

ALFRED and ROYAL WINCHESTER.

By HENRY WINTER.

THE recent Millenary of King Alfred has revived public interest in this ancient city, whose earliest history may almost be said to have been the history of the nation. It was founded long before the Christian era, and was in the time of the Ancient Britons, the most important city in the country.

The whole place is rich in historic connections. It was occupied in succession by the Iberians, Britons, Belgians, Romans, Saxons and Normans. Where the present cathedral now stands was a Saxon minster in which Egbert was crowned the first king of all the English.

A meadow—"Danemark Mede"—near the city is still pointed out as the scene of a terrific encounter between Guy, Earl of Warwick and the Danish giant Colbrand. In the reign of Athelstan the Danes were trying to reduce Winchester, and agreed to settle the matter between two champions, one from either side. The terrible duel ended in favour of Guy, and the Danes withdrew. From a turret in the north wall which is called "Athelstan's Chair" the king is said to have been an interested spectator of the fight.

King Alfred was born at Wantage, but he spent much of his time at Winchester, where after finally defeating the Danes with terrible slaughter at Heddington in Wiltshire he settled down. Many stories are told of him during the period when the Danes held the upper hand, but whether they are true or not is a moot point. About the name of such a

man traditions were certain to cluster thickly.

There is no doubt however that to his capital city of Winchester he was a great benefactor. He enlarged, and partly rebuilt it; he drew within its walls the sages of many lands; he founded a school and monas-

tory, and made the city the headquarters of all that was good in the arts of war and peace.

"It was from Winchester," says the learned Dean Kitchin, "that Alfred set in motion his many plans for the benefit of his people. Here he issued the West-Saxon 'laga,' the new code of Wessex law, the often mentioned Domboc or book of laws; here, too, he is said to have made some fresh distribution of land, and perhaps rearranged the counties and hundreds. Moreover, he is said to have collected at Winchester from every quarter,

which he embodied in a first 'Liber de Winton,' the earliest Domesday Book. This register, it is recorded, was kept among the royal archives at Winchester, until rendered useless as men thought by William's more complete Royal Roll, it was lost or destroyed."

But, lover of peace and education as Alfred was, he lived in an age when only the strong arm could protect the liberty of his people. The Danes were fierce foes, and to keep them at bay Alfred needed stout vessels. He was a good ship-builder, and his vessels were more than a match for those of the Danes. Four years before his death he destroyed a Danish fleet in the Solent Sea, and carrying the crews to Winchester, promptly hanged them from the walls of Wolvesey Castle.

