

**ETHELSTAN; OR, THE BATTLE
OF BRUNANBURGH, A
DRAMATIC CHRONICLE, PP.
1-95**

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Ethelstan; Or, The Battle of Brunanburgh, a Dramatic Chronicle, pp. 1-95 by George Darley

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GEORGE DARLEY

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ETHELSTAN;

OR,

THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH.

A DRAMATIC CHRONICLE.

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY GEORGE DARLEY,

AUTHOR OF "THOMAS A BECKET."

LONDON:
EDWARD NOXON, DOVER STREET.

MDCCLXII.

844.

them was Civil Freedom first established; and not for themselves alone, but all nations, as each has or shall become fit to receive it. I have sought to portray this people in one of its best Representatives—steady-hearted, high-souled, strong of will and of mind, yet soft through his affections. Strange prejudice! that the proverbial valour of a nation which has won the title of “War-smiths,” should have been rated beneath the Norman from a single ill-judged trial; ignorant prejudice, moreover, that the same nation is pronounced blockish and un-imaginative, despite its wonderful Poems still before us, and its *hundred and thirty-six* different species of rhyme (alliterative or other);—nay, pronounced incapable of *Music*, though as much given to it and gifted in it as even their German brethren are now!

The Saxon Ode on Brunanburh Battle has always “moved my heart more than a trumpet!” That was the hardest-fought field, say our Chronicles, before Hastings, and all but as momentous in its political consequences. I have gladly seized the subordinate fact of King Ethelstan’s seven years’ penitence for his Brother’s death, towards gaining domestic interest, far dearer than political to most hearts. Anlaf’s picturesque adventure at the Saxon camp, and his more picturesque retinue,—the Sea-kings, or prince-pirates of Scandinavia,—gave occasion to sketch that people also, from whom we, as part Danish,* have derived, perhaps, much of our enterprising character, as well as the daring and wild sublimity which distinguishes our poetic genius. For my own admiration of this, let me plead that of Milton, several amongst whose noblest images are taken from the EDDA †.

* Such a sketch belongs of right to my subject: for *Dane-lagh*, that district where the Danes lodged themselves, or lay as possessors, took up a full third of England—almost all north of the Humber, together with East-Anglia, and various midland territories.

† E. g. Odin’s Hall is said to be illuminated by drawn swords:—

“Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
Of mighty cherubim; the sudden blaze
Far round illumined hell.”

PERSONS.

ETHELSTAN, *King of Wessex.*

EDMUND ETHELING, *Brother of ETHELSTAN.*

TURKETUL, *Chancellor.*

ALGER, }
GODERIC, } *Thanes.*

PRIOR of *St. John's Monastery at Beverley.*

ANLAF, *a Danish King.*

CONSTANTINE, *King of Scotland.*

EDWAL, *Prince of North Wales.*

FERGUS, *Son of Constantine, a Hostage at ETHELSTAN'S Court.*

HACO, *Prince of Norway, Pupil and Guest of ETHELSTAN.*

FRODA, }
GORM, } *Sea-Kings.*

EGIL SKILLAGRYM, *a Norwegian Skald.*

BRUERN, *a Sword-bearer.*

Body-guard of House-Carls, Chiefs, Soldiers, Attendants, &c.

EDGITHA, *ETHELSTAN'S Sister, Ex-Queen of Northumbria, and Abbess of Beverley Convent.*

ELLISIP, *a Probationer at Beverley Convent.*

RUNILDA, *a Glee-Maiden.*

ETHELSTAN;

OR,

THE BATTLE OF BRUNANBURH.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Cloisters of St. John's Church, Beverley. A Tomb and recumbent Statue seen within. Moonlight.

ELLISIF *pacing the Cloisters disturbedly.* BRUERN *bearing after her a sword.*

Ellisif. FOLLOW me still, thou spectre of this gloom!
That shrink'st from light's soft shaft as from a spear;
Follow me still with sliding echoless step
Round these dim alleys!—Demon shadow thou,
Cast by hell's flame gigantic on the wall,
O'er my dark thoughts to fling thy murkier nature
And shape me out dread doings with thy sword:
I understand thy flourishes,—too well!
The devil within us never wants a seconder
Outside, to tarre him on: follow me still!—

[Paces mutely for a time.

Yet whither and for what thus stalk we here
Over the low-roof'd chambers of the dead,
Stepping from grave to grave? Is it to gibber
And play the sad ghost?—fright fools?—and be frightened
Ourselves at cockcrow?—Why, alas! ne'er rest we
Where all are slumbering in heart-still repose?

Which strength unseen shall then drag down to earth,
And bury him in the ruins!

Bruern. Cursed fratricide
Done on the rightful heritor of Wessex,
By one but half-blood kinsman to a king!
What gave he the liege lord of all the land,
Edwin, his true-born elder?—What, forsooth?
A boat!—grown green with tufted rottenness,
(So rank that very toadstools sprouted from it!)
And then—his choice of the sea-rocks! For a crew
My single self!—Thus he, and all thy fortunes
Waiting thee as his Queen, were wreck'd and lost;
The while this wolf's whelp by a shepherd's daughter—
At best, her base-begotten by King Edward—
Jumping on our legitimate Edwin's throne,
Sits now, from Dover Cliff to Dunbar Crags,
Despot o'er Dane-lagh and all Angle-land!

Ellisif. A potent conqueror he has been; I grant it;
The winged serpent has flown far and wide
Over our Isle,—the Dragon Flag of Wessex.

Bruern. It was his inward serpent stung him on;
He strove to stun it in the din of arms,—
Drown it amid the bloody waves of fight,—
Outride it on the whirlwind of his rage
'Gainst Pict, Scot, Cumbrian, Welsh-kin,—oftener still,
With semblance sly of patriotism, to gull
His soft-brain'd Saxons,—'gainst our Danish Host,
Us whom they call, in hate superlative,
The 'Loathed Ones!'—But to his heart it sticks
And will not be flung off, good serpent-leech!
That draws him pale, and for the blood pours in
As much slow poison—

Ellisif. Psha!—Where sits he now?
I have been long a stranger to this land.