

and peaceful. The land is one of orchard lawns and green fields, of picturesque farm dwellings and manor houses. No great city is anywhere near. You can see the small delightful cathedral town of Wells as you stand on the top of the Tor by St. Michael's tower. The brown moss of the most perfectly preserved of England's churches shows through the soft blue here against the distant Mendips. Below you lies Glastonbury, shaped like a cross and hidden among the trees. The little river Brue, lazily slipping down from the forest of Selwood, strikes the foot of the Tor and glides away past the town, crossing the long plain until it drops into Bristol Channel, having made part of its journey through dykes,—for all the world like a Dutch canal with its bed above the adjacent fields.

Looking eastward across the plain to the high lands of Welschire, you will see King Alfred's tower, a modern memorial, commanding the site where Alfred routed the Danes; and within sight of that tower at the junction of the rivers Parret and Tona, King Alfred rallied his nobles, and built the fastness which proved to be the turning point in his fortunes. It was near here that Alfred sought shelter in a herdsman's cottage and scandalized the goodwife by letting her cakes burn upon the hearth.

Here lies old Isle Chester, chief city of the ancient Belgae, who migrated hither out of Gaul about 300 B. C. These Celtic people—and mayhap from them we have some Celtic blood—drove out the aborigines and established colonies. To them is credited the great wall or dyke to protect them from the foe. Portions of this dyke called the Wansdyke are to be seen at the present time along Marlborough Downs terminating in Porteshead.

The savage and furious contentions of these Belgae with those whose soil they had usurped, lasted until the arrival of the Romans, when they in turn became the oppressed. Many of the neighboring hills are crowned with the remains of Roman camps and Roman roads are still in use. The main road of this country is the old Roman Fosseway, running through Ilminster and another Roman road in use runs through Taunton.

In the 5th century, on the decline of the Roman power, the country became subject to the Saxons and formed a part of the kingdom of Wessex. Here King Ina began his reign over the West Saxons, 688 A. D. and built the college at Wells, dedicated to God and St. Andrew. It was King Ina who fought with the Welsh king, Gerest, and made Taunton a border fortress (710) (722). Later than this the incursions of the Danes kept the country in continual alarm, and in the reign of King Alfred they carried their ravages to Somerset and reduced that king to his most dire extremity until from Athelney Isle he sallied forth and won his great victory at Edington.

Then came the Norman Conquest and the capture of Exeter (1068). Perkin Warbeck, who seized and abandoned Taunton in 1497, had his short sway, while in the revolution of 1643-45 the people of this district proved again that they were not noted for their attachment to royalty. The great mass of people, especially those in the towns, took the Parliament side in the great conflict, and Taunton made its heroic defence under Blake until relieved by Fairfax. The continuance of strong Puritan feeling in the district was evidenced by the support given to the Duke of Monmouth forty years later in the rebellion of 1685, and the last battle fought on English soil saw the Duke defeated at Sedgmore within full sight of old Tor hill.