

SECTION II

There are facts which are naturally detested, . . . despotism, for instance; . . . yet if they have contributed in some way to civilization, then up to a certain point we pardon them. — GUIZOT.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST AND OCCUPATION OF
GAUL (58 B.C.—A.D. 481)

7. Cæsar's Battle with Ariovistus; his Account of Gaul. — Fifty-eight years before the birth of Christ, Julius Cæsar set out to conquer the German tribes which were then invading Gaul, and to take possession of the country for Rome. Before beginning the war, however, he sent a message to the German chief, Ariovistus,¹ proposing negotiations. Ariovistus sent back word: "If I wanted anything of Cæsar, I should go to him; if Cæsar wants anything of me, let him come where I am."

Cæsar answered by ordering Ariovistus to desist troubling the Gauls, threatening to punish him if he did not. Ariovistus replied: "If Cæsar wishes to try it, let him come, and he will find what can be done by men trained to arms, inured to hardships, and who have not slept beneath a roof for fourteen years."

The result of this defiance was a battle in which the bold barbarian was hopelessly beaten, and shortly after died. This commenced a series of campaigns against not only the Germans, but the Gauls, who had now risen in insurrection. The war lasted nine years. Cæsar's object was twofold: first,

¹ Ariovis'tus.

to extend the dominion of Rome; next, to obtain fame, wealth, and political power for himself.

From the notes which he made we get our first clearly drawn picture of the country and its people.¹ The written history of Gaul begins at this point. Cæsar divides the country into three districts: that of the Belgians in the north, of the Aquitanians in the southwest, and of the Celts or Gauls in the center. Of the people he says there were likewise three classes, — warriors, priests, and slaves. The first was the nobles, who disdained work and lived by fighting. The next class was the priests, or Druids,² as they were called.

The Druids were not only religious teachers, but judges, physicians, and educators. They represented whatever learning and mental culture then existed, and from them the people derived their first rude notions of geography and astronomy. As with the Celts of Britain, so here, the Druids conducted their worship in the gloomy recesses of the primeval forests, or in temples of rough stone open to the sky. They taught that there is one supreme God, represented by the sun, giver of light and life, and by the clear flame of burning wood rising heavenward from the altar. To that God they sometimes offered human sacrifices, in the belief that no gift can be so precious and so acceptable as the blood and the life of man.

To them the mistletoe, a parasitic evergreen plant growing on certain trees, seemed especially sacred. When by chance they found its slender green branches clinging to the leafless oaks in winter, they gathered it with mystical ceremonies, regarding it as an emblem of human immortality, and also as a medicine which might impart new life to the sick and the dying.

¹ See Cæsar's Commentaries on the Gallic War.

² Druid: a name sometimes derived from the Greek *δρῦς*, an oak, but really of unknown origin.

The Romans had lost much of their early faith in a future existence; great, therefore, was their astonishment to find that these barbarians had such implicit belief in it that they did not hesitate to lend money to be repaid in another world! Well might the warriors of such a race fight desperately, since they were convinced that, if slain, they would rise again to enjoy a heaven where fighting never ceased.

The last class was the slaves. Their existence shows how the Gauls had advanced. At first they had killed their prisoners of war. Later they saw that this was poor economy, and that, instead of chopping off their captives' heads, it was much wiser to make them till the soil, cut the wood, tend the cattle, and cook the food for their masters. Slavery was thus a first step in humanity and civilization: it saved those who would otherwise have been destroyed.

When Cæsar entered the country, the Gauls had long since ceased to be mere savages. They lived in settlements of circular, dome-shaped huts made of wood and clay,¹ which were protected against attack by a ditch, with an embankment or wall set with sharp stakes.

They had made considerable progress in the arts, had learned how to mine and work metals, used iron weapons and armor, and excelled in weaving cloths of brilliant and variegated colors.

8. Cæsar's Campaigns and Final Victory. — Still, in such a contest the Romans had every advantage except that of brute strength. First, they had an immense force of thoroughly disciplined and admirably equipped veteran troops, led by the greatest general in the world. Next, they had a permanent base of supplies in the Greek seaport of Massalia,² of which

¹ One of these huts is represented on the column of Antonine at Rome. It is made of poles bound together with twigs, and was probably plastered with clay. It had a door, but no window, with perhaps an opening at the top to let out the smoke.

² Massalia: see Paragraph 4.

Cicero did not hesitate to say that "had it not been for her help, Rome would never have triumphed over the barbarians."

Yet these northern races were, after all, a formidable foe even for Cæsar. Their gigantic stature and fierce appearance inspired such dread that the Roman soldiers, at first, it is said, shed tears at the sight of them and used to make their wills before going into battle. The country, too, was almost wholly a wilderness; and Cæsar had to fight his way with ax and spade, cutting roads and building bridges, before he could fight with the sword and spear.

At last, after incredible hardships, he conquered; but it was a conquest of devastation and, in some districts, of extermination as well. He had subdued three hundred tribes, taken eight hundred towns, slain a million of fighting men, and captured and sold another million into slavery. At Avaricum,¹ out of a population of forty thousand, only eight hundred escaped. At Uxellodunum² Cæsar cut off the right hands of the entire male population, in order to prevent their ever making any further resistance. At Dariorigum³ he put all the chiefs of the tribe to death, and sold the rest at auction. In some cases such multitudes were slaughtered that the swamps and streams were filled with the dead bodies, and the Roman troops marched over them as on bridges.

Alesia, a fortified town in eastern Gaul,⁴ was the last place to hold out. It was built on a rocky height, and was defended by Vercingetorix,⁵ one of the bravest of the Gauls, who was commander in chief of their forces. Cæsar surrounded this stronghold with a line of intrenchments upwards of fifteen miles in

¹ Avaricum: now Bourges (bōorz).
² Uxellodunum: the site of this place has not been positively determined, but see map of Gaul, page 2.

³ Dariorigum or Veneti: now Vannes (vân).

⁴ Alesia, now Alais (ā-lā'), — see Map No. II, page 2, — was situated on a high hill near the Côte-d'Or (kōt-dōr') Mountains, in the east of Gaul, and near the head waters of one of the chief tributaries of the Seine (sân).

⁵ Vercingetorix.

circumference. He was thus able to cut off all supplies and to starve the garrison into submission. When at length Vercingetorix was compelled to give himself up as a captive, the whole of Gaul was practically at the mercy of the conqueror.

Cæsar had left Rome a poor man, deeply in debt. He returned flushed with victory and laden with treasure. The city was wild with joy over the hero who had subjugated the barbarians that had menaced its safety. But, great as Cæsar was, he lacked the magnanimity to spare a helpless and prostrate foe. Vercingetorix, on his way to imprisonment and death, was led in chains in the celebration held in honor of his conqueror, while the crowded streets resounded with shouts of exultation:

"Hurrah for the great triumph
That stretches many a mile!
Hurrah for the wan captives
That pass in endless file!"¹

When peace was declared, Cæsar changed his policy. He now endeavored to conciliate the people that had submitted to his arms. He even formed a legion of Gauls, — all picked men, — called the "Legion of the Lark," from the image of that bird worn on their helmets. This dauntless corps became his bodyguard. They crossed the Alps with him, singing like the lark whose name they bore, and during the civil war they helped Cæsar to get control of Rome and thus make himself master of the world.

9. Spread of Roman Civilization in Gaul. — Next followed the spread of Roman civilization in the subjugated territory. Among the places which Cæsar had taken was a wretched village built of reeds and rushes on a swampy island in the Seine. It was called in the Gallic language Lutetia,² or Mud-town, and was inhabited by a tribe known as the Parisii.³ There

¹ Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*, "The Prophecy of Capys."

² Lutetia (lu-te'she-ah).

³ Paris'ii.

the Romans erected a temple to Jupiter, which subsequently gave way to the cathedral of Notre Dame.

Some centuries later they built a spacious palace on the left bank of the river. It was the favorite residence of the Emperor Julian, and part of it still remains. The temple became the center of a growing population; the palace became another. Eventually the two centers united, and from these there gradually grew up the splendid capital of Paris.¹

So in many parts of Gaul, but especially in the district bordering on the Mediterranean, stately cities rose, modeled on that of Rome. They were adorned with public squares, marble temples, theaters, aqueducts, baths, triumphal arches, statues of the emperors and the gods, and arenas not very far inferior to the Coliseum in size and splendor.² Of these cities, Lyons, in eastern Gaul, at the junction of the Rhone and the Saône,³ was for a long time the most important. From it four great Roman military highways, solidly built of stone, radiated to the chief points, — to Marseilles on the south, to the Rhine on the north, to Brest on the Atlantic, to Boulogne⁴ on the Channel, thence connecting at Dover with all the principal cities of Britain, which was likewise a Roman province.

These roads were cut through dense forests, carried over mountains and across rivers, through swamps, quicksands, and bogs. In many cases their beds still remain in use as the foundation of modern roads and railways, thus testifying to

¹ Paris: the temple of Jupiter, on whose site Notre Dame (Our Lady, or the Virgin Mary) now stands, occupied one end of the island of Lutetia. Julian's palace, known to-day as the Palais des Thermes (Palace of the Hot Baths), is nearly opposite, on the left bank of the Seine.

² At Nîmes, Arles, Carcassonne, Orange; and at Treves in the north. No city of France, or in fact of northern Europe, is so rich in Roman remains as Nîmes with its grand Amphitheater (still in use), its Temple of the Nymphs, its Baths, its elegant Corinthian temple, known as the Maison Carrée, its two Roman gates, and the magnificent aqueduct of the Pont du Gard fourteen miles distant.

³ Saône (sōn).

⁴ Boulogne (bō-lōn').

the skill of those Roman engineers who built not for their day only, but for ours as well.

But these outward and material signs of civilization were after all but the smallest part of the momentous change that came over the country. Schools, colleges, and libraries sprang up, literature and art were cultivated, Roman law took the place of barbaric custom, and the Latin language in a modified form gradually but surely usurped that of the Gauls, supplanting it in the course of centuries so completely that at the present time not one word out of a hundred in a French dictionary can be traced to a Gallic source.

For a long period the country seemed to gain by the change. Roman law was everywhere enforced; peace prevailed; justice was impartially administered; industry flourished; the taxes were light; the towns practically possessed self-government; agriculture improved; the cultivation of corn, the olive, and the vine were introduced; manufactures of flax, silk, glass, tapestry, iron, bronze, jewelry, armor, tools, and weapons increased rapidly; and the commerce of Marseilles connected Gaul with all the countries of the Mediterranean.

10. Decline of Roman Civilization; Corruption and Oppression. — But this age of prosperity was not to last. Rome, eaten up by her vices and rent with dissension and civil wars, began to totter to her fall. Then it became apparent that this splendid civilization resembled those strange, brilliantly colored plants which spring up in a night on the decaying trunks of fallen trees, — a certain sign of corruption and death.

Before the Roman conquest Gaul had liberty without order or unity; now, in the days of Roman decline, she had order and unity without liberty. The small farms were one by one bought up by wealthy men, who converted them into extensive cattle and sheep pastures tended by a few slaves. Thus the independent peasant population was gradually driven off the

land, and agriculture declined. Meanwhile taxes grew constantly heavier; for in proportion as Rome became more corrupt, and at the same time weaker, the demand for money to waste in extravagance and in the maintenance of armies for defense became more and more imperative. These demands reached such an exorbitant height, that eventually every third bushel of grain which the farmer raised was seized by the government, and the greedy army of taxgatherers, not yet satisfied, plundered for themselves as well as for the emperor.

In the cities matters were no better. A few of the inhabitants were enormously rich, but all the rest were fast becoming miserably poor. Those who had money spent it in luxury and dissipation. They were surrounded by a multitude of dependents and flatterers, who lived at their expense and ministered to their caprices and their vices. After a night of drunkenness and debauchery, the millionaire of that age rose at noon to take his perfumed bath and drag out a languid day, hearing poems recited in his praise, listening to the latest gossip of the town, amusing himself with the songs and graceful movements of his dancing girls, or going to the arena to watch the gladiators fight for their lives with wild beasts or with each other.

But in time Rome disgusted even the rich with their riches; for she made all who had property responsible for the taxes, so that they had to pay not only for themselves, but for that ever-increasing number who could not. In their despair the moneyed class used to run away to escape their burdens. They enlisted in the army, and in some cases even sold themselves as slaves to get rid of a responsibility which was worse than actual bondage.

If a man was a workman, he was no better off. All that he earned above a bare subsistence was taken from him, and he was compelled by law to labor at his trade as long as life lasted.

His amount of work was regulated by an overseer. If he failed to do it in the appointed time, he was severely punished. If he spoiled his work, he might answer for it with his life. Finally, if he fled, he was pursued, brought back, and branded with a red-hot iron on the hand, that he might be known in future.

The law, in fact, regulated everything. A man could not set a price on his own goods; the government did it for him.¹ These oppressions destroyed all public spirit and desire for life.² When the Empire broke up, and the northern barbarians swept down like vultures on a dying beast of burden, the Gauls, far from resisting them, welcomed them as their deliverers and saviors.

II. Influence of Christianity. — Meanwhile another influence was at work which was destined to prepare the way for a new national life; not that of Rome, but one organized out of the material which Rome had left, joined to other elements brought in by the German tribes of the north.

Sometime during the second century Christianity appears to have reached Gaul.³ At first the Roman emperors treated it with contemptuous indifference. Then, as it continued to spread, they became alarmed lest it should overthrow that worship of themselves which they had set up. When a Roman soldier who had become converted to the teachings of Christ refused to kneel before a bronze image of the emperor as he knelt in prayer to God, his refusal seemed little short of treason.

¹ This was done by Diocletian's Law of Maximum. See Gibbon.

² Every one had his chain. The farmer was bound to the soil; the public official to his office; the tax-paying citizen (curial) to his town; the merchant to his shop; the workman to his trade-corporation. — LÉVASSEUR.

³ There is a tradition that the Apostle Paul preached in Provence; but though this may be true, nothing certain can be learned in regard to it. Most authorities suppose that Pothinus and Irenæus introduced Christianity about the middle of the second century. St. Denis suffered martyrdom at Paris about 270. He was followed by St. Martin, St. Germain, St. Hilaire, and other eminent teachers and missionaries.

Soon the government began its efforts to crush out the new faith which dared to declare that there was a power higher and holier than that of the Cæsars. The evangelists and missionaries, — such men as St. Denis,¹ who later became to France what St. George did to England, — were imprisoned, tortured, and put to death. Crowded circuses shouted their applause at seeing the tigers tear a delicate woman to pieces, or on hearing the dying groans of an aged man stretched in mockery bleeding on the cross. But no persecution could stop the spread of the Gospel among the poor and the oppressed. To them it was in very truth "the good news" of God.

In the fourth century a great change took place. The Emperor Constantine himself became a convert — at least in name — to Christianity, and established it as the state religion. From this time the bishops of Gaul set themselves to work to destroy heathenism and heresy. They pulled down the idols, and erected crosses and crucifixes in their stead. They changed the temples into churches; and if sometimes they spared the great Druidical oaks, which the country people held sacred, yet when the peasants assembled under them, they were sure to see the gracious image of the Virgin looking down upon them from amid the branches.

As time went on, monasteries and convents were founded, where the monks and nuns lived by the cultivation of the soil and the work of their hands. Hitherto, such labor had been looked upon as a disgrace — fit only for slaves. Christianity lifted it out of its degradation and made even the lowest drudgery seem honorable.

Meanwhile the Church was growing rich and powerful. During the decline of the Empire, when neither flogging nor torture could wring another penny of taxes from the poor man for the support of the government, he could yet find something to give toward the support of his religion.

¹ St. Denis (săn-dnĕ').

Eventually, the bishops and clergy of the cities came to have far greater influence than the magistrates. It was right that they should, for they were then the men best fitted to wield power. The Greek philosopher, Archimedes, said of the lever, that there was nothing that could withstand its force. He declared that he could even move the world with it if he only had another world on which to rest it. The Christian Church had found that other world; and by the lever of hope and fear it moved this one at its pleasure. To its honor it must be said it generally moved it for good.

12. Results of the Roman Conquest of Gaul. — Taken all in all, therefore, Rome, notwithstanding the despotism of its later days, accomplished much that was excellent. She planted cities, fostered arts, established a uniform system of law, and introduced her language and her literature. Finally, after long and futile persecution, she gave her powerful support to the Christian Church. These were enduring benefits which no oppression could wholly destroy.

Cæsar's conquest of Gaul was marked by the most deliberate and revolting cruelty.¹ But let us suppose that he had failed, and that Vercingetorix had succeeded not only in driving out the Romans, but in pursuing them and taking Rome itself, as the barbarians did five centuries later; in that case the progress of civilization and Christianity would certainly have been seriously retarded, if not, indeed, hopelessly and finally destroyed. In Gaul the victorious armies of Cæsar accomplished what they failed to do in Britain — they Romanized the country. In England to-day we find nothing left of the Latin conquest but the buildings, roads, walls, and fortifications which the Roman soldiers constructed;² in France we likewise see all these, but in addition we find that nowhere else in Europe did Roman speech, Roman institutions, Roman

¹ See Paragraph 8.

² See The Leading Facts of English History in this series.

legislation, Roman worship¹ and modes of life impress themselves so deeply and so permanently.

13. Summary. — If Cæsar had not subjugated Gaul, it seems quite certain that the northern barbarians would have done so, and furthermore they might have threatened the existence of the "Eternal City" itself. Roman arms triumphed. They brought civilization with them; after a time they also brought oppression, corruption, and religious persecution.

In the end, however, Rome adopted and protected Christianity until it grew strong enough to take care of itself. On the whole, Rome conferred benefits which far outweigh the evil she wrought, and France has abundant reason to be grateful to the name of Cæsar and to the Latin conquest.

¹ Roman worship: meaning by this the Christian religion which Rome had adopted.