

**FAMOUS CHARACTERS OF
HISTORY. KING ALFRED
OF ENGLAND. VOLUME II**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649581429

Famous Characters of History. King Alfred of England. Volume II by Jacob Abbott

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JACOB ABBOTT

**FAMOUS CHARACTERS OF
HISTORY. KING ALFRED
OF ENGLAND. VOLUME II**



ALFRED THE GREAT.

Famous Characters of History

**KING ALFRED
OF ENGLAND**

BY
JACOB ABBOTT



VOLUME II.



ILLUSTRATED

1906

THE ST. HUBERT GUILD

NEW YORK

WOMANHOOD: AKNOW, OGG

ST. HUBERT
PUBLIC
LIBRARY

PREFACE

KING ALFRED OF ENGLAND is one of the noblest of the sovereigns upon whom History has conferred the title of "The Great." At the very beginning of the world-encircling history of the Anglo-Saxon race looms his majestic figure. We see him through the mist of ten centuries hurling back the invaders of his country, giving peace to his realm, ruling it with consummate wisdom, laboring arduously at the translation and composition of books that his subjects might receive the precious light of learning, codifying their laws that justice might prevail in the land,—in short, building up out of his broken little dominions a kingdom destined to become the corner stone of the mighty British Empire.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE BRITONS	15
II. THE ANGLO-SAXONS	32
III. THE DANES	51
IV. ALFRED'S EARLY YEARS	66
V. STATE OF ENGLAND	82
VI. ALFRED'S ACCESSION TO THE THRONE	99
VII. REVERSES	114
VIII. THE SECLUSION	131
IX. REASSEMBLING OF THE ARMY	145
X. THE VICTORY OVER THE DANES	161
XI. CHARACTER OF ALFRED'S REIGN	177
XII. THE CLOSE OF LIFE	193
XIII. THE SEQUEL	206

ALFRED THE GREAT

CHAPTER I.

THE BRITONS.

Alfred the founder of the British monarchy.—Hereditary succession.—The fabulous age of history.—Tradition.—The Trojan war.—Adventures of Æneas.—Wanderings of Brutus.—Singular treaty of peace.—Brutus lands on a deserted island.—Response of the oracle.—Brutus passes the Pillars of Hercules.—He lands in Britain.—Giants and wild beasts.—Situation and extent of Great Britain.—Fertility and beauty of the island.—Successors of Brutus.—Tales and legends.—The story of King Lear.—Honest truth and empty professions.—Ingratitude of Lear's daughters.—Julius Cæsar.—His conquest of Great Britain.—Queen Boadicea.—Her person and character.—Death of Boadicea.—Final subjugation of the Britons.—The Picts and Scots.—Their depredations.—Visit of the Emperor Severus.—His dissolute sons.—Base conduct of Bassianus.—His interview with his father.—Peace with the Picts and Scots.—The Wall of Severus.—Stattons.—Castles.—Turrets.—Ditch.—Military road.—Decline of the Roman empire.—Distress of the Britons.

ALFRID THE GREAT figures in history as the founder, in some sense, of the British monarchy. Of that long succession of sovereigns who have held the scepter of that monarchy, and whose government has exerted so vast an influence on the condition and welfare of mankind, he was not, indeed, actually the first. There were several lines of insignificant

nificant princes before him, who governed such portions of the kingdom as they individually possessed, more like semi-savage chieftains than English kings. Alfred followed these by the principle of hereditary right, and spent his life in laying broad and deep the foundations on which the enormous superstructure of the British empire has since been reared. If the tales respecting his character and deeds which have come down to us are at all worthy of belief, he was an honest, conscientious, disinterested, and far-seeing statesman. If the system of hereditary succession would always furnish such sovereigns for mankind, the principle of loyalty would have held its place much longer in the world than it is now likely to do, and great nations, now republican, would have been saved a vast deal of trouble and toil expended in the election of their rulers.

Although the period of King Alfred's reign seems a very remote one as we look back toward it from the present day, it was still eight hundred years after the Christian era that he ascended his throne. Tolerable authentic history of the British realm mounts up through these eight hundred years to the time of Julius Cæsar. Beyond this the ground is covered by a series of romantic and fabulous tales, pretending to be history, which extend back eight hundred years further to the days of Solomon; so that a much longer portion of the story of that extraordinary island

comes before than since the days of Alfred. In respect, however, to all that pertains to the interest and importance of the narrative, the exploits and the arrangements of Alfred are the beginning.

The histories, in fact, of all nations, ancient and modern, run back always into misty regions of romance and fable. Before arts and letters arrived at such a state of progress as that public events could be recorded in writing, tradition was the only means of handing down the memory of events from generation to generation; and tradition, among semi-savages, changes every thing it touches into romantic and marvelous fiction.

The stories connected with the earliest discovery and settlement of Great Britain afford very good illustrations of the nature of these fabulous tales. The following may serve as a specimen:

At the close of the Trojan war,* Æneas retired with a company of Trojans, who escaped from the city with him, and, after a great variety of adventures, which Virgil has related, he landed and settled in Italy. Here, in process of time, he had a grandson named Silvius, who had a son named Brutus, Brutus being thus Æneas's great-grandson.

One day, while Brutus was hunting in the forests,

*For some account of the circumstances connected with this war see our history of Alexander, chapter vi.