

# **Ebandun: An Epic Poem in Twelve Parts (Bk VI)**



*"I know your water rite," the Dane replied,  
"is more than just a change of loyalty..."*

Illustration by Miko Simmons

## VI. Among Devils

*Alfred and a band of gleemen arrive in Chippenham. Alfred gains an audience with Guthrum, but instead of killing him, he becomes his counselor.*

**Abundant-bellied Ymme**, Halga's handmaid, whom Earl Hrut had brought from Cirencester [\[1\]](#) when the drubbed Saxon captains downed their swords, hugged a pitcher of sweet mead to her breast and by her bigness blazoned to the Danes, victorious, though worn by years of toil, the fruit of Freya's bounty, soon to yield the bounty of the newly conquered land. Unknowingly, the lass prepared those pagans to yield to what, to them, was yet unknown, the knowledge and the blessing of our Lady, the Holy Ghost's beloved, heaven's Queen—though even those whom heaven's King had chosen to come to him through her, and her tough glory, had yet a stony, blood-soaked road to tread, which she with tears beheld from heaven's mount. [\[2\]](#)

The men had drunk and feasted for a spell when a guard bent his lips to Halga's ear, [\[3\]](#) old Gormr being absent from the platform. "Heroes!" he cried, hammering on the table, [\[4\]](#) "a troupe of Jutish gleemen, circling home, they say, from entertaining Frankish kings, [\[5\]](#) has come to Chippenham. Well, let them come. If they be spies, their glee will be their grave." [\[6\]](#)

The hooting of a hawthorn flute was heard from the thick bank of smoke that screened the door, and four capering gleemen soon appeared. [\[7\]](#) First, Abba dipped, stiff-limbed, along the fire,

breathing the notes, his cheeks flicked by the flames;  
his helpmeet then hopped in, thumping her drum;  
next Edith wheeled into view, their daughter;  
and last, the slender forepost of a harp,  
thrusting from the chest of a one-eyed elder,  
sundered the smudge as a dragon's fanged prow  
saws the fog that shrouds a sleeping shore.

Aghast at the display of weathered heads  
he'd passed atop the fiends' fresh-cut stockade,  
and grieved to see the jarls' raven banner  
glowering from the thinly whitewashed wall,  
the harper (Alfred) struck the instrument  
as sick with hate, like Christ entering hell  
among the elves, he bobbed past the tables  
in easy reach of his exulting foes.  
Too late, he saw that murdered Godfred's seed [\[8\]](#)  
was not among the worthies ranged on high.

"My glorious lord," cried Abba, bowing low,  
"your hand-thanes have performed for counts and kings,  
but never yet beneath the imperial eye  
of Denmark, Frisia, and pacific Britain."

"The emperor has just stepped out," said Halga,  
at which the rowers and their steersmen chortled,  
"but I'm his *sub-regulus pro tem*.

A song, my good Jutes, to amuse the Danes!" [\[9\]](#)  
"A song!" cried the sailors, beating the boards.

"Dread master," Alfred answered, bending so  
low the wood of joy just touched the rushes,  
"excuse us, but we dare not mock your monarch  
by rendering unto other men, though noble,  
our panegyric to His Caesarhood."

The seed of Hemming, Ymme's husband, brightened. [\[10\]](#)  
"Presumably, you're murderers and thieves,"

he said, "in pay of some pig-headed personage who kicks against the judgments of your God—[\[11\]](#) but you may play as long as your songs please."

A stirring flourish heralded a run on the taut harp, the Danes fell more or less quiet, and Alfred, Ingeld's seed, boldly intoned:

*Nor trumpet we the trials of Cerdic king, [\[12\]](#)  
who wafted to the west and whipped the Welsh;  
nor boast of Brutus, his own father's bane, [\[13\]](#)  
who, banned from Rome, bred Romans in the island;  
nor glorify Theodoric, the Goth, [\[14\]](#)  
the Amaling who upstaged Odovacar; [\[15\]](#)  
no, we sing the Cimbrian seed of kings,  
the grim, greedy, groaning Gormr the Great!*

The singer watched his fingers peck, then listened as fiendish applause rattled Athulf's hall. When the Danes' din died, he resumed his lay.

*With shoals of heroes huge, from heath and shore  
Gormr, guided by God to goad the folk,  
floated to once-fruitful fertile Britain,  
where one realm remained to rack and maim.*

Again the sailors shouted for sheer pleasure, but Alfred, hot brine rising in his eyes, sang louder, outclamoring their clatter. He lauded Alfred's downlands, meadows, fields, then traced the Danes' campaigns to treacherous Wareham, [\[16\]](#) followed Gorm's escape to Exeter, and haled the host from Gloucester back to Wiltshire, feasting the fiends on his own feigned demise. [\[17\]](#)

*The chief chivvied the cheat through chilly vales,  
shivered his shield and spitted him at Wilton.  
The Wylve, winter-wild, whelmed his relics, [\[18\]](#)  
bouncing his body off its ice-bound bottom:*

*Swanage swallowed Scaef's sorry spawn.*

So Alfred twined the tale he'd meditated  
from Hamwic, where he'd taken up with Abba,  
on past the hanging stones and Woden's dike. [\[19\]](#)  
He'd known the gleeman at his father's court  
in Canterbury, during Athulf's exile. [\[20\]](#)  
The Jute had had a little son named Samson  
who joined young Alfred when he roamed the meadows,  
harrying hares with a soft, boy-sized bow.  
Now Samson filled the Frisian fosse he'd found  
upholding Edith's, and their father's, honor.  
The count (a northman) granted Abba wergild [\[21\]](#)  
and leave to sail from Dorestad unharmed,  
whence he'd arrived in Hamwic, where the king  
encountered him, despondent, in a tavern.  
Abba fell in with Alfred's scheme. That night,  
a frigid, moonless night in vanquished Hampshire,  
they set out on their march to Chippenham—  
which, when they boarded, Beornwulf took leave,  
hurrying home to Denulf and their herds.

The rowers, ravished by the rascal's fate,  
which none had known, rocked the roof with their cheers.  
Satisfied, the Saxon broached the theme  
he hoped would win an interview with Gorm.

*The region's ravaged raches, reft of rule, [\[22\]](#)  
implore the pirate to appoint a peace.  
Does Gormr grab the god-descended scepter?  
Hang hundreds to console young Harald's ghost? [\[23\]](#)  
The king recalls the kinship of two kindreds:  
he waits on word from wide-ruling Woden  
on how to hew a keel for a kingdom,  
for as the stem strays, so swerves the stern.  
Thuswise Guthrum governs the Gewisse,  
dealing dire dooms to doleful docgan. [\[24\]](#)*

The oarsmen rose. They rang the planks and roared.  
The earls on the dais clapped their hands,  
content to hear, in terms their foes could follow,  
the justice of their cause and Alfred's end.  
But Ingeld's imp begged pardon of the Lord  
deep in his heart, for unlike Hilda's herdsman, [\[25\]](#)  
whom an angel taught the art of plaiting hymns,  
he hadn't praised earth's splendor, or the hand  
that ransomed Moses, or our Savior's passion.  
No, to serve his folk, he caressed their foes,  
for unlike Willibald, or Boniface  
who felled the fiends' world-tree at Geismar, [\[26\]](#)  
the Lord had charged him not to save the Danes,  
but by his grace to flush them from the kingdom.

The gleemen had unrolled their humble bedding  
when Halga summoned Alfred to the study.  
"He overheard you from the passageway,"  
said Halga. "Hew to the truth, or hello hell."

The harper's blood was thudding in his head,  
so quickly did his business rush to meet him.  
Again he saw his dame turning away  
and Octa cut down in the skirts of Selwood.  
Mercifully, the Spirit of the Lord  
relieved him of the pangs of memory.  
Like Ehud, Eglon's bane, like Eomer, [\[27\]](#)  
he wore a two-edged thigh-knife on his hip.

"Here is your one-eyed spy," said Hemming's grandson.  
"Obviously, you didn't finish Alfred.  
We saw the scoundrel scam on a swift gray."  
He cast a parting glance at Ingeld's seed.  
A hunk of pork appeared before the harper,  
who crossed himself and drew his whetted blade.

"Excuse a hero's rudeness," said the Dane, [\[28\]](#)  
watching the gleeman manhandle the joint.

"I stood him as a mother and a father, [\[29\]](#)  
but failed to inculcate our courtlier ways."

"He loves you with a brother's love," said Alfred, [\[30\]](#)  
affecting an old poet's gruff abruptness.  
Six, seven times he'd met the heathen chieftain,  
but never had he glimpsed a kinsman's heart  
pittering under the grim mask of war.

"How marvelously harp and song," said Gormr,  
tapping his breast with a scarred, bristled fist,  
"both rouse and soothe the tumult in the soul! [\[31\]](#)  
I bet the earl a shilling you were Welsh.  
But is it true, this figment of our triumph?  
Is Alfred Athulfing distinctly dead?  
You paint him as a prize ass, a weakling,  
but it took seven years to bring him down."

The Saxon brushed a sleeve across his lips  
to cover an involuntary grin.

"I wish him dead, of course," the northman said,  
"but as a reigning king, I wish him peace. [\[32\]](#)  
The Saxons will not pull a pagan's wagon, [\[33\]](#)  
nor will the jealous Zealanders endure  
me as their king. Had we but captured Alfred,  
we could have salvaged his, and Edward's, reign.  
Did I twig it? You are a Welshman born?"

"Gise," the seed of Athelwulf replied, [\[34\]](#)  
"a Briton from Dumnonia I am.  
They snatched me when they massacred my kin. [\[35\]](#)  
Old Ecgbert son of Ealhmund was *cyning*,  
the dragon egg the Germans call 'the Great.'" [\[36\]](#)

"You hate them, then," concluded Godfred's seed.  
"So tell me what you know of Alfred's death." [\[37\]](#)

"We halted, sir, three nights ago in Wilton,"



said Alfred, "where the whipped whelp retired.  
I saw him, sir, I saw him plain as daylight  
topple like a felled oak from his mount,  
with purple blood spurting from every pore.  
He broke the ice and disappeared from sight."

The pagan sailor halted by the table  
and fixed the harper's solitary eye.  
"Then you have seen him but as I have seen him,"  
he said, "in the sly jugglery of thought.  
A hurt hero can drop from his horse and live." [38]

"Gee, sir, he can," the Athulfing concurred, [39]  
"he can, if there's a dram of blood left in him. [40]  
By now the *hræw* has reached the open sea." [41]

Gormr examined Alfred's glabrous scars  
and watched his fingers roll the idle knife.  
The Saxon felt he now might stick the devil,  
but doubted it would benefit his folk  
to sic a pack of wolfish jarls on them. [42]

"What is your name, old man?" inquired Gormr. [43]  
"They called me Mervyn at my christening,"  
said Alfred, "Mervyn *ap*, or son of, Myrddin."

The sailor turned away. "Are you a wizard?  
Can you commune with *\*alfar*, ghosts, and trolls [44]  
and mutter spells like Saxon cunning men?"

The seed of Ingeld scanned the brigand's back,  
in which he read old pride worn down with toil,  
and answered he could pray as well as any.

"Then you shall prove your worth," the northman said, [45]  
"by tracking down the ousted Saxon king  
wherever he may be in the nine worlds.  
Do it, and I'll hand over ten gold pounds  
and my exhausted folk will have a home."

He poured a sack of thrymsas on the desk  
collected from the hoards of Frankish lords.  
Their muted clatter, softer than pure silver's,  
startled Alfred, who never touched such spoil.  
They flickered under his eye like sun-soaked pebbles  
bathing in the bed of a shallow stream.  
It struck him that the stranger, Harald's father, [\[46\]](#)  
was tapping him to serve, as Joseph served  
Pharaoh and preserved his father's house. [\[47\]](#)  
He fidgeted. It seemed the Holy Ghost  
said no to nicking Godrum's jugular.

The Dane inclined his head so near that Alfred  
could feel his vinous breath caress his ear.  
"Two widowed sisters live nearby," said Gorm, [\[48\]](#)  
"One will bear me the son of my old age  
who, backed by his ambitious Saxon kinsmen,  
will split and mitigate the natives' hate.  
Now, which of these two fruitful Saxonesses  
to wed and bed is what I want to know.  
The one is forward, fit to rule our board.  
The other, overshadowed, even grave,  
will nurse our newborn nation on her wisdom."

The seed of Ingeld flushed and swallowed hard.  
He knew the noble families nearby  
and didn't relish heaping up their troubles.  
He spied Ealhswith's silver sieve on the chest.  
"Gee, sir," he said, "our spell must ease their fears.  
May I inspect the sisters?"

"By no means,"  
said Gorm, his grained and pouchy eye aglitter,  
"you might fancy the *\*froia* meant for me." [\[49\]](#)

"Then lend me a short bow," said Alfred, rising,  
"to spit a hare, whose heart we'll grind to dust."

“There’s one more thing,” said Godrum, “keep your seat. If Hrothulf takes the crown, he’ll offer up the whole Saxon folk to Woden’s glory.[\[50\]](#) He must be crushed, for your good and for ours. You do these things for me, and you shall be my father, son, and mother, three in one. Then I’ll uncork the rest of my adventures which, I promise, you will find worth singing.”

The Saxon stumbled out under the stars, which seemed a sharper, harder testament, now that he was the devil’s captive bard,[\[51\]](#) than when, though menaced, he’d possessed his realm. His head aswim, he ranged the palisade where farers, lit by fires, warmed their hands.[\[52\]](#) “Lord, take this vial from my lips,” he prayed, “this sickening leechcraft of sin.”[\[53\]](#)



Alfred awoke with Godrum’s hugeous head blotting out the charred beams of the hall. Had the fiend pierced his sham? Was this the end? Blindly they trod the hard-rutted yard to the limed stables, dim gray in the starlight, where two young mermen held four drowsy mounts.

“Can Mervyn ride?” inquired Harald’s father, watching a gelding nuzzle the harper’s chest. “Aye, sir,” said Alfred, scratching bony noses, “in Kent I had the run of a dun nag.”

The heavens shed successive robes of gloom as Guthrum, too familiar with the track for Alfred’s liking, led them through the trees. Screeching, a jay alighted on a branch; a woodpecker rattled its alarm.

“We need all kinds of herbs,” cried Ingeld’s seed.

He slid down and kicked at a hump of snow.  
“A doe hare’s belly, dried, will propagate  
their goodness, but you too must swig the brew.”

He knelt beside the path, tying a snare.  
“Can’t you compel your elves,” the fiend inquired  
coolly, “to inflame their widowed loins?”

Twisting his head, the seed of Ingeld saw  
the heathen’s eyeballs shining like wet stones.  
“We do not call upon such sprites,” said Alfred,  
“but only spirits that obey our *Frea*.[\[54\]](#)  
A litany, a credo, and twelve masses  
should saturate the potion with his power.”

They breakfasted astride a rotting oak,[\[55\]](#)  
shortening a sausage with their steel.  
“Your ladies,” Alfred added as he chewed,[\[56\]](#)  
“as Saxon matrons, surely serve our Savior.”  
“Of course they do,” the foreigner replied.  
“I told you the whole purpose of this union.”  
“The Church,” said Alfred, “judges ‘disparate cults’  
a ‘diriment impediment’ to marriage.”  
He paused and said, “My lord, you should convert.”[\[57\]](#)

The pagan cut an ample chunk of flesh  
and masticated it in pregnant silence.  
Tearing a loaf of bread, the harper added,  
“King Athelbert of Kent acknowledged Christ  
after marrying a Frankish maid.[\[58\]](#)  
Their daughter wed King Edwin of Deira  
on promise he would study heaven’s law.[\[59\]](#)  
The pope urged her to sermonize her husband  
and sent her robes, a mirror, and a comb.[\[60\]](#)  
Chlodovech, that lady’s ancestor,  
received a Catholic girl from Burgundy,  
Clotilde, as she is known, or Chrotochildis.[\[61\]](#)  
She led him to the font, assisted by

the Lord's miraculous victory at Zulpich,  
where he dispersed the menacing Alamanni.[\[62\]](#)  
Thus three prepotent pagan kings converted  
based on acquiring royal Christian brides."

The sailor took a long pull from the wineskin  
then cautiously surveyed the nearby trees.  
Observing him, the son of Athulf thought,  
I could dispatch him now, here in this grove.[\[63\]](#)  
Yet by God's grace, we gabble peacefully.  
Sufficient unto the day the ills thereof.[\[64\]](#)

Soon a junior devil reappeared,  
a nest of tangled herbage in his arms.  
The Saxon extracted a blackened leaf.  
"Waybread it is," he said, "the warrior's friend,  
for wounds, sores, and the bite of a mad dog."  
Just then the wintry overcast disbanded  
as heaven's artisans blew up the flames  
that lit their tilework above the trees.  
The seed of Ingeld saw the other youngster  
high in the black branches of an ash,  
straining to reach a sprig of mistletoe.[\[65\]](#)  
The anxious Athulfing felt comforted  
by the sausage, bread, and staunch Frankish wine—  
his own, untasted through these wretched weeks—  
and by the oddity of heaven's ways.



King Eric's august killer occupied[\[66\]](#)  
the former judgment seat of Saxon kings,  
as Halga and suspicious Hrut perused  
the clustered suitors, muttering in the smoke.  
The seed of Ingeld, lurking in a corner,  
revolted at the sight of Saxon swordsmen[\[67\]](#)  
humbly soliciting the devils' dooms,  
but such disgust was nothing to the shame

that whelmed him when he saw his alderman,  
Lord Wulfhere, his late brother's widow's father, [\[68\]](#)  
posted among the earls flanking Gorm-  
like one of those putrescent senators  
that ratified their Gothic master's rancor  
and sentenced the philosopher to death. [\[69\]](#)  
Unsure whom he should hate the most, the fiend,  
his *princeps*, or himself, he seemed to sway,  
but as he swayed, good Halga cocked a finger  
at two devils dragging a monk between them, [\[70\]](#)  
a man whose stricken features Alfred knew.

"What is it, lads?" King Hemming's grandson asked.  
"Did Freya cast her fascination on him?  
Inveigle him to thief some sluttish sow?"  
The younger fiend replied, "He was hoarding grain."

"You know your country's law," the earl said.  
"Thou shalt not steal."

"I charge the wretched monk," [\[71\]](#)  
said Hrut, "with pilfering our property.  
Cut off his hands and hang him from Ygg's tree."

"Kind lords, the people faint," the brother said. [\[72\]](#)  
The Saxons glared, incensed at his neglect  
of Godrum's laws and waste of Godrum's patience.  
Contemptibly, Lord Wulfhere lowered his eyes.  
King Alfred bent his lips to Godrum's ear.  
"A holy monk," he murmured. "*La*, have mercy.  
Who loves his heavenly Father feeds his sheep."

Godfred's grandson, twisting in his chair,  
stared into Alfred's single blinking eye.  
"Enough," he said, "or you shall wield the axe. [\[73\]](#)  
I know your God doomed his own Son to death." [\[74\]](#)

"Then take me in his stead," the harper said. [\[75\]](#)  
"Take me. I'll hang for the man's criminal love."

The heathen growled to Halga, "Let him go."

That afternoon, the northman ordered Alfred to join him for a jaunt, allotting him the mare on which Edward had learned to ride— but first they watched the fiends drill in the yard. Lord Halga, vapor dangling from his lips, strode like a god among his worshippers, explaining how to shed a heavy brunt or swing a swifter, shrewder, deadlier tip. "Observe the science of the Franks," said Godrum.

They passed the gateway, crowned with pecked-at heads, and trotted down the high street, where the townsmen had patched their roofs with reeds hacked from the ice. On Godrum's undertaking, they'd restored their market day, when folk sold hides and cheese. "The Saxons have declined since former times," said Godrum, "though King Alfred's father thrashed us.[\[76\]](#) I'd hate to grow as feeble as these Christians."

They galloped for a mile below the meads, then reined in to track a crusted brook, and as they jogged, the agitated Saxon assailed the Dane's ignorant reluctance.

"A Christian crushed the Welsh at Heavenfield after rearing our Redeemer's rood.[\[77\]](#) When Penda martyred him at Oswestry, his brother pegged the unrepentant pagan and won the warlike Mercian tribe for Christ.[\[78\]](#) Among the Franks, the Christian emperor, roaring like a fire through dry timber, in eight campaigns devoured the Old Saxons."[\[79\]](#)

At this, the heathen chief had had enough. "My grandfather stopped him cold," said Gormr,[\[80\]](#) "despite the elephant called Abul Abbas—

the caliph sent him to stampede our men.”[\[81\]](#)

“He overcame the Avar horde,” said Alfred,  
“and baptized their high chagan Abraham.”[\[82\]](#)

“His pious son betrayed his Danish allies,”  
said Guthrum. “Men he’d sponsored at the font.”[\[83\]](#)

The pair proceeded southwest in silence.  
Then Alfred touched his heels to the mare  
and shot ahead, outpacing Guthrum’s stallion  
(though slowing at the brook called Cocklemoor  
for the frail shells that lingered from the Flood),  
and veered, laboring up the oak-wood slope.  
Gormr, flushed, caught up with him on the crest.  
From there, they overlooked the stripped elms,  
the gray-black river, and the captive town.

“His throne is vacant now,” the harper said,  
extending a cupped, reddened palm to Gorm.  
“Our warlike pontiff craves a warlike partner  
to shove the Saracens from Sicily.”[\[84\]](#)

A murderous usurper rules the Greeks.”[\[85\]](#)  
He clenched a ruddy fist. The farer frowned.

“King Pippin worshipped Woden,” he replied,  
referring to great Charles the Great’s great-grandson.[\[86\]](#)

“I sailed with a man who feasted with him.”  
“Grim jilted him,” the harper answered sharply,  
“to perish, raving, in his uncle’s dungeon.”[\[87\]](#)

The sailor shrugged, for such was Woden’s way.  
He eyed the chilly country with a smile.  
“I wonder why you subjugated Britons,”  
he countered, “haven’t profited from our toil.”

“No noble *dux bellorum*,” Alfred said,  
“has led our people since Artorius’ day.  
They say he’ll come again. You may be he.”



Returning, they drew up beside the river.  
The heavens were a faceless, depthless mass,  
as if the Lord, at large among the clouds,  
had crushed the sun under his booted heel.  
Across the pitch-black flood, a pair of swans  
stood motionlessly on a bank of ice,  
apart and yet unquestionably united,  
their black shanks tying their shining bodies  
to the bright shoreline under their black feet.

“The earls will be here in two weeks’ time,”  
said Godrum, rolling backwards as his stallion  
stretched head and neck to clear the silvery shelf.  
“My plan is, at that gathering, to unveil  
the spouse you were supposed to help me choose.” [\[88\]](#)

“I thought you meant allegorical ladies,”  
said Alfred. “Is my high lord decided  
not to fish for a royal Frankish damsel?” [\[89\]](#)

“To thrust me from the throne and wed my son,”  
the Dane rejoined, “like Alfred’s Frankish stepmother,  
now trebly wedded to the count of Flanders?” [\[90\]](#)  
I saw her in Count Eric’s ale-hall—  
Halga’s uncle, in case you didn’t know. [\[91\]](#)  
He gave them sanctuary when her father  
and Archbishop Hincmar banished them. [\[92\]](#)  
A willful and experienced young quean, [\[93\]](#)  
superbly cased in yards of crimson stuff.”

“I counseled so,” the Saxon countered coldly,  
“that my dread *dryhten*, dunked and dripping chrism, [\[94\]](#)  
might row to Rome and reap the diadem.  
Our Lord himself was born a man of Rome—  
though if you’d bathed, my *brego* of the Bright-Danes,  
you wouldn’t have breached your sworn pact with Alfred.” [\[95\]](#)

A surge of anger blackened Godrum’s brow

as Alfred darkened to his stubbled scalp.  
“Besides,” he said, “I never heard that Judith,  
tutored by Pardulus and John the Scot,  
ever indulged in her own flesh and blood.[\[96\]](#)  
In justice, then, she may not be compared  
to Semiramis, who debauched her son;[\[97\]](#)  
or poor Jocasta, whose exuberant womb  
bore four ill-fortuned siblings to their father;[\[98\]](#)  
or Philip, who defiled Alexander,  
the brother of his Epirotic queen;[\[99\]](#)  
or Ptolemy of Alexandria,  
who spoiled his sister, then, his daughter-niece;[\[100\]](#)  
or Gaius, who molested his three sisters;  
or Agrippina’s lad, who smirched his dam.[\[101\]](#)

“Unlike such signal evildoers, lord,[\[102\]](#)  
our Judith but infringed an ecclesial scheme  
adopted to amalgamate the nations,  
which purpose she’d already served by marrying  
the widowed Saxon *cyning*, Alfred’s father,  
instead of one of her gilt Frankish cousins.”[\[103\]](#)  
Here Alfred took advantage of the pagan,  
for Judith, when she married Alfred’s brother,  
in truth fused with her spiritual son.[\[104\]](#)  
“Moreover, sir,” the seed of Athulf added,[\[105\]](#)  
“you have no son to blast your nuptial comfort  
with the shamefast stigma you detest.”[\[106\]](#)

Across the way, the swans had moved downstream  
to keep their territory free of mallards,  
a flock of which had occupied the reach.  
“You vex me, Mervyn,” Godfred’s seed replied.  
“You said yourself King Alfred breached the peace  
when he withheld the wergild owed the Danes,  
not to mention murdering my boy.[\[107\]](#)  
As to the spotlessness of Baldwin’s bedmate,  
conceded, though when last I saw the lady,

she looked well founded to support the load  
of sin that men's malice laid at her feet.  
But I will never brook a Frankish bride.  
You know what Lothar's lass was saddled with—[\[108\]](#)  
and look at Brunhild, who destroyed ten kings.”[\[109\]](#)

The seed of Ingeld warily declared,  
“She was a Gothic, not a Frankish, frow.”

After a time, the heathen captain growled,  
“Your God won't grudge a favor done a friend.”  
But Alfred saw no amiable glint  
in Guthrum's speckled eyes. “*La, sir,*” he said,  
“You long to dive beneath the Savior's wave.  
Why wait until you sniff the pit of hell?”

“I know your water rite,” the Dane replied,  
“is more than just a change of loyalty.  
On peril of your head,” he remonstrated,  
then turned his steed and spurred it to a run.[\[110\]](#)

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[\[1\]](#) “Siziter”

[\[2\]](#) munt (OE)

[\[3\]](#) \*trik (OE)

[\[4\]](#) \*halir (OE)

[\[5\]](#) \*kunukar (OE)

[\[6\]](#) \*kraf (OE)

[\[7\]](#) gleowmenn (OE)

[\[8\]](#) Guthrum

[\[9\]](#) \*søkr (OE)

[\[10\]](#) \*bunta (OE)

[\[11\]](#) \*Kup (OE)

[\[12\]](#) K. Cerdic d. 534

[\[13\]](#) K. Ascanius

[\[14\]](#) K. Theodoric d. 532

[\[15\]](#) K. Odovacar d. 493

[\[16\]](#) 876

[\[17\]](#) Jan. 878

- [18] R. Wylfe
- [19] Stonehenge
- [20] K. Athelwulf d. 858
- [21] Eric s. of K. Hemming
- [22] ræccas (OE)
- [23] s. of Guthrum
- [24] dogs (OE)
- [25] Cædmon ca. 680
- [26] Bp. Willibald d. 787; Abp. Boniface d. 754
- [27] Jud. 3:16; 626
- [28] \*halr (OE)
- [29] \*mupur, \*fabur (OE)
- [30] \*broþor (OE)
- [31] \*siol (OE)
- [32] \*kunukr (OE)
- [33] \*uakn (OE)
- [34] yes (OE)
- [35] mægþ (OE)
- [36] K. Ecgbert d. 839
- [37] \*taupi (OE)
- [38] \*halr, \*hect (OE)
- [39] yea (OE)
- [40] blod (OE)
- [41] corpse (OE)
- [42] \*iarlar (OE)
- [43] \*nafn, \*gamal (OE)
- [44] elves (OE)
- [45] \*uarþ (OE)
- [46] Harald s. of Guthrum
- [47] Gen. 47:12
- [48] \*sustur (OE)
- [49] lady (OE)
- [50] \*Ruulf, \*0pen (OE)
- [51] feond (OE)
- [52] ferendas (OE)
- [53] Luke 22:42; læce cræft (OE)
- [54] Lord (OE)
- [55] ac (OE)
- [56] hlæfdigan (OE)
- [57] hlaford (OE)
- [58] K. Athelbert d. 616; mægþ (OE); Bertha da. of K.

Charibert d. 567

[59] K. Edwin d. 632

[60] Boniface V 618–625

[61] K. Clovis d. 511; Clotilde da. of K. Chilperic II

[62] 496

[63] graf (OE)

[64] Matt. 6:34

[65] misteltan (OE)

[66] K. Eric I d. 854; \*bani (OE)

[67] secgas (OE)

[68] Wulfthryth wid. of K. Athelred d. 871

[69] K. Theodoric d. 526; Boethius d. 525

[70] deoflas (OE)

[71] \*mokr (OE)

[72] munuc (OE)

[73] \*øhs (OE)

[74] \*Kup, \*Sunr (OE)

[75] hearpere (OE)

[76] Aclea 851

[77] K. Oswald d. 641; Heavenfield, 634; rod (OE)

[78] K. Penda d. 654; K. Oswy d. 670; mægburh (OE)

[79] Emp. Charles d. 814

[80] \*afi (OE)

[81] \*fill (OE); Haroun al-Rashid d. 809

[82] 796

[83] Emp. Louis d. 840;

Harald Klak d. 852

[84] John VIII 872–882

[85] Emp. Basil acc. 867

[86] K. Pippin II d. ca. 864; \*Oþen (OE)

[87] K. Charles the Bald

[88] \*spusa (OE)

[89] sinfrea, fæmne (OE)

[90] \*sun, \*stiubmopur (OE); Judith da. of K. Charles the Bald; Baldwin I d. 879

[91] \*Helki (OE)

[92] \*Ærkibiskub (OE)

[93] \*snot (OE)

[94] lord (OE)

[95] Orosius bk. vi; king (OE)

[96] Pardulus bp. of Laon; John Scotus Erigena

- [97] Orosius bk. i; bearn (OE)
- [98] Orosius id.
- [99] Orosius bk. iii; Olympias
- [100] Orosius bk. v; swyster (OE)
- [101] Caligula; Orosius bk. vi; Nero; Orosius id.
- [102] domne (OE)
- [103] K. Athelwulf d. 858; fæder, magas (OE)
- [104] K. Althelbald d. 860; sunu (OE)
- [105] Alfred
- [106] sceamfæst (OE)
- [107] \*makur (OE)
- [108] Teutberga w. of K. Lothar II d. 869
- [109] Brunhild d. 614
- [110] \*hofop, \*hist (OE)