III.

"Force and Right rule the world: Force, till Right is ready."
JOUBERT.

ROMAN BRITAIN, 55 B.C. 43–410 A.D.

A CIVILIZATION WHICH DID NOT CIVILIZE.

39. Europe at the Time of Cæsar's Invasion of Britain. — Before considering the Roman invasion of Britain let us take a glance at the condition of Europe. We have seen that the Celtic tribes of the island, like those of Gaul (France), were not mere savages. On the contrary, we know that they had taken more than one important step in the path of progress; still, the advance should not be overrated. For, north of the shores of the Mediterranean, there was no real civilization. Whatever gain the men of the Bronze Age had made, it was nothing compared to what they had yet to acquire. They had neither organized legislatures, written codes of law, effectively trained armies, nor extensive commerce. They had no great cities, grand architecture, literature, painting, music, or sculpture. Finally, they had no illustrious and imperishable names. All these belonged to the Republic of Rome, or to the countries to the south and east, which the arms of Rome had conquered.

40. Cæsar's Campaigns. — Such was the state of Europe when Julius Cæsar, who was governor of Gaul, but who aspired to be ruler of the world, set out on his first campaign against the tribes north of the Alps. (58 B.C.)

In undertaking the war he had three objects in view: first, he wished to crush the power of those restless hordes that threatened the safety, not only of the Roman provinces, but of the Republic

itself. Next, he sought military fame as a stepping-stone to supreme political power. Lastly, he wanted money to maintain his army and to bribe the party leaders of Rome. To this end every tribe which he conquered would be forced to pay him tribute in cash or slaves.

41. Cæsar reaches Boulogne; resolves to cross to Britain. — In three years Cæsar had subjugated the enemy in a succession of victories, and Europe lay virtually helpless at his feet. Late in the summer of 55 B.C. he reached that part of the coast of Gaul where Boulogne is now situated, opposite which one may see on a clear day the gleaming chalk cliffs of Dover, so vividly described in Shakespeare's "Lear." While encamped on the shore he "resolved," he says, "to pass over into Britain, having had trustworthy information that in all his wars with the Gauls the enemies of the Roman Commonwealth had constantly received help from thence."[1]

42. Britain not certainly known to be an Island. — It was not known then with certainty that Britain was an island. Many confused reports had been circulated respecting that strange land in the Atlantic on which only a few adventurous traders had ever set foot. It was spoken of in literature as "another world," or, as Plutarch called it, "a country beyond the bounds of the habitable globe."[2] To that other world the Roman general, impelled by ambition, by curiosity, by desire of vengeance, and by love of gain, determined to go.

43. Cæsar's First Invasion, 55 B.C. — Embarking with a force of between eight and ten thousand men[3] in eighty small vessels, Cæsar crossed the Channel and landed not far from Dover, where he overcame the Britons, who made a desperate resistance. After

[1] Cæsar's Gallic War, Book IV.
[2] Plutarch's Lives (Julius Cæsar).
[3] Cæsar is supposed to have sailed about the 25th of August, 55 B.C. His force consisted of two legions, the 7th and 10th. A legion varied at different times from 3000 foot and 200 horse soldiers to 6000 foot and 400 horse.

a stay of a few weeks, during which he did not leave the coast, he returned to Gaul.

44. Second Invasion, 54 B.C. — The next year, a little earlier in the season, Cæsar made a second invasion with a much larger force, and penetrated the country to a short distance north of the Thames. Before the September gales set in, he re-embarked for the continent, never to return. The total result of his two expeditions was, a number of natives, carried as hostages to Rome, a long train of captives destined to be sold in the slave-markets, and some promises of tribute which were never fulfilled. Tacitus remarks, "He did not conquer Britain; he only showed it to the Romans."

Yet so powerful was Cæsar's influence, that his invasion was spoken of as a splendid victory, and the Roman Senate ordered a thanksgiving of twenty days, in gratitude to the gods and in honor of the achievement.

45. Third Invasion of Britain, 43 A.D. — For nearly a hundred years no further attempt was made, but in 43 A.D., after Rome had become a monarchy, the Emperor Claudius ordered a third invasion of Britain, in which he himself took part.

This was successful, and after nine years of fighting, the Roman forces overcame Caractacus, the leader of the Britons.

46. Caractacus carried Captive to Rome. — In company with many prisoners, Caractacus was taken in chains to Rome. Alone of all the captives, he refused to beg for life or liberty. "Can it be possible," said he, as he was led through the streets, "that men who live in such palaces as these envy us our wretched hovels!"[1] "It was the dignity of the man, even in ruins," says Tacitus, "which saved him." The Emperor, struck with his bearing and his speech, ordered him to be set free.

47. The First Roman Colony planted in Britain. — Meanwhile the armies of the Empire had firmly established themselves in the

[1] Tacitus, Annals.

southeastern part of the island. There they formed the colony of Camulodunum, the modern Colchester. There, too, they built a temple and set up the statue of the Emperor Claudius, which the soldiers worshipped, both as a protecting god and as a representative of the Roman state.

48. Llyn-din.[1] — The army had also conquered other places, among which was a little native settlement on one of the broadest parts of the Thames. It consisted of a few miserable huts and a row of entrenched cattle-pens. This was called in the Celtic or British tongue Llyn-din or the Fort-on-the-lake, a word which, pronounced with difficulty by Roman lips, became that name which the world now knows wherever ships sail, trade reaches, or history is read, — London.

49. Expedition against the Druids. — But in order to complete the conquest of the country, the Roman generals saw that it would be necessary to crush the power of the Druids, since their passionate exhortations kept patriotism alive. The island of Mona, now Anglesea, off the coast of Wales, was the stronghold to which the Druids had retreated. As the Roman soldiers approached to attack them, they beheld the priests and women standing on the shore, with uplifted hands, uttering "dreadful prayers and imprecations." For a moment they hesitated, then urged by their general, they rushed upon them, cut them to pieces, levelled their consecrated groves to the ground, and cast the bodies of the Druids into their own sacred fires. From this blow, Druidism as an organized faith never recovered, though traces of its religious rites still survive in the use of the mistletoe at Christmas and in May-day festivals.

50. Revolt of Boadicea. — Still the power of the Latin legions was only partly established, for while Suetonius was absent with his troops at Mona, a formidable revolt had broken out in the east. The cause of the insurrection was Roman rapacity and cruelty. A native chief, Prasútagus, in order to secure half of his

[1] Llyn-din (lin-dĭn).

property to his family at his death, left it to be equally divided between his daughters and the Emperor; but the governor of the district, under the pretext that his widow Boadicea had concealed part of the property, seized the whole. Boadicea protested. To punish her presumption she was stripped, bound, and scourged as a slave, and her daughters given up to still more brutal and infamous treatment. Maddened by these outrages, Boadicea roused the tribes by her appeals. They fell upon London and other cities, burned them to the ground, and slaughtered many thousand inhabitants. For a time it looked as though the whole country would be restored to the Britons; but Suetonius heard of the disaster, hurried from the north, and fought a final battle, so tradition says, on ground within sight of where St. Paul's Cathedral now stands. The Roman general gained a complete victory, and Boadicea, the Cleopatra of the North, as she has been called, took her own life, rather than, like the Egyptian queen, fall into the hands of her conquerors. She died, let us trust, as the poet has represented, animated by the prophecy of the Druid priest that, —

> "Rome shall perish — write that word
> In the blood that she has spilt; —
> Perish, hopeless and abhorred,
> Deep in ruin, as in guilt."[1]

51. Christianity introduced into Britain. — Perhaps it was not long after this that Christianity made its way to Britain; if so, it crept in so silently that nothing certain can be learned of its advent. Our only record concerning it is found in monkish chronicles filled with bushels of legendary chaff, from which a few grains of historic truth may be here and there picked out. The first church, it is said, was built at Glastonbury.[2] It was a long, shed-like structure of wicker-work. "Here," says Fuller, "the converts watched, fasted, preached, and prayed, having high meditations under a low roof and large hearts within narrow walls."

[1] Cowper, Boadicea. [2] Glastonbury, Somersetshire.

Later there may have been more substantial edifices erected at Canterbury by the British Christians, but at what date, it is impossible to say. At first, no notice was taken of the new religion. It was the faith of the poor and the obscure, hence the Roman generals regarded it with contempt; but as it continued to spread, it caused alarm. The Roman Emperor was not only the head of the state, but the head of religion as well. He represented the power of God on earth: to him every knee must bow; but the Christian refused this homage. He put Christ first; for that reason he was dangerous to the state: if he was not already a traitor and rebel, he was suspected to be on the verge of becoming both.

52. Persecution of British Christians; St. Alban. — Toward the last of the third century the Roman Emperor Diocletian resolved to root out this pernicious belief. He began a course of systematic persecution which extended to every part of the Empire, including Britain. The first martyr was Alban. He refused to sacrifice to the Roman deities, and was beheaded. "But he who gave the wicked stroke," says Bede,[1] with childlike simplicity, "was not permitted to rejoice over the deed, for his eyes dropped out upon the ground together with the blessed martyr's head." Five hundred years later the abbey of St. Albans[2] rose on the spot to commemorate him who had fallen there, and on his account that abbey stood superior to all others in power and privilege.

53. Agricola explores the Coast and builds a Line of Forts. — In 78 A.D. Agricola, a wise and equitable ruler, became governor of the country. His fleets explored the coast, and first discovered Britain to be an island. He gradually extended the limits of the government, and, in order to prevent invasion from the north, he built a line of forts across Caledonia, or Scotland, from the mouth of the river Forth to the Clyde.

54. The Romans clear and cultivate the Country. — From this date the power of Rome was finally fixed. During the period of

[1] Bede, Ecclesiastical History of Britain, completed about the year 731.
[2] St. Albans, Hertfordshire, about twenty miles northwest of London.

three hundred years which follows, the entire surface of the country underwent a great change. Forests were cleared, marshes drained, waste lands reclaimed, rivers banked in and bridged, and the soil made so productive that Britain became known in Rome as the most important grain-producing and grain-exporting province in the Empire.

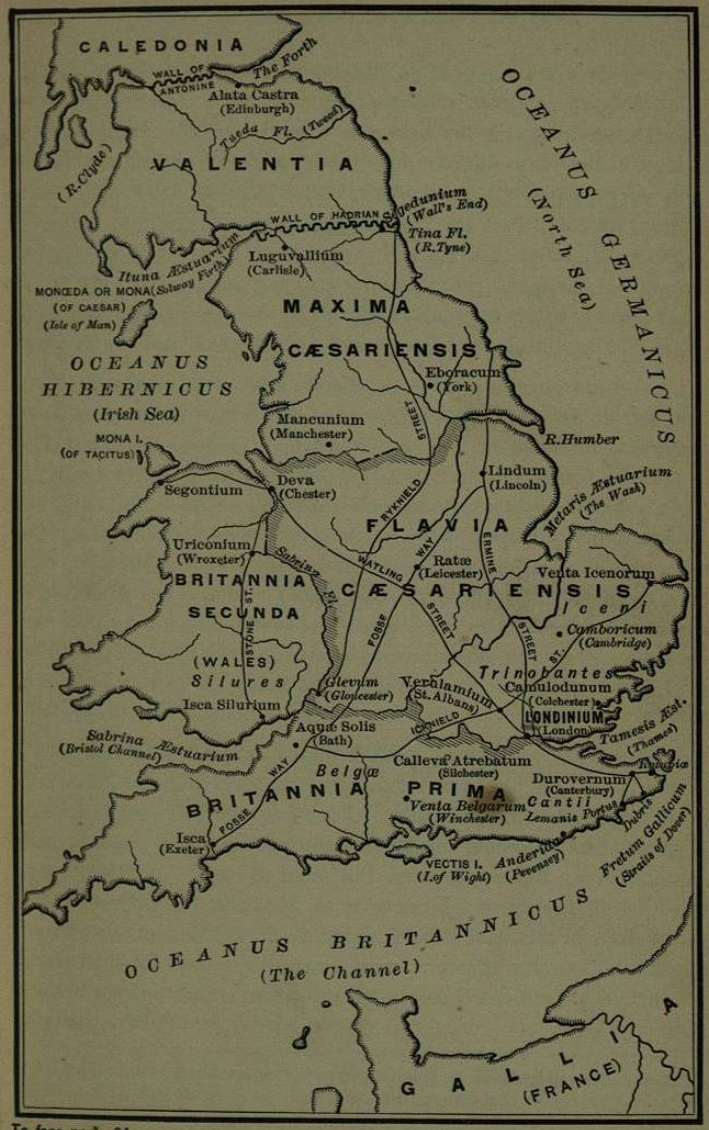
55. Roman Cities; York.—Where the Britons had had a humble village enclosed by a ditch, with felled trees, to protect it, there rose such walled towns as Chester, Lincoln, London, and York, with some two score more, most of which have continued to be centres of population ever since. Of these, London early became the commercial metropolis, while York was acknowledged to be both the military and civil capital of the country. There the Sixth Legion was stationed. It was the most noted body of troops in the Roman army, and was called the "Victorious Legion." It remained there for upward of three hundred years. There, too, the governor resided and administered justice. For these reasons York got the name of "another Rome." It was defended by walls flanked with towers, some of which are still standing. It had numerous temples and public buildings, such as befitted the first city of Britain. There, also, an event occurred in the fourth century which made an indelible mark on the history of mankind. For at York, Constantine, the subsequent founder of Constantinople, was proclaimed emperor, and through his influence Christianity became the established religion of the Empire.[1]

56. Roman System of Government; Roads.—During the Roman possession of Britain the country was differently governed at different periods, but eventually it was divided into five provinces. These were intersected by a magnificent system of paved roads running in direct lines from city to city, and having London as a common centre. Across the Strait of Dover, they connected with a similar system of roads throughout France,

1 Constantine was the first Christian emperor of Rome. The preceding emperors had generally persecuted the Christians.

No. 3.

ROMAN BRITAIN.



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Spain, and Italy, which terminated at Rome. Over these roads bodies of troops could be rapidly marched to any needed point, and by them officers of state mounted on relays of fleet horses could pass from one end of the Empire to the other in a few days' time. So skilfully and substantially were these highways constructed, that modern engineers have been glad to adopt them as a basis for their work, and the four leading Roman roads[1] continue to be the foundation, not only of numerous turnpikes in different parts of England, but also of several of the great railway lines, especially those from London to Chester and from London to York.

57. Roman Forts and Walls. — Next in importance to the roads were the fortifications. In addition to those which Agricola had built, later rulers constructed a wall of solid masonry entirely across the country from the shore of the North to that of the Irish Sea. This wall, which was about seventy-five miles south of Agricola's work, was strengthened by a deep ditch and a rampart of earth. It was further defended by castles built at regular intervals of one mile. These were of stone, and from sixty to seventy feet square. Between them were stone turrets or watch-towers which were used as sentry-boxes; while at every fourth mile there was a fort, covering from three to six acres, occupied by a large body of troops.

58. Defences against Saxon Pirates. — But the northern tribes were not the only ones to be guarded against; bands of pirates prowled along the east and south coasts, burning, plundering, and kidnapping. These marauders came from Denmark and the adjacent countries. The Britons and Romans called them Saxons, a most significant name if, as is generally supposed, it refers to the short, stout knives which made them a terror to every land on which they set foot. To repel them a strong chain of forts was erected on the coast, extending from the Wash on the North Sea to the Isle of Wight on the south.

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[1] The four chief roads were: 1. Watling Street; 2. Icknield Street; 3. Ermine Street; and 4. The Fosse Way. See Map No. 3, page 24.

Of these great works, cities, walls, and fortifications, though by far the greater part have perished, yet enough still remain to justify the statement that "outside of England no such monuments exist of the power and military genius of Rome."

59. Roman Civilization False. — Yet the whole fabric was as hollow and false as it was splendid. Civilization, like truth, cannot be forced on minds unwilling or unable to receive it. Least of all can it be forced by the sword's point and the taskmaster's lash. In order to render his victories on the continent secure, Cæsar had not hesitated to butcher thousands of prisoners of war or to cut off the right hands of the entire population of a large settlement to prevent them from rising in revolt. The policy pursued in Britain, though very different, was equally heartless and equally fatal. There was indeed an occasional ruler who endeavored to act justly, but such cases were rare. Galgacus, a leader of the North Britons, said with truth of the Romans, "They give the lying name of Empire to robbery and slaughter; they make a desert and call it peace."

60. The Mass of the Native Population Slaves. — It is true that the chief cities of Britain were exempt from oppression. They elected their own magistrates and made their own laws, but they enjoyed this liberty because their inhabitants were either Roman soldiers or their allies. Outside these cities the great mass of the native population were bound to the soil, while a large proportion of them were absolute slaves. Their work was in the brick fields, the quarries, the mines, or in the ploughed land, or the forest. Their homes were wretched cabins plastered with mud, thatched with straw, and built on the estates of masters who paid no wages.

61. Roman Villas. — The masters lived in stately villas adorned with pavements of different colored marbles and beautifully painted walls. These country-houses, often as large as palaces, were warmed in winter, like our modern dwellings, with currents of heated air, while in summer they opened on terraces ornamented

with vases and statuary, and on spacious gardens of fruits and flowers.[1]

62. Roman Taxation and Cruelty. — Such was the condition of the laboring classes. Those who were called free were hardly better off, for nearly all that they could earn was swallowed up in taxes. The standing army of Britain, which the people of the country had to support, rarely numbered less than forty thousand. The population was not only scanty, but it was poor. Every farmer had to pay a third of all that his farm could produce, in taxes. Every article that he sold had also to pay duty, and finally there was a poll-tax on the man himself. On the continent there was a saying that it was better for a property-owner to fall into the hands of savages than into those of the Roman assessors. When they went round, they counted not only every ox and sheep, but every plant, and registered them as well as the owners. "One heard nothing," says a writer of that time, speaking of the days when revenue was collected, "but the sound of flogging and all kinds of torture. The son was compelled to inform against his father, and the wife against her husband. If other means failed, men were forced to give evidence against themselves and were assessed according to the confession they made to escape torment."[2] So great was the misery of the land that it was not an uncommon thing for parents to destroy their children, rather than let them grow up to a life of suffering. This vast system of organized oppression, like all tyranny, "was not so much an institution as a destitution," undermining and impoverishing the country. It lasted until time brought its revenge, and Rome, which had crushed so many nations of barbarians, was in her turn threatened with a like fate, by bands of barbarians stronger than herself.

63. The Romans compelled to abandon Britain. — When Cæsar returned from his victorious campaigns in Gaul in the first

[1] About one hundred of these villas or country-houses, chiefly in the South and Southwest of England, have been exhumed. Some of them cover several acres.

[2] Lactantius. See Elton's Origins of English History.

century B.C., Cicero exultingly exclaimed, "Now, let the Alps sink! the gods raised them to shelter Italy from the barbarians; they are no longer needed." For nearly five centuries that continued true; then the tribes of Northern Europe could no longer be held back. When the Roman emperors saw that the crisis had arrived, they recalled the legions from Britain. The rest of the colonists soon followed. For the year 409 we find this brief but expressive entry in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,[1] "After this the Romans never ruled in Britain." A few years later this entry occurs: "418. This year the Romans collected all the treasures in Britain; some they hid in the earth, so that no one since has been able to find them, and some they carried with them into Gaul."

64. Remains of Roman Civilization. — In the course of the next three generations whatever Roman civilization had accomplished in the island, politically and socially, had disappeared. A few words, indeed, such as "port" and "street," have come down to us. Save these, nothing is left but the material shell, — the roads, forts, arches, gateways, altars, and tombs, which are still to be seen scattered throughout the land.

The soil, also, is full of relics of the same kind. Twenty feet below the surface of the London of to-day lie the remains of the London of the Romans. In digging in the "city,"[2] the laborer's shovel every now and then brings to light bits of rusted armor, broken swords, fragments of statuary, and gold and silver ornaments. So, likewise, several towns, long buried in the earth, and the foundations of upwards of a hundred country-houses, have been discovered; but these seem to be all. If Rome left any traces

[1] Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: the earliest English history. It was probably begun in the ninth century, in the reign of Alfred. It extends, in different copies, from Cæsar's invasion until the beginning of the reign of Henry II., 1154. It is supposed that the work was written in Canterbury, Peterborough, and other monasteries. The first part of it is evidently based on tradition; but the whole is of great value, especially from the time of Alfred.

[2] The "city" — that part of London formerly enclosed by Roman walls, together with a small outlying district. Its limit on the west is the site of Temple Bar; on the east, the Tower of London.

of her literature, law, and methods of government, they are so doubtful that they serve only as subjects for antiquarians to wrangle over.[1] Were it not for the stubborn endurance of ivy-covered ruins like those of Pevensey, Chester, and York, and of that gigantic wall which still stretches across the bleak moors of Northumberland, we might well doubt whether there ever was a time when the Cæsars held Britain in their relentless grasp.

65. Good Results of the Roman Conquest of Britain. — Still, it would be an error to suppose that the conquest and occupation of the island had no results for good. Had Rome fallen a century earlier, the world would have been the loser by it, for during that century the inhabitants of Gaul and Spain were brought into closer contact than ever with the only power then existing which could teach them the lesson they were prepared to learn. Unlike the Britons, they adopted the Latin language for their own; they made themselves acquainted with its literature and aided in its preservation; they accepted the Roman law and the Roman idea of government; lastly, they acknowledged the influence of the Christian church, and, with Constantine's help, they organized it on a solid foundation. Had Rome fallen a prey to the invaders in 318 instead of 410,[2] it is doubtful if any of these results would have taken place, and it is almost certain that the last and most important of all could not.

Britain furnished Rome with abundant food supplies, and sent thousands of troops to serve in the Roman armies on the continent. Britain also supported the numerous colonies which were constantly emigrating to her from Italy, and thus kept open the lines of communication with the mother-country. By so doing she helped to maintain the circulation of the life-currents in the remotest branches of the Roman Empire. Because of this, that

[1] Scarth, Pearson, Guest, Elton, and Coote believe that Roman civilization had a permanent influence; while Lappenburg, Stubbs, Freeman, Green, Wright, and Gardiner deny it.

[2] Rome was plundered by the Goths, under Alaric, in 410. The empire finally fell in 476.

empire was able to resist the barbarians until the seeds of the old civilization had time to root themselves and to spring up with promise of a new and nobler growth. In itself, then, though the island gained practically nothing from the Roman occupation, yet through it mankind was destined to gain much. During these centuries the story of Britain is that which history so often repeats — a part of Europe was sacrificed that the whole might not be lost.

IV.

"The happy ages of history are never the productive ones." — HEGEL.

THE COMING OF THE SAXONS, OR ENGLISH, 449 A.D.

THE BATTLES OF THE TRIBES. — BRITAIN BECOMES ENGLAND.

66. Condition of the Britons after the Romans left the Island. — Three hundred and fifty years of Roman law and order had so completely tamed the fiery aborigines of the island that when the legions abandoned it, the complaint of Gildas,[1] "the British Jeremiah," as Gibbon calls him, may have been literally true, when he declared that the Britons were no longer brave in war or faithful in peace.

Certainly their condition was both precarious and perilous. On the north they were assailed by the Picts, on the northwest by the Scots,[2] on the south and east by the Saxons. What was perhaps worst and most dangerous of all, they quarrelled among themselves over points of theological doctrine. They had, indeed, the love of liberty, but not the spirit of unity; and the consequence was, that their enemies, bursting in on all sides, cut them down, Bede says, as "reapers cut down ripe grain."

67. Letter to Aëtius. — At length the chief men of the country joined in a piteous and pusillanimous letter begging help from

[1] Gildas: a British monk, 516(?)–570(?). He wrote an account of the Saxon conquest of Britain.

[2] Picts: ancient tribes of the North and Northeast of Scotland; Scots: originally inhabitants of Ireland, some of whom settled in the West of Scotland, and gave their name to the whole country.