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SKETCHES
FROM
ENGLISH HISTORY.

I.

THE ROMAN OCCUPATION.—GREEN.

[At the time of Cæsar's invasion of Britain, B.C. 55, the land was inhabited by the Celts, who were members of the great Aryan family of nations to which the Romans themselves belonged. The natives were in a semi-barbarous condition, and, though they fought bravely for their homes, were no match for the trained legions of the Empire. Cæsar himself made no systematic attempt to subjugate the island; but about a hundred years after him the work of conquest was begun in earnest and pushed steadily until all the country south of the Forth had submitted to the Roman arms. Britain remained a province of the Empire for three hundred and fifty years.]

THE island of Britain was the latest of Rome's conquests in the west. Though it had been twice attacked by Julius Cæsar, his withdrawal and the inaction of the earlier emperors promised it a continued freedom; but a hundred years after Cæsar's landing, Claudius undertook its conquest, and so swiftly was the work carried out by his generals, and those of his successors, that before thirty years were over, the bulk of the country had passed beneath the Roman sway. The island was thus fortunate in the moment of its conquest. It was spared the pillage and exactions which ruined the provinces of Rome under the Republic, while it felt little of the evils which still clung to their administration under the earlier Empire. The age in which its organization was actively carried out was the age of the Antonines, when the provinces

became objects of special care on the part of the central government, and when the efforts of its administration were aided by peace without and a profound tranquillity within. The absence of all record of the change indicates the quietness and ease with which Britain was transformed into a Roman province. A census and a land-survey must have formed here, as elsewhere, indispensable preliminaries for the exactions of the poll-tax and the land-tax, which were the main burdens of Rome's fiscal system. Within the province the population would, in accordance with her invariable policy, be disarmed; while a force of three legions was stationed, partly in the north to guard against the unconquered Britons, and partly in the west to watch over the tribes which still remained half-subdued. Though the towns were left in some measure to their own self-government, the bulk of the island seems to have been ruled by military and financial administrators, whose powers were practically unlimited. But, rough as their rule may have been, it secured peace and good order; and peace and good order were all that was needed to insure material development. This development soon made itself felt. Commerce sprang up in the ports of Britain. Its harvests became so abundant that it was able at need to supply the necessities of Gaul. Tin mines were worked in Cornwall, lead mines in Somerset and Northumberland, and iron mines in the Forest of Dean. The villas and homesteads which, as the spade of our archæologists prove, lay scattered over the whole face of the country, show the general prosperity of the island.

The extension of its road system, and the upgrowth of its towns, tell above all how rapidly Britain was incorporated into the general body of the empire. It is easy, however, to exaggerate the civilization of Britain. Even within the province south of the firths the evidence of inscriptions shows that large tracts of country lay practically outside the Roman life. Though no district was richer or more peopled than the

south-west, our Devonshire and our Cornwall seem to have remained almost wholly Celtic. Wales was never really Romanized; its tribes were held in check by the legionaries at Chester and Caerleon, but as late as the beginning of the third century they called for repression from the Emperor Severus as much as the Picts. The valleys of the Thames and of the Severn were fairly inhabited, but there are fewer proofs of Roman settlement in the valley of the Trent; and, though the southern part of Yorkshire was rich and populous, Northern Britain, as a whole, was little touched by the new civilization. And even in the south this civilization can have had but little depth or vitality. Large and important as were some of its towns, hardly any inscriptions have been found to tell of the presence of a vigorous municipal life. Unlike its neighbor, Gaul, Britain contributed nothing to the intellectual riches of the empire; and not one of the poets or rhetoricians of the time is of British origin. Even moral movements found little foothold in the island. When Christianity became the religion of the empire, under the house of Constantine, Britain must have become nominally Christian; and the presence of British bishops at ecclesiastical councils is enough to prove that its Christianity was organized in the ordinary form. But as yet no Christian inscription or ornament has been found in any remains of earlier date than the close of the Roman rule; and the undoubted existence of churches at such places as Canterbury, or London, or St. Albans, only gives greater weight to the fact that no trace of such buildings has been found in the sites of other cities which have been laid open by archæological research.

Far, indeed, as was Britain from the center of the empire, had the Roman energy wielded its full force in the island it would have Romanized Britain as completely as it Romanized the bulk of Gaul. But there was little in the province to urge Rome to such an effort. It was not only the most distant of her western provinces, but it had little natural

wealth, and it was vexed by a ceaseless border warfare with the unconquered Britons, the Picts, or Caledonians, beyond the northern firths. There was little in its material resources to tempt men to that immigration from the older provinces of the empire which was the main agent in civilizing a new conquest. On the contrary, the harshness of a climate that knew neither olive nor vine deterred men of the south from such a settlement. The care with which every villa is furnished with its elaborate system of hot-air flues shows that the climate of Britain was as intolerable to the Roman provincial as that of India, in spite of punkahs and verandas, is to the English civilian or the English planter. The result was that the province remained a mere military department of the empire. It is a significant fact that the bulk of the monuments which have been found in Britain relate to military life. Its inscriptions on tombs are mostly those of soldiers. Its mightiest work was the great wall and line of legionary stations which guarded the province from the Picts. Its only historic records are records of border forays against the barbarians.

It was not merely its distance from the seat of rule, or the later date of its conquest that hindered the province from passing completely into the general body of the empire. Its physical and its social circumstances offered yet greater obstacles to any effectual civilization. In spite of its roads, its towns, and its mining works, it remained, even at the close of the Roman rule, an "isle of blowing woodland," a wild and half-reclaimed country, the bulk of whose surface was occupied by forest and waste. The rich and lower soil of the river valleys, indeed, what is now the favorite home of agriculture, had, in the earliest times, been densely covered with primæval scrub; and the only open spaces were those whose nature fitted them less for the growth of trees, the chalk downs and oolitic uplands that stretched in long lines across the face of Britain from the Channel to the Northern Sea. It is mainly in the natural

clearings of the uplands that the population concentrated itself at the close of the Roman rule, and it is over these districts that the ruins of the villas or country houses of the Roman land-owner are most thickly scattered.

The cities of the province were, indeed, thoroughly Romanized. Within the walls of towns such as Lincoln or York, towns governed by their own municipal officers guarded by massive walls, and linked together by the network of roads which reached from one end of the island to the other, law, language, political and social life, all were of Rome. But if the towns were thoroughly Romanized, it seems doubtful, from the few facts that remain to us, whether Roman civilization had made much impression on the bulk of the provincials, or whether the serf-like husbandmen, whose cabins clustered round the luxurious villas of the provincial land-owners, or the yet more servile miners of Northumbria, and the Forest of Dean, were touched by the arts and knowledge of their masters. The use of the Roman language may be roughly taken as marking the progress of the Roman civilization; and, though Latin had all but wholly superseded the languages of the conquered peoples in Spain and Gaul, its use was probably limited in Britain to the townsfolk, and to the wealthier proprietors without the towns. Over large tracts of country the rural Britons seem to have remained apart from their conquerors, not only speaking their own language, and owing some traditional allegiance to their native chiefs, but retaining their native system of law. Imperial edicts had long since extended Roman citizenship to every dweller within the empire; but the wilder provincials may have been suffered to retain in some measure their own usages, as the Zulu or Maori is suffered to retain them, though subject in theory to British law, and entitled to the full privileges of British subjects. The Welsh laws, which we possess in a later shape, are undoubtedly, in the main, the same system of early customs which Rome found existing among the Britons

in the days of Claudius and Cæsar; and the fact that they remained a living law when her legions withdrew proves their continuance throughout the four hundred years of her rule, as it proves the practical isolation from Roman life and Roman civilization of the native communities which preserved them.

II.

THE ENGLISH CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT.—GARDINER.

[At the beginning of the fifth century the Roman Empire was in a state of dissolution. The barbarian tribes had broken into it in many directions, and in 410 the Goths, under Alaric, took and sacked Rome itself. In the following year the government, needing all its available forces at home, withdrew its army of occupation from Britain. The Britons, thus left to themselves, remained nominally independent for sixty years. But, accustomed as they had so long been to imperial protection, they were unable to defend themselves. They were attacked from the north by the Picts and Scots, who had never been brought under the Roman sway, as well as by the Teutonic or German pirates from the south. The latter they invited to assist them against their northern enemies. Quarrels arose between them and their allies. The Teutons, among whom the Angles predominated, came in ever-increasing numbers. The natives made a desperate resistance. The struggle lasted a hundred and fifty years. At the end of that period the invaders had succeeded in establishing ten or twelve petty kingdoms on the soil of Britain.]

WHEN, in the middle of the fifth century, our Teutonic ancestors landed on the shores of Britain, they carved out settlements for themselves; they were Jutes and Saxons and Angles from the coast which stretches from Jutland to the mouths of the Elbe and Weser. Over the horror of the struggle a thick darkness has settled down, and, with the exception of one lightning-flash from a Celtic writer, it was only by its leading features, by a battle or a siege traditionally remembered, that any portion of it could be recovered when civilization and its power of recording events again spread over the land. At the end of a century and a half the Teu-

tonic settlers occupied the whole of the eastern half of the land, from the Forth to the Straits of Dover, and from the coast of the German Ocean to the Severn. Over all this tract the Low German speech of the invaders was to be heard. To what extent the British population had disappeared is a matter of controversy. It is a point on which no certain knowledge is attainable. The invaders did not enter the island impressed with the dignity of Roman civilization. They knew nothing of the Roman speech. They seized upon the lands of the Britons. They stormed and sacked their cities. They probably carried off their daughters to be their wives or concubines. The men who resisted were slain as wild beasts are slain, without thought of mercy. Of the rest, some were reduced to slavery, some may have kept up a precarious independence in the woods. Under such circumstances a population suffers fearful diminution from misery and starvation. The weak and the old, with the young child, the hope of future generations, perish for lack of food. Yet, whatever the numerical amount of the survivors may have been, the general result is certain. The Teutonic speech, save in a few words used principally by women and slaves, prevailed every-where. The Teutonic law, the Teutonic way of life, was the rule of the land. The Teutonic heathenism was unchanged. The Celtic element, whether it was larger or smaller, was absorbed, and left scarcely a trace behind.

If the history of the settlement is to be gathered from scanty tradition, the character and institutions of the settlers have to be inferred from that which is known of them in their own land, and from that which is known of them later in the land of their adoption. Fierce and masterful as they were, they were not barbarians, except in antithesis to the civilization of Rome. The stage which they had reached was very much that of the Homeric Greeks, if we allow for the greater inclemency of a northern sky. Each tribe was

complete in itself. It had its own assembly of freemen, whose voice was decisive in regulating its actions. At its head was a chief, the ealdorman, as he was named, who guided its deliberations, and who, after its arrival in England at least, headed it in war. The freemen themselves were composed of two ranks, eorls and ceorls. The eorls, or nobles by birth, whose origin is lost in the mists of the past, had an honorary pre-eminence. Their voice was of greater weight, their life was of greater value, their share of booty larger. But they did not make the State, though they had, doubtless, much to do with its direction. In fact, there was nothing that we should now call political life in existence. New legislation there was none. The old customs, handed down from father to son in Germany, were adhered to in England, and the only question which could arise for deliberation was whether some new expedition should be undertaken against the enemy. Outside the assembly, as well as within it, all freemen were equal, however much they might differ in influence or wealth. Each man had his own share of the conquered land, and his share of pasturage or wood-cutting in the folkland—the common land that had been left undivided. The organization of which he formed a part did not, as in the empire, reach from the State to the individual, but from the individual to the State. Each township which, in an ecclesiastical form, became the parish of modern days, made its appearance once a month, in the hundred mote, to decide quarrels and to witness contracts; while the members of the tribe met twice a year to decide matters of more general importance. As every man was a judge—unless, indeed, the practice of attending the hundred mote by a deputation of the reeve, or head man, and four best men of the township, had already been adopted—so every man was a soldier. The assembly was, in truth, the tribe in arms, and the eorls and the ealdormen could but lead, they could not constrain, the will of their fellow-tribesmen.

Left in the positions they had originally occupied, the tribes might have retained these institutions unaltered for centuries. The progress of the war necessitated expansion and amalgamation in order that greater force might be brought to bear on the enemy. As it had been with Rome so it was now with the English tribe. The system of popular assemblies had reached its limit. The men of Dorset or the men of Norfolk could come up without difficulty to the place of meeting. The men of a State reaching from the Severn to the borders of Sussex could not come up. The idea of delegation, if it had as yet existed at all, had not acquired sufficient strength to suggest the idea of a general collective council. Recourse was had to a different factor in the commonwealth. Of all human occupations war requires the most complete discipline and the most prompt obedience to a single chief. Naturally, therefore, it was the chief, the ealdorman, who gained most by the changes wrought by war. Every-where he took the higher title of king, and in taking its title he gained a higher standing-point. He was the bond of union between many tribes. The ealdorman who now presided in the tribal assembly derived his authority from him, even if he owed his position to an older tribal authority. At the end of the sixth century some ten or twelve kingdoms existed, and the authority of the kings would, doubtless, tend to increase in civil matters as they grew more successful as leaders in war.

Yet, growing as it was, the king's authority was by no means absolute. The power which the king wielded could only be exercised in accordance with the wishes of the armed force, and that armed force was still, in great measure, composed of the contingents of the freemen of the several tribes. It is true that it was not so altogether. By an old German custom a great man had been accustomed to entertain a body of followers—gesiths, as they were called in England—who attached themselves, not to the tribe, but to the person of

him whom they followed, and upon whose bounty they lived. For him they fought, and for him they were ready to die. They held it disgraceful to forsake him in battle, or even to leave the field alive if he were lying dead upon it. No doubt, if we possessed a history of those times, we should find that these two component parts of the king's army were also component parts of his council, and the witan, or wise men, without whose advice he did not venture to act in any important matter, were, some of them, the chief men of his personal following; some of them leading eorls, or land-owners, from the various populations which were blended together under his rule. But, however this council may have been formed, it had no immediate organic connection with the people. Its members were not elected from beneath. They became councillors either from their own position in life, or as selected by the king. As long as there was a powerful enemy in the field this breach in the continuity of the constitution might not be felt; but it was, none the less, a source of danger.

The judicial arrangements of our ancestors were those of a strong-handed but law-loving race, in which each man was ready to do himself right with his own hand, but in which there was a general understanding that feuds should not be perpetual. The notion that it was the duty of the State to punish crime, and the notion that the criminal himself was any the worse for the crime which he had committed, would have been alike unintelligible to them. All that they saw was that it was in their power to enforce upon the kindred of a murdered man, or upon him who had suffered a loss of property, the acceptance of a weregild, or money payment, in satisfaction of the injury done to them, which they might otherwise have avenged by the slaughter of the aggressor. As, again, the power of taking vengeance was different in different ranks—as the relations of a murdered king were more likely to take effectual vengeance than the relations of

an eorl or a simple ceorl, and as they, therefore, required more to induce them to draw back—a larger money payment was enforced in proportion to the rank of the person injured. As, too, the State had no interest in the matter, excepting to prevent continual private warfare, it had no trained police to seize the criminal, and no trained advocates or judges to investigate evidence. It looked to the kindred of the accused person to present him before the popular assembly at which he was to be tried, or to pay his weregild in his stead. If he denied his guilt he had to bring others to swear that he was innocent, and the declaration of the belief of these compurgators in his favor was accepted as satisfactory. If he failed to find compurgators he had still the resource of appealing to the ordeal, doubtless performed, in heathen times, in some specially sacred spot. The assembled people, who acted as his judges, contented themselves with seeing that the provisions of ancient customs were duly carried out.

III.

CONVERSION OF THE ENGLISH.—MILMAN.

[The conquerors had scarcely established themselves in the land when a contest began between the different English kingdoms for supremacy. To the war between Britons and Englishmen was added a war between Englishmen and Englishmen. The struggle went on for two hundred years, and culminated in the final supremacy of Wessex. Long before the end of this period, however, an event had occurred which contributed powerfully to the work of consolidation and unification. This was the conversion of the heathen English to Christianity. The work was accomplished in the south by Roman, in the north by Irish, missionaries. The two tides of Christian influence met in the center of England. After a brief struggle the Roman party triumphed, in 664, at the Synod of Whitby, and Archbishop Theodore organized the new Church on the Roman model.]

NOTHING certain is known concerning the first promulgation of the Gospel in Roman Britain. There can be no doubt,

however, that conquered and half-civilized Britain, like the rest of the Roman Empire, gradually received, during the second and third centuries, the faith of Christ. The depth of her Christian cultivation appears from her fertility in saints, and in heretics. But all were swept away, the worshipers of the saints and the followers of the heretics, by the Teutonic conquest. The German races which overran the island came from a remote quarter yet unpenetrated by the missionaries of the Gospel. They knew nothing of Christianity but as the religion of that abject people whom they were driving before them into their mountains and fortresses. Christianity receded, with the conquered Britons, into the mountains of Wales, or toward the borders of Scotland, or took refuge among the peaceful and flourishing monasteries of Ireland. The clergy fled, perhaps fought, with their flocks, and neither sought nor found opportunities of amicable intercourse, which might have led to the propagation of their faith; while the savage pagans demolished the churches and monasteries, with the other vestiges of Roman civilization. They were little disposed to worship the God of a conquered people or to adopt the religion of a race whom they either despised as weak and unwarlike, or held as stubborn and implacable enemies. Nor was there sufficient charity in the British Christians to enlighten the paganism of their conquerors.

Happily Christianity appeared in an opposite quarter. Its missionaries from Rome were unaccompanied by any of these causes of mistrust and dislike. It came into that part of the kingdom the farthest removed from the hostile Britons. It was the religion of the powerful kingdom of the Franks; the influence of Bertha, the Frankish princess, the wife of King Ethelbert, wrought, no doubt, more powerfully for the reception of the faith than the zeal and eloquence of Augustine.

Gregory the Great, it has been said, before his accession to the papacy, had set out on the sublime though desperate mission of the reconquest of Britain from idolatry. It was Greg-

ory who commissioned the monk Augustine to venture on this glorious service. Yet so fierce and savage, according to the common rumor, were the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of Britain, that Augustine shrank from the wild and desperate enterprise; he hesitated before he would throw himself into the midst of a race of barbarous unbelievers, of whose language he was ignorant. Gregory would allow no retreat from a mission which he had himself been prepared to undertake, and which would not have appalled, even under less favorable circumstances, his firmer courage.

The fears of Augustine as to this wild and unknown land proved exaggerated. The monk and his forty followers landed without opposition on the shores of Britain. They sent to announce themselves as a solemn embassy from Rome, to offer to the King of Kent the everlasting bliss of heaven, an eternal kingdom in the presence of the true and living God. To Ethelbert, though not unacquainted with Christianity, for, by the terms of his marriage, Bertha, the Frankish princess, had stipulated for the free exercise of her religion, there must have been something strange and imposing in the landing of these peaceful missionaries on a shore still constantly swarming with fierce pirates, who came to plunder or to settle among their German kindred. The name of Rome must have sounded, though vague, yet awful, to the ear of the barbarian. Any dim knowledge of Christianity which he had acquired from his Frankish wife would be blended with mysterious veneration for the pope, the great high-priest, the vicar of Christ and of God upon earth. With the cunning suspicion which mingles with the dread of the barbarian, the king insisted that the first meeting should be in the open air, as giving less scope for magic arts, and not under the roof of a house. Augustine and his followers met the king with all the pomp which they could command, with a crucifix of silver in the van of their procession, a picture of the Redeemer borne aloft, and chanting their litanies for the salvation of the king

and his people. "Your words and offers," replied the king, "are fair; but they are new to me, and, as yet, unproved; I cannot abandon at once the faith of my Anglian ancestors." But the missionaries were entertained with courteous hospitality. Their severely monastic lives, their constant prayers, fastings, and vigils, with their confident demeanor, impressed more and more favorably the barbaric mind. Rumor attributed to them many miracles. Before long the king of Kent was an avowed convert; his example was followed by many of his noblest subjects. No compulsion was used, but it was manifest that the royal favor inclined to those who received the royal faith.

The British Church, secluded in the fastnesses of Wales, could not but hear of the arrival of the Roman missionaries, and of their success in the conversion of the Saxons. Augustine and his followers could not but inquire with deep interest concerning their Christian brethren in the remote parts of the island. It was natural that they should enter into communication; unhappily they met to dispute on points of difference, not to join in harmonious fellowship on the broad grounds of their common Christianity. The British Church followed the Greek usage in the celebration of Easter; they had some other points of ceremonial, which, with their descent, they traced to the East; and the zealous missionaries of Gregory could not comprehend the uncharitable inactivity of the British Christians, which had withheld the blessings of the Gospel from their pagan conquerors. The Roman and the British clergy met, it is said, in solemn synod. The Romans demanded submission to their discipline, and the implicit adoption of the western ceremonial on the contested points. The British bishops demurred; Augustine proposed to place the issue of the dispute on the decision of a miracle. The miracle was duly performed—a blind man brought forward and restored to sight. But the miracle made not the slightest impression on the obdurate Britons. They demanded

a second meeting and resolved to put the Christianity of the strangers to a singular test, a moral proof with them more convincing than an apparent miracle. True Christianity, they said, "is meek and lowly of heart. Such will be this man (Augustine), if he be a man of God. If he be haughty and ungentle he is not of God, and we may disregard his words. Let the Romans arrive first at the synod. If on our approach he rises from his seat to receive us with meekness and humility, he is the servant of Christ, and we will obey him. If he despises us and remains seated, let us despise him." Augustine sat, as they drew near, in unbending dignity. The Britons at once refused obedience to his commands, and disclaimed him as their metropolitan. The indignant Augustine (to prove his more genuine Christianity) burst out into stern denunciations of their guilt in not having preached the Gospel to their enemies. He prophesied—a prophecy which could hardly fail to hasten its own fulfillment—the divine vengeance by the arms of the Saxons. So complete was the alienation, so entirely did the Anglo-Saxon clergy espouse the fierce animosities of the Anglo-Saxons, and even imbitter them by their theologic hatred, that the gentle Beda relates with triumph, as a manifest proof of the divine wrath against the refractory Britons, a great victory over that wicked race, preceded by a massacre of twelve hundred British clergy, chiefly monks of Bangor, who stood aloof on an eminence praying for the success of their countrymen.