CHAPTER II

THE ROMANS IN BRITAIN

I

BRITAIN BEFORE ITS ROMANIZATION

THE historians tell us that Comm, the chieftain of the Atrebates already mentioned, who was one of the most remarkable figures of the Gallic War, after serving Cæsar became a deadly enemy of Rome in consequence of a quarrel with an officer of the Roman army, who had betrayed him. In 51 he withdrew into Britain with some of his people, continuing the work of colonization done by the Belgæ in the south of the island. He struck coins with Latin characters. He had three sons, who reigned in Britain. [MacNeill, CCCCXLI, p. 168; Jullian, CCCXLVII, ii, p. 470.]

Britain had not yet been conquered by Rome. Celtic civilization held its own there; Celtic art prevailed [Parkyn, CCCCXLVI, p. 101; Reginald A. Smith, "On Late Celtic Antiquities discovered at Welwyn," in CXXII; S. Reinach, in CXXXIX, 1925, 172. Cf. Collingwood, CCCCXX; Bushe Fox, *Excavation of the Late-Celtic Urn-field at Swarling, Kent*, CXXVI, 1925.]; ornament developed with taste, particularly enamel-work, with its combinations of colours. This art, indeed, quickly travelled far from the classic models of Celtic art; decorative fancy had free rein, while the workmanship continued to be admirable. The centre of this art, and of all the civilization of Britain, was in the south of England, in a region bounded on the north by a line drawn from the Bristol Channel to the Wash. Only here do we find Celtic coins.

There were a few towns in Britain, open towns or *oppida*, such as Londinium (London), the port of the Cantii, Camulodunum (Colchester), the stronghold of the Trinovantes, Eboracum (York), the capital of the Brigantes. Ptolemy mentions only about sixty, and many of these were doubtless only refuges or markets. Britain does not seem to have been so advanced as Gaul in the organization of city life.

There is never any mention of British shipping. Cæsar's two expeditions would have been at the mercy of any such fleet. But the monopoly of the Veneti probably extended to Britain. [Lloyd, CCCCXXXVIII, 41.]

II

THE ROMAN CONQUEST

Britain lived in peace until the time of Caligula, when the Romans made an expedition. The resistance was headed, as in Cæsar's time, by the King of the Trinovantes and by Cassivelaunus's successor Cunobelinus, Shakespeare's Cymbeline. [Ibid., 47.] The Romans returned under Claudius in 43, for the first time with the fixed intention of remaining. Gradually they had learned to know Britain better. Aulus Plautius, the commander-in-chief of the expedition, was remarkably well informed. The pretext of the expedition was a refusal to deliver up deserters. [Windisch, *Das keltische Britannien bis zu Kaiser Arthur*, p. 14; Tac., *Agr.*, 14.] Cunobelinus's two sons, Togidumnus and Caratacus (Caractacus) led the opponents of the Romans. Camulodunum was taken, and the south of the island reduced to a province. In this campaign the future Vespasian conquered the Isle of Wight (Vectis). [Dion Cass., ix, 210; Suet., *Vesp.*, 4; Eutrop., vii, 19. Cf. Bruton, CCCCXVI, 208 - 210; Windisch, p. 15.] The first successors of Plautius, in a series of campaigns of which Tacitus gives a mere summary, tried to extend the new province northwards in the direction of the Brigantes, and west-wards in that of the Irish Sea and the Silures. Caratacus took refuge with the Queen of the Brigantes, who gave him up. He was taken to Rome, where he defended his conduct so eloquently that he was restored to liberty.

The Romans established a colony at Camulodunum and a system of small forts in the west facing Cornwall and the Silures, on the last spurs of the chalky uplands.

A serious set-back led to the appointment in 57 of a capable general, Suetonius Paulinus. He organized an expedition against the Druid sanctuary on Anglesey, which is described as a refuge of deserters. The Druids had been an element of opposition in Britain. [Tac., *Ann.*, xiv, 29 - 30; cf. Windisch, p. 17.] Suetonius Paulinus was recalled by a general rising; the Trinovantes had retaken Camulodunum and massacred the colony, and a legion had been wiped out. The general, after evacuating London and Verulamium (near St. Albans), gained a decisive victory which saved the Roman settlements. [Tac., *Ann.*, xiv, 32; Windisch, pp. 18 - 19.]

After some years of uncertainty, Vespasian, who knew the country, revived the attempt to conquer it. The Brigantes and the Silures were defeated in turn. [Windisch, pp. 19 - 20.] Then the famous Agricola arrived, who governed Britain from 78

to 86. Thanks to him and to his son-in-law Tacitus, the story of the conquest of the island has become classic, almost as much so as that of Gaul. He had served under Suetonius Paulinus, and made Anglesey his objective. Then he advanced north, gaining ground every year. In his third year in the field he reached the Firth of Tay, *œstuarium Tanaum*. Subsequently, he erected a first edition of the *vallum* of Antoninus between the Clyde and the Firth of Forth. In his sixth and seventh campaigns he went beyond his *vallum* either with his fleet or with his land-forces, but did not establish himself permanently. [Tac., CCCCXXVII. Cf. Macdonald, CCCCXL, pp. 111 - 138.]

After that, Hadrian and Antoninus built each a *vallum*. Under Commodus the future Emperor Pertinax put down a rebellion. Later, Septimius Severus made an expedition into Caledonia, of which we know nothing. [Windisch, pp. 42 - 3. Cf. Paus., vii, 31.]

Britain was conquered, except that mysterious Caledonia and the central portion of Wales, occupied by the Ordovices and Demetæ, who were to be reinforced by Irish colonies.

The Roman government carried on the same policy of assimilation in Britain as in Gaul, but with some differences and less success. Tacitus gives the credit of this policy to Agricola, who won over the people with the conveniences of Roman civilization and city life. He advanced money for building, set up schools, and instituted fashions. The archæological finds show us a Britain living partly in buildings of Roman type. Towns sprang up (the remains of about thirty are known), but less spontaneously than in Gaul, since the legionary camps constituted towns in Britain. The IInd Legion was quartered at Isca Silurum, or Cærleon, "Camp of the Legion"; the VIth at Eboracum, or York; the XIVth at Uriconium (Shrewsbury); the XXth at Deva (Chester). In the seventh century the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius gives a list of twenty-six towns whose names begin with *Caer*, derived from *castrum*. These are garrison towns, in which the soldiers seem to have been more intermingled with the population than in Gaul. [Windisch, pp. 46 - 8: Sagot, CCCCLIV. Cf. Loth, in CXL, 1914, p. 109; Drexel, "Denkmäler der Brittonen am Limes," in LXVII, 1922, p. 31; Haverfield and Macdonald, CCCCXXXI; Lethaby, CCCCXXXVIII; Collinge, CCCCXIX; Fabricius, "Neuere Arbeiten über die britannischen Limites," in LXVIII, 1923, p. 79.]

In these towns Latin was spoken. It was the official language, that in which the inscriptions are written. But whereas in Gaul it outlasted the Roman rule, in Britain it vanished with it; much of it lingers in the Welsh vocabulary, but it was British that survived. We may consider the reasons for this. [Budinsky, CXCII.]

The chief reason was that in Britain Romanization was far less general and

less deep than in Gaul. It is true that the remains of a large number of very luxurious Roman villas have been found, which confirm what Tacitus tells us of the Romanization of the British nobility. In fact it is to this nobility that we must ascribe the permanent buildings rather than to the Roman officials, whose stay was transitory, or to the men planted in the colonies, who must have been chiefly small folk. But the evidences of Roman culture are very definitely confined to certain districts - the neighbourhood of the northern garrisons, the south coast (Kent, Sussex, the Isle of Wight), and the agricultural areas of Gloucestershire and Lincolnshire, which seem to have been supply-centres of the Roman army. [Collingwood, CCCCXX; Taylor, CCCCLX; Macdonald, "The Building of the Antonine Wall," in LXXVIII, 1921; Miller, CCCCXLII.]

About the towns, one point is to be noted - the absence of municipal inscriptions of any importance. The fact is that the country continued to be military and the administration was purely military until the time of Diocletian. The names of peoples disappeared; the small nations were not, as in Gaul, made the basis of the political and territorial organization of the country. At any rate each was not centred on a town, as in Gaul, and held together by its town. In Diocletian's time each province corresponds to a group of little nations; for example Flavia Cæsarensis consists of the Iceni, Trinovantes, Cantii, Regni, and Atrebates.

III

THE ARMY OF BRITAIN. ARTHUR

At the end of the second century, in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, we find in Britain four chief officials, two of whom are military. One commands the fleet, and is called Count of the Saxon Shore *(comes littoris Saxonici)*. This proves that the Saxon invasions started nearly two hundred years before Hengist and Horsa. He had the IInd Legion under his orders. The other military official is called Duke of the Britains *(dux Britanniarum)*, with the VIth Legion under him. It was his duty to resist the repeated attacks of the northerners, who were no longer held back by the ramparts of Hadrian and Antoninus - Caledonians, Picts or Scots, and also people from the west. The military forces of Britain were caught between these two groups of enemies, and faced now one, now the other, and sometimes both. [Lloyd, CCC-CXXXVIII, 59; Windisch, *Das keltische Britannien*, pp. 43 ff., 57. Cf. Ridgeway, "Nial of the Nine Hostages," in Phil. Soc. Cambridge, 1924, p. 14; R. G. Collingwood, "The Roman Evacuation of Britain," in LXXIX, xii, 1922, pp.

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These officials, stranded on the very edge of the Empire, beyond the Channel, and left to their own resources, gradually became independent in practice. They also tried to obtain complete independence, and there were revolts. Some sought the Imperial throne, and crossed the sea. The story becomes mixed with legend. The attitude of chroniclers like the pseudo-Nennius and Geoffrey of Monmouth after him is very interesting. The usurper and the rebel are to them the heroes of the story, and in their eyes they are not Romans, but Britons. In the curious work of Gildas entitled *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* [Published by Mommsen in CCCLVIII, xiii, *Chronica Minora*, iii, pp. 1 ff. See Faral, CCCCXXVI, i, p. 39. For the sources for the life of Gildas, see Lot, *Mélanges d'histoire bretonne: études et documents,* Paris, 1907. Gildas died in 569 or 570.] we already find signs of the same state of mind, and the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius, in repeating a passage from Gildas, alters and further amplifies its character in this respect. [The question of the composition of the compilation known as the Historia Britonnum, ascribed to Nennius, and of the identity of its supposed author, has given rise to a series of important controversial works. The latest is that of M. Faral, op. cit., ii, pp. 56 - 224; in his third volume he has attempted a critical restoration of the text. Mommsen published the text, op. cit., xiii, *Chronica Minora*, iii, pp. iii, 59. Mgr. Duchesne had, in CXL, xvii, p. 15, made a preliminary classification of versions which is still a very remarkable piece of work. Zimmer has devoted an important work to Nennius, in which he says that he really existed and ascribes the whole of the original version of the history to him. According to M. Faral, this text is later than 687 and earlier than 801. In any case it contains traditions of older origin, which probably refer to the south of Britain.

For Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote about the second quarter of the twelfth century, see Faral, op. cit., ii, and the critical restoration of his *Historia Britanniæ* in the third volume of that work. At the same time as M. Faral's work, Messrs. Griscom and Jones brought out an edition of Geoffrey's text, with a translation and an essay on the author (London, 1929). Cf., too, the important work of Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, Göttingen, 1928, two vols. Cf. below, p. 266.]

In the time of Diocletian, in 286, the Count of the Saxon Shore, Carausius, revolted and assumed the purple, and was killed by one of his lieutenants. [Eutr., ix, 22; Oros., vii, 25; Windisch, op. cit., p. 43.] A little later Constantius Chlorus took the field in Britain against the Picts and died at York in 306. The attacks of the Picts were repeated; they came down as far as London; and Ammianus Marcellinus, the great historian of this period, shows us Theodosius the Great fighting them from 364 to 366. Some years later Britain produced another pretender, Maximus, who must have been the Duke of the Britains. In 387 he left Britain with his army, which was scattered and annihilated by Theodosius. This Maximus is doubtless the hero of the legend which tells of an Emperor of Rome of that name who was attracted to Britain by a wonderful beauty whom he had seen in a dream; he there forgot his duties. Rome revolted, he reconquered it, and his British troops returned to their country no more. It is the subject of a Mabinogi, the *Dream of Macsen Wledig*. [Windisch, op. cit., p. 44; cf. Loth, CCLXX, i, p. 219.]

The Greatness and Decline of the Celts

A line of Claudian suggests that Stilicho defended Britain against the Picts and Saxons. In any case, there were still troops in the country under Honorius, [Windisch, op. cit., p. 45.] and they there set up three emperors in succession - Marcus, Gratian, and Constantine III. This last, like Maximus, left the island and fought Stilicho in Gaul. He had a detachment in Spain, commanded by his son Constans. During this time, the towns of Britain seem to have succeeded in running the affairs of Britain independently. The historian Zosimus quotes a curious circular letter written to them by Honorius, asking them to provide for their own defence. [Zosim., vi, 10, 2.] But the loosening bonds were not yet broken, and it appears that in 440 the Britons came into Gaul to help Aëtius. Britain was still theoretically part of the Empire in 537, when Belisarius ceded it to the Goths who had been driven out of Aquitania by Clovis.

During the period of the first Saxon invasions, the office of Duke of the Britains does not seem to have lapsed. We know of two historical Dukes, and there are two others who are chiefly legendary. In Nennius these officials are called *reges*. In Welsh they bear the same title as Maxen Wledig.

The two historical Dukes are Guortigernus or Vortigern, who was certainly a Briton, and Aurelius Ambrosius, who came of a Roman or very much Romanized family and whose father is said to have been a Consul. He is the hero of the story for Gildas and the Latin and Welsh chroniclers. [Windisch, op. cit., p. 38; cf. Gildas, xiv.]

The two legendary Dukes are Uther Pendragon, the father of Arthur, and Arthur himself. The Triads of the *Red Book of Hergest* make Uther Pendragon the brother of Emreis, that is Ambrosius, and the son of Kustennin Vychan, that is Constantine the Small, the usurper Constantine III. The conquest of Rome is one of the main episodes in the legend of Arthur, which symbolizes and depicts not only the fight of Britain against the northerners and Saxons but also the revolt of Britain against Rome and its defeat of the Roman power. [Windisch, op. cit., p. 52. Cf. Faral and Bruce, opp. citt.]