

## KING ALFRED AND THE CAKES.

Many years ago there lived in Eng-land a wise and good king whose name was Al-fred. No other man ever did so much for his country as he; and people now, all over the world, speak of him as Alfred the Great.

In those days a king did not have a very easy life. There was war almost all the time, and no one else could lead his army into battle so well as he. And so, between ruling and fighting, he had a busy time of it indeed.

A fierce, rude people, called the Danes, had come from over the sea, and were fighting the Eng-lish. There were so many of them, and they were so bold and strong, that for a long time they gained every battle. If they kept on, they would soon be the masters of the whole country.

At last, after a great battle, the English army was broken up and scat-tered. Every man had to save himself in the best way he could. King Alfred fled alone, in great haste, through the woods and swamps.

Late in the day the king came to the hut of a wood-cut-ter. He was very tired and hungry, and he begged the wood-cut-ter's wife to give him something to eat and a place to sleep in her hut.

The wom-an was baking some cakes upon the hearth, and she looked with pity upon the poor, ragged fellow who seemed so hungry. She had no thought that he was the king.

"Yes," she said, "I will give you some supper if you will watch these cakes. I want to go out and milk the cow; and you must see that they do not burn while I am gone."

King Alfred was very willing to watch the cakes, but he had far greater things to think about. How was he going to get his army to-geth-er again? And how was he going to drive the fierce Danes out of the land? He forgot his hunger; he forgot the cakes; he forgot that he was in the woodcutter's hut. His mind was busy making plans for to-mor-row.

In a little while the wom-an came back. The cakes were smoking on the hearth. They were burned to a crisp. Ah, how angry she was!

"You lazy fellow!" she cried. "See what you have done! You want some-thing to eat, but you do not want to work!"

I have been told that she even struck the king with a stick; but I can hardly be-lieve that she was so ill-na-tured.

The king must have laughed to himself at the thought of being scolded in this way; and he was so hungry that he did not mind the woman's angry words half so much as the loss of the cakes.

I do not know whether he had any-thing to eat that night, or whether he had to go to bed without his supper. But it was not many days until he had gath-ered his men to-geth-er again, and had beaten the Danes in a great battle.

## KING ALFRED AND THE BEGGAR.

At one time the Danes drove King Alfred from his kingdom, and he had to lie hidden for a long time on a little is-land in a river.

One day, all who were on the is-land, except the king and queen and one servant, went out to fish. It was a very lonely place, and no one could get to it except by a boat. About noon a ragged beggar came to the king's door, and asked for food.

The king called the servant, and asked, "How much food have we in the house?"

"My lord," said the servant, "we have only one loaf and a little wine."

Then the king gave thanks to God, and said, "Give half of the loaf and half of the wine to this poor man."

The servant did as he was bidden. The beggar thanked the king for his kindness, and went on his way.

In the after-noon the men who had gone out to fish came back. They had three boats full of fish, and they said, "We have caught more fish to-day than in all the other days that we have been on this island."

The king was glad, and he and his people were more hopeful than they had ever been before.

When night came, the king lay awake for a long time, and thought about the things that had happened that day. At last he fancied that he saw a great light like the sun; and in the midst of the light there stood an old man with black hair, holding an open book in his hand.

It may all have been a dream, and yet to the king it seemed very real indeed. He looked and wondered, but was not afraid.

"Who are you?" he asked of the old man.

"Alfred, my son, be brave," said the man; "for I am the one to whom you gave this day the half of all the food that you had. Be strong and joyful of heart, and listen to what I say. Rise up early in the morning and blow your horn three times, so loudly that the Danes may hear it. By nine o'clock, five hundred men will be around you ready to be led into battle. Go forth bravely, and within seven days your en-e-mies shall be beaten, and you shall go back to your kingdom to reign in peace."

Then the light went out, and the man was seen no more.

In the morning the king arose early, and crossed over to the mainland. Then he blew his horn three times very loudly; and when his friends heard it they were glad, but the Danes were filled with fear.

At nine o'clock, five hundred of his bravest soldiers stood around him ready for battle. He spoke, and told them what he had seen and heard in his dream; and when he had finished, they all cheered loudly, and said that they would follow him and fight for him so long as they had strength.

So they went out bravely to battle; and they beat the Danes, and drove them back into their own place. And King Alfred ruled wisely and well over all his people for the rest of his days.

## KING CANUTE ON THE SEASHORE.

A hundred years or more after the time of Alfred the Great there was a king of England named Canute. King Canute was a Dane; but the Danes were not so fierce and cruel then as they had been when they were at war with King Alfred.

The great men and officers who were around King Canute were always praising him.

"You are the greatest man that ever lived," one would say.

Then another would say, "O king! there can never be another man so mighty as you."

And another would say, "Great Canute, there is nothing in the world that dares to disobey you."

The king was a man of sense, and he grew very tired of hearing such foolish speeches.

One day he was by the seashore, and his officers were with him. They were praising him, as they were in the habit of doing. He thought that now he would teach them a lesson, and so he bade them set his chair on the beach close by the edge of the water.

"Am I the greatest man in the world?" he asked.

"O king!" they cried, "there is no one so mighty as you."

"Do all things obey me?" he asked.

"There is nothing that dares to disobey you, O king!" they said. "The world bows before you, and gives you honor."

"Will the sea obey me?" he asked; and he looked down at the little waves which were lapping the sand at his feet.

The foolish officers were puzzled, but they did not dare to say "No."

"Command it, O king! and it will obey," said one.

"Sea," cried Canute, "I command you to come no farther! Waves, stop your rolling, and do not dare to touch my feet!"

But the tide came in, just as it always did. The water rose higher and higher. It came up around the king's chair, and wet not only his feet, but also his robe. His officers stood about him, alarmed, and wondering whether he was not mad.

Then Canute took off his crown, and threw it down upon the sand.

"I shall never wear it again," he said. "And do you, my men, learn a lesson from what you have seen. There is only one King who is all-powerful; and it is he who rules the sea, and holds the ocean in the hollow of his hand. It is he whom you ought to praise and serve above all others."

## THE SONS OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR.

There was once a great king of England who was called Wil-liam the Con-quer-or, and he had three sons.

One day King Wil-liam seemed to be thinking of something that made him feel very sad; and the wise men who were about him asked him what was the matter.

"I am thinking," he said, "of what my sons may do after I am dead. For, unless they are wise and strong, they cannot keep the kingdom which I have won for them. Indeed, I am at a loss to know which one of the three ought to be the king when I am gone."

"O king!" said the wise men, "if we only knew what things your sons admire the most, we might then be able to tell what kind of men they will be. Perhaps, by asking each one of them a few ques-tions, we can find out which one of them will be best fitted to rule in your place."

"The plan is well worth trying, at least," said the king. "Have the boys come before you, and then ask them what you please."

The wise men talked with one another for a little while, and then agreed that the young princes should be brought in, one at a time, and that the same ques-tions should be put to each.

The first who came into the room was Robert. He was a tall, willful lad, and was nick-named Short Stocking.

"Fair sir," said one of the men, "answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?"

"A hawk," answered Robert. "I would rather be a hawk, for no other bird reminds one so much of a bold and gallant knight."

The next who came was young William, his father's name-sake and pet. His face was jolly and round, and because he had red hair he was nicknamed Rufus, or the Red.

"Fair sir," said the wise man, "answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?"

"An eagle," answered William. "I would rather be an eagle, because it is strong and brave. It is feared by all other birds, and is there-fore the king of them all."

Lastly came the youngest brother, Henry, with quiet steps and a sober, thought-ful look. He had been taught to read and write, and for that reason he was nick-named Beau-clerc, or the Hand-some Schol-ar.

"Fair sir," said the wise man, "answer me this question: If, instead of being a boy, it had pleased God that you should be a bird, what kind of a bird would you rather be?"

"A star-ling," said Henry. "I would rather be a star-ling, because it is good-mannered and kind and a joy to every one who sees it, and it never tries to rob or abuse its neigh-bor."

Then the wise men talked with one another for a little while, and when they had agreed among themselves, they spoke to the king.

"We find," said they, "that your eldest son, Robert, will be bold and gallant. He will do some great deeds, and make a name for himself; but in the end he will be over-come by his foes, and will die in prison.

"The second son, William, will be as brave and strong as the eagle; but he will be feared and hated for his cruel deeds. He will lead a wicked life, and will die a shameful death.

"The youngest son, Henry, will be wise and prudent and peaceful. He will go to war only when he is forced to do so by his enemies. He will be loved at home, and re-spect-ed abroad; and he will die in peace after having gained great pos-ses-sions."

Years passed by, and the three boys had grown up to be men. King William lay upon his death-bed, and again he thought of what would become of his sons when he was gone. Then he re-mem-bered what the wise men had told him; and so he de-clared that Robert should have the lands which he held in France, that William should be the King of England, and that Henry should have no land at all, but only a chest of gold.

So it hap-pened in the end very much as the wise men had fore-told. Robert, the Short Stocking, was bold and reckless, like the hawk which he so much admired. He lost all the lands that his father had left him, and was at last shut up in prison, where he was kept until he died.

William Rufus was so over-bear-ing and cruel that he was feared and hated by all his people. He led a wicked life, and was killed by one of his own men while hunting in the forest.

And Henry, the Handsome Scholar, had not only the chest of gold for his own, but he became by and by the King of England and the ruler of all the lands that his father had had in France.

Source:

Baldwin, James. "King Alfred and the Cakes." *50 Famous Stories Retold*. New York: American Book Company, 1896. 5-8. Electronic.

Baldwin, James. "King Alfred and the Beggar." *50 Famous Stories Retold*. New York: American Book Company, 1896. 8-10. Electronic.

Baldwin, James. "King Canute of the Seashore." *50 Famous Stories Retold*. New York: American Book Company, 1896. 10-13. Electronic.

Baldwin, James. "The Sons of William the Conqueror." *50 Famous Stories Retold*. New York: American Book Company, 1896. 13-18. Electronic.