
Notes on the Priory of S. Neot, Huntingdonshire,

Read at the meeting of the S. Albans Architectural and Archæological Society held at S. Neots, May 25th, 1886,

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This Church of S. Mary, it appears, has always been parochial, but its history is closely associated with the Monastery of S. Neot. The last Prior of that house became Vicar of the parish in Henry VIII.'s reign. A few notes, therefore, on the Priory may be a suitable introduction to the subject of the Church.

I have to confess that I was quite ignorant in the matter till a visit to the British Museum made me acquainted with the interesting work of Gorham—"The History and Antiquities of Eynesbury and S. Neots"—written in 1820. I have also been indebted to the Vicar, Mr. Meade, for the loan of his copy, and other kind help. Probably few parishes have had their history compiled with such elaborate research.

As the book is now rather scarce, the information which I have extracted may be new to most of our members.

Mr. Gorham, it appears, was a native of this town; his name is familiar to us in connection with the Gorham Controversy of some 40 years ago. He was the author of several archæological works. One is the history of the Norman family of Gorham, which gave its name to two Abbots of S. Albans and to Gorhambury. The time, of course, will only admit of a brief review.

It may be most convenient to begin with some notice of the Patron Saint of the Monastery. It may be said that Cornwall was the home of the Saint, and the shrine in Huntingdonshire was the home of his Mediæval Cultus.

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Asser in his Biography of K. Alfred quotes a Life of S. Neote, which must have been written very shortly after the Saint's death. He commences his account of the king's visit to the herdsman's cottage with the words, "Ut in vita S. Patris Neoti legitur." Of the extant Latin biographies, the MS. Claudius A.V., Cotton Lib., is stated to be the oldest, and probably the source of the others, including that found by Leland, in Henry VIII.'s reign, in the library of the Monastery here. All these deal largely in the marvellous. The biography which has most attraction for me is that contained in an Anglo-Saxon Homily for S. Neot's day (the 31st of July). It appears there is only one ancient copy, the MS. known as Vespasian D. XIV, in the Cottonian Library—perhaps of the 12th Century. It is edited in the appendix to Gorham's work. I was so much interested in it that I attempted a literal translation. When I had written it, I discovered there was a printed translation in Gorham's Appendix (I had overlooked it at the Museum). The date of the composition has to be inferred from the style of the language. I am able to say, on the authority of the Oxford Professor of Anglo-Saxon, that this is corrupt and late, belonging to the period when the Anglo-Saxon was passing into the stage which we may call *Early English*—about the reign of Henry I., or Stephen.

Gorham, therefore, is clearly in error when he assigns it to c. 1050.

The most interesting feature of the picture presented to us in the Homily is the Saint's intercourse with King Alfred the Great. S. Neot is represented to have died shortly before Alfred's victory over Guthrum, the date of which is known to be 878. It quotes an earlier book as its authority, and it contains two anachronisms. The scene is laid chiefly to Cornwall. The Saint is represented in the twofold character of a recluse and a Missioner. He is said to have been admitted to Glastonbury (the Monastery), and there to have been ordained priest by Alfege, the Holy Bishop. (But S. Alfege was not made Bishop of Winchester till towards the end of the 10th Century.)

[The tradition at Glastonbury was, that S. Neot was so short that he had to stand on an iron stool when he celebrated mass—Leland says, that he saw this relic at Glastonbury.] He made seven pilgrimages to Rome,

and received absolution from the Pope, Martin. Here again is an anachronism. Then the Homilist says he sought for a secluded spot for his abode, and by Divine guidance was directed to a fair place abounding with sweet water springs, ten miles from Petrocstowe (Bodmin in Cornwall) he named it Noetestoke. We may suppose this habitation to have been a sort of Mission House, from which the Confessor and his disciples went forth to preach in the country round. Here it is said he was visited by Angels, who charged him to offer the Word of God to all men—and so he did. There was doubtless much need of missionary efforts in Wessex at the time when the Saint is said to have lived. The devastations of the Danes in the reigns of Ethelwolf and his sons had demoralised the people. Some of the Bishops were occupied in fighting with the invaders. Ealhstan, Bishop of Sherborne, is an instance. The Celtic Bishops in the West, who were heard of in King Ina's days, had passed away. All Wessex, to the West of Selwood, was nominally under the care of the Bishop of Sherborne. It seems probable Cornwall had relapsed into semi-heathenism. [The See of Crediton, in Devon, was not founded till 909].

But whatever may have been S. Neot's Missionary labours, the Homily gives no account of them, it merely informs us that he fulfilled his mission, exhorted the people to repent, and instructed them in true belief, and was gentle and loving towards all men. The writer dwells on his austerities—one of these is illustrated by a story, related by no other biographer.

His custom was to resort early in the morning to a well near his dwelling, and stand in the water with bare limbs, whilst he recited psalms and other devotions.

* William of Malmesbury relates the same thing of S. Aldhelm, first Bishop of Sherborne. He used to stand up to his shoulders ("humerotenus") in a pool and sing his psalter. One day the Saint was surprised in his well by a party of horsemen, and in his hasty retreat to his oratory he lost a shoe; this was found by his servant sticking in the throat of a dead fox. Of course its recovery is attributed to miraculous intervention.

The latter part of the Homily is occupied with the dealings of S. Neot with King Alfred; his spiritual

* For this reference I am indebted to Mr. W. de Gray Birch, F.S.A.

counsels and prophecies, and the influence which he exerted upon Alfred's fortunes when he had become a beatified Saint. The time will not allow me to enlarge on these topics.

The compiler (or the authority whom he interprets) was evidently an enthusiastic admirer of Alfred, who is stated to have surpassed in knowledge of the Scriptures, Bishops, Mass-priests and Archdeacons. He gives the story of King Alfred and the loaves, which seems to be generally admitted as authentic. For these matters, which are by no means devoid of interest, I must refer you to the document or the translation.

S. Neot is said to have died at Neotestoke, and to have been buried by his disciples in the Church which he had erected. Seven years after, his bones were removed to the high altar—the writer ignores any other translation of his relics.

S. Neot's College existed till the time of the Conquest. In the Domesday survey the Clerks of S. Neote are said to hold two hides in Neotestoke. Earl Moreton deprived them of all their land except one acre. After this the monastery is not heard of. In later times S. Neot was reputed an Abbot.

In the existing Parish Church of S. Neot, in Cornwall, a structure of the 15th Century, are windows still retaining the ancient glass in which is depicted the legendary history of the Saint.

NOTE. — Since delivering my paper I have been favoured with a communication from the Rev. Prebendary Earl, Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford, who is of opinion that the Homily is not much earlier than 1150. He says, "there is much good phraseology disfigured by degenerate grammar. The writer had evidently good old specimens before him, and hence appear such antique forms as: 'dæig.' It may be based on a real old Homily of the Saint, or made up out of old Homiletic books. The writer had little idea of Chronology."

We now pass on to the Priory in Hunts. The chief sources of information are the annals of Ely, of Henry II.'s reign, and a MS. in the Bodleian Library.

Towards the end of the reign of King Edgar, a certain Earl Alric (or Leofric) determined to found in Eynesbury a Monastery in honour of S. Neot. The

locality is said to derive its name from Ernulf, or Eynulf, a Saxon hermit. A Roman road, leading to Godmanchester, passed thro' the parish, it was its boundary on the East. There are still some vestiges in Eynesbury of the Roman earthworks by which the line of the Ouse appears to have been once defended.

The design probably originated with Brithnod, Abbot of the great Benedictine House of Ely, which had just been reinstated. The Cell was to be subject to Ely. Relics were needed to give dignity to the foundation, so a scheme was devised for carrying off the Cornish shrine. Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester, with whom Brithnod had been associated, lent his aid; and by the complicity of the Shrine-keeper the plan was successfully executed. The king, who had given a sort of general licence to Ethelwold for translating relics from obscure localities, sent soldiers to defend the relic-translators against the Cornish men. The turn given to the matter by the Monkish Chronicles is, that the Saint appeared in a vision to the Shrine-keeper at Neotestock, and said, he wished his bones to be removed; thus the fraud is covered with a cloak of piety. The treasure was first lodged in the mansion of Earl Alfrid. Soon a Chapel was built, and the mansion converted into a Monastery. Monks were sent to occupy it from Ely and Thorney. At the dedication, about A.D. 974, Ethelwold, Abbott Brithnod, and Æscwin, Bishop of Lincoln, the diocesan, signed the charter of foundation, which required that the Priors should be Monks of Ely. It was endowed with 17 hides of land, two of which were in Eynesbury. The site of the Priory was on the north side of the present town, probably reaching nearly to the Market Place, and to the River Ouse on the West. The Alderman of East Anglia became the Patron. In the year 992 Earl Alric's wife, or widow, Ethelfleda, was present at the dedication of Ramsey Abbey, and she is described by the Chronicles as the Foundress of S. Neot's (Priory).

This Monastery had a very brief duration. About 30 years after its foundation it was threatened by the Danes; a certain Lady Leowina removed the Shrine to her Manor at Whittlesea, and requested Osketul, Abbot of Croyland, who was her brother, to take it under his charge; and it was carried to Croyland with the chanting of psalms. Ingulf's Chronicle asserts

that the sacred deposit was never restored. The Monks of S. Neots afterwards claimed to have the relics, implying that they had been sent back. The story reminds us of the dealings of Abbott Alfric with the Monks of Ely, about the bones of S. Alban in the reign of Edward the Confessor. S. Neot was certainly adopted as one of the Patron Saints of Croyland; his bones are said to have been removed in 1213 to an altar erected to him in the Church by Abbot Henry de Longchamp.

The Priory of S. Neot was burnt by the Danes about 1010, and nothing more is heard of it till shortly after the Norman Conquest, when the Monks of Ely complained that it was violently taken from them by Gilbert, Earl of Owe. The account of Thomas de Ely implies, that a portion of the Saxon Monastery had been restored, for he says, a few Monks who would not surrender to the Normans were forcibly ejected and sent prisoners across the sea to Bec in Normandy.

What is certain is, that the House was now refounded as an Alien Priory, subject to the Monastery of S. Mary at Bec. The famous Anselm became Abbot there in 1078. In that year Richard de Clare (son of Earl Gilbert) and his wife Rohais (or Royse), applied to Anselm, and he furnished their new Priory with White Monks from Bec, probably Cistercians. Anselm visited the monastery, now become a Cell to his House, examined the relics, and pronounced them to be the genuine remains of S. Neote; one arm was wanting. He subsequently sent a testimonial to this effect to Oliver Sutton, Bishop of Lincoln. The key of the Feretory was to be kept in Normandy. [I may mention that there was some reputed relic of S. Neote preserved in S. Alban's Abbey.]

In a letter to Earl Richard, Anselm exhorted the faithful to make liberal offerings for the erection of the Priory Church. With regard to this structure nothing appears to be known except that the tower fell in 1265 and destroyed some of the muniments of the Convent. The dedication was to S. Mary the Virgin and S. Neote; a taper was kept burning before S. Neote's Altar.

In the Domesday Survey S. Neote is said to hold three carucates in demesne at Neotesbury, a mill and a fish-pond. The Lady Royse then held the Manor. In 1113

she granted this to the Priory, and is accounted the second Foundress. The fraternity was a small one—15 Monks beside the Prior—but there was probably a considerable body of *Conversi*, or lay brethren—at least this was usual in Cistercian houses. The Monastery at a later period covered 49 acres. The Cartularies preserved in the British Museum attest that Anselm's exhortation was well responded to. There is a full account of the benefactions, which were principally in Hunts. and Beds. Henry I. granted the privilege of a Market and four Statute Fairs, one on the Feast of the Translation of the Saint, the 17th December. The town was then probably growing up round the Monastery. This, being near the great Northern Road, would be easily accessible by travellers, to whom the Monks were bound to offer hospitality by a Bull of Pope Celestine III. Guests would enter by the great gate, which was close to the Bridge. The last vestiges of this were removed in 1814. The site of the Priory is liable to serious inundations, probably the outer wall was raised on an earthwork.

It is thought that the town acquired its present name when the parish was separated from Eynesbury in Henry II.'s reign, soon after the 3rd Council of Lateran (1179.) Previously to this the townsmen probably worshipped in the nave of the Conventual Church, this being a very usual arrangement. The Parish Church of Eynesbury (S. Mary's) appears never to have been adapted for a town population. Parts of the existing structure are of the Norman period.

The first Parish Church here, in the town, was probably erected before 1183, when the Rectory was appropriated to the Priory by a Bull of Lucius III. A grant of Hugh de Wells, Bishop of Lincoln, between 1209 and 1234, confirms to the Prior and Convent "The Parochial Church of S. Mary, in the town of S. Neots, with all its appurtenances." Of this early structure there is no record. The date of the ordination of the Vicarage is not given by Gorham. In the list of Vicars taken from the Registers of Lincoln, Walter is first named, in 1225. The Vicarage seems to have been very fairly endowed, considering the Priory was not a rich one. In the taxation of Pope Nicholas it was valued at £198, and at £233 at the Dissolution. During the

French wars the Priory was several times sequestered by the King. Up to 1409 the Priors were appointed by the Abbots of Bec. The lay-patrons were, first the noble family of De Clare, and afterwards the Earls of Stafford; the Bishops of Lincoln, who had a Palace at Buckden, (5 miles to the North) gave institution.

The documents furnish a list of 32 Priors. The earliest, Martin de Vecti, or de Bec, is thought to have been appointed by the Foundress (Royse de Clare). He was a man of high distinction, and is interesting to us to-day because he became Abbot of Peterborough. King Henry I. procured his appointment in 1133. We shall probably hear of him from Canon Davys in connection with that splendid Monastic Church.

About the year 1160 a Conference was held at the Priory (on the Festival of S. Simon and S. Jude) between the Bishop of Lincoln, Robert de Chesney, and the Abbot of S. Albans, Robert de Gorham. Here a dispute in reference to the processions of the clergy at S. Albans was compromised by the mediation of the Bishop of Durham and other prelates.

In Henry IV.'s reign serious complaints were raised against the Alien Priors, and the connection with Bec was severed in 1405 by Letters Patent of the King. Under Edward Salisbury, the first Indigenous Prior, the House returned to the Benedictine rule.

An impression of the Common Seal (preserved at Westminster) has the legend "Sigillum Prioris et Conventus Sci. Neoti," the device represents the Blessed Virgin enthroned delivering a pastoral staff to a kneeling monk. The Priors here appear to have left no mark in the History of England; the records remaining relate mainly to their dealings with estates and the advowsons of churches.

The last three have most interest for us to-day, because of their presumed connection with the re-building of this Parochial Church. Prior William Eynesbury, died in 1486, and was succeeded by Thomas Raunds, who was appointed in 1490, and resigned in 1507, when he received a pension. Nothing seems to be known about them except these facts: their connection with the fabric is a matter of inference which I leave in the able hands of Mr. Clarkson. As they were Rectors of the Church, we may presume they took considerable interest

in it, and they probably had command of funds. But it is likely that so sumptuous a structure would never have been erected without very liberal aid from the parishioners. In fact, various documents are extant which put this beyond dispute. These also have an interesting bearing on the dates of certain portions of the fabric—but I must not anticipate.

The last Prior, John Raunds, was instituted Vicar in 1512; he was presented by Thomas Lynde, Yeoman of the Guard to Henry VIII., the advowson being made over to him for that purpose. Thomas Lynde was also a benefactor to the Church, and his monumental brass existed in the Jesus Chapel up to 1684. John Raunds surrendered the Priory in 1539, and received a pension, together with his seven Monks—he died the next year.

The site of the Priory was retained in the hands of the King. The Manor of S. Neots was granted to Richard Cromwell (of the family from which Oliver Cromwell descended). It is now possessed by Lord Sandwich, of Hinchbrook, who is Earl of S. Neots.

All vestiges of the Monastery have disappeared; it is a thing of the past; but the stately Parochial Church which rose under its auspices is happily a thing of the present.

Anglo-Saxon Homily for S. Neot's Day

(31st JULY).

Translated literally from the printed copy in Gorham's History of S. Neot's, vol. II. appx. I. [taken from MSS. Cott. Vesp. D. XIV.]—By the REV. H. FOWLER.

Of Sainte Neote.

Men beloved, we wish to make known to you somewhat concerning the holy man, whom we honour to-day, that your faith may be the sounder, because mankind require divine instruction, whereby they may attain to the way of life.

It is said in the Holy Gospel, that the light in God's Church should not be hid, but set upon a candlestick, that they who enter in there may see the flame and be in light. Even so might not Saint Neote be hid or in secret, when God would have him held up.

He was in youth, so the Book saith, devoted to book-learning, and he entered upon godly habits, and he earnestly meditated, as soon as he became intelligent, about the Life Eternal and how he might most strictly live unto God here in life. As it is written, that the way that appertains to Eternal Life is steep and narrow, and no man cometh to it except through much labour and self-denial: so did S. Neote restrain himself from pleasure of this life. He was gentle and mild

to all men ; and he daily called upon his Lord according to David's psalm, thus saying—" Lord, I love Thy ways, and purpose to follow Thy law ; Do concerning me after Thy mercy, and teach me Thy righteousness."

Truly the same prayer is allowed to us, if we will inwardly call to God, and pray for His lovingkindness. It says in the written (history), that this holy man had recourse to Glastonbury in the days of Alfege, the Holy Bishop, and at his hands received the sacred priesthood, and he bore himself well and thereunder well profited, and was humble and loving to all men ; and he practised his psalms and other devotions day and night ; and his custom was often to bend his knees, in the day, and also in the night, to Almighty God, like as did the holy Apostle S. Bartholomew, a hundred times by night, and as often by day. He constantly bewailed the sins he had committed in his youth, and heartily wept and mourned for them ; and he shewed a good example in other ways. He visited the City of Rome seven times, to do honour to Christ and to S. Peter ; and there he received absolution from his sins. He was very perfect in all God's commandments. Then he sought over all this land a retired place for his abode. There he arrived through God's guidance. It is in the west part of this land, ten miles from Petroc's-Stowe. He called it *Neotes-Stoca*. And he there built a dwelling in a very fair spot ; and merry water-springs stand thereabout ; and they are very sweet to taste. Here the servant of God, S. Neote, passed his life in much severity, serving with courage and might, beyond other men, Him who had chosen him to be His servant ; that was God himself. No man can fully know how strictly he passed his life before his mass-priesthood, nor after. He did not adorn his body with costly raiment, nor fill his stomach with dainties. When he had thus dwelt a long time in the place we before mentioned, then began the invisible fiend to work against him : as he is vexed at every good thing ; so he began to direct against the holy man his poisoned weapons, which are temptations. But he overcame the foe with true faith through God's protection. Often God's holy angels came to him and comforted him, and well encouraged him. And they exhorted him that he should not cease to offer God's Word to all men unto his life's end, and they promised him surely that Eternal Life, in which he now abideth with joy. He did as the angel commanded ; he enjoined to all men right belief. To the sinful, and to them who would confess their sins and cease from them ever, he promised God's goodness and His mercy, and thereto also Eternal Life. The good he exhorted to persevere in goodness.

It befell one day that the holy man at his habitation went privately in the morning to his water-well, and there he practised his devotional exercises and his Psalms in the water with naked limbs, as his custom was. Then he heard a company of horsemen riding along : thereupon he suddenly quitted the pool with much haste ; he would not that any earthly men should know his austerities in his life, but only He who ruleth over all. Then he lost one of his shoes on the way, and brought the other with him to his oratory. While he was meditating his Psalms and prayers and his readings heedfully, he happened to remember his other shoe, which he he had lost on the road. Then he called to his servant, and ordered him to fetch him his shoe. He thereupon was obedient to the orders of his Father, and hastily went to the pool : and there on the way a marvellous thing happened : viz., that a fox, which is the most cunning of all beasts,

there ran over the downs and dells, looking about with his eyes wonderingly hither and thither; and passing on came to the place where the Saint washed his feet and left the shoe, and he determined to get it. Then the gracious Lord looked thereupon, and would not that His servant should be disquieted even in so slight a matter. Thereupon He sent a sleep on the fox, so that he lost his life, having the thongs of the shoe in his greedy mouth. The servant got to him, and took the shoe, and brought it to the holy man, and told him all that had happened. Then the Saint was much astonished, and charged the servant in the Saviour's name that he should tell it to no man before the end of his life.

* At that time Alfred was King, and he often came to the holy man about his soul's needs. The Saint also reproved him with many words, and said to him with prophetic prescience—'Alas, O King, much shalt *thou* suffer in this life, so much trouble must thou expect in time to come, that no human tongue may declare it all. Now, dear child, hear me, if thou wilt, and apply thy heart to my counsel. Depart wholly from thy unrighteousness, and redeem thy sins with almsgiving, and blot them out with tears, and bring thy gift to Rome, to Pope Martinus, who now rules the English School.' The King Alfred then did as the holy man enjoined him, and willingly listened to his exhortation; and he predicted to him by forecast many things which afterwards happened to him. The holy man afterwards said other words—'I will not conceal from thee, good King, that the day of my death is drawing very near to me; for this I have always yearned with all my heart. But I say moreover, that after my departure, thou must suffer many things; and thou wilt be driven from thy kingdom by the Danish people, and thy soldiers and captains will be parted from thee and dispersed; as it is written in the Lord's Passion, that 'when the Shepherd shall be driven away and slain, then shall all the sheep be scattered.' But when thou shalt be distressed in mind to the uttermost, think on me; and I will shield thee in the name of the Lord.'

When the King heard that word, then was he very exceedingly afraid, and he besought his blessing, and he went away. To him it fell out afterwards as S. Neote foretold to him.

The Saint's weakness thereupon increased from day to day, and then on his last day he spread towards heaven the palms of his hands, and gave up his spirit with joy, and went to rest. Certainly angels came to meet his soul, and conducted it with much rejoicing to the gladness of the kingdom of heaven. His disciples then buried his body with much honour in the Church which he had made. There arose thereupon at that time a perfume of great sweetness, as if that place were entirely bespread with odorous flowers and a mixture of spices. Many sick folk also were healed of divers diseases through God's power and the merits of the Saint. And within seven years after his bones were taken up, and laid with honour in another place, near the altar; and thereafter at that removal the stones came to be of great sweetness.

† That all the words might be fulfilled which the holy man pro-

* This account of S. Neote's counsels to Alfred may be compared with that given by Asser—the original source of information on these points—'Quo beatissimus vir Neotus, adhuc vivens in carne, qui erat cognatus suus, intimo corde doluit, maximamque adversitatem ob hoc ei venturam, spiritu prophetico plenus, prædixerat, &c. . . . Vide, apud Camden's Anglica Scripta, ed. 1603, 'Asser's Life of Aelfred—p. 9.'

† It may be interesting to compare this crude and loose account of Alfred's military movements, which resulted in the victory over Guthrum at Ethandun, with the narrative of Asser. See note at end of this paper.

nounced concerning the King, there came Guthrum, the heathen king, with his savage host, first on the east part of Saxony, and there slaughtered many men: some moreover took to flight, and some fell into captivity. When King Alfred, about whom we spoke before, enquired thereof, because the host was so stern and so near Engleland, he soon for fear took to flight, and left all his soldiers, and his captains and all his people, treasure, and precious vessels, and defended his life. Then he went lurking about hedges and ways, over woods and fields, until by God's guidance he came safe to Athelney [Æthelingege], and in the house of a certain swain sought his shelter, and also willingly obeyed him and his ill-tempered wife.

*It happened one day that this swain's wife was heating her oven, and the king sat thereby warming himself at the fire, the family not knowing that he was the king: Then the ill-tempered housewife got up to go out, and, said she to the king, in angry mood,—“Turn thou the loaves, that they be not burnt, for I see daily that thou art a keen eater.” He was soon obedient to the waspish housewife, because there was no help for it.

He then, the good king, with much anxiety and sighing called upon his Lord, beseeching His compassion. What then! all things fell out to him as the holy man had predicted aforetime, and he endured more troubles than we can now describe. But he became comforted again very quickly by means of the Holy Neote. He came to him one night in a dream, very radiant in brightness, and said to him. “Well, thou king, what wilt thou give as a reward to him who shall deliver thee from this distress.”

He became very quickly affrighted in his dream, yet he answered the Saint. “Alas, beloved one, said he, what can I give: I am bereft of all my goods and of my kingdom.” The Saint replied, “I am Neote, thy friend, and I now rejoice with the King of Heaven. Hope now in His might; then shalt thou come after Easter to thine inheritance; and thy scattered army shall come to meet thee; and shall exceedingly rejoice in thy coming. I will go before thee; follow thou after me, and thy people with thee. Verily I will scatter all thy adversaries, and will turn the king, who fights against thee, to the faith.”

It then fell out according (to his word). Guthrum, the heathen king, came to Alfred, the Christian king, with weary soldiers, and sought for peace, and received Baptism; and after that dwelt here in the land twelve days with much gladness, and afterwards went safe with his army to his own land with all peace. Then Alfred's kingdom grew, and the fame of him widely spread, that he was well learned in Holy Scriptures, so that he surpassed Bishops and Mass-priests and Archdeacons, and Christianity flourished well in that good time. Also it should be known that king Alfred thro' God's Spirit composed many books, and that within the two and twenty years of his reign, and then quitted this earthly life, and went to the life eternal: so God granted to him because of his uprightness. Ah, men beloved, those

*This agrees in the main with Asser's account, which he quotes from the Life of S Neote—

“Et, ut in vita S. Patris Neoti legitur, apud quendam suum Vaccarium moram duxit. Contigit autem die quodam, ut rustica, uxor videlicet illius vaccarii, paravit ad coquendum panes. Et ille rex, sedens sic circa focum, præparavit sibi arcum et sagittas et alia bellorum instrumenta. Cum vero panes ad ignem positos arduos aspexit illa infelix mulier, festinanter currit, et amovit eos, increpans regem invictissemum, et dicens:

Hens, homo:
Urere quos cernis panes, gyrare moraris,
Cum nimium gaudes hos manducare calentes?

were good days, in that good time, because of the worth of Christian folk and righteous leaders. But now everywhere is mourning and weeping and cattle-plague for people's sins; and the fruits both in orchard and field are not so good; but all fruit of the earth waxeth worse exceedingly; and iniquity greatly increaseth widely over the world, and breach of compact, and slander. And he is now thought the most wary and clever who can cheat another, and take from him his property. Also man presseth man, more than he should; whereby it is widely the worse on the earth: and by this we may understand that it is near Domesday. Father now spareth not son, nor any man his fellow; and every man contendeth against another. Men regard not God's laws as they ought. By this we may perceive that this world is passing away, and it is very near the end of this world. Ah, happy is he who well acquitteth himself in time. Let us now earnestly pray S. Neote and other Saints to be our intercessors to the King of Heaven, that we never by any means abide to evil time in this miserable life, and that we may after death attain to Life Eternal.

The narrative in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (sub anno 878) agrees substantially with the following account by Asser—

“Eodem Anno, (A.D. 878) post Pascha Ælfred rex cum paucis adjutoribus fecit arcem in loco, qui dicitur Æthelingæg, et de ipsa arce semper cum nobilibus vassallis Summersetsensis contra Paganos infatigabiliter rebellavit. Iterumque in septima hebdomada post Pascha ad petram Ægbryhta, que est in orientali parte saltus, qui dicitur Selwudu, Latine autem, ‘Silva Magna,’ Britannice, ‘Coitmaur,’ equitavit. Hicque obviaverunt illi omnes accolæ Summersutensis pagæ et Wiltunensis, omnes accolæ Hamptunensis pagæ, qui non ultra mare pro metu Paganorum migraverant. Visoque rege, sicut dignum erat, quasi redivivum post tantas tribulationes recipientes, immenso repleti sunt gaudio: et ibi castra metati sunt una nocte. Diluculo sequenti illucescente, rex in castra commovens, venit ad locum qui dicitur Æcglea, (Iley?) et ibi una nocte castra metatus est. Inde, sequenti mane illucescente, vexilla commovens ad locum, qui dicitur Ethandun, (Eddington,) venit; et contra universum Paganorum exercitum cum densa testudine atrociter belligerans, animoseque diu persistens, divino nutu tandem victoria potitus, Paganos maxima cæde prostravit, et fugientes usque ad arcem percutiens persecutus est; et omnia, quæ extra arcem invenit, homines scilicet, et equos et pecora, confestim cædens, homines surripuit, et ante portas paganicæ arcis cum omni exercitu suo viriliter castra metatus est. Cumque ibi per XIV. dies remoraretur, Pagani fame, frigore, timore et ad extremum desperatione perterriti, pacem ea conditio petierunt, ut rex nominatos hostes, quantos vellet, ab eis acciperet, et ille nullum eis daret: ita tamen qualiter nunquam cum aliquo pacem ante pepigerant. Quarum legatione audita rex, sua ipsius misericordia motus, nominatos quantos voluit obsides ab eis accepit: quibus acceptis, Pagani insuper juraverunt, se citissime de suo regno exituros, necnon et Godrum, rex eorum, Christianitatem subire, et baptismum sub manu Ælfredi regis accipere promisit. Quæ omnia ille et sui, ut promiserant, impleverunt—Nam post hebdomadas Godrum, Paganorum rex, cum XXX. electissimis de exercitu suo viris, ad Ælfred regem prope Æthelingæg, in loco qui dicitur Alre (Aller), pervenit, quem Ælfred rex in filium adoptionis sibi suscipiens, de fonte sacro baptismatis elevavit. Cujus Chrismatis solutio octavo die, in villa regia, quæ dicitur Wædmor, fuit, qui postquam baptisatus fuit, XII. noctibus cum rege mansit. Cui rex cum suis omnibus multa et optima *ædificia largitur dedit.”

*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reads “feo,” i.e. cattle or money.
It gives “Æthelstan” as Guthrum’s (or Guthorm’s) baptismal name.