

**ATHELSTAN: A  
POEM. BOOK I-VII**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649215065

Athelstan: a poem. Book I-VII by Anonymous

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**ANONYMOUS**

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# ATHELSTAN:

A POEM.

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LONDON:  
EDWARD MOXON & CO., DOVER STREET.  
1862.

PR  
3991  
A1A86

BOOK I.

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B

Noise choked the narrow streets of Winchester,  
A noise to rouse the morning from its bed,  
When steel met steel, and heart encounter'd heart  
With the keen hate of hours. The sombre air  
Was tortured into sound, as arrows whirr'd  
Like birds of iron beak, and missive spears  
Knock'd at the breasts that fronted them, to seek  
An entry into life—alas! for man  
That such a scene where ghastly wounds unmake  
The beauty which God made of face and form  
Should have a grandeur in it! 'Tis the stake,  
The chance of loss in such a mortal game,  
That turns red carnage from a murd'rous fiend  
To a destroying angel. On one side,



The smaller number'd, there were ranged a few  
With better arms, and bearing more composed,  
For the stern work they handled : at their head  
Was *Ælfred*, the ambitious *Ætheling*.  
He, fighting for a crown, of such an aim  
Fought worthy, throwing into voice and arm  
The weight of his great venture ; with each shout  
That cheer'd his friends, he struck a foe to earth.\*

The fight was straiten'd by the little breadth  
Of the old city's threads of winding road,  
Where buildings of all sorts, some timber-ribb'd,  
Tall, and stone-corner'd, others shed-like, thatch'd  
With broad-leaf'd water-flags, stood opposite  
With slender interval ; where fortress-house

\* Historically the opposition of *Ælfred* to *Athelstan's* succession, is surrounded with numerous difficulties. On what he founded his claims to succeed the son of the Great *Alfred*, has never been explained, and is, perhaps, not susceptible of explanation ; but that foul play was used toward him cannot be doubted. Rome has always been ready to oblige such princes as have displayed an inclination to enrich its treasury, which *Athelstan's* policy, as well as his superstition, induced him to do ; and therefore we are little surprised at the series of tragical incidents which terminated *Ælfred's* career.

Of noble Thane, jostled the shiv'ring hut  
 That crouch'd beside it ; or the huckster's shop,  
 With all its small display of daily wares  
 Spread out and open to the air and eye,  
 Fronted a palace of the priests of Christ.

Adown the central lane a wavy crowd  
 Of men pour'd, struggling in uncertain fray,  
 On dashing, or forced backward as the luck  
 Of victory bore them--'twas the profitless rage  
 Of party-passion, and the taste of blood  
 That turn'd the current of humanity :  
 Men slew their neighbours, and then scream'd for joy.  
 Half-arm'd, and arm'd, and unarm'd citizens,  
 And old and young, struck out, and stabb'd, or tore  
 With naked hands, dyeing their clothes with blood  
 As the true colour of their loyalty.

Amid the many combatants were two  
 Pre-eminent in noise and action ; one

Was young and tall, and angularly built,  
And strong, and quick of limb, nor over-clothed.  
His features had a false and wasted look,  
The ineffaceable stamp of suffering vice.  
The other was a portlier man, though short,  
And drest in such habiliments as mark'd  
A lot which Fortune had made comfortable.  
His sycee was wove of linen ; to his knee  
Adorn'd with trimmings, loosely flow'd and large  
His linen tunic, while his feet were housed  
Within an old similitude of shoes :  
But, to leave free his movements, he had left  
His decent sagum safely hung at home.  
'Twas a strong party-feeling which had forced  
The citizen to risk his gotten wealth  
And the few years of life which yet remain'd  
To make him own himself an aged man.  
The two fought boldly on opposing sides,  
And 'mid the thick confusion of the fray  
The younger sought the elder, for he strove