

**EDWY AND  
ELGIVA; A TALE OF  
TENTH CENTURY**

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Edwy and Elgiva; A Tale of Tenth Century by W. Burnett Coates

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**W. BURNETT COATES**

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TENTH CENTURY**



EDWY AND ELGIVA.

EDWY AND ELGIVA,

Tale of the Tenth Century;

BY W. BURNETT COATES, ESQ.

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‘That tale of horror chills my blood:  
That tale rolls back the crimson flood—  
That tale unfolds the Monk’s dark deeds:  
That tale!—it tells the Victim bleeds.’

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London:

HOULSTON AND STONEMAN;  
MANCHESTER: J. AINSWORTH, PICCADILLY.

1852.



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## CHAP. I.

INTRODUCTION—EDRED—DUNSTAN—ODO.

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**A**LLUDING to many persons of our own times, who regret the dark ages with which the high-born spirit of chivalry has departed,—purely for the passing away of that spirit; a spirit sometimes displayed in noble brilliancy; but as frequently sullied by barbarous cruelties,—it has been pertinently remarked by a contemporaneous writer, that “civilization is, after all, the great blessing of modern times.” But when we reflect upon the tardy progress with which it has unfolded its train of wonders; and the difficulties of its march, we must feel constrained to prize it the more for the blessings it has brought, as well as for the terrors it has swept away.

When Britain's Alfred commenced the successful operations which cleared away the Scandinavian barbarities from his native soil, and laid the foundation of future greatness, he found the struggle arduous

and slow from the commencement of his career, until from Selwood's dark forests he issued with his faithful subjects to the final overthrow of the Danes, who had pillaged and massacred old and young, almost unrestrained.

It was in the last of his struggles with this marauding people that the greatness of the hero contrasted its brilliancy with the violence of the savage. When the furious Northmen were victors, indiscriminate slaughter marked the fearful paths they trode, whilst their fierce soldiery amused themselves by tossing children upon their spear-heads. When Alfred conquered he resorted to kindness, stipulating that those amongst the vanquished who embraced christianity might dwell in the land, while those who declined it should be free to embark for Flanders.

The Danish Prince, Guthrum, with thirty of his nobles, embraced the former alternative, and the King answered in person for the Prince at the font.

The glories of Alfred are too well known, and too widely appreciated, to require a further notice here ; yet for the antecedents of the tale it was necessary to occupy attention thus far, because, although history



is somewhat obscure as to one of Alfred's daughters, the Lady Elfleda, she must come to the foreground, as his descendant, and, according to the probabilities of tradition, as the wife of Guthrum, whose issue is one of the principal characters in the historical incidents upon which this narrative is founded.

The Danes entirely subdued, Alfred was now in the meridian of his glory, and like an enlightened monarch, determined upon a wise course. To conciliate his former enemies who made submission and became christian subjects, upon the day he answered for Guthrum at the baptismal font, he made a royal feast to him and his nobles, where the Danish Prince had his first interview with the Lady Elfleda, of whom he became enamoured, and shortly afterwards, as it seems, led her to the hymeneal altar.

To Alfred in the year 901, succeeded his son Edward, surnamed the elder, and to him Athelstane, his son; to him his brother Edmund; and to Edmund his brother Edred,—by appointment—although Edmund had direct heirs living.

This Edmund was grandson to Alfred, and consequently nephew to the lady Elfleda.

Edred was a weak Prince, and submitted implicitly

to the directions of Dunstan, the Monk,—Abbot of Glastonbury—in Church and State. In fact, Dunstan ruled while the King reigned; the King occupied the throne, and Dunstan the treasury; the King wore the crown, but Dunstan swayed the sceptre; the King was but a cypher while Dunstan was every thing.

For ten years Dunstan pulled the wires of the State with the covert intention of ultimately attaching Britain, as a province, to the Papal dominions. He was a bold aspiring man; a zealous ecclesiastic, and a wily politician. Full of daring and energy, he planned and executed as his views led him to determine; and having been entrusted with the state Treasury, he did not scruple to apply its resources to the advancement of his secret projects.

Dunstan had a chief friend, although for a time a bar to his ambition; this man was Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury, an office regarded as next in dignity to the King. Odo also being a zealot, was deeply imbued with the spirit of party, then animating the contending interests; the principal of which was that evoked by Dunstan in pursuit of his ulterior views, regarding the annexation of the kingdom as a province to the Popedom.

Even in those days the Church had assumed high authority over the temporal affairs of mankind, which her ministers exercised rigidly, zealously watching for every opportunity of enlarging and perpetuating the dominions, since first the Saxon Heptarchy received Augustine as a missionary from Rome, until says the Historian, "England became as famous for its superstitions, as it was previously for its averseness to Christianity."

In the tenth year of Edred's reign, upon a day in the year 955, a man of bold mien and firm tread, enwrapt in a monkish garb, was seen to enter the Archiepiscopal Palace of Canterbury, by a private door, opening into a saloon, through which lay the direct passage to the Archbishop's library. At that time the shelves of library's did not groan beneath the weight of paper and print, as do the learning-stored repositories of the nineteenth century. The improved invention of type and press, in herculean efforts, did not then scatter literature over the surface of the earth as in our favoured day. No: a few manuscript tomes, upon parchmēt, or papyrus, in a foreign tongue; and perhaps a single copy of the Great Alfred's Saxon composition, were all that