

CHAPTER III.

Usurpation of Carausius.—Britain returns to the subordination of a Roman province.—Condition of the country at the end of the third century.—Its abundant produce.—Division into five provincial districts.—Amount of its population.—Roads.—The Army.—Fortified places.—Cities, and their Roman remains.—Mixed population of Britain.—Early settlement of foreigners.—Character of Roman administration.—Prevalence of Latin language and literature.—Traces of Roman customs and superstitions.

THE usurpation by Carausius of the sovereign power in Britain, in the year 286, offers one of the best historical proofs of the strength and prosperity of the country. He was by birth a Menapian, or native of Belgic Gaul; and, according to Mr. Kemble, "in the third century the inhabitants of the Menapian territory were certainly Teutonic." Appointed to the command of a powerful armament, to repress the ravages of Saxon pirates on the shores of Gaul and Britain, he abused his authority in a way which roused the indignation of the Emperors Maximian and Diocletian. Fleeing from their vengeance into Britain, he assumed the imperial purple, with the title of Augustus, and, trusting to the power of his island empire, defied the whole majesty of Rome. After six years of dominion, in which he raised the naval supremacy of Britain to a height which it only subsequently attained in the days of Alfred, he was betrayed and murdered by his minister Allectus; and in three more years, independent Britain was again subjected to the rule of the Cæsars, by the defeat of this second usurper, and quietly remained under the Imperial government of Constantius Chlorus, and of his successor Constantine.

A few years after these events occurred, our country was panegyrised by Eumenius, as "Britannia, fortunate and happier than all other lands; enriched with the choicest blessings of heaven and earth." To the Romans of the days of Constantine it was proclaimed, by another orator, to be matchless as "a land so stored with corn, so flourishing in pasture, so rich in variety of mines, so profitable in its tributes, on all its coasts so furnished with convenient harbours, and so immense in its circuit and extent." Gibbon says, "It is difficult to conceive that, in the beginning of the fourth

century, England deserved all these commendations. A century and a half before, it hardly paid its own establishment." Let us not forget that two centuries before carry us back to the time of Agricola, when the country from the Thames to the Humber was in revolt; and that a century and a half before, Antoninus was striving to shut out the incursions of the Caledonians by his turf rampart. A century and a half of comparative tranquillity for Southern England, under the fertilising power of the Roman civilisation, would afford ample time to convert an expensive conquest into a valuable possession. Whether the individual happiness of the people had accompanied the productiveness of the soil, may be questioned. "Fortunate Britannia" was an eulogy for an emperor's ear.

This island, "so immense in its circuit and extent," was divided into five provinces. "Britannia Prima" was the name of all the district from the North Foreland to the Land's End, including the Isle of Wight, and comprehending all the inland parts south of the Thames and the Bristol Channel. North and South Wales constituted "Britannia Secunda." The third province, "Flavia Cæsariensis,"—so called from the cruel and jealous lord, Titus Flavius Domitianus, of the wise Agricola, who subdued and settled this important district—extended from the Humber to the Mersey. "Maxima Cæsariensis," the fourth province, included all the northern district to the wall of Hadrian and Severus. Beyond that wall, the fifth province, "Valentia," extended to the rampart of Antonine between the friths. To the extreme north was the unconquered Caledonia.

Of the amount of the population of Roman Britain it is difficult to arrive at any satisfactory estimate. Hume says, "The barbarous condition of Britain in former times is well known; and the thinness of its inhabitants may easily be conjectured, both from their barbarity and from a circumstance mentioned by Herodian, that all Britain was marshy, even in Severus' time, after the Romans had been fully settled in it above a century."* Hume accepted, as many others have done, the common opinion of the "barbarity" of the inhabitants of Britain; but he has gone beyond this prejudice. He has misrepresented what Herodian does say. That historian, who flourished in the third century, describing the march of Severus against the Northern tribes, which we have narrated in the last chapter, says: "He more especially endeavoured to render the

* Essay xi.

marshy places stable by means of causeways, that his soldiers, treading with safety, might easily pass them, and, having firm footing, fight to advantage. *For many parts of the British country, being constantly flooded by the tides of the ocean, become marshy.*" This is very different from Herodian saying, "*all Britain is marshy.*" It would be as absurd to say, upon the authority of Eumenius, that in the time of Constantius *all Britain* was rich with abundant harvests and innumerable flocks and herds. That this description of its wealth was applicable to the southern and midland provinces of Britannia Prima and Flavia Cæsariensis, as well as to the rich valleys of the northern Maxima Cæsariensis, we can have little doubt, when we look at the roads with which they were intersected, and the numerous towns, forts, and harbours connected by these roads. This network of highways was not constructed for the sole purpose of marching the Roman legions from Dover to London, or from Bristol to Lincoln,—up and down through the five provinces wherever there was a revolt to be put down or a tribute to be enforced.* The roads were the great connecting communications of a large population, who had not been without roads and towns in what was called their uncivilised state. They were not rude cartways between one village and another, but substantial works, with bold cuttings, and solid terraces carried by piles over marshy ground, and raised upon piers where elevation was required. Setting aside those numerous branch railways of modern England which the manufacturing element has created, they carried on the communications of the island, from the shores of the English Channel to those of the Irish Sea and the German Ocean, and connected all the inland country from the Thames to the Tyne, as completely, and more directly, than the railway system of our day. According to the wants of the Roman colonisers and the Romanised English, they made this island, sixteen hundred years ago, one whole. These great works could not have been constructed or sustained except upon a self-supporting principle, derived from the intercourse of a considerable population. Tacitus, in speaking of those grievances of the native people which were remedied by Agricola, says that they were compelled to take long journeys for the purpose of carrying grain to places extremely distant, instead of supplying the troops in the winter-quarters which were nearest

* The lines of Roman roads of which undoubted traces exist at the present time, are clearly shown by red lines in the map of "*Britannia Romana*," published in "*Monumenta Historica Britannica*."

the homes of the cultivators. They were obliged to travel the remote places for the benefit of those who monopolised the corn. Here is distinct evidence, before the close of the first century, that the Roman legions and auxiliaries were supported by the produce of a country in which there were roads; and that they were not only supported by the tribute of grain, but that official rapacity wrung still more out of the capital of the cultivators. Had Agricola found a country without intercourse, he would necessarily have found no corn for tribute. The people, in their isolated fields, would have produced no more than they could have consumed. We are not told by the historian that the oppressive monopolists left the people to starve while the Roman soldiers were fed; but that the greedy officials seized upon the corn, and made the people buy it for their own consumption. Agricola augmented the tribute; but he made it less onerous by a just and equal distribution of the public burthens. If the produce was considerable, and the communications numerous, in the time of Agricola, we may well conceive that they had kept pace with the wants of an increasing civilised population in the time of Constantius. We cannot have a better evidence of the fertility of Britain, and the ease with which its produce was transmitted to its ports, than is furnished by one remarkable fact in the middle of the fourth century. The Emperor Julian, it is recorded, had built warehouses in his continental dominions for the reception of corn from Britain. But the amount of supply in one season is manifested by the fact, that six hundred large barks, built from the woods of the Ardennes, made several voyages under his direction to the coasts of Britain, and supplied the starving Rhine provinces, desolated by war, from the stores of the fertile island. The Romans had, without doubt, improved the agriculture of the country, and had bestowed upon the cultivators "the crooked plough," with "an eight-foot beam," of the Georgics of Virgil.* The abundance of Agricultural produce for export assumes the existence of a large rural population. Nor is the fact less clear that there had been, from very early times, a mining population. The tin mines of Cornwall, and the lead mines of Derbyshire, were systematically worked, and their produce reserved with jealous care for Roman use. The pigs of lead in the British Museum, which bear the stamp of Domitian and Hadrian, show that Tacitus was not talking vaguely when he spoke of the abundance of metals in Britain which was the prize of the

* Georg. I., 174.

conquerors. There is visible proof at this day that the mining and smelting of iron was carried on by the Romans in Britain to a very large extent. Hutton, in his "History of Birmingham," speaks of an enormous cinder-heap which had existed there from the Roman time. Yarranton, who published a book at the end of the seventeenth century, entitled "Improvement by Sea and Land," describes "great heaps of cinders formerly made of ironstone, they being the offal (or waste) thrown out of the foot-blasts by the Romans; they then having no works to go by water, to drive bellows, but all by the foot-blast." At Worcester, he found the hearth of a Roman furnace; and he carried away many thousand tons of these cinders, which, having been imperfectly smelted, would still yield iron. Roman coins, in large numbers, have been constantly found buried amongst these scoriæ, upon which great oaks were growing. Mr. Thomas Wright, in 1852, went over the Roman iron district of the Forest of Dean and its neighbourhood; where he found deep pits, out of which ironstone had been dug, where Roman coins are frequently discovered; and he traced the cinders covering the earth in many parts of this district, which furnished the ore, and the wood for smelting. On the banks of the Wye, below Monmouth, the cinders "lay under our feet like pebbles on the sea-shore."*

That the first real civiliser of Britain was the military arm, is evident from every incidental relation of the Roman conquest. It was, for a long time, a very doubtful fight between disciplined legions and fearless multitudes. But the power established with so much difficulty could not be sustained without continual watchfulness. It was not only Agricola that erected fortified stations, and planted garrisons, but we may be quite sure that during several centuries they were multiplied all over the land, either as defences of the coasts, or in the centre of Roman colonies, or in connection with municipal communities. The country is covered with the most enduring remains of these bulwarks of the Imperial dominion. The earthworks of the people that the Cæsars came to conquer still remain in many places. They interposed formidable barriers to the quiet progress of the Roman troops; and they were defended by large bodies of the whole population capable of bearing arms. But the legions and auxiliaries of the Roman garrisons were composed of an army, properly so called—men trained solely to the business of warfare, and wielding their strength under the most complete subjection to the will of an experienced commander,

* Gentleman's Magazine, January, 1852.

and with all the resources of civilisation that made war a science. The stations were, therefore, selected with all the skill that economises military power. They were on the coast, on the great navigable rivers, on the chief roads. Their distribution, when the rule of Rome was tranquilly established in Britain, was such as to require no very large force to garrison them. Although Aulus Plautius is held to have been at the head of four legions and their auxiliaries, computed at fifty thousand men,—although Severus lost fifty thousand followers in his terrible marches through the wild mountainous regions of the North,—we learn from that curious record of the later Roman levies, the "Notitia Imperii," that the permanent forces in Britain amounted to only about twenty-one thousand men. They were all Romans or soldiers of tributary continental nations. The Britons, according to the invariable policy of Rome, were not entrusted with any share in the charge of the defences. They formed part of the ranks that were employed to hold other nations in subjection.

Of these fortified places, some of the most important remains are found on the coast of South Britain, which was under the command, at an early period, of a military chief designated as Comes Tractûs Maritimi, and, at a later period, Comes Littoris Saxonici per Britanniam. The Count of the Saxon Shore in Britain had nine fortresses to guard, from Portsmouth to Brancaster, at the mouth of the Wash. The interesting remains of Richborough, in Kent, and Burgh, in Suffolk, show the importance of those maritime stations.

It is not within the object of this history to describe antiquities, but only to allude to them as undoubted memorials of a past time. The holiday-visitor of the Isle of Thanet, if he be not familiar with his country's annals, may have difficulty in comprehending why that fertile territory, now partially bounded by the sea, is called an island. The railroad, which branches from Minster to Deal, goes beneath the walls of Richborough. The great sea passage from Boulogne to London, now a tiny stream, called the Wantsum, but in the fourteenth century termed an estuary by Richard of Cirencester, passed by these walls, and bore the Roman vessels to Reculver. The nearest station from Gaul was Dover; but the safest and nearest sea passage to London was by Richborough to the estuary of the Thames. Richborough was a colony, where Romans were settled as possessors of the land, and where the institutions of Rome were adopted without any change in the forms or prin-

ciples of local government. There were nine of these colonies in Britain — London, Colchester, Richborough, Bath, Caerleon (in Monmouthshire), Chester, Gloucester, Lincoln, and Chesterford (near Cambridge). There were also two Municipal Cities, York and Verulam. The Roman walls of some of these places are more or less remarkable; but they are for the most part hidden by modern buildings, or buried amidst the accumulating rubbish of generations. From time to time, in London, when a sewer has to be formed, or a new foundation to be dug deep, we come upon fragments of wall that are undoubtedly Roman. At Lincoln there are fragments of Roman walls and a Roman gate. At York, the Eboracum of the Romans, where Severus and Constantius died, the Roman work has been really distinguished from the more modern city wall. The walls of Bath have been swept away, whatever was their age; but that they contained many Roman remains is distinctly attested. The walls of Chichester are very perfect. The walls of Colchester “may be advantageously compared with any other remains of the kind in this island, or even on the continent.”* Exeter and Chester have walls erected upon Roman foundations. A fragment of Roman wall still stands to point out the site of the famous Verulam. These were all populous places—colonies or municipia. But the remaining walls of Richborough, a great military colony, stand in their solitary magnificence, as they have stood for sixteen or seventeen centuries, eleven or twelve feet thick at the base, from twenty to thirty feet in height, and their outer masonry as perfect in many places as when their alternate courses of stone and tile were first laid. The sea has receded from them; the broad channel they protected is a ditch; huge fragments have fallen in the course of generations; the area within them of five acres is a corn field; but they still tell something of the story of a great era in the life of our nation, whose influence will be permanent when even these mighty ruins shall be swept away.

Burgh Castle (Gariannonum) is situated at the junction of the Waveney and the Yare. The east wall has four circular towers; the west side was once defended by the sea. Both Richborough and Burgh are examples of the great changes of the coast-line, and show how these defences, which seem built for eternal dominion, would have become useless under physical revolutions, if the great revolutions of society had not riven them into fragments.

* Quarterly Review, No. cxiii.

Richard of Cirencester, a monk of the fourteenth century, who collected valuable materials for the statistics of Roman Britain, says, “Among the Britons were formerly ninety-two cities, of which thirty-three were more celebrated and conspicuous.” He then recites their Latin names. Amongst these cities it is doubtful whether he mentions one of the chief, now known as Silchester. He may notice it under some other name than that now assigned to it—Calleva Atrebatum. Of all the existing Roman remains, there are none which present more distinct evidence of the existence, some sixteen centuries ago, of a large civil community. It is situated in a district, at the present time of small population, and somewhat removed from all great communications; but it was once a central point, with roads converging to it from London, Spene, Winchester, Old Sarum, Bath, and Cirencester. It is now neglected, unknown, almost a solitary place amidst thick woods and bare heaths. The most striking characteristic of Silchester is the ruined wall, with old trees that have grown up in generations long past, and are now perishing with it. This remarkable spot is still pretty much as Camden described it: “The walls remain in good measure entire, only with some few gaps in those places where the gates have been; and out of these walls there grow oaks of such a vast bigness, incorporated, as it were, with the stones, and their roots and boughs are spread so far around that they raise admiration in all who behold them.” But there is another remarkable characteristic of Silchester which Camden also observed, as it may be observed now: “The inhabitants of the place told me it had been a constant observation among them, that, though the soil here is fat and fertile, yet in a sort of baulks which cross one another, the corn never grows so thick as in other parts of the field. Along them they believe the streets of the old city to have run.” These streets occupy an area of a hundred acres; and their lines have been mapped out. The people around still call the lonely place within these ruined walls, “the City.” Let us consider what are the probable circumstances which have reduced this once flourishing city, with its remains of baths, of a forum, of a temple, of an amphitheatre, to its present desolate condition. Such considerations belong to history.

Nearly all the great Roman towns have been fixed in localities which possess some eminent natural advantages. Many of these sites were perhaps chosen by the natives before the Romans, who improved the advantages by their higher civilisation. It was not

the policy of Rome to extirpate the natives as an inferior race; but to use them as brave and intelligent instruments for advancing its own wealth and power. Agricola exhorted the British people to build houses, temples, and market-places. When they had completed their works of utility they proceeded to erect other buildings for ornament, such as galleries, baths, and banqueting houses. The testimony of Tacitus is clear, that the conquerors excited and assisted the conquered to the emulation of the Roman conveniences and luxuries. Agricola had the sons of their chiefs taught the liberal sciences and the Roman language. There can be no doubt that the imperial power was in many cases delegated to the native rulers. Cogidubnus was one of these, who was permitted to retain possession of his kingdom; and an inscription has been discovered at Chichester, which imports that he was king and legate of the emperor.* In the same way it may be presumed that Silchester, the city of the Atrebatii, was under the rule of a native prince of the tribe. The form of its walls is not Roman; and it was much too large for a military station. It was a great agricultural capital, approached by roads in all directions. But it had no important natural advantages,—no river for commerce, and no hills for defence. It was in a rich plain; and was, most probably, a store for agricultural produce. Governed, no doubt it was, by its own municipality, under more or less stringent centralisation. When the imperial supervision, which was the key-stone of the arch of British local government, was withdrawn, Silchester was more exposed to the assaults of hostile forces than the towns which the Romans had planted round hill forts and defences of coasts and estuaries. The history of its actual ruin is buried in the obscurity of the centuries that we designate as those of the Saxon invasion. It was probably sacked and burned; but it would not have remained a ruin for hundreds of years had not the conditions of its prosperity been of a transitory nature.

In striking contrast to the desolation of Silchester stand the exuberant riches and mighty population of London. They had each the same institutions which at first sight might appear to bind their citizens to a common interest and a common defence against external assaults. But Silchester had no Thames as London had, through which, whether her government were Roman or Saxon, or Norman, she could draw to herself some portion of the wealth of continental civilisation. We have no evidence that London ever

* Philosophical Transactions, vol. xxxii. See Quarterly Review, No. cxcliii.

exhibited such remains of Roman magnificence as Giraldus Cambrensis describes of Carleon in the twelfth century—stately palaces, towers, temples, theatres, aqueducts. Its buildings were probably of brick, which no Augustus could convert into marble. But wherever we step, within certain limits of the present city, evidences of the Roman presence are continually discovered. Leadenhall Street yields its tessellated pavements, at nine feet and a half below the surface. Here Bacchus rests on his tiger bearing his thyrsus and his drinking-cup. Small silver and bronze images are found even in the bed of the Thames, supposed to have been the penates of some Roman or Romanised family. Londinium, as far as we can judge from its remains, appears to have extended from Blackfriars to the Tower, on the bank of the river; and, in an irregular form, to a line formed northward by Bishopsgate. Much controversy has arisen about the limits of Roman London, which concern us not in this narrative. Within these limits, and beyond them, constant evidences of the old arts and the old religion present themselves. Where the great preachers of a reformed Christianity thundered forth their denunciations against a papal Rome, there, at Paul's Cross, were many evidences of a Heathen Rome disinterred. Cemeteries have been discovered beyond the walls, where the cinerary urns of the dead were evidences of other burial rites. These tell of a large and busy population here once abiding; whose ashes have "quietly rested under the drums and tramlings of three conquests."* But London has its relics which tell something more of the inner life of that population. In excavating the site of the Royal Exchange in 1840, the workmen came to a mass of Roman brickwork about six feet square, which it was necessary to remove. The earth beneath was unsound; and they dug lower. A deep pit was discovered. It contained, not urns and vases, but every species of rubbish that could have been accumulated by the diligent dustmen of a Roman city. Here was a great heap of oyster-shells, goat's horns and sheep's horns, cinders, broken pottery and glass, worn-out soles of shoes and sandals. There was the light sole for the woman's sandal, less than eight inches long by two broad; and the heavy sole, of several pegged leathers, a foot long by three inches and a half broad. There were the waxen tablets, with their bone and wood styles, upon which dealers recorded their bargains, and enamoured youths their appointments. There were every variety of

* Sir T. Brown on Urn Burial.

tool—broken for the most part—gouges, augurs, saws. Knives were there with the makers' names upon them, as some of the pottery also bore the makers' names. Bobbins were there for weaving, similar in form to the slivers used by our own hand-loom weavers, if there be any such remaining. There were also found a few coins, chiefly those of Vespasian and Domitian. We cannot have better evidence of the existence in London of a busy population, of various occupations, and, no doubt, of various ranks—the senator and the slave, the soldier and the shopkeeper.

But there is nothing in the relics of the Roman dominion, as they are thus manifested when the soil is disturbed of once populous cities, that can tell us of what different nations the population was composed. Everything has a Romanised aspect. We cannot learn what was the proportion of the British population to the Roman, and what was the Gaulish or Teutonic element as compared to the British. The popular opinion of this difficult question seems to have resolved itself into this:—that our island had first a native people, whom we call Britons; then the Roman conquerors; and, these having seceded after four or five centuries, then the Saxons. We have been accustomed to look upon our early history as a great drama with its division into acts, so separate from what had gone before that the continuity of the events could nowhere be recognized. As "the child is father of the man," so is one period of our history the father of the next period; and the later period infallibly derives much of its character, not only from its immediate predecessor, but from all that has gone before. The right understanding of the History of England much depends upon not forgetting this continuity.

The population of England at the end of the third century, we are inclined to believe, in accordance with opinions that appear founded upon careful research, was a very mixed one. Tacitus, in the oration of Galgacus, speaks of Gauls and Germans in the army of Agricola. Cæsar distinctly notices the presence of continental tribes in Britain, both in the interior and on the coast. When Marcus Antoninus had put down the great German confederacy against the Roman power, he commanded two of the nations "to deliver up the flower of their youth, who were immediately sent into Britain, a remote island, where they might be secure as hostages, and useful as soldiers." Gibbon derives this fact from the authority of Dion Cassius. Probus, according to Zosimus, sent Burgundians and Vandals into Britain, "who, when settled in that

island, were serviceable to the emperor, as often as any one thenceforward revolted." There are later traces of Germans serving with the Roman legions. Mr. Kemble considers it "not at all improbable that Carausius, when, in the year 287, he raised the standard of revolt in Britain, calculated upon the assistance of the Germans in this country, as well as that of their allies and brethren on the continent."* Finally, three of the soundest authorities upon the subject of our early history, Dr. Lappenberg, Sir Francis Palgrave, and Mr. Kemble, agree in the belief, that the Saxon shore of Britain, of which, as we have mentioned, there was an especial officer in command, derived its name from a settlement of Saxons. "The prevailing opinion, that the 'Litus Saxonicum' borrowed its name from the enemy to whose attacks it was exposed, appears as contrary to the principles of sound philology, as it is unhistorical."† These facts, derived from so many independent sources, go far to refute the common opinion set forth in all our histories, but resting only on loose traditions, that the settlements of the Germanic races in England were subsequent to the termination of the Roman rule. The "Notitia Imperii," in which the Saxon shore is mentioned, was drawn up, according to Dr. William Smith, about the year 400.‡ So far from the Roman government in Britain discouraging settlements of foreigners, we see, from the policy of the emperor Probus, that they were encouraged to abide amidst the native races, as a method, amongst others, of neutralising their hostility. We shall have to return to this interesting subject. We slightly mention it here to show that the character of the population of Britain must have been greatly modified by the admixture of races. The original British or Celtic element had in all likelihood greatly diminished by the end of the third century, and remained without admixture only in districts which had infrequent intercourse with the more cultivated and populous parts of the island, and which the Romans purposely separated by military barriers, such as the Severn exhibits, from their lowland towns. But if the population of Britain which the Romans governed was, as we may well conclude, very various in its character, according to the varieties of its original stock, and therefore more or less adapted for a full development of the Roman civilisation, the imperial power which controlled these discordant elements was unvary-

* Saxons in England, vol. i. p. 12.

† Lappenberg, History of England under the Anglo-Saxon Kings, vol. i. p. 46.

‡ Gibbon, edited by Dr. Smith, vol. iv. p. 388.

ing in its principles, and universal in its application. Let us briefly examine the leading features of the Roman administration of a great province.

When Agricola exhorted the British people, wild and dispersed over the country, to congregate in towns, he was labouring to carry out the universal principle of Roman government. He was not unsuccessful in his endeavours to form them into large communities; for, forty years after, Ptolemy the geographer gives the names of fifty-six towns in Britain. That many of these existed before the Roman occupation, we may well believe. Agricola assisted the people in carrying forward the principle of large associations, and invited them to a more convenient and luxurious form of town life than they had previously known. That principle was inapplicable to a scattered population, such as we see in the rural districts of England at the present day, where a few cottages are clustered round the neighbourhood of the parish church, and the solitary homestead of the farmer here and there lies sheltered on the side of the hills. The owners of the land dwelt in the towns; their serfs went forth from the towns to cultivate the fields, or tended the herds in some mud cabin not far removed from their masters. "The history of the conquest of the world by Rome," says M. Guizot, "is the history of the conquest and foundation of a great number of cities." The government of Rome was, therefore, essentially municipal. It would thus appear to have been far removed from unmitigated despotism, and to have conferred great powers and privileges upon the municipality. We must not judge of this by any modern analogies. The inhabitants of a city were permitted various conditions of self-government, according to the nature of its relations with the centralising power; and these distinctions were preserved in Britain, where, of the ninety-two cities mentioned by Richard of Cirencester, some were ranked as Municipal, some as Colonial, some as under the Latin law, and some as Stipendiary. Into these distinctions it is not necessary for us to enter. However named, they were all governed by municipal regulations and municipal officers, either freely chosen, or forced upon the community. There were privileged residents in each of these cities, who, in historical documents, are termed senators. How they were constituted, and what were their duties, does not appear very clear. They formed, no doubt, a political aristocracy. The active and really important members of the municipal body were the "curiales," (sometimes called "decuriones") men of landed property residing within the

walls of the city, and discharging every municipal function, from that of the tax-collector to the chief magistrate. But let us not imagine that these official persons had a position in the least corresponding in freedom to that of the common councilmen, or elected vestrymen, of our modern English society. They were not representatives of the great body of the citizens; there was no election to the office; to belong to the "curia" was not claimed by them as a right, but forced upon them as a task. It was, indeed, a task involving many restrictions and some risks, even in the best times. They were not allowed to absent themselves without permission from their town; a portion of their property, at their decease, went to the common stock of the "curia;" they were not the assessors of the taxes, but were bound to collect what was imposed, and were responsible for any deficiency. They were exempted from torture and ignominious punishment, to which those below them, the "plebs," were subject; but they had the constant torture of being harassed by the Roman officials, civil and military, whose chief labour was to extract as much as possible out of the municipality, with slight regard to the ease of the people. Agricola, as we have seen, struggled against the rapacity of the imperial functionaries. The great "procurator," or revenue officer, of the province, had his subordinates in every city to look after the "curiales," and to take especial care that no lenity interfered with the rigid collection of the poll-tax, the funeral-tax, the legacy-tax, the auction-tax, the tax on the sale of slaves, the tithe of mining produce, and the tribute of corn, hay, and cattle. Sometimes the levy was just; often it was frightfully oppressive. We may be pretty well assured, if the procurator and his officers pressed the curiales, that the curiales, who had to make up a deficient impost, equally pressed the plebeians. These, the holders of small patches of land, the artisans and the traders, had no responsibility in the management of affairs, and no power of control over those who were responsible. They pursued their occupations,—the rich, with the aid of their domestic slaves; the poorer, with their own unassisted labour. At the end of the third century, it may be reasonably assumed that the class of free artisans was established in the British cities. Whether at this period they were formed into those guilds, which in subsequent times had such an important influence in raising the burgher class, is matter of conjecture; but such corporations of handicraftsmen seem a natural offshoot of the general municipal government of Rome. Perhaps the most numerous class

of the Romanised cities of Britain were the slaves,—varying in their condition of comfort according to the circumstances of their masters,—some attached to the land, and depending for sustenance upon the owner; some discharging the domestic offices, pilfering and pampered; and some approaching almost to the condition of free labourers. But, one and all, they had no political powers. The curiales and the plebeians had, at one period, and in some places, voices in the election of magistrates. All this municipal organisation included the mixed population whom we have mentioned—Romans, Britons, Gauls, Germans. But over all rode the great centralising power of Rome itself; suspicious, exclusive, rapacious, and utterly selfish. Revolts were constantly taking place under the system of extortion which Agricola tried to suppress; and then the Roman slave-dealer had his full share of the plunder of the revolters. Fiscal exactions and private luxury ate deeply into the resources of the land-owners who had the barren dignity belonging to the curia; and then the Roman mortgagees drove that class to desperation, as the philosopher Seneca, who could write of the duty of conferring benefits but was practically a griping usurer had very early tormented them. There was nothing confiding or generous in the Roman rule. Modern nations have tried the same system of colonial oppression, and have gathered the same fruits of injustice. Britain was never a secure possession. Her resources were never fully developed; because her nationality was outraged, and her people were disarmed and fettered. Such was the municipal economy of Roman Britain for four centuries. The visible head of this mighty dominion was the Consul—sometimes called Legatus, sometimes Præfectus or Proprator. In him was the supreme military and civil power vested, up to the time of Constantine. But over him was the jealous control of the Cæsar of the hour, and round him was the imperial spy. He might be recalled to a triumph or a grave. He might remain to seduce the legions, and become himself a Cæsar.

M. Guizot, endeavouring to express a general truth in a few words, says that amongst the elements of modern civilisation, the spirit of legality, of regular association, was derived from the Roman world, from the municipalities and the Roman laws. From the Germans came the spirit of personal liberty.* When we consider how essentially these two great elements have been blended in the political institutions of modern Britain, and in the

* Histoire de la Civilisation en France, Septième Leçon.

individual character of the British people, we may feel some reverence, however qualified, for the municipal principle of Rome thus impressed upon us, so as to have become united with the other principle of personal freedom which we derive from the Saxons, and with which the social state of Rome had no identity. It is this admixture of various elements of society that so constantly arrests our attention in the early history of our country. We are encountered, at every step of historical inquiry, by considerations that belong to the varieties of race, of language, of institutions, of manners,—all sufficiently distinct, but rather to be regarded in their union than their separation.

Much that has been said of the low amount of the permanent civilisation of England through the Roman rule, may perhaps be accounted for without believing in what is called the "barbarity" of the native people. It was in the earlier years of the Roman occupation that Tacitus tells us of the aptitude of the more educated classes to acquire the Roman eloquence, and when Martial intimates that the Roman poets were read in Britain. Macaulay holds, that "It is not probable the islanders were at any time generally familiar with the tongue of their Italian rulers." It is easy to account for the difficulty of altering the language of that portion of the people which was somewhat remote from the great masses of society, when we know that Welsh is a common language at this day, and that Cornwall had a spoken language of its own in the last century. But that the more educated inhabitants of the cities were unacquainted with the language in which all their municipal regulations were conducted, is to presume an incapacity which is not justified by historical evidence. A great number of Latin words are found in the Welsh language, although in Wales there are fewer Roman remains than in any part of Britain. The Latin tongue was no doubt driven out by the Anglo-Saxon; but if we assume a much earlier settlement of a Saxon population in England than is commonly imagined, we may account for "the incorporation of much Latin with Anglo-Saxon," without holding that the mixed languages came from the region of the Saxon race, "where the Roman power and preponderance had been quite sufficiently felt to produce this effect."* In no country under the dominion of Rome was the admixture of races so extensive as in Britain; and that admixture, be it remembered, chiefly prevailed in the most populous places. The result, in the large communities, was a blended progeny and a

* Forby, Vocabulary of East Anglia, vol. i. p. 28.

blended language. A writer who knows how to be popular without being superficial, tells us how the Roman features may be still traced in the Isle of Wight, where the Roman soldier had his first encampments.* In the same way the great seats of Saxon settlement may be also identified by a distinctive character of countenance. As we find an old British law in the present day, which Roman, and Saxon, and Norman codes have not obliterated—the law of Gavelkind—so in particular districts dialects and manners continued unchanged. That the Britons were not as fully Romanised as were the people of Spain and Gaul, was a natural consequence of their insular position, and of that indomitable character under oppression which Tacitus so honestly records.

Of the state of the arts in Britain we have no very distinct means of judging; nor can we separate, in the erection and ornament of any building, the skill of the Roman workman from that of the British. It is recorded by Eumenius, that when the Emperor Constantius rebuilt the city of Autun, in Gaul, he brought the artificers chiefly from Britain. Nothing, however, has been discovered of architectural remains which show a very high style of art; and we must bear in mind that the climate was unfavourable for the preservation of richly-ornamented friezes and capitals, if any such existed. Of decorative painting we are not without specimens. Forbearing to enter into antiquarian details, we may mention the remarkable Roman villa of Bignor, in Sussex; which, probably, was the country-house of some important officer of the neighbouring city of Chichester, the Regnum of the Romans. On the slope of a gentle hill, and not far removed from the old Roman road known as Stone Street, may be seen the very perfect remains of a house and its offices, of considerable extent. Here are mosaic pavements and painted walls of bold and elegant designs, whose colours are still fresh, and whose chemical composition, according to Sir Humphry Davy, is similar to that employed in the baths of Titus at Rome, and the buildings at Pompeii. An inscription found at Chichester † records that the guild or college of workmen built a temple to Neptune and Minerva. Were they the builders of the villa at Bignor? Were there, in this now solitary place, other buildings in which lived the slaves and dependents of the personage who occupied it? Had he every household resource within his own gates; or did his tailor and his grocer drive their carts along the highway from the city,

* Landmarks of the History of England, by the Rev. J. White, p. 3 † See p. 52.

which was then a port, and bring him the newest fashion of the toga, or the last imported luxury, from the seat of empire? We only know that in this remote place a rich man dwelt, with numerous chambers and spacious courts,—his atrium and his basilica, his baths, his colonnades, and his gardens.

The customs of a nation, and whatever relates to its common life, furnish as enduring traces of what has gone before, as its laws and its language. There cannot be a more striking example of the blending of Roman and Teutonic modes of thought than is furnished by the names of our months and of our weeks. January presents itself under the influence of the “Two-faced Janus;” March is the month of Mars; July keeps to the memory of the mighty Julius; and August claims an annual reverence for the crafty Augustus. It was in vain that the Saxons would have superseded these popular titles by their “wolf-monat,” for January; and their “lenet-monat” (lengthening month) for March. In vain they would have made Cæsar and Octavius yield to their “hay-month” and their “barn-month.” And yet they have put their perpetual stamp upon our week days. The Saxon Woden set his mark upon Wednesday, and banished the “dies Mercurii;” Thor, the Saxon thunderer, was too mighty for the Roman Jupiter, who yielded up his “dies Jovis;” and that endearing wife of Woden, the Saxon Frea, dispossessed the Roman goddess of love of her “dies Veneris.” But the Saxons have not obliterated more trifling things. Many traditional customs and superstitions which have come down to us from the Roman period still bear testimony to the Roman influence. Our parochial perambulations are the ancient Terminalia; our May-day is the festival of Flora. Our marriage ceremonies are all Roman—the ring, the veil, the wedding gifts, the groomsmen and bridesmaids, the bride-cake. Our funeral images and customs are Roman—the cypress and the yew, the flowers strewn upon graves, the black for mourning. The lucky days of a century ago were the “dies albi” of the Romans, and the unlucky, the “dies atri.” If we ask why we say “God bless you” to the sneezer, we only ask a question which Pliny asked, and perform a ceremony which even the stern Tiberius thought it necessary to perform. If we laugh at the credulous fancy of the simple maiden, who, when her ears tingle, says that a distant one is talking of her, we should recollect that the Romans believed in some influence of a mesmeric nature which produced the same effect. We have faith in odd numbers, as Virgil records the faith “Numero Deus impare

gaudet." "A screech-owl at midnight," says Addison, "has alarmed a family more than a band of robbers." The terror was traditional. "The bird of night" was ever an evil bird; and no Roman superstition entered more completely into the popular belief, and was more referred to by the historians and the poets. Indications such as these of the influences of the obscure past may be as trustworthy records as half obliterated inscriptions. They enable us to piece out a passage or two in the history of a people.

CHAPTER IV.

Introduction of Christianity.—Persecution of Diocletian.—St. Alban.—Constantine.—Church in Britain.—Extortions and cruelties of the notary Paulus.—Irruption of the Scots and Picts.—Maximus.—British colony of Armorica.—Assertion of independence by Britons and Armoricans.

An ancient chronicler of Dover Castle says,—“In the year of Grace, 180, reigned in Britain, Lucius. He became a Christian under Pope Eleutherius, and served God, and advanced Holy Church as much as he could. Amongst other benefits, he made a church in the said Castle, where the people of the town might receive the sacraments.”* The remains of some ancient church, constructed of Roman materials, if not of Roman work, are still to be seen within the area of Dover Castle. The ruins, and the traditions which belong to them, are no sufficient evidence that here is the church of Lucius; nor is the record of the Dover chronicler and other annalists of much more value as to the period of the introduction of Christianity into Britain, or of the instruments of the Divine will by whom it was introduced. Tertullian, at the beginning of the third century, says that Britain had received the faith of Christ. The extent of its reception at that early date is very doubtful.

But if the statements of the ancient British writers, as to the adoption of Christianity by Lucius, or Lever Maur (the great light), are deficient in that precision which constitutes historical authenticity, there is ample evidence that a Christian church of some importance was established in Britain at the beginning of the fourth century. At the first Council of Arles, in 314, three British bishops are recorded to have been present, and to have asserted opinions in some degree differing from those of the Romish Church. Constantine was then Emperor. He, the son of Constantius, by an English mother, Helena,—born in Britain—raised to the imperial power by the affection of the army in Britain, in 306,—would necessarily afford every encouragement to the propagation of the faith which he had himself adopted. But, a few

* Quoted in Dugdale—Account of the Nunnery of Saint Martin.