century equivalent of "ealdorman" or chief.

Ethelred, a name which is common in Old English annals, is that of Alfred's father-in-law in this play. His second name or title is Mucil, which may have been used to distinguish son from father, as Stevenson suggests. Asser calls him Ethelred of the Gaini, a name which has never been satisfactorially located or identified, although it is believed to be a district or a title. Ethelred's part in The Patriot King is small indeed and quite unhistorical; he is nothing more than a tool which Haldane uses in his plan of seduction.
Edwyn, who appeared in the Mallet Alfred: a Masque as courier or servant to the King, has a similar position in this play. As we have shown, he is without any authentic basis. However, he exemplifies the young chief, delivers some excellent panegyric speeches on Alfred, and contributes romantic interest to the plot.

The year 878 was the twenty-ninth of Alfred's life and a memorable one of both defeat and victory. The Patriot King is true to the Alfred tradition and represents the King as faithfully as dramatic limitations permit in a play of this period. Bicknell has seriously attempted to infuse some of the character of Alfred into his drama, giving the audience as much of the King's history as possible and, at the same time, creating a sub-plot of sufficient interest to carry the bulk of the story. Battles alone, no matter how glorious, lack dramatic appeal unless sparked with something personal.

The historical Alfred of this period was a "king without a crown, but no less the stronghold and shield of his people." As an individual leader and as a man, he shines from out the dark recesses of Athelney; he came forth from the little island strengthened by the belief that "Providence had elected him as the protector and champion of the Cross, and the savior and support of the Saxon race." Even if we reject the legends of St Neot and St. Cuthbert, we must acknowledge Alfred's Christian convictions in view of his later life and work. When he met his people at Egbert's Stone, "they were fain of him," that is, they rejoiced in him. "The personality of Alfred was beginning to tell, and to rally to itself all that was worthiest in the nation."
Bicknell did not agree with the description in The Chronicle of St. Neot concerning Alfred's retreat before the Danish onslaught at Chippenham. Odun, meeting the King after the battle, has only praise for the latter's stand on the "well-fought field." The Earl emphasizes that Alfred's choice -- to flee and hope for a future victory -- was best for the nation and was not, by any means, to be counted a dishonorable act. Edwyn and the loyal group who gathered in Selwood Forest also regarded Alfred's defense at Chippenham as gallant and kingly. Even though this band believed the King to be dead, they reverenced his name and organized their proposed attack as a revenge for their King's death. When they learned that he was yet alive, their joy broke forth in speeches of praise, their confidence was such that they believed victory was assured.

The tactical strategy exhibited in the Ethandun campaign calls attention to Alfred's ability as a military leader. He had good helpers, in men like Odda and Ethelnoth, but the victory points to the prowess of a single leader who was Alfred. Many events of this period reveal the King's outstanding capabilities:

(1). The simultaneous meeting of all forces at Egbert's Stone, enabling the King to march on to Acglea on the very next day shows that the plan was highly organized, probably under the sole and direct orders of the King.

(2). The clever spying activities carried on by Alfred in the disguise of a minstrel point to his daring and courage.

(3). His personal calmness and his ability to quell rashness in others.

(4). He realized the importance of the element of surprise; his movements
toward the final battle were swift and secret.
The list might be continued at length, but these few instances attest
to Alfred's outstanding ability as a military leader.

The view of Alfred as a husband, which this drama presents in such
detail, can only be authorized through what we know of him as a king
and as a man. A devout Christian, he was the "devoted champion of
widows, wards, orphans, and poor;" a man endowed with justice and
temperance would surely bear great affection for his wife.

According to Nicoll, The Patriot King "is interesting because of
its supernatural machinery, which includes the presence of an Attendant
Spirit, a Magician, and a Witch, and because of its utilization of a
Chorus of Furies in the Greek manner." The suggestion for the Attendant
Spirit, whose duty it was to protect the honor of Elvida, came from the
legend of St. Neot; the saint promised Alfred that the Lord would visit
him and his people. This Spirit is of the Lord, for the Witch acknowledges
her own powers are of no avail in the face of the protecting angel. The
Witch, in direct contrast, readily admits that she serves the Devil, who is
the source of her power. The Magician represents yet another power, that
of the heathen gods of the Danes. The protecting spell which he cast over
Haldane and his warriors grew out of heathen powers and faded before the
heavenly forces. The Danes believed strongly in such spells and in magic
banners such as the Raven Standard.

The military movements of the play are historical, if considered
broadly. They begin as Alfred is brought from Athelney to the rendezvous at
Egbert's Stone in east Selwood Forest, where he is joined by all the men of
Somerset, and of Wiltshire, and that part of the men of Hampshire who are on this side of the sea.\textsuperscript{35} Egbert's Stone has been variously identified and its exact location has never been set with certainty. One theory names Stourton Hill in Somerset, where Alfred's Tower was erected about 1722 by Henry Hoare. Others, including Plummer, believe the meeting place to be the present Brixton Deverill near Warminster in Wiltshire. The location of Egbert's Stone is dependent on the line of march and the locations of Ockley and Eddington, which offer as many possibilities as the first. The encampment at Ockley is not considered by Bicknell, who makes the Wessex army go directly from Egbertesstan to Ethandun; neither place is mentioned by name in the play. Bicknell\textsuperscript{37} states that the distance between the two points is only a few furloughs, and, consequently, none of the suggested locations of Ethandun suits, in relation to Egbertesstan. One of the more romantic theories places Ethandun at Wiltshire Edington near Westbury; the White Horse there is said to be a memorial of the battle.\textsuperscript{38} This possibility is around fifteen miles from "Alfred's Tower" and twelve miles from Chippenham, the headquarters of the Danish forces.

Somerset Edington, which draws less authoritative favor than the Wiltshire location, is only a few miles from Athelney. The former fits more closely the information given in The Patriot King, but it rules out "Alfred's Tower" as the muster place. However, if we accept the Somerset Edington, Egbertesstan might be "a few furloughs" from the scene of the battle and but a short distance from Athelney. On the other hand, the longer three-day march is more in keeping with the information given in Asser and the Chronicle, in which Acklea is named as an intermediate point,
a place of rest for one night immediately preceding Ethanandun.

Bicknell's chief credit lies in his careful use of the facts of history. His style is turgid, his expression is unpoetic, but he has done honor to Alfred and the early history of England. Although we have not had an opportunity to use his Life of King Alfred, we would venture to say that this work was more in keeping with his natural abilities than is The Patriot King.
"Alfred le Grand" is but one narrative in a twelve volume collection called *Delassemens de l'Homme Sensible*. It was written and published in Paris between 1783-7 by François Thomas Baculard D'Arnaud, an author who was more interested in composing a clever story than in instructing his readers in the basic facts of ninth century English history. In a footnote he cites a quotation from Hume, but this lead proved futile when an investigation of this source failed to reveal D'Arnaud's plot. We may safely assume that the background structure is imaginary, and only the names of Ethelwita and Ethelbert and the character of Alfred are even remotely connected with history. The author appears to be quite familiar with Alfred's life, for he praises the Saxon's virtue, justice, equity, and honor as an introduction to his tale.  

While the story admits to no comparison with ninth century history, it is closely related to an English version of the same incident in the form of a drama, written and presented anonymously in 1789. A comparison will be made in the next section, in which the English play is discussed.

"Alfred le Grand" may be summarized as follows: The predominant trait in human nature, formerly regarded as fear, is now discovered to be, through reason and reflection, the quality known as virtue. This discussion brings to mind one of the most virtuous of Saxon kings, Alfred. This story is one of his acts of justice which, more than all his feats of arms ("long since forgotten through so many centuries"), assures him of one lasting memory.

In the time of Alfred, kings and kingdoms were based on a more democratic scheme than they now are (1783-7). Even a simple noble was admitted into the
society of the king and lived with him in great familiarity. A noble might invite his lord to his castle, offer him a supper and a bed. How different from the rules of modern etiquette!

On a trip through his lands, Alfred, accompanied by one of his general officers, Ethelbert, resolves to seek the hospitality of one of his courtiers, Albanac. This noble is the epitome of integrity and incorruptibility, a man who has often fought long and hard by Alfred's side against the Danish invaders. He has now retired, covered with glory, to his manor and his family, composed of his lady, two sons, and three daughters.

Albanac is over-joyed to have his beloved master as his guest. He loses no time in presenting his family to the king, who is greatly impressed by the charms of all the daughters, but especially those of Ethelvitha. However, being a cavalier and a gentleman, Alfred conceals his excessive emotion and sheds compliments indiscriminately on all three.

At supper, the daughters are appointed to serve him. Albanac recalls in glowing colors the great days of combat, of his prowess against the Danish leaders Læf and Hastings. Alfred turns the subject and his eyes again and again to Ethelvitha.

After supper, Ethelvitha shows the king to his apartment. Albanac and his wife also retire, and a serious discussion ensues between them. The noble has noticed the amorous looks which Alfred casted on his daughter, and he fears the danger that may arise from this. He loves his king, but he loves honor more, and he is prepared to undertake desperate measures to protect his and his family's honor.

In the meanwhile, Alfred and Ethelbert discuss the same situation;
the king's praises extend to the sky. Ethelbert offers only encouragement for his master's suit. The author points out that this courtier, Ethelbert, should have cautioned Alfred, reminded him of the sinfulness of his thoughts and of how he violated the rules of hospitality and honor.

The next morning Albanac asks admittance to Alfred's suite before the king has dressed. He is somewhat displeased with Albanac for disturbing him at this early hour and is taken aback with the spectacle that he sees. The noble has a sword in his hand and beside him are his three daughters, all dressed in black. Albanac states in unmistakable terms his convictions regarding honor and concludes by saying that he means to kill his daughters and himself if any member's honor is stained.

Alfred admits that his thoughts were not honorable but adds that Albanac has recalled him to his duty. He then offers Ethelwitha his hand and his throne. The lady accepts, confessing that she loved the king the very instant he entered her father's house. Their reign was one of the greatest with which Great Britain has been honored.

In "Alfred le Grand," we meet again Alfred the lover, and a not very honorable lover at that. The entire episode is entirely out of keeping with what we know from history of Alfred's nature. That it was necessary for him to be reminded of his duty to honor is as unlike the Saxon king as is the cake-burning incident. However, since that incident has come to be accepted in the popular tradition, this amorous affair would be no more of a stain on his worthy memory.

Alfred is not acceptable to the reader in this role of erring lover. That he was recalled to honor before the dishonor occurred probably is considered a highly commendable and completely virtuous act according to the eighteenth century standards of the author. However, so wise and honorable
has Alfred become to the student of Alfred lore that the D'Arnaud hero seems another man. Certainly, the English nation can feel no great pride in the king that is presented here.

Ordinarily, it is a simple matter to discover the date of an Alfred story through the battle or battles on which it is based. Here the question of date becomes more difficult. I think we may assume that Ethelwitha, Elswitha as the Chronicle spells her name, was Alfred's wife. Even though Asser's brief account fails to mention her name, her noble parentage is cited. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle enters her death in the year 905, and various chroniclers of later centuries name her as the mother of Alfred's children and the inheritress of vast lands and estates at the time of his death. The year of their marriage, 868, may be accepted tentatively as the date of this piece, even though Alfred was not king at that time.

This elegant description is given of the charms of the Lady Ethelwitha. I think we might guess from these flowing words that the story is of French origin, even if we did not know the fact otherwise.

...Il se récroire successivement sur sa taille souple et déliée, sur sa bouche de rose, ses cheveux blonds, ondoyants avec grace sur ses épaules, son front d'albâtre, la rondeur élegante de son col de cygne....

I have not succeeded in finding an historical source for this account and, therefore, am forced to attribute it to the ingenuity of M. D'Arnaud.

Albanac as the retired English warrior, who delights in reminiscing about his and Alfred's encounters with the Danes, is the most believable and dramatically effective character in the story, even though he is not based on history. These two statements unite him rather loosely with the
historical Wessex-Danish wars.

(1) D'Albanac, flatté encore du ressouven de ses prouesses guerrières, brûle de rappeler ces combats où les Danois se sont vu chassés de l'Angleterre ....

(2) D'Albanac parloit avec chaleur d'Hastings, de Lef....

I consider his characterization much more heroic and admirable than Alfred's.

As I understand the author's purpose, he meant to draw a picture of a more democratic society and to contrast it with the absolute monarchy of his own nation and age. For example, concerning the custom of a king's visiting his nobles, he writes: "Si différens de l'etiquette modern..." Also, D'Arnaud states his own convictions regarding the moral laws governing kings in this reprimand directed at Ethelbert's laxity in not reminding Alfred of the rules of hospitality and honor.

One cannot help but wonder if D'Arnaud is referring to the dissolute conditions of the French court.

The story is very disappointing, taken by itself, because of its deficiency in historical analogy. My main purpose in discussing it here is to show its connection with its English counterpart, Alfred, An Historical Tragedy.
Alfred, An Historical Tragedy is probably the least historically accurate of all the Alfred plays. It was written and presented in 1789 at which time it played but eight performances. The author remains anonymous, even though some authorities name him as Ebenezer Rhodes, a topographer and publisher of Sheffield, where the play was printed. Nicoll's sole reference to the work falls in his discussion of English dramas taken from the French.

The popularity of the Parisian drama in London has been noted in Section VI. There Bicknell boasted that his is no translated tragedy. One of the characters in Reynold's comedy The Dramatist (1789) has this to say on the subject:

I'll tell you, -- write a play, and bad as it may possibly be, say it's a translation from the French, and interweave a few compliments on the English, and my life on't, it does wonders.

As Nicoll points out, many followed exactly this formula and found success. The author of Alfred, An Historical Tragedy was one of the group; he readily admits his debt to the French narrative (not play, as Nicoll states) "Alfred le Grand," which was discussed in the preceding section. In a note at the beginning of the piece, the writer attempts to give his work historical authenticity by citing his source.

As the Story of Alfred, Ethelwitha, and Albanac--which forms a principal part of the first two acts of this Tragedy--is not universally known to be historical, it may not be improper to inform the Reader, that it may be found in the French of M. d'Arnaud, nearly the same as in the following drama. Not only the story, but a few lines, in the last scene of the second act, are likewise from that excellent author.

It is my opinion that the author is too ready to own his debt to M. D'Arnaud.
As I hope to point out by comparison, the debt is less significant than the acknowledgement. This should show that the admission was more for reasons of prestige than for obligation.

A synopsis of the play is given below:

Act I  Eldred and Egbert, sons of Albanac, return from a day of hunting, resolved to win their father's long-delayed consent to enter the Danish wars. A messenger announces that Alfred will honor Albanac with a visit and will arrive that evening. Ethelwitha and Ethelinda, the two daughters, are instructed to prepare a sumptuous feast for the king, such as will show all their love for him. Alfred enters; the national condition and strategic military maneuvers are discussed. Albanac agrees to allow his sons to join Alfred and the war on the following day.

Act II  Albanac notices that Alfred looks with more than esteem on Ethelwitha; he is afraid that the King means to ruin his child. He tells him misgivings to his daughters and requests that they dress in black and return to him. In another apartment, Alfred and his two attendants, Edward and Ethelbert, discuss Alfred's love. Edwards reminds the King of his duty to honor and to the state. Albanac enters, carrying a sword and leading his daughters clothed in black. The old man states his fears and asks Alfred's intention. The King offers Ethelwitha his hand, and she accepts. Fitzhugh, a messenger, arrives, announces the Danes have pitched their tents about 500 paces from the junction of the Thone and Parret, the location of the Saxon camp.

Act III  Alfred, observing the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel, discovers dissention there. Hardune is jealous of the superior
position of Haldane and the favors shown the latter by the Danish general Guthrem. Hardune has been in disgrace since he lost the Raven Standard to the English; along with his lost favor is also the loss of Christina, Guthrem's sister, as bride, and who is now being given to Haldane. Avar, Hardune's messenger, is sent to bring Haldane to his master's tent. Hardune means to fight and kill him as revenge for past injuries.

Act IV As they fight, Guthrem and Alfred (disguised as a harper) enter the tent. Guthrem stops the fight, saying that if Alfred knew of this discord, it would assure him of success; indeed, Alfred is assured. However, Hardune recognizes him in spite of his menial dress but does not discover him to Guthrem. Instead, he tells Alfred of his wrongs and resolves to help the Saxons defeat his kinsmen. He informs the King of the Danish feast on the following day and suggests an attach before midday.

Act V Alfred successfully escapes from the Danish camp and rejoins his army, which is prepared for the engagement. Meanwhile, Guthrem hears of Hardune's treachery, but the Saxons attack before he is able to get revenge. Alfred and Hardune unite forces, as the troops storm the center of the camp. Haldane and Hardune meet in hand to hand combat, and Hardune is slain. At the last, Guthrem and Alfred meet, and the Saxon overcomes the Dane. Guthrem is told to swear at Christian altars and return to Denmark, never to draw sword against British sons again. The famous isle of retreat is consecrated the Isle of Princes.

Here the love story of D'Arnaud is made secondary to the victory; it may be called the sub-plot. It has served in such a capacity in several
of the preceding plays — in Home's Alfred and in Bicknell's The Patriot King, for example. The present author recognized the dramatic possibilities of D'Arnaud's fictional history and, at the same time, its limitations. Actually, his debt to the Frenchman is comparatively small, when the entire play is considered. The subject matter of the first two acts and seven speeches at the end of Act II are the sum of the obligation.

In Act I only the announcement of Alfred's visit and his arrival coincide with D'Arnaud. However, Act II follows the original rather closely. Here are the few lines near the end of Act II which he attributes to "that excellent author." They are almost a direct translation.

Alfred: Heav'ns! what do I see!
Albanac: A father, sir, Whose honour is far dearer to him than his life.
Alfred: But what may this unusual sight portend?
Albanac: Why have I thus intruded on your privacy, I shall explain: You are a king, and I Your subject, not your slave: Pardon my liege, The freedom of my speech. You know from what An honourable house I am descended: As the remaining guardian of that honour, It now becomes me To speak my sentiments without restraint.
Alfred: Let me hear all that thou would'st wish to say.
Albanac: I may have err'd, perhaps, in my conjecture; And yet the fix'd, and singular attention With which, last night, you ey'd my daughters, And various other circumstances noted, Have alarmed me. I need not tell you how A tender father doats upon his children; Yet if the mad idea has possess'd your brain, (Which heav'n forbid) of bringing a dishonor On my family, this sword shall instantly Prevent the impending shame; -- this hand shall plunge it Into the bosom of the unfortunate
Yet willing victim. But if a pure, and
Honourable flame, be kindled in your breast,
And if an alliance with my house be not
Deem'd unworthy of Royalty, choose, name her
Whom you would wish to honour....

Alfred: Your nobleness recalls me to myself,
Love might have led me from the paths
Of virtue: you point out my duty,
And I obey its dictates -- my choice is fix'd,
Irrevocably fix'd, for long ere now
Have I beheld your blooming daughter with
A lover's eyes.\textsuperscript{13}

Another parallel is the characterizations of Ethelbert and Edward,
Alfred's attendants. In the English version, Etherbert has this to say
of Alfred's love:

And what, my liege, can bar its confirmation?
Are not you a king? and is not she the
Daughter of a subject? Nay, more, of your
subject too.
I think you might command her.\textsuperscript{14}

This is the attitude of Ethelbert in "Alfred le Grand." Edward, on the
other hand, takes D'Arnaud's view, which we noted in the previous discus-
sion.\textsuperscript{15} He reprimands Alfred for his rashness and reminds him of his
duty and honor.

The last three acts are original with the English author, or perhaps
it would be more correct to say that they were not drawn from the French.
The events definitely establish the date as 878, since Cynuit is over,
and the final battle seems to have the decisiveness of Eddington.

The personages offer nothing interesting by way of comparison.
Albanac appears to be merely a figment of D'Arnaud's imagination, who
was taken over in both name and action by the English author. His sons
Eldred and Egbert bear Old English names, but neither has any relation
with an historical person.
Among the Danes, only Guthrem and Haldane are based on facts; both have been met frequently before. As history requires, Guthrem is the Danish leader at Eddington, but Haldane, better known as Halfdane, fills a fictional position.

The only incidents that have an authentic foundation are the ones concerning the Raven Standard and the spy episode. The former is said to be the cause of Hardune's loss of favor, but it does not mention the defeat which the lost standard was supposed to connote.

The play breaks between Acts II and III and forms two distinct parts, neither of which has any real connection with the other. The first part is filled with talk and no action; the latter is weighted down with fights and battles. It is even lacking in historical incidents to recommend it.
IX

John Penn, the author of *The Battle of Eddington*, was the grandson of William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania.¹ This tragedy, also known by the title *British Liberty*, was his only attempt in the field of drama, although he has several other published works to his credit.² The play was first performed anonymously on October 11, 1792 at Sadler's Wells and was revived in 1796 and 1832 for short engagements.³ It was presented privately for a night or two at Haymarket.⁴

In dedicating the play "To the Honourable William Pitt," he praises the virtues of the prime minister to the greatest extent and finally compares his work for his country to that of Alfred.

It will not seem extraordinary that I should hope to throw lustre, by its dedication to a first Minister, of eminent character, and great abilities, on a drama, which may recall to the recollection of their descendants that noble work of a patriotic king and people, the first attempt though effectual to frame a government upon the principal of reason.⁵

This dedication is exemplary of the play's style -- verbose, involved, and unpastic. The subject matter was timely, however, and the author's political ties added the "lustre" he desired.

*The Battle of Eddington* is the only composition in this study to which is appended a series of notes. As far as they go, they are quite helpful in identifying characters and in discovering the author's sources. Penn states that he consulted these authorities on ninth century English and Irish history: Leland's *History of Ireland*, Lord Littleton's *Henry II*, Bicknell's *Life of Alfred*, the Chronicle, and Asser.⁶ Bicknell's history was spoken of in connection with *The Patriot King* in Section VI.⁷ Although Rapin is not included in his list, Penn mentions having consulted this historian with regard to the spelling of the name of Ceoluph.⁸
The action of the play begins with the English, headed by Ethelred and Mervin, driving a company of defeated Danes before them. They speak of the valor of Alfred, the love of him and Elsitha; they fear the treachery of Lord Ceoluph, who is in close contact with the Irish, the allies of the barbarians. Elsitha, the queen, enters and reveals a scroll showing the intended treachery. Ethelred retires to inform the king. In a nearby cottage occupied by an aged woman, the queen seeks refuge and is guarded by a chorus of attendants.

Ceoluph, on learning that Elsitha is in the camp, bids the chorus leave its post and come with him. Alfred arrived to inspect Ceoluph's position and a learned disputation on freedom and the civil rights of man ensues. One of Ceoluph's aides accompanies the king on an inspection of the army's rear. The chorus suspects treachery, and, together with Mervin, it goes in search of the king.

Alfred and the queen meet at the beginning of the third act. They spend some time in reminiscing on such events as Alfred's anointing by the Pope, the burning of the cakes, and the re-building of London. The conspiracy of Ceoluph is discovered and plans are made to remove Elsitha to a place of safety. Ceoluph, in an ultimatum, demands the queen as prisoner, saying that the Danish monarch can pay him more than Alfred is able. Ceoluph's treachery was caused by his jealousy of other English nobles.

Ceoluph and Dane approach. This Dane, who has become a Christian convert during his stay in Ireland, has since endeavored to live the life of a Christian even as a soldier. He is to stand guard over the queen, but when he is called away on some urgent business of war, the chorus
takes the queen to a place of safety. The Irish retreat, followed by English and Welsh; the Battle of Eddington is won.

An attendant arrives, announcing the recapture of Elsitha. She had been taken to a ruined convent by her guard, and the fleeing Danes sought the same retreat. Mervin then comes with the news that the queen is again free and relates how he fought and killed Ceoluph. Several lesser lords beg to be taken under Alfred's domination. To the Danes the king offers Christianity and peaceful retirement to Mercia. The play ends on a happy note, with glorious plans for the future of England.

The presence of a chorus and semi-chorus brings to mind Bicknell's play of 1788, in which an attendant spirit, a magician, and a chorus of furies supplied similar effects. "Penn shared with his friend, William Mason, a curious belief that a chorus and semi-chorus should be employed in English drama." Besides serving as a guard for the queen, the chorus presents a song at the end of each act. According to the stage direction given by the author in his notes, the song is to continue between the acts.

The 1792 edition of The Battle of Eddington contains the notes spoken of previously. Miles states that Penn "seems at least to have possessed a genuine interest in the history of Alfred, as is attested by the numerous notes...." I think Penn should be given credit for his honesty, to which his own statement testifies:

This subject is mentioned in a particular manner by Milton, in his List of Tragic Subjects, as far as relates to the Principal event. Most of the facts pointedly alluded to, are equally founded on history, it having been intended to exhibit as clear a picture as possible of those dark times, and above all to collect together every circumstance
in the life of Alfred anywise remarkable, or interesting.

— The plot, considered as to the mere relation to its parts, is imaginary. ¹⁴

This, certainly, is more than many of the Alfred plays give us. Some of the events which have been discussed at length previously will be limited to Penn's interpretation here.

Ethelred, speaking of the dangers surrounding the queen, expresses this futile wish:

Would that when Buthred, her ill-fated brother,
Driv'n by the Danes from his Northumbrian throne,
Sought quiet in the friendly walls of Rome,
Would she had accompany'd his flight. ¹⁵

This refers to the famous Mercian king who fled the repeated onslaughts of the Danes and sought refuge in the sanctity of Rome. The event receives a fuller discussion in a succeeding section. ¹⁶ Buthred, or Burhred, was given in marriage the only daughter of Ethelwulf, Ethelswith, in the year 853. ¹⁷ It is, then, essentially correct to speak of Buthred as brother to Alfred's queen.

This introduces us to a related event. A part of the alliance of 853, which the marriage cemented, was an agreement that the forces of Mercia and Wessex join against the invading Welsh. One of the Welsh kings in this struggle was known as Roderick ap Merfyn. ¹⁸ The Welsh Mervin of our play may be intended as the same person. Penn's note offers but little help in identifying him.

Mervin: There is nothing particular told of this prince in the History of England, but that he, and his brother Cadelh were tributary to Alfred before the battle, and Anarawd their brother afterwards. ¹⁹

Roderick Mawr, Merfyn's son and the father of Anarawd, defeated the Danes in two battles in 878 but was forced to flee Ireland, leaving
South Wales to be ravaged by Hubba.\textsuperscript{20}

Anarawd, in asking Alfred to receive him and his people as part of the Wessex kingdom, is depicted accurately. Asser gives the authority for this; the year is 877:

Yea, Anaraut, the son of Rodri, with his brethren, left, in the end, the friendship of the Northumbrians (i.e., the Danes, who now held Northumbria), and earnestly sought the friendship of the King, and came in to him. By the King he was received with honour, and taken as his godson at the Bishop's hand in Confirmation.\textellipsis And he, on his part, submitted him to the Lordship of the King, on his troth, that in all things, he would obey the Royal will, even as Ethelred and the Mercians.\textsuperscript{21}

The other brother, Cadelh, remains unidentified.

Ethelred has figured prominently in several of our plays and is the alderman of the Mercians, under Alfred's rule. His marriage to Elfleda has been spoken of in the section devoted to Alfred the Great, Deliverer of His Country.\textsuperscript{22} Here is Penn's note on Ethelred:

\begin{quote}
He was called "Princeps militiae" and for his long services, and great merit, was made Duke of Mercia by Alfred, to whose herioc daughter, called the English Zenobia, he was married.\textsuperscript{23}
\end{quote}

His actions in the play are based on his military reputation and are not founded on any recorded incident.

The characterization of Ceoluph, however, has some historical basis. He took over the duties of Buthred of Mercia, when the latter fled his throne for a less honorable though much more tranquil life in Rome.

And after his (Buthred) driving out, the Heathen got under their sway the whole Mercian kingdom; yet did they grant it in trust to a certain foolish King's Thane (Ceolwulf by name), on these miserable terms, that whenever they might wish to have it again, he should at a day's notice, give them quiet and peaceable possession thereof. And in this
troth he gave them sureties, and swore, moreover, that never would he cross their will, but be obedient unto them in all things.24

Ceolwulf in The Battle of Eddington is this same type of person -- an Englishman turned traitor. According to history, his kingdom was gradually subdivided by the Danes,25 and he "at the last, was deposed by his Danish masters and stripped stark naked, thus coming to a wretched end."26

Several incidents, common to Alfredian stories are given to us here in Penn's elevated and involved style. These two examples will suffice to illustrate the point.

(1) Shall I reflect on thy debas'd estate,
When fortune made thee vassal of a vassal,
Serving the aged housewife of a cot,
And then dismiss the thought, as each desires?...
Shall I indifferent muse on the commands
Giv'n, as she left the shed, over the flame
To tend her food; which, when thou didst neglect,
Rapt, and attentive to thy bow and darts,
The loud-ton'd anger of the poorest told,
But too well told, anon, thy sad reverse?27

(2) Inventive love shall tell.
Yes, with the pilgrims we will throng the ways
Of mighty Rome, and in its holy walls
Wear out the blameless remnant of our days
In honour'd ease.28

The last suggests Buthred's flight. Even Alfred's anointing is mentioned in this remark by Elsitha:

...as when a Pope foretold thee,
Anointing as he spoke, reserv'd for empire.29

The Danish convert, who was sent to guard the queen, tells of how Ireland was taken by Sitric, Ivar, and Amlave. Ivar is a name with which we are quite familiar, but the others require a word or two.

Sitric is best known for his raids in the Seine valley around the year
855; the Frankish Chronicles often mention his name. Amlave, I believe, can be identified with Olaf the White, the Norse king of Ireland and comrade of Ivar. Some Irish annals make them brothers.

This same Dane also speaks briefly of Hubba's Mound, which according to tradition, contained the remains of that Danish leader. Gaimar says that he was slain in the wood of Pen. "When the Danes found him, they made over him a great mound, and they called it Ubbe-laws." Conybeare says there was such a mound near Kinwith Castle, on the sandhills by Barnstaple Bay, until the seventeenth century, when it was washed away by the tide. Whether tradition or fact, by the end of the eighteenth century it was doubtless accepted with the other legends of Alfred's age, and, therefore, Penn was justified in using it as fact in his drama.

The Battle of Eddington is inartistic but it partially recompenses this fault by being accurately historical. There is practically no action during the first two acts, but we do learn that Alfred was a great and just king and an able leader. Penn emphasizes the fact that Alfred initiated the kind of government that has become the foundation of England's greatness.

As Penn writes:

William the Conqueror by no means founded the English Government. It was the work of a prince who never conquered but to defend himself, who never extended his dominions by conquest, but who extended them considerably by the voluntary submission to neighboring monarchs, owing, more probably, to his merit. It was this scholar and philosopher to dispassionately formed his code upon the theories of the ancients.
In the last decade of the eighteenth century, the turmoil of revolution in Europe began to creep into the literature of England. As monarchies on the continent weakened and tottered, some Englishmen cheered, others feared for their own security. The revolutionary spirit found an ideal medium of expression in the plays, and Alfred's history was again drawn upon as source material for the patriotic motif. One such play was John O'Keeffe's *Alfred or The Magic Banner*, which was first presented at the Theatre-Royal, Haymarket, on June 22, 1795.¹

According to Nicoll, O'Keeffe is the author of or contributor to sixty-seven theatrical presentations, including farces, comic operas, operatic farces, interludes, and pantomimes. He was a native of Ireland and an actor by profession.² High praise for his dramatic works is offered by Hazlitt:

O'Keeffe might well be called our English Molière. The scale of the modern writer was smaller, but the spirit is the same. In light, careless laughter and pleasant exaggerations of the humorous, we have no equal to him. There is no labour or contrivance in his scenes, but the drollery of his subject seems to strike irresistibly upon his fancy, and run away with his discretion as it does with ours.³

Although this may be exaggerated to a certain extent, when considering all the plays of O'Keeffe, the description seems quite true for *The Magic Banner*. As may be easily deduced, the drama draws its title from the famous story of the Raven Standard. O'Keeffe writes in his *Recollections* that "on some well-known circumstances recorded of Alfred the Great I formed a three-act play."⁴ Indeed, the author has selected almost every Alfredian story of fiction and fact which might interest an audience. Although the play emphasizes comedy and depends upon this primarily, it
does reflect O'Keeffe's knowledge and use of source material.

George Colman the younger "brought it (Alfred) out at Haymarket, but it had not much success," writes the author. "It was played three nights, and then the audience furled up my tremendous banner of the three ravens forever." In the same account, he rationalized on the play's failure in good Irish fashion, saying that he derived some comfort from the thought that, in writing the play, he had done honor to a distant ancestor of the house of O'Keeffe who had struck off the head of Magnis, the standard-bearer, and captured the Raven Banner.

This is a brief account of each of the three acts:

Act I Sweno, standard-bearer to the Danes, is in pursuit of Blanche, the daughter of the carpenter, Gog, and Bertha. Thwarted in his attempts to take her, Sweno joins the hunting party of Earl Burrhed as falconer, replacing Oswald who goes to join Alfred's army. Eustace, the betrothed lover of Blanche and the apprentice of her father, returns to Gog's house, after a day of fighting against the Danes, in time to see Blanche carried away by Sweno as a boon of Burrhed for the former's good service. King Alfred is in Wareham to execute a peace with the Danes. Before the treaty is ratified, news is brought of a newly arrived Danish fleet under the traitor Briton, Hastings, and the Danes flee to join the new forces. Eustace makes his way to the isle of Purbeck where Hastings lands, hoping to dissuade the traitor from his determined course. During this interview, it is revealed that Hastings and Eustace are father and son. Hastings chooses to remain with the Danes, and he and Eustace exchange helmets in order to avoid each other on the battlefield.
Act II  
Blanche, who is being held at Earl Burrhed's castle, escapes in the disguise of a friar. Through the help of Hollybush, the Earl's fool, she causes Sweno to accompany her home on the pretext of uniting him and Blanche in marriage. Gog comes to the castle to recover his daughter and learns that Lady Albina, the Earl's wife, was the young maid who promised to marry him many years before. He is sure that the King would recognize his prior claim to her and dissolve her intervening marriage. Albina agrees to the hoax, hoping to re-win the wandering affections of her husband. Gog demands the Lady's hand before Burrhed and takes her off to his cottage. In the meanwhile, the disguised Blanche reaches her home, and after changing to her own dress, makes Sweno believe that she intends to marry him. Eustace overhears and is convinced of Blanche's fickleness. Alfred arrives at the cottage in the disguise of a peasant and the cakes of Bertha are burned in due order. Eustace then announces the gathering of forces in Sellwood Forest and Alfred goes to join them. Sweno finally realizes that Blanche has tricked him and leaves for the Danish camp accompanied by Gog, who received fifty pieces of gold as the Dane's ransom.

Act III  
Sweno, near his own troops, turns the table, demanding his original gold plus fifty additional pieces of Gog's ransom. Alfred enters the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel, is discovered to be a spy, but is released by the Briton Hastings. At Gog's cottage, the situation of the two wives is played upon at length, until Earl Burrhed is rescued from stocks by Albina and the two reunited. Because of a misleading letter and the exchanged helmets, Alfred believes Eustace is a traitor and orders his death. The English go on to win a final victory.
over the Danes. Blanche, who has taken the Danish magic standard from
Sweno, presents it to Alfred and receives pardon for Eustace in return;
Alfred then learns of his relationship to Hastings. Alfred gives his
blessings to the lovers and plans their wedding at Wareham.

The play is not strong in Alfredian history, despite frequent allu-
sions to stories connected with Alfred's life. The comic characters and
situations, tuned to the humor of an Irishman, fill in the web-like
basis which history provides. The original battle of the play, for which
Alfred and Hubba meet to sign the treaty, is the siege of Wareham in 876,
which was a Danish victory. Asser gives an account of the treaty, imply-
ing, as does O'Keeffe, that Alfred dictated the terms:

And with this host did King Alfred plight firm troth, on
these terms, that they should leave his land.... Yet, after
their wont, dealt they treacherously, and recked nought of
sureties, or oath, or promise, or honour: but one night brake
their troth every mounted man they had, and suddenly hied
them thence West to Devonshire, to a place which is in Saxon
called Eaxanceastre....

The Anglo-Saxon "fyrd" followed and besieged the Danes at Exeter.

With the approach of Hastings (Haesten), the story now draws from
the events connected with his invasion of Britain in 893. In this year
Haesten came with thirty-five ships up the mouth of the Thames, and built
his fortification at Milton, and the other army was at Appledore.³ Alfred
stationed himself in Kent, between the two armies, and tried to win Haes-
ten over with bribes and flattery. Indeed, Haesten swore oaths, accepted
gifts, and withdrew to Kent, only to build a defense against Alfred at
Benfleet in Essex. The "Great Army" of the Danes abandoned Appledore and
pushed toward Benfleet to effect a union with Haesten. The combined
forces, plus a number of Northumbrians and East Anglians, made a great naval attack at Exeter and an unnamed Devonshire fort. The defeat of Haesten at Exeter serves to represent the remaining two years of fighting before the pirate viking gave up his wars on the English.

The historic action of the play centers around this invasion of the Danish fleet and its commander Haesten. The events take place on land rather than the sea, but the defeat of the viking marks the surrender and retreat of the Danes.

There are but eight of the fourteen personages in the play who may, by any reckoning, be called historical. It is most gratifying to find that Ealswitha and her Danish seducers have been omitted from this work, although O'Keeffe could not resist the story of Bertha and the cakes. Since the source of this tale has not been given in full before, I include it here; it is found in Asser as an interpolated passage from the St. Neot Chronicle:

...Once, in the house of one of his cowherds, it chanced that one day a country-wife (the wife, indeed, of that same cowherd), was making ready to bake cakes. And the King sat thus by the hearth, and would make ready his bow and arrows and other war-gear. But when that unhappy woman saw that the cakes she had put before the fire were burning, she hasted and ran and moved them, scolding the while at our all-conquering King, and saying, 'Fie, fellow!

'And why so slack to move the cakes?
And canst not see them burn?
Thou'rt all too glad to eat them up
When they are done to a turn.'

O'Keeffe follows the entire episode in his play, turning the bit of poetry into these lines for Bertha to speak:

Bless me! my cake all burned on one side! Sat down to divert yourself? Is this the way you mind what I set you to? I warrant, when nicely baked, you wou'd be ready enough to eat the cake; and yet cou'd not give a hand to turn it....
The character of Bertha develops from this picture of the churlish housewife.

Gog, who is Bertha's husband and a carpenter by trade, bears but slight resemblance to the shepherd in the cake episode, who later became a priest under Alfred's patronage. He takes no serious thought of Alfred's wars and appears to regard the Saxons in much the same light as he does the invaders. He considers the Danish inroads the natural circumstance of history. When told that he should join in the war, he answers:

Me! I'm an old Briton. As the Saxons came over and took our inheritance, let the Danes come and take it from them---it's only one thief robbing another....

Though the event occurred some five hundred years previously, it remains clear in Gog's mind, and, on these grounds, he steadfastly refuses to give his support to the Saxons.

Something of the same is true in the case of Eustace, who historical authenticity is rather vague and legendary. He, too, professes Briton progenitors but gives his unquestioning allegiance to his King. Eustace grows from a legend, told by the fourteenth century writer John of Tynemouth, of a beautiful child, Nestingus, who was found by Alfred in an eagle's nest; the infant was robed in purple and had gold bracelets on his arms. The child was rescued and educated at the King's expense.

The exposition in the play is merely a dramatization of this source material.

Hubba (surveying Eustace with contempt) 'Oh, I've heard of this stripling when a babe--found, as 'tis rumour'd in an eagle's nest; and foster'd here by Alfred--.'

Hastings (agitated) 'Indeed!--the peculiarity of this circumstance--so ere my precipitate retreat from Britain,
my infant boy, my Eustace, was lost.'

Eustace 'How!'

Hastings 'It may be -- I would wish to think it so -- Tell me, young man, what truth is there in this story?'

Eustace "Do I, at this first meeting with a parent, behold his sword raised against my sovereign, my youth's protector?"

Hastings 'My son!'14

The incident of the infant Nestingus, or Eustace, may be regarded as being as highly improbable as the possibility of Hastings being the father. The son has no further historical suggestion other than this brief account of his childhood.

Hastings, or more properly Haesten, has an historical analogue in the form of a bold and crafty pirate of unknown origin. His connection with the campaign of 893-4 has already been discussed.15 His introduction as a Briton, wronged of old, is pure fiction; even though his background is shadowy, he is generally regarded as a Dane.16 The author's humane concept of him is out of keeping with what we know of Heesten.17

The personage known as Odune is, both in position and action, the chief of Devonshire, whom we have met in several Alfred plays previously.18 The character here is too vague and poorly drawn to bear any close resemblance to an historical person.

Hubba signified the Danish leader and nothing more. His historical connection with the battle of Cynuit must not mislead us, for it is not the principal engagement of the play.

Alfred's part is small and without dignity. By associating the Wessex king with such ridiculous situations and characters, O'Keeffe has preserved little of Alfred's true majesty. The case of Gog and Albina
is the author's example of the King's sense of Justice:

Knight: And if this man was actually, as the Lady Albina declares, betrothed to her before your marriage, I doubt not but the King, from his strict love of justice, would ratify the claim.

Albina: Oh yes; Alfred, ever impartial in his decisions, where equity is the point, 'twixt the peasant and the noble knows no distinction.

Earl Burrhed: Why, true; yet though he exacts obedience to the laws with much vigour; and to keep the common herd honest, even hangs golden bracelets on the trees, which no passenger dares touch....

The last speech refers to the well-known story, found in William of Malmesbury, of the golden bracelets which Alfred ordered hung at the cross-roads, unguarded; the peace and security in the land was so great that none dared steal them.

Alfred's visit to the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel is given a new approach in that he is captured with a map of the fort in his possession. The noble Hastings releases him, believing he is nothing more than an ordinary spy. The fact that Alfred undertakes the stratagem for reasons of state, and not for personal gain, marks an advancement over Home's version of the minstrel story.

As has been noted earlier, the play takes its name from the fabulous magic standard of the Danes. Asser states that it was captured from the men of Hubba after their defeat at Cynuit. The banner had been woven by the three sinister sisters of Ingwar and Hubba, the daughters of Lodbrock, between night and morning of a single day.

In every fight, wherein that flag went before them, if they were to win the raven in the midst thereof would seem to flutter as if it were alive. But were their doom to be worsted, then it would droop, still and lifeless. And oft was this well proven.
The dramatic version runs along the same lines:

Sweno: The Danish magic banner, wove by Hubba's three sisters, fair lades, famous in the black art; that raven work'd on it is our oracle; whilst we follow his banner we're invincible.

Hollybush: Hem! But, sir, can all your soldiers see this fine raven at a distance?

Sweno: From any part of the field, in the heat of action, they must keep an eye upon that....

The raven was the symbol of the war god Odin, who formed an integral part of the Danish theocracy. Alfred realized the morale value of the raven banner for the army that possessed it and offered the reward of an unlimited wish to the one who captured it from the Danes. "Whilst the Danes possess that, their enthusiastic ardor baffles all efforts to subdue them." After Blanche brings the standard to Alfred, he examines the prize and says that "the possession of this delusion, indeed, is the very summit of England's happiness."

The troubled times of the last part of the eighteenth century are reflected in The Magic Banner through speeches of the "wise King Alfred." The dangers and fears of the English nation, facing a formidable enemy just across the channel, are summed up in this way by Alfred:

Of life, the past has faded into nothing; the future we know not; the present is ours, but that in a moment becomes a past, nothing, or future uncertainty; what then is all our anxious preparation for enjoyment; climbing to the height of a pinnacle, which no sooner gain'd than we slip from it.

The speech, besides its lack of dignity, is not in keeping with Alfred's nobility of character. However, the words must be spoken by the King, because no other personage in the play is capable of philosophizing on this timely subject. For the same reason, Alfred is made to speak on the growing feeling against absolute monarchy and the right of trial by
In the following illustration, the King has just learned the true facts relating to the supposed treason of Eustace, which facts proved the young man innocent of his charge:

Your miraculous escape from death has awakened in me, the godlike privilege of genuine legislation. A man's life is too sacred to depend on the capricious breath of an individual...—Alfred decrees, that henceforth none shall be deemed guilty till convicted by twelve of his peers; and from this happy moment let posterity date the glorious blessings of an English Jury. 27

This play serves to illustrate how the Alfred story can degenerate in the hands of a disrespectful writer. For O'Keeffe the first interest was comedy, and everything was sacrificed for this. The flippancy of the dialogue, the coarseness of the characters, the indignity attached to the name of Alfred make The Magic Banner the least acceptable of all the compositions of the eighteenth century on the subject of King Alfred.
A Sketch of Alfred the Great or The Danish Invasion, a "Grand Historical Ballet of Action," was performed at Sadler's Wells on Monday, May 7, 1799. A note at the beginning of the play attributes its authorship to Mr. Lonsdale, who is also responsible for its direction. Nicoll lists the ballet among those whose authors are not known but assigns a play called The Spanish Rivals to M. Lonsdale. The latter play is in the Larpent collection and bears the date 1784. Possibly M. Lonsdale and the Mr. Lonsdale of our ballet are the same, although I am not able to present proof to this effect.

The ballet is of special importance for two reasons. It comes at a period of political turmoil, when revolution in France forced England to join European powers in war against its spread. As Englishmen clamored more and more for freedom, for changes in the monarchical form of government, they saw what had happened in France and came to respect more the conservatism that monarchy represented. Lonsdale in this ballet reminded them of one of England's first great kings, whose deeds and reign prepared the way for the glory of the later England. He pointed out the justice and wisdom of Alfred, as he went about molding his state into the foundation for an even more glorious nation. As one recalls these trying days of his country some eight centuries ago, he must feel a sense of pride in his heritage, passed down to him through monarchy. The patriotism which Lonsdale meant to inspire was not only for the war against France but for the value of a government headed by an able king.

The second reason for the importance of the ballet is its utilization of events previously neglected by writers of the eighteenth century. Several of the lesser known of Alfred's accomplishments, such as the
founding of the English navy and his dividing bread "with a poor pilgrim in a time of famine," are included by the composer.

The sketch is formed of twelve scenes and concludes with a grand historical pageant.

Scene I. A procession of victorious Danes, with their Saxon captives, moves into view. Guthrum, the Danish leader, suggests new acts of plundering to his troops and offers a high reward for the capture of Alfred. Oscitel and other Danes set out on a party of destruction.

Scene II. These plundering Danes organize themselves for the purpose of plundering an English monastery; they assume disguises as a means of gaining entrance.

Scene III. Alfred, at the neatherd's cottage, is reproved for burning the country wife's cakes. Oddune, the Earl of Devon, recognizes the King and wants to take him to a safer place on the Isle of Athelney.

Scene IV. Oscitel, disguised as a pilgrim, gains entrance to the monastery. Once inside, he opens the gates to his fellows, who plunder and set fire to the place. Queen Ethelswitha and Alfred's sister Judith, who had been taking sanctuary there, escaped but were pursued by the Danes.

Scene V. At the English camp on Athelney, Alfred reveals his identity to his men, who rejoice and swear fealty to him. On learning that the Queen and his sister are prisoners of the Danes, the King adopts the plan of visiting the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel. Oddune and his men go to oppose the incursion of Hūba in Devonshire.

Scene VI. In the Danish camp, Guthrum becomes enamored of Ethel-
switha and has her conducted to his tent. A report of Alfred's death prevails among the Danes, and this enables the King, in the disguise of a harper, to circulate freely about the camp.

Scene VII Guthrum is host at an elaborate banquet, where he and Oscitel quarrel over Ethelswitha, the latter Dane urging a prior claim. The soothing effect of Alfred's harp music settles the strife, and Guthrum orders Alfred to play at the banquet, hoping that the reserve of Ethelswitha may be softened by the harper's music.

Scene VIII At the banquet, Alfred plays and a Danish bard sings of the valor of Guthrum and the death of Alfred. The Saxon King, moved by the constancy of his Queen, throws himself at her feet then, realizing the rashness of his action, pretends to plead the cause of Guthrum. Both Ethelswitha and Judith, having recognized the King, feign submission and retire. Alfred seizes Guthrum's signet and hopes to use it to ransom his queen, but she escapes beforehand. He flees the camp, and Judith's death is ordered immediately.

Scene IX Alfred kills a Danish officer and discovers the order for Judith's execution among his papers. He dons the Dane's clothes and hurries off, resolving to ransom Judith with Guthrum's signet. Ethelswitha happens on the scene and discovers the order for Judith's execution that Alfred has left behind.

Scene X The scene is a pagan altar in a gloomy wood. Alfred enters and stays the sacrifice of both Judith and Ethelswitha (who has been captured a second time) by showing the signet. In the distance shouts are heard and Oddune soon appears, driving before him a company of routed Danes. Guthrum then appears at the head of his troops and
engages the English. During the conflict Judith and Ethelswitha escape; Oscitel is killed, and the Danes are compelled to lay down their arms.

Scene XI At a ruined monastery, Alfred reflects on the severe famine, which has left his country destitute. He divides his last morsel with a poor pilgrim, and, seemingly by a miracle, prosperity is restored to the country. Alfred then offers terms of peace which are immediately accepted by Guthrum. An artisan displays a model of a ship, and Alfred orders the building of a powerful navy. The poor pilgrim then becomes the Genius of Britain and, in a recitative, praises the virtues and gallant deeds of the Wessex King.

Scene XII Then a grand historical pageant celebrates the glory of the England which was to follow. The columns of the Temple are decorated with the medallions of kings prior to Alfred; the leading events in the history of England are represented also. Banners and portraits of outstanding English monarchs, with explanatory inscriptions, are paraded across the stage. These monarchs are Canute the Great, John, Edward III, Richard II, Henry V, Elizabeth, James I, George II, and George III. A grand chorus concludes with two stanzas of "Rule Britannia."

The ballet is rich in historical allusions, many of which I have not noted previously. Among these is the character of Burhred or Burghred, the brother-in-law of Alfred and King of the Mercians for twenty-two years. His dramatic duties have little, if any, connection with those of the true Burghred, but the background makes his characterization have greater appeal for the reader. The story is told in Asser, the Chronicle, Simeon of Durham, and others; I follow the Asser version here:
Burghred..., the king of the Mercians, drove they to leave his kingdom and go over seas into exile, and hie him to Rome, in the twenty-second year of his reign. And full loth was he so to do; and after he got to Rome he lived not there long, but died, and in the School of the Saxons in the Church of St. Mary, was he buried worshipfully. This, of course, was the easy but not the most honorable way. Afterwards Mercia became a stronghold of Danes, and the people were ruled by the puppet king, Ceolwulf, who was obedient to the Danes in all things. The date of this abdication, according to Asser, is 874, but we must suppose it to have been later for the sake of this play.

The Abbey of Coldingham receives no mention in either Asser or the Chronicle, and I am able to find it only in Roger of Wendover. We are told how the nuns there cut off their noses in order to escape dishonor at the hands of the Danes. "The tyrants rushed in haste away, nor would make one moment's tarrying." However, they did burn the Abbey, nuns and all. We are told in this same account that many noble abbeys were destroyed, that holy matrons and virgins were shamefully handled. I believe this was the suggestion for the monastery in the ballet, even though the atrocity which Roger of Wendover mentions is omitted.

The lady called Judith is spoken of throughout the sketch as the sister of Alfred. This is true, but there is much more to the story, and it is the remainder which gives Judith her appeal. On his way back from Rome, in 855, King Ethelwulf, Alfred's father, took Judith, the daughter of Charles of the Franks, as his bride. On their return to Wessex, the King demanded that she sit beside him on the throne and that she be called queen and not merely consort. This the people would not sanction, and it served the cause of Ethelbald who, with certain lords, of the kingdom, was planning a revolt against the king his father. As
has been noted elsewhere, the matter was settled upon the basis of a joint reign. But Judith remained a point of contention. When Ethelwulf died two years later, Ethelbald not only took the kingdom but also his father's widow. Asser records this of the event, showing that the people were outraged by the action:

Ethelbald... against the ban of God and Christian worthiness -- nay, and against all Heathen wont also -- went up unto his father's couch, and took to him in wedlock Judith, daughter of Charles, King of the Franks.

And thus she was Alfred's sister, or, to be more exact, sister-in-law. If she did remain in the Wessex court after Ethelbald's death in 860, Alfred would have afforded her just the sort of protection that the play describes.

Another person of historical importance is Canute, the strong Danish king who took the English throne in 1017. His "explanatory inscription, respectfully offered as a brief Epitome of Information" was brought before the audience on a banner: "The king reproving his Flatterers, by ordering the sea to retire before him." This is the episode to which this refers:

Some of his flatterers breaking out one day in admiration of his grandeur, exclaimed that every thing was possible for him; upon which the monarch, it is said, ordered his chair to be set on the sea-shore, while the tide was rising; and as the waters approached, he commanded them to retire, and to obey the voice of him who was lord of the ocean. He feigned to sit some time in expectation of their submission; but when the sea still advanced towards him, and began to wash him with its billows, he turned to his courtiers, and remarked to them, they every creature in the universe was feeble and impotent, and that power resided with one being alone, in whose hands were all the elements of nature.

I feel justified in including Canute in my study, to the exclusion of the English monarchs of the pageant, because his reign is included in
the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the extended history of the Alfredian period.

At the beginning of Scene XI, Alfred is distressed by the severe famine in his land; the army lacks provisions and the people are destitute. In this state of mind he shares his last morsel of bread with a poor pilgrim. A seeming miracle then restores the land to prosperity. This is one of the least known tales connected with Alfred's sojourn at Athelney.

There had the King no sustenance save what he caught by fowling, hunting, and fishing.... When his men were away fishing, and he was solacing his distress by meditating Scriptures, suddenly there stood beside him a pilgrim, begging alms in the name of God.... And quickly doth the King in his pity call his servant, who had naught but a little vine and one loaf, and.... bids him give the half unto the beggar. The begger thanks him, and in a moment, leaving no foot-print in the mire, vanisheth away.¹⁴

The significance of this was revealed later to Alfred in a dream. The pilgrim proved to be Cuthbert, the priest of Lindisfarne, who promised to take Alfred under his care; the series of successes of 878 followed.

Alfred's fame as the founder of the British navy is alluded to in the ballet, but only briefly; he ordered the building of a powerful fleet for the protection of his country against future invasions. Even though English ships took part in several engagements prior to 897, it was in that year that Alfred ordered the long ships to be built as a defense against the "aescas," or ashes of the Danes, and this event is usually regarded as the origin of the British navy.

They were fully twice as long as the others, some had sixty oars, some more. They were swifter, steadier, and also higher than the others. They were fashioned neither in the Frisian nor in the Danish manner, but as it seemed to him that they might be most useful.¹⁵

It is because of this experiment in shipbuilding that his popular reputation as the founder of the British navy rests. Edward the Elder car-
ried on his father's naval policy, for in 911 he gathered together a fleet of a hundred ships. The event of 897 proves more important in retrospect. In correlation with this founding of the navy, Lonsdale has taken the liberty of using two stanzas from two different versions of "Rule Britannia." They were sung at the close of the ballet by a grand chorus. The stanza taken from the 1751 Alfred: a Masque of David Mallet comes first and is copied exactly, with one exception -- "her" is "him" in the last line of the stanza proper.

How blest the prince reserv'd by fate,
   In adverse days to mount thy throne;
Renew thy once triumphant state,
   And on thy grandeur build her own.

   Rule Britannia,—rule the waves,
   Britons never will be slaves. 16

The second is from "Rule Britannia" of the 1740 Alfred by Thomson and Mallet. The only change is in the first line where "Rash Invaders" replaces "haughty tyrants."

Thee Rash Invaders ne'er shall tame;
 All their attempts to bend thee down,
Shall but arouse the gen'rous flame,
 Shall work their woe and thy renown.

   Rule Britannia,—rule the waves,
   Britons never will be slaves. 17

The poem makes a very effective ending for the ballet. The audience doubtless recognized it as "Rule Britannia," and Lonsdale felt no need for giving a credit for its use in his work.
CONCLUSION

The reputation of King Alfred in the eighteenth century literature rests on these eleven compositions. Each served a distinct purpose in England's struggle toward political and religious freedom and in meeting its serious foreign problems. The first half of the century witnessed the growth and influence of the party system, and each political group had its personal guard of writers. Their contribution lay in expressing in an acceptable medium their party principles and in bringing into prominence the facts about which the public should be informed. Their place is somewhat like our present day journalists, and their verse is usually known as "Whig panegyric verse." It is not a product of the Whig party exclusively, although its contributions do exceed others; more precisely, it is self-praise of the controlling class. Blackmore's Alfred, An Epick Poem is primarily a Whig contribution, showing many of the wretched political conditions that Englishmen witnessed in Europe.

The 1740 Alfred; a Masque points to Thomson and Mallet as members of the opposition to the conservatism of Walpole. Home's Alfred and Bicknell's were written to stimulate patriotism during the American Revolution.

The last decade called forth Penn's The Battle of Eddington, O'Keeffe's The Magic Banner, and the historical ballet. Each had a definite plan and purpose in recalling to the English public the deeds of Alfred.

Most of the works of this study fall short in comparison with other English literature. Most are occasional pieces, which seldom retain their power after their usefulness is past. However, we must
not lose sight of their purpose, for it represents their principal value. When England sought political and religious liberties, when her trade was encroached upon by Spain and France, the writers voiced the need and placed it before the public. When the proposition of liberty took form in the American and French Revolutions, the writers justified conservatism. And always the virtuous and able Alfred was brought to the fore.

I cannot say that the eighteenth century represented Alfred as he deserves; that remained the work of the nineteenth century. Yet the value gained by way of patriotic stimulus for the cause of liberty in part justifies the inadequate treatment. It is interesting to conjecture, however, what the Alfred story might have become in the hands of Milton.
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4 Ibid., p. 461.
6 Lees, op. cit., p. 458.
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8 Charles Plummer, Life and Times of Alfred the Great.

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7 Lees, op. cit., p. 63.
8 Charles Plummer, Life and Times of Alfred the Great, p. 73.
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13 Lees, loc. cit.
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16 _Ibid._, p. 105.
17 Conybeare, _op. cit._, p. 16-7.
18 Lees, _op. cit._, p. 95.
19 _Ibid._, p. 105.
20 Lees, _loc. cit._
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25 Blackmore, _op. cit._, XII.

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17 Rapin, op. cit., p. 331.
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21 Asser, Section 8, as translated by Conybeare, op. cit., pp. 160-1.
22 Asser, Section 32, as translated by Conybeare, op. cit., p. 101.
23 One son died in infancy; see Asser, Section 80, as translated by Conybeare, op. cit., p. 117.
24 Thomson and Mallet, op. cit., II, iii.
25 Rapin, op. cit., p. 331.
26 Asser, Section 56, as translated by Conybeare, op. cit., p. 110.
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29 Ibid., pp. 435-6, note 2.
30 Charles Plummer, Life and Times of Alfred the Great, p. 58.
31 Thomson and Mallet, op. cit., I, ii.
33 John O'Keeffe, The Magic Banner, Section X.
34 Thomson and Mallet, op. cit., II, iv.

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4 Section II.


7 Louis Wardlaw Miles, *King Alfred in Literature*, p. 58.


9 Asser, Section 64, as translated by Edward Conybeare, *Alfred in the Chroniclers*, p. 112.


15 Henry of Huntingdon, Section 11, as translated by Conybeare, *op. cit.*, pp. 198-9.


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