

Chapter 3

England Becomes One Kingdom

England becomes one kingdom under Egbert, A.D. 802–838

After the days of Offa, King of Mercia, there arose a great king in Wessex called Egbert. Egbert had seen much of the world, for before he became king he had lived for some years at the court of Charles the Great. He had learned much from Charles, and had watched how Charles by his wisdom gained new lands for himself and made other kings obey him. Egbert made up his mind to try to do the same thing in England. So he fought against the other kings, and one by one he conquered them, and they owned him as their lord. Even the kings of Wales and Scotland owned Egbert for their lord, and at last, after the English had been nearly four hundred years in the land, there was a king who was strong enough to make all the others obey him. So there was one king in the land, as there was one Church.

The Northmen come to England

A new danger, which came upon all the English people alike, helped to make them feel and act like one nation. They were terrified by the arrival on their coasts of fast-sailing ships filled with fierce bold men. These were the Northmen, who came from Norway and Denmark. Troubles in their own lands had made the Northmen take to the sea and seek a new home on the stormy waters, and these wild sea-kings, who were still heathens, did much harm wherever they went. They sailed up the English rivers, and where they landed made a rough fort of earth for their camp, and then went out to plunder. They drove the cattle and the horses to the fort, and took all the gold and silver they could find, and plundered and burned the churches and slew the priests.

Æthelwulf reigns in England, A.D. 836–856

The English had so much to do in fighting against the Northmen that they had no time left to fight against one another. When Egbert died the chief men of the land, who when met together were called the *Wise Men*, chose his son Æthelwulf to reign in his stead. Æthelwulf spent his life in fighting against the Danes, who seized the land and settled down in the north of England. Æthelwulf had four sons, and his elder sons helped him in his wars. The youngest of the four was called Alfred; he was so gentle and good a child that his father and mother loved him more than all his brothers. As he grew up he became lovely to look upon, graceful in all his actions, and

skilled in all his boyish exercises. His mother was a wise and holy woman. She sang to him tales of the heroes of old and the brave deeds which they had done, and he listened to her with joy. One day she showed him and his brother a beautiful book of poetry, adorned, as books were in those days when they were all written by the hand, with beautifully colored letters and ornaments, and she said that whichever of them could soonest say the verses which were in the volume should have it for his own. So Alfred, eager to have the book, took it to his teacher and read it with him, and soon came back and said it to his mother. After this he went on and learned all that he could; but in his days there were no good teachers in the land, and all his life he grieved that when he was young and had time to learn he had not had good teachers.

Alfred's three elder brothers each reigned for a short time and fought against the Danes, and all died without children. Then Alfred became king. He was only twenty-two years old, and we are told that he had been smitten on the very day of his marriage with a disease which never left him. We do not know what it was, but it troubled him all his life, and this makes us wonder all the more at all the great things he did.

Alfred becomes king, A.D. 871–901

Alfred when he became king had a hard task before him. The land was full of Danes, and their swift boats constantly brought new men to plunder and spoil the land of the English. For a while Alfred fought on, as he was very brave and felt that he was fighting for his country against the heathens. But when the fighting had lasted ten whole years the English people were so weary of it that they lost courage, and felt that they would rather serve the Danes than fight any more. Alfred did not lose courage. He retired with his wife and children and a few faithful followers to a little island in the middle of the marshes of Somersetshire, where he threw up a fort called Æthelney, the Prince's Island. There he stayed three months waiting for brighter days. Sometimes he and those who were with him wanted even food and drink, and had to go out and fight against the Danes to get them. Alfred used to comfort himself in those evil days by studying the Book of Psalms. Once when he was wandering in the country around he sought shelter in the hut of a cowherd. The wife of the cowherd was baking bread, and Alfred, seated before the fire, busied himself with mending his bow and arrows. The woman asked him to watch the bread while she went out, but Alfred, busy with other thoughts, never heeded that the cakes were burning, until the woman came back and flew at him in rage, crying, "Canst thee mind the cakes, man, and dost not see them burn? Thou wouldst be ready enough to

eat them.” She little knew that it was to her king she spoke.

Alfred makes peace with the Danes, A.D. 878

When the winter was over, and the English saw that their king did not lose courage, many came and joined themselves with him. Soon he had a great army again, and he went out and won a battle over the Danes, so that they agreed to make peace with him. The Danish king Gorm and some of his men became Christians and were baptized, and Alfred stood as his godfather. It was settled that Gorm was to keep all the part of England north of the great Roman road called Watling Street, and Alfred was to have the rest.

After this there was more quiet in England, but still sometimes new bands of Northmen came and plundered the coasts, and Gorm and his men did not always keep the peace; but by degrees the Danes became Christians and settled down to lead quiet lives.

How Alfred ruled the land

Alfred still often had to fight against the Danes, but on the whole he managed to keep them out of his land. He got many good soldiers together to fight against them, and he built ships to destroy these terrible men in their own homes, the wild seas. There was much to do before Alfred could bring order into the land, for the Danes had plundered and burned everywhere. He set to work to build up the churches that they had ruined, and he founded new monasteries. He built up London again, which had been destroyed; and many merchants, Danes as well as English, settled there from all parts of the country. Alfred was very fond of learning, and was grieved that there were no learned men left in his land, which in the days of Bede had been famous for learning. So he sent to all parts of Europe for scholars to come and teach his people, and he placed them at the head of his monasteries that they might teach the clergy. At his court he made a school for his own children and the children of his great lords, and used often to come himself to hear them taught. In this school the children learned to read and write Latin and English, and they learned the psalms and the old English songs.

Alfred was never idle; he even found time, though he had so much to see after, to write books for his people, and translated Latin books into English for their use. He made wise laws, and took care that the judges should be taught their duties, that they might be just and see that the laws were kept. Alfred did much for his people. He saved them from the fierce Danes, and afterwards he brought back order and peace, and taught his people, and

made the land rich and prosperous again. All this he did because he loved his people, and because he loved his God. He was always bright and cheerful; though he had so many troubles to go through, and such pain to bear from his sickness. Men loved their great king dearly, and there is no one in all of English history deserving of more honor than Alfred, whom his people called "England's Darling."

Alfred reigned thirty years, and all men mourned when he died, and they chose his eldest son Edward to be king in his place.

Edward the Elder, A.D. 901–925

Edward, who was called the Elder, was a great soldier, and he fought well against his enemies. Æthelflæd his sister had been made by Alfred Lady of Mercia; she was very brave, and helped Edward. They built up the cities which the Danes had destroyed, and they built strong walls around their cities to make them safe from the enemy, and they built strong castles to defend the land. Edward made the Danes keep the peace, and he was so strong that the kings of the Danes, the Welsh, and the Scots took him to be their lord. They were still kings in their own lands, but they looked upon him as lord over them, and Edward was the first king who was really king of all England. Edward died at the height of his glory when he had reigned twenty-four years. He had a great many children, and Athelstan his son was chosen king in his stead.

Athelstan, A.D. 925–940

Athelstan was born when his grandfather Alfred was still alive, and Alfred loved him, for he was a good and lovely child. When he was six years old, Alfred gave him a purple cloak and a beautiful sword with a golden sheath fastened to a jewelled belt. Athelstan was a kind and good king. He was very handsome, with long golden hair, and he cared for his people. He did not care to grow rich himself, but gave away the spoil he won in war. The Danes and the Scots fought against him, but he won a mighty battle over them; and there is an old song about this battle which tells how Athelstan slew the Scottish king's son and five Danish sea-kings and many great men. After this there was peace. Foreign kings heard what brave men the English kings were, and four of Athelstan's sisters were married to foreign kings. Across the Channel was a great man called the Count of Paris, who also had hard work to do fighting against the Northmen, for they had settled on the coast, and the Frankish king had been forced to give them a piece of land, which they called Normandy. The Northmen would have liked to sail up the river Seine and take Paris, but they could not because the Counts of Paris were so

strong. The Count of Paris sent and asked Athelstan to give him one of his sisters for his wife, and he sent him splendid gifts, the spear of the great Emperor Charles, and a wonderfully carved cup and splendid horses and jewels; and Athelstan's sister was sent to be the count's wife. Many kings sent Athelstan presents. The King of Norway sent him a great ship with a gilded prow and a purple sail, with a row of gilt and painted shields all around. Athelstan only reigned fifteen years, and men were very sad when he died, and as he had no children they chose his brother Edmund to reign in his stead.

Edmund, A.D. 940–946

The Danes thought they would try to fight against the English king again, but Edmund went against them and won five great towns from them, and after that they kept the peace. Edmund made friends with a learned monk called Dunstan, and he made him abbot, or chief of the monks at Glastonbury, one of the great English monasteries. Dunstan had studied much, and had learned music and painting and how to work in metals. He was also very wise, and knew how to rule men. He did a great deal of good at Glastonbury, and rebuilt the church and kept the monks in order.

When Edmund had reigned only six years he was sitting one day at meat with his men when a robber called Liofa, who had been ordered to keep out of the land, pressed his way into the hall and sat down at the feast. The king, angry at his boldness, bade his cupbearer turn him out. But Liofa turned upon the cupbearer and tried to kill him. Then the king, eager to help his cupbearer, seized Liofa by the hair of his head and threw him on the ground. But Liofa with his dagger stabbed the king from below. The King's men fell upon the robber and cut him to pieces, but the king lay dead. Then as the king's sons were only babes, they chose his brother Edred to be king.

Edred, A.D. 946–955

King Edred had much fighting to do, for the men of the north tried to set up another king, but Edred went against them and made them obey him. In all things Edred listened to the advice of Dunstan, for he knew how wise he was, and Dunstan managed things wisely and well. Edred was a good and a pious king like his grandfather Alfred; he had weak health, but was still brave and active.

Edwig rules foolishly, A.D. 955–959

Edred reigned eleven years, and when he died the Wise Men chose Edwig, Edmund's son, who was now old enough to be king after Edred. Edwig was

a foolish king, and cared only about getting his own way. He quarrelled with all his best friends, and at last drove Dunstan out of the kingdom. But Edwig died after four years, and then his brother Edgar was chosen king.

Edgar rules gloriously, A.D. 959–976

Edgar had to fight first against the Welsh and the Scots, but then he made peace, and he was called “Edgar the Peacewinner” because there was peace while he ruled. He was not crowned until he had reigned fourteen years; we do not know why he waited so long, but when at last he was crowned, he held a mighty feast at Chester. Many lords and priests came to it, as well as the Welsh and Scottish kings, who owned Edgar as their lord. The king sat in his boat on the river Dee; eight kings came down and met him at the waterside, and they rowed him in his boat while Edgar steered.

Edgar made Dunstan Archbishop of Canterbury, and he and Dunstan worked together and did many good things for England. They made wise laws and built beautiful churches. Dunstan tried hard to make the monks and priests lead holy lives, and to obey the rules of the Roman Church, which did not allow priests to marry. Edgar had many ships, and he sent his fleet to sail around England every year so that no foes might come near it. He died when he was very young, only thirty-one, and evil days followed for England.

How England was governed

Before we go on let us look back a little and think of the change that had come over England since Alfred became king, a little more than a hundred years before the death of Edgar. England had now only one king, and he was stronger than any of the kings before had been, for he ruled over more people. The English people felt that if they kept together and were true to their king, they would be strong and able to keep out their enemies, and so they learned to feel like one people and to love their country. Their kings were brave soldiers and drove out their enemies, and they made wise laws so that their people could live in peace and safety. The land was divided into shires as it is now, and over each shire the king placed one of his thanes or servants, as the lords were called who served him at his court or fought under him in battle. The chief people in the shires used to meet together to settle the business of their shire and judge all those who were accused of having done wrong. So from the very first the English people learned to manage their own affairs, and each village and each shire ruled itself and kept its roads in order and raised soldiers to send up to the king.

Besides these meetings in the shires the chief men of the kingdom used

to meet together with the king to decide what was best to be done for the whole land. This was the meeting of the Wise Men, or the Witan as it was called, which said who should be king, though it generally chose the eldest son of the last king. During the hundred years from Alfred to Edgar, during which great and wise kings had ruled in the land, many cities had been built and fine churches, and houses for monks and nuns to live in. There were priests in the villages, and the people served the true God. The Danes who had settled in England became Christians too. Overall there was peace, and men tilled the land and bred cattle, and England grew rich and prospered.

Chapter 3: England Becomes One Kingdom

Preparing to Read

Your textbook reader focuses on events of English history, as you would expect, as its title is *A First History of England*. However, you would be wrong to assume that the island nation of England was totally isolated from other countries of the world. In Chapter 3 and many of the following chapters, you will note that many of the kings had intimate dealings with foreign kingdoms. You will read about English monarchs and princes, for instance, that spent much of their time on the European continent. Some of the kings that you will be reading about even owned lands in Europe and some monks, such as Alcuin, labored as teachers in European courts. In Chapter 3 of your reader, you will learn that Egbert spent several years in the court of Charles the Great before becoming king. Also called Charlemagne and Charles I, Charles the Great (42–814) ruled the Franks after the death of his father Pepin in 768. On Christmas Day in 800, Pope Leo III crowned him the Holy Roman Emperor. Since Charlemagne was such an important person in European history, you will be learning more about him in this study guide—in a primary source document as well as a brief biography.

Reading Questions

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which of the following is one of the countries from which the Northmen originally came?
 - a) Iceland
 - b) Denmark
 - c) France
 - d) Normandy
 - e) Saxony

2. Which of the following is not true of the Northmen who came to England in the days of Egbert and Æthelwulf?
 - a) They came to England as a result of troubles in their own land.
 - b) They plundered the English lands.
 - c) They were Christian.
 - d) Their arrival encouraged the separate Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to come together as one nation.
 - e) They settled in the north of England.

3. Which of the following things is not true of Alfred the Great?
 - a) He spent much of his rule in fighting the Danes.
 - b) He was the fourth and youngest son of King Æthelwulf.
 - c) He did much to further education in England.
 - d) He is called "England's Darling."
 - e) He spent much time rebuilding his army of soldiers on land, but nothing to improve his naval forces.

4. With whom did Alfred make a peace treaty in which England would possess all land except north of Watling Street?
 - a) Gorm
 - b) Charles the Great
 - c) the Count of Paris
 - d) the King of France
 - e) Edgar the Peaceful

5. Which words both accurately describe Athelstan's character?
 - a) kind and lazy
 - b) rich and devious
 - c) crafty and powerful
 - d) brave and kind
 - e) handsome and stingy

6. Athelstan gave his sister in marriage to ____.
 - a) Charles the Great
 - b) the Count of Paris
 - c) King Gorm of Normandy
 - d) Dunstan

- e) the book does not tell
7. Who was Dunstan?
- a) The Danish king who was eager for more riches
 - b) a Danish soldier
 - c) a pagan
 - d) a learned monk who later became the Archbishop of Canterbury
 - e) King Edmund's brother
8. Which of the following kings had a great disagreement with Dunstan?
- a) Edmund
 - b) Edgar
 - c) Edwig
 - d) Edred
 - e) Athelstan
9. Who rowed Edgar's boat and why?
- a) Danish kings...they were stronger than English rowers
 - b) Welsh and Scottish kings...they hoped to be paid well for doing the king a favor
 - c) Welsh and Scottish kings...as a sign of humility and submission to the English king
 - d) English slaves...they had never rowed a boat and wanted to try
 - e) Danish kings...being good seamen, they hoped to escape to Denmark with Edgar in the boat
10. Who were the Witan?
- a) foreign kings
 - b) priests
 - c) enemies of the king
 - d) the common people
 - e) the king's counselors

Identification

1. Burnt the cakes
2. Won five Danish towns
3. Friends of the English

4. King who crushed the Scots and Danes in battle
5. World traveler king
6. Edmund's assassin
7. The swamp hideout of the man who burnt the cakes (Question 1)

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Though an abbot with a royal friend,
 Learned in arts and music too,
 Wicked Edwig nearly sealed his end.

Questions for Class Discussion

1. One modern idea that has increasing popularity is the borders are not only unnecessary, but wrong. They believe that people should be allowed to move from one country to another as they please without stringent immigration laws. Those who hold such an idea believe that those who want to put them up are *xenophobic*, or have an unreasonable fear of foreigners. There are just as many (or more), however, who hold the contrary opinion. They believe that barriers should be put up for the safety of the country's citizens. They also say that to keep a stable culture with a distinct identity, with the same language and important values, there must be some "border control." The chapter that you read, "England Becomes One Kingdom," mentions that the English united in fear of losing their property and way of life. Discuss both sides of the

- issue of nations' borders in terms of the this idea that countries develop naturally from the threat of outsiders. Do you think it is pragmatic or possible to live in a world without borders between countries?
2. Why did Alfred do to become England's *darling king*? Does the United States have a *darling president*? What did that president do for the nation to deserve the admiration of the American people?
 3. Be able to explain how England was governed. Be able to discuss who the leaders were, how the land was divided, and who were the Witan.

Additional Reading

Charlemagne¹

Pepin, the King of the Franks, had two sons named Charles and Carloman. After their father's death, they ruled together, but in a few years Carloman died, and then Charles ruled alone. This Charles was the most famous of the kings of the Franks. He did so many great and wonderful things that he is called *Charlemagne*, which in French means Charles the Great.

Charles was a great soldier. For thirty years he carried on a war against the Saxons. Finally he conquered them, and their great chief Wittekind² submitted to him. The Saxons were a people of Germany, who then lived near the land of the Franks. They spoke the same language and were of the same race as the Franks, but had not been civilized by contact with the Romans. Just as the Franks had been before Clovis³ became a Christian, they were still pagans and actually offered human sacrifices. After Charlemagne conquered them he made their lands part of his kingdom. A great number of them, among whom was Wittekind, then became

¹ By John H. Haaren and A. B. Poland and revised by William Walter

² Also called Widukind, Wittekind was the leader of the Saxons against Charles the Great. Charles forced the Saxons to be baptized under the penalty of death. The Saxons would not submit, and a war ensued. A peace treaty was made, and accepting the terms, he had his people baptized. (Walter)

³ Clovis I (466–511) was the first king of the Franks. He defeated the Romans at Soissons in 486 ending the Roman rule in Gaul. (Walter)

Christians and were baptized, and soon they had churches and schools in many parts of their country.

Another of Charlemagne's wars was against the Lombards. Charles's father Pepin had defeated the Lombards and given to the pope part of the country held by them. The Lombard king now invaded the Pope's lands and threatened Rome itself, so the Pope sent to Charlemagne for help.

Charlemagne quickly marched across the Alps and attacked the Lombards. He drove them out of the Pope's lands and took possession of their country.

After he had conquered the Lombards he carried on war, in 778, in Spain. A large portion of Spain was then held by the Moorish Saracens. But a Mohammedan leader from Damascus had invaded their country, and the Moors invited Charlemagne to help them. He therefore led an army across the Pyrenees. He succeeded in putting his Moorish friends in possession of their lands in Spain and then set out on his return to his own country.

On the march his army was divided into two parts. The main body was led by Charlemagne himself. The rear guard was commanded by a famous warrior named Roland. While marching through the narrow pass of Roncesvalles, among the Pyrenees, Roland's division was attacked by a tribe called the Basques, who lived on the mountain slopes of the neighboring region.

High cliffs walled in the pass on either side. From the tops of these cliffs the Basques hurled down rocks and trunks of trees upon the Franks, and crushed many of them to death. Besides this, the wild mountaineers descended into the pass and attacked them with weapons. Roland fought bravely, but at last he was overpowered, and he and all his men were killed.

Roland had a friend and companion named Oliver, who was as brave as himself. Many stories and songs have been written telling of the wonderful adventures they were said to have had and of their wonderful deeds in war.

The work of Charlemagne in Spain was quickly undone. Abd-er-Rahman, the leader of the Mohammedans who had come from Damascus, soon conquered almost all the territory south of the Pyrenees.

For more than forty years Charlemagne was king of the Franks. But a still greater dignity was to come to him. In the year 800 some of the people in Rome rebelled against the pope, and Charlemagne went with an army to put down the rebellion. He entered the city with great pomp and soon

conquered the rebels. On Christmas day he went to the church of St. Peter, and as he knelt before the altar the Pope placed a crown upon his head, saying: "Long live Charles Augustus, Emperor of the Romans."

The people assembled in the church shouted the same words, and so Charlemagne was now emperor of the Western Roman Empire, as well as king of the Franks.⁴

Charlemagne built a splendid palace at Aix-la-Chapelle, a town in Germany, where perhaps he was born.

Charlemagne was a tall man, with long, flowing beard, and of noble appearance. He dressed in very simple style; but when he went into battle he wore armor, as was the custom for kings and nobles, and often for ordinary soldiers in his day.

Armor was made of leather or iron, or both together. There was a helmet of iron for the head, and a breastplate to cover the breast, or a coat of mail to cover the body. The coat of mail was made of small iron or steel rings linked together, or fastened on to a leather shirt. Coverings for the legs and feet were often attached to the coat.

Charlemagne was a great king in many other ways besides the fighting of battles. He did much for the good of his people. He made many excellent laws and appointed judges to see that the laws were carried out. He established schools and placed good teachers in charge of them. He had a school in his palace for his own children, and he employed as their teacher a very learned Englishman named Alcuin.

In those times few people could read or write. There were not many schools anywhere, and in most places there were none at all. Even the kings had little education. Indeed, few of them could write their own names, and most of them did not care about sending their children to school. They did not think that reading or writing was of much use, but thought that it was far better for boys to learn to be good soldiers, and for girls to learn to spin and weave.

⁴ The emperors of Constantinople still called themselves Roman Emperors, and still claimed Italy, Germany and France as parts of their empire, though really their authority had not been respected in these countries for more than 300 years. (Haaren)

Charlemagne had a very different opinion. He was fond of learning; and whenever he heard of a learned man living in any foreign country, he tried to get him to come and live in Frankland.

The fame of Charlemagne as a great warrior and a wise emperor spread all over the world. Many kings sent messengers to him to ask his friendship, and bring him presents. Harun-al-Rashid⁵, the famous caliph, who lived at Bagdad, in Asia, sent him an elephant and a clock which struck the hours.

The Franks were very surprised at the sight of the elephant, as they had never seen one before. They also wondered much at the clock. In those days there were no clocks in Europe, though water clocks and hour glasses were used in some places. The water clock was a vessel into which water was allowed to trickle. It contained a float which pointed to a scale of hours at the side of the vessel. The float gradually rose as the water trickled in.

The hour glasses measured time by the falling of fine sand from the top to the bottom of a glass vessel made with a narrow neck in the middle for the sand to go through. They were like the little glasses called egg timers, which are used for measuring the time for boiling eggs.

Charlemagne died in 814. He was buried in the church which he had built at Aix-la-Chapelle. His body was placed in the tomb, seated upon a grand chair, dressed in royal robes, with a crown on the head, a sword at the side, and a Bible in the hands.

This famous emperor is known in history as Charlemagne, which is the French word for the German name Karl der Grosse (Charles the Great), the name by which he was called at his own court during his life. The German name would really be a better name for him, for he was a German, and German was the language that he spoke. The common name of his favorite residence, Aix-la-Chapelle, also is French, but he knew the place as Aachen.

The great empire which Charlemagne built up held together only during the life of his son. Then it was divided among his three grandsons. Louis took the eastern part, Lo-thaire' took the central part, with the title of emperor, and Charles took the western part.

⁵ Harun-al-Rashid (ca. 764–809) encouraged the arts and it was during his rule of Arabia that Baghdad was culturally very prosperous. He is mentioned in many of the stories in the *Thousand and One Arabian Knights*.

Questions for Class Discussion

Be able to answer the following questions in class.

1. Compare and contrast the Franks and the Saxons during the time of Charlemagne. How were they different and how were they similar?
2. In what specific ways did Charlemagne help the Roman papacy? Was he rewarded for his efforts?
3. In 1492 the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabel drove out the Moors from Granada. (You will learn later in your textbook reader that King Henry VIII married their daughter, Catherine of Aragon.) What similar deed did Charlemagne accomplish during his rule?
4. You learned from your textbook reader that Charlemagne was a contemporary of (or lived at the same time as) the English king Egbert, whose grandson was King Alfred. How were Alfred and Charlemagne very similar in their achievements and interests?
5. How was Charlemagne an international figure? In other words, how was he in many ways French, German, and Roman?