

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

INVASION BY THE ROMANS UNDER CLAUDIUS—CARACTACUS—BOADICEA- AGRICOLA -GALGACUS- SEVERUS- VORTIGERN CALLS IN THE SAXONS.

IT was not until ninety-seven years after Cæsar had seized upon the island that it was unceremoniously clawed by the Emperor Claudius. Kent and Middlesex fell an easy prey to the Roman power; nor did the brawny sons of Canterbury since so famous for its brawn—succeed in repelling the enemy.

Aulus Plautius, the Roman general, pursued the Britons under that illustrious character, Caractus. He retreated towards Lambeth Marsh, and the swampy nature of the ground gave the invaders reason to feel that it was somewhat too “Far into the bowels of the land, They had march’d on without impediment. “Vespasian, the second in command, made a tour in the Isle of Wight, then called Vectis, where he boldly took the Bull by the horns, and seized upon Cowes with considerable energy.

Still, little was done till Ostorius Scapula whose name implies that he was a sharp blade put his shoulder to the wheel, and erected a line of defences a line in which he was so successful that it may have been called his peculiar forte to protect the territory that had been acquired. After a series of successes, Ostorius having suffocated every breath of liberty in Suffolk, and hauled the inhabitants of Newcastle over the coals, drove the people of Wales before him like so many Welsh rabbits; and even the brave Caractacus was obliged to fly as well as he could, with the remains of one of the wings of the British army.

He was taken to Rome with his wife and children, in fetters, but his dignified conduct procured his chains to be struck off,

and from this moment we lose the chain of his history. Ostorius, who remained in Britain, was so harassed by the natives that he was literally worried to death; but in the reign of Nero (a.d. 59), Suetonius fell upon Mona, now the Isle of Anglesey, where the howlings, cries, and execrations of the people were so awful, that the name of Mona was singularly appropriate. Notwithstanding, however, the terrific oaths of the natives, they could not succeed in swearing away the lives of their aggressors. Suetonius, having made them pay the penalty of so much bad language, was called up to London, then a Roman colony; but he no sooner arrived in town, than he was obliged to include himself among the departures, in consequence of the fury of Boadicea, that greatest of viragoes and first of British heroines. She reduced London to ashes, which Suetonius did not stay to sift; but he waited the attack of Boadicea a little way out of town, and pitched his tent within a modern omnibus ride of the great metropolis. His fair antagonist drove after him in her chariot, with her two daughters, the Misses Boadicea, at her side, and addressed to her army some of those appeals on behalf of "a British female in distress," which have since been adopted by British dramatists. The valorous old vixen was, however, defeated; and rather than swallow the bitter pill which would have poisoned the remainder of her days, she took a single dose and terminated her own existence. Suetonius soon returned with his suite to the Continent, without having finished the war; for it was always a characteristic of the Britons, that they never would acknowledge they had had enough at the hands of an enemy. Some little time afterwards, we find Cerealis engaged in one of those attacks upon Britain which might be called serials, from their frequent repetition; and subsequently, about the year 75 or 78, Julius Frontinus succeeded to the business from which so many before him had retired with very little profit.

The general, however, who cemented the power of Rome or, to speak figuratively, introduced the Roman cement among the Bricks or Britons was Julius Agricola, the father-in-law of Tacitus, the historian, who has lost no opportunity of puffing most outrageously his undoubtedly meritorious relative.



Agricola certainly did considerable havoc in Britain. He sent the Scotch reeling oyer the Grampian Hills, and led the Caledonians a pretty dance, Portrait of Julius Agricola. He ran UP a kind of rampart between the Friths of Clyde and Forth, from which he could come forth at his leisure and complete the conquest of Caledonia, In the sixth year of his campaign, a.d. 83, he crossed the Frith of Forth, and came opposite to Fife, which was played upon by the whole of his band with considerable energy. Having wintered in Fife, upon which he levied contributions to a pretty tune, he moved forward in the summer of the next year, a.d. 84, from Glen Devon to the foot of the Grampians. He here encountered Galgacus and his host, who made a gallant resistance; but the Scottish chief was soon left to reckon without his host, for all his followers fled like lightning, and it has been said that their bolting came upon him like a

thunderbolt. Agricola having thoroughly beaten the Britons on the principle, perhaps, that there is nothing so impressible as wax began to think of instructing them. He had given them a few lessons in war which they were not likely to forget, and he now thought of introducing among their chiefs a tincture of polite letters, commencing of course with the alphabet.

The Britons finding it as easy as A, B, C, began to cultivate the rudiments of learning, for there is a spell in letters of which few can resist the influence.

They assumed the toga, which, on account of the comfortable warmth of the material, they very quickly cottoned; they plunged into baths, and threw themselves into the capacious lap of luxury. For upwards of thirty years Britain remained tranquil, but in the reign of Hadrian, a.d. 120, the Caledonians, whose spirit had been "scotched, not killed," became exceedingly turbulent. Hadrian, who felt his weakness, went to the wall of Agricola, which was rebuilt in order to protect the territory the Romans had acquired. Some years afterwards the power of the empire went into a decline, which caused a consumption at home of many of the troops that had been previously kept for the protection of foreign possessions. Britain took this opportunity of revolting, and in the year 207, the Emperor Severus, though far advanced in years and a martyr to the gout, determined to march in person against the barbarians. He had no sooner set his foot on English ground than his gout caused him to feel the greatest difficulties at every step, and having been no less than four years getting to York, he knocked up there, a.d. 211, and died in a dreadful hobble. Caracalla, son and successor to the late Emperor Severus, executed a surrender of land to the Caledonians for the sake of peace, and being desirous of administering to the effects of his lamented governor in Rome, left the island for ever.

The remains of this wall are still in existence, to furnish food for the Archeologists who occasionally feast on the bricks, which have become venerable with the crust of ages.

A morning roll among the mounds in the neighbourhood where this famous wall once existed, is considered a most delicate repast to the antiquarian.



The history of Britain for the next seventy years may be easily written, for a blank page would tell all that is known respecting it. In the partnership reign of Dioclesian and Maximian, a.d. 288, “the land we live in” turns up again, under somewhat unfavourable circumstances, for we find its coasts being ravaged about this time by Scandinavian and Saxon pirates. Carausius, a sea captain, and either a Belgian or Briton by birth, was employed against the pirates, to whom, in the Baltic sound, he gave a sound thrashing. Instead, however, of sending the plunder home to his employers, he pocketed the proceeds of his own victories, and the Emperors, growing jealous of his power, sent instructions to have him slain at the earliest convenience. The wily sailor, however, fled to Britain, where he planted his standard, and where the tar, claiming the natives as his “messmates,” induced them to join him in the mess he had got into. The Roman eagles were put to flight, and both wings of the

imperial army exhibited the white feather. Peace with Carausius was purchased by conceding to him the government of Britain and Boulogne, with the proud title of Emperor.

The assumption of the rank of Emperor of Boulogne seems to us about as absurd as usurping the throne of Broadstairs, or putting on the imperial purple at Herne Bay; but Carausius having been originally a mere pirate, was justly proud of his new dignity.

Having swept the seas, he commenced scouring the country, and his victories were celebrated by a day's chairing, at which he assisted as the principal figure in a procession of unexampled pomp and pageantry. The throne, however, is not an easy fauteuil, and Carausius had scarcely had time to throw himself back in an attitude of repose, when he was murdered at Eboracum (York) (a.d. 297), by one Alectus, his confidential friend and minister. In accordance with the custom of the period, that the murderer should succeed his victim, Alectus ruled in Britain until he, in his turn, was slain at the instigation of Constantius Chlorus, who became master of the island.

That individual died at York (a.d. 306), where his son Constantine, afterwards called the Great, commenced his reign, which was a short and not a particularly merry one, for after experiencing several reverses in the North, he quitted the island, which, until his death in 337, once more enjoyed tranquillity.

Rome, which had so long been mighty, was like a cheese in the same condition, rapidly going to decay, and she found it necessary to practise what has been termed "the noble art of self-defence," which is admitted on all hands to be the first law of Nature. Britain they regarded as a province, which it was not their province to look after. It was consequently left as pickings for the Picts, * nor did it come off scot free from the Scots, who were a tribe of Celtæ from Ireland, and who consequently must be regarded as a mixed race of Gallo-Hibernian Caledonians. They had, in fact, been Irishmen before they had

been Scotchmen, and Frenchmen previous to either. Such were the translations that occurred even at that early period in the greatest drama of all—the drama of history.

“The Picts,” says Dr. Henry, “were so called from Pictich, a plunderer, and not from picti, painted,” History, in assigning the latter origin to their name, has failed to exhibit them in their true colours.

Britain continued for years suspended like a white hart—a simile justified by its constant trepidation and alarm—with which the Romans and others might enjoy an occasional game at bob-cherry. Maximus (a.d. 382) made a successful bite at it, but turning aside in search of the fruits of ambition elsewhere, the Scots and Picts again began nibbling at the Bigaroon that had been the subject of so much snappishness.

The Britons being shortly afterwards left once more to themselves, elected Marcus as their sovereign (a.d. 407); but monarchs in those days were set up like the king of skittles, only to be knocked down again. Marcus was accordingly bowled out of existence by those who had raised him; and one, Gratian, having succeeded to the post of royal ninepin, was in four months as dead as the article to which we have chosen to compare him. After a few more similar ups and downs, the Romans, about the year 420, nearly five centuries after Cæsar’s first invasion, finally cried quits with the Britons by abandoning the island.

In pursuing his labours over the few ensuing years, the author would be obliged to grope in the dark; but history is not a game at blind-man’s-buff, and we will never condescend to make it so. It is true, that with the handkerchief of obscurity bandaging our eyes, we might turn round in a state of rigmarole, and catch what we can; but as it would be mere guesswork by which we could describe the object of which we should happen to lay hold, we will not attempt the experiment.

It is unquestionable that Britain was a prey to dissensions at home and ravages from abroad, while every kind of faction—except satisfaction—was rife within the island.

Such was the misery of the inhabitants, that they published a pamphlet called “The Groans of the Britons” (a.d. 441), in which they invited Ætius, the Roman consul, to come over and turn out the barbarians, between whom and the sea, the islanders were tossed like a shuttlecock knocked about by a pair of battledores. Ætius, in consequence of previous engagements with Attila and others, was compelled to decline the invitation, and the Britons therefore had a series of routs, which were unattended by the Roman cohorts, Sir James Mackintosh’s “History of England,” Vol. I. chap,ii., p. 49,It is probable that the part of the metropolis called Little Britain, may have derived its name from the princes having established a little Brittany of their own in that locality. Athelstane appears also to have taken a limited number of pupils into his own palace to board and educate, for Harold, the king of Norway, consigned his son Haco to the care The southern part of the island was now torn between a Roman faction under Aurelius Ambrosius, and a British or “country party,” at the head of which was Vortigern. The latter is said to have called in the Saxons; and it is certain that (a.d. 449) he hailed the two brothers Hengist and Horsa, who were cruising as Saxonpirates in the British Channel. These individuals being ready for any desperate job, accepted the invitation of Vortigern, to pass some time with him in the Isle of Thanet. They were received as guests by the people of Sandwich, who would as soon have thought of quarrelling with their bread and butter as with the friends of the gallant Vortigern. From this date commences the Saxon period of the history of Britain,Horen, means a horse; and the white horse, even now,appears as the ensign of Kent, as it once did on the shield of the Saxons. It is probable that when Horsa came to London, he may have put up somewhere near the present site of the White Horse Cellar. Vide “Palgrave’s Rise and Progress of the English Commonwealth.