THE CHRONICLE OF ETHELFLED

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The Chronicle of Ethelfled by Anne Manning

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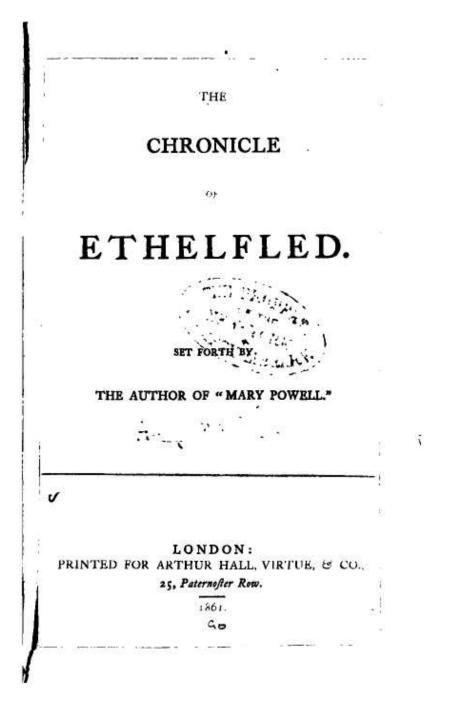
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ANNE MANNING

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Trieste





PREFACE.



E would not advife the frugal reader to confume too much midnight oil in afcertaining the authenticity of this pfeudo-chronicle, left

he thereby impair his entertainment. We have collated it with that of Affer, from whofe manufcript we derive nearly all the information we poffers, and are accuitomed to believe, of our glorious king. But doubts have been raifed concerning the genuineners even of Affer's work; and had ALFRED written his life himfelf, there be those who would have found it done amifs. Let us earneftly enjoin the reader, therefore, to believe as much or as little of this work as he chooses: taking heed not to call anything in it an anachronism

PREFACE.

till he has fearched the Saxon hiftorians and likewife Sharon Turner; left peradventure he himfelf be caught tripping.

There feemed no reafon why our pfeudo-translation fhould not be in the modern vernacular, fave in the occasional use of an archaistic expression which had "no incongruity nor unnatural strangeness," to suggest the good abbess's own use of an evident Saxonism badly Latinized.

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BOOK I.

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ORASMUCH as fundry perfons have taken in hand, whether with or without reafon, to fet forth in order the notable things which in divers times and places have happened, it feems good alfo to me, Ethelfleda, Abbefs of this poor houfe of St. Audrey, to record certain events, for caufes that will in fit feafon appear.

I Ethelfied, fecond daughter of Athelred, furnamed Mucil, Earl of the Gaini,¹ was born in the year of our Lord's incarnation 858. My fifter Ethelfwitha was by five years my elder. Now it came to pafs, about a week after her firft coming into this naughty world, that my mother had a dream concerning her, fomewhat after the fashion of the patriarch Joseph, to the effect that

¹ Gainfborough,

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the child newly born should eventually be fet up on high, and that her father, mother, and kindred should do homage to her, which in due time came to pass. And this gives me occasion to think that dreams are not always mere phantafies of the brain, but that on occasions fuited for the discernible action of a superior intelligence, visions of forthcoming events are fometimes disclosed to the inward and spiritual fight.

By reafon of the frequent incurfions of the pagans, who laid hands alike on live ftock, arms, chefts of plate, and noble damfels, my father was fain to commit my fifter and me to the care of an aunt, who was Superior of one of the very few religious houfes left in Mercia for the refuge of holy and high-born virgins. This was about the time of the good King Ethelbert's death. Ethelred his brother then reigned over Weft Saxony in his ftead. That was in the days of our King Buhred. It mattered very little to my fifter and me who reigned, as long as mother Gundred let us fee her hive the bees and take the honey. Ethelfwitha was fairer and more facetious than I, therefore the greater favourite; and being by fo many years m

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elder, had many pleafures and indulgences which I had not; but, on the other hand, I had many pleafures too, all to myfelf. For inftance,fabling certain flowers to talk to one another and to me, and to tell of their how and about. Alfo fancying certain trees and patches of chalk on the hill-fide into images of dragons and ghofts until I was fore ydrad, and yet feeling a ftrange mixture of pleafure and trepidation in going up to the dragon's mouth with a handful of grafs, and faying, "Dragon, will you bite me?" and then running away. There were certain peep-holes through the oak-palings, and dark corners among the tree-roots, that I fhould have been forry if any had wift of except myfelf. Once, lying under a hollow oak, I feemed to feel the fairies pulling at my hair, that they might get withinfide of the trunk. One of my peep-holes looked into our burial-ground. I knew defunct perfons lay there, their faces all turned upward; and my aunt the Abbefs told me their fouls went to heaven. I thought if I kept a fharp look-out, I fhould fee fome of them going there, on a ftarry night, if any of the nuns would but die.

Thère was a Sifter who, I think, was as

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learned as Leobgitha, the correspondent of Boniface. She was always making enigmata, and poring over manuscripts. Of her I acquired my facility of writing, which the King says is remarkable; but, in regard of its neatness, I am always at the mercy of my pen;—however, I now always have a good one.

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About the year 869, my fifter and I were fent home. Thenceforth, my father, mother, and Ethelfwitha were much at court; but, by reafon of my tender years, I went not. After one of these their visits, it was currently reported among us that Alfred, Prince of the Weft Saxons, whofe fifter had married our king, would fhortly come to fee our chafe. The beft tablecloth was washed, and many dishes were cooked; howbeit, he came not. The fewer, the better cheer; and I was lefs difappointed than was Ethelfwitha. This time, fhe told me fo many fine things about the court, that when they all returned to it, which they fhortly did, I felt for the first time lonely. They had made a pretty clear larder before they went, and I was left nominal miftrefs of the household, both fervile and freed, but with very little to do, except to fee a ftag now and then put his head