

PREHISTORIC SCOTLAND.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION—THE HISTORIC BORDERLAND.



RIOR to the occupation of Britain by the Romans vague reports of the British Isles had found their way into the literature of Greece and Rome, but of these only a few have come down the stream of time to our day. Such historical data are now valuable chiefly for comparison with deductions derived from archæological and other sources. The Phœnicians, as early as the twelfth century B.C., founded colonies on the western shores of the Mediterranean, as well as on the coast of the Atlantic beyond the Pillars of Hercules ; and after the conquest of Phœnicia by the Assyrians, about the middle of the ninth century B.C., these colonists acquired greater influence, more especially the Carthaginians, who organised commercial enterprises to distant lands. They sent expeditions in quest of tin, then so much in demand in the East, to the Cassiterides, or Tin Islands, identified by some authorities as the Scilly Isles, and by others as a group of islands on the north coast

of Spain. Herodotus candidly confesses his ignorance of the whereabouts of the Cassiterides, "from whence," he says, "our tin comes." During the last few years there seems to be a consensus of opinion among English scholars that there is no evidence that the Phœnicians ever traded for tin as far as Britain. But, however this may be, there can be no question that they held for a long time a monopoly of navigation and trade in the Mediterranean, so that they must have played an important part in the early civilisation of Europe.

At a subsequent date (600 B.C.) the Phocæans founded Massilia (Marseilles), which speedily became an important station for the tin trade of Britain by means of a land-route across France. It was through this source that the Greeks became first aware of the existence of the British Isles, and henceforth we find the two largest of the group incidentally referred to by various classical writers under the distinctive names Albion and Ierne. Much of their information appears to have been derived from the narratives of the voyages of Himilco and Pytheas, but, unfortunately, only a few fragmentary passages of these narratives have survived to the present day as extracts incorporated in other works.

Himilco was a Carthaginian who, about 500 B.C., set out from Gades, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, on a voyage of discovery. Coasting along the shores of Spain and Portugal, he crossed the Bay of Biscay and arrived at the islands of the Æstrymnides, described as rich in tin and lead, and inhabited by a numerous population who were in the habit of using skin boats (coracles). It would appear from 'Ora Maritima' of Festus Avienus that Himilco knew of the plains of the Britons, the distant Thule, the grass-green "Insula Sacra" inhabited by the race of the Hibernians, and the adjacent island of the Albiones.

About 150 years later the Romans, then aspiring to be rivals to the Carthaginians in the tin trade, but unable to procure any definite information in regard to the Cassiterides, instigated the merchants of Marseilles to fit out an expedition to ascertain the whereabouts of these mysterious islands. Pytheas, an eminent mathematician of that town, and a contemporary of Aristotle and of Alexander the Great, accompanied the expedition, and on his return home published an account of his adventures. His story, though received both at the time and by subsequent classical writers with the greatest distrust—Strabo, indeed, going so far as to characterise him as a charlatan and his statements as utterly untrustworthy—is now recognised to be singularly accurate.

Entering the Atlantic by the Straits of Gibraltar, Pytheas sailed round Spain to Brittany, and thence crossed over to the neighbouring shores of Britain and the estuary of the Thames. From Britain he sailed to the mouth of the Rhine, and after coasting along the shore northwards, rounded Jutland and entered the Baltic, going as far east as the mouth of the Vistula. Here he turned back and proceeded along the coast of Norway as far as the Arctic circle and the island of Thule. On his return journey he touched at the north of Scotland, and finally reached Brittany and the mouth of the Garonne, whence he travelled to Marseilles by land. Although Pytheas does not appear to have visited the tin districts of Cornwall, his statements made known, for the first time, the three promontories of Cantium (Kent), Belerion (Land's End), and Orcas (North of Scotland). From his time the overland trade-route to Britain was permanently established, a fact which satisfactorily accounts for the earliest coins struck in the island being modelled after Greek coinage, especially the gold stater of Philip II., king of Macedonia.

It was not till the invasion of Britain by Julius Cæsar,

in 55 B.C., that the Romans came into actual contact with the tribes inhabiting that mysterious and, hitherto, to them inaccessible island. The reasons which induced Cæsar to fit out this expedition at such an advanced season (August) are thus stated in his Commentaries (book iv. chap. xx.) :—

“During the short part of summer which remained, Cæsar, although in these countries, as all Gaul lies towards the north, the winters are early, nevertheless resolved to proceed into Britain, because he discovered that in almost all the wars with the Gauls succours had been furnished to our enemy from that country ; and even if the time of the year should be insufficient for carrying on the war, yet he thought it would be of great service to him if he only entered the island, and saw into the character of the people, and got knowledge of their localities, harbours, and landing-places, all which were for the most part unknown to the Gauls. For neither does any one except merchants generally go thither, nor even to them was any portion of it known, except the sea-coast and those parts which are opposite to Gaul. Therefore, after having called up to him the merchants from all parts, he could learn neither what was the size of the island, nor what or how numerous were the nations which inhabited it, nor what system of war they followed, nor what customs they used, nor what harbours were convenient for a great number of large ships.”¹

With the military exploits of Cæsar in Britain during that and the following year we are not here concerned, beyond the glimpses of British civilisation which they disclose—thus summarised in the Commentaries (book v. chaps. xii.-xiv.) :—

“The interior portion of Britain is inhabited by those of whom they say that it is handed down by tradition that they were born in the island itself ; the maritime portion of those

¹ Bohn's Classical Library.

who had passed over from the country of the Belgæ for the purpose of plunder and making war ; almost all of whom are called by the names of those states from which being sprung they went thither, and having waged war, continued there and began to cultivate the lands. The number of the people is countless, and their buildings exceedingly numerous, for the most part very like those of the Gauls ; the number of cattle is great. They use either brass (bronze) or iron rings, determined at a certain weight, as their money. Tin is produced in the midland regions ; in the maritime, iron, but the quantity of it is small ; they employ brass, which is imported. There, as in Gaul, is timber of every description except beech and fir. They do not regard it lawful to eat the hare, and the cock, and the goose ; they, however, breed them for amusement and pleasure. The climate is more temperate than in Gaul, the colds being less severe. . . .

“The most civilised of all these nations are they who inhabit Kent, which is entirely a maritime district, nor do they differ much from the Gallic customs. Most of the inland inhabitants do not sow corn, but live on milk and flesh, and are clad with skins. All the Britons, indeed, dye themselves with woad, which occasions a bluish colour, and thereby have a more terrible appearance in fight. They wear their hair long, and have every part of their body shaved except their head and upper lip.”¹

Cæsar bears testimony to the courage with which the Britons fought against his troops, sometimes fearlessly encountering them in the open in war-chariots, and at other times rushing upon them from their places of concealment in woods and fortifications.

Strabo (book iv. c. v.) supplies some additional particulars as to the manners and customs of the Britons. According

¹ Bohn's Classical Library.

to him their country produced corn, cattle, gold, silver, iron, skins, slaves, and dogs sagacious in hunting. The natives carried on a trade in these commodities with the Kelts, who exported ivory bracelets and necklaces, amber, vessels of glass, and small wares. The manners of the Britons were in part like those of the "Kelts" of Gaul, but more simple and barbarous; insomuch that some of them, though possessing plenty of milk, had not skill enough to make cheese. They were also unacquainted with horticulture and other matters of husbandry. Strabo informs us that there were four passages commonly used for crossing over into Britain—viz., from the mouths of the rivers Rhine, Seine, Loire, and Garonne; but for such as sailed from the parts about the Rhine the passage was not exactly from its mouths, but from the country of the Morini, in which also was situated Itium, which Cæsar used as a naval station when about to pass over into the island.

Diodorus Siculus makes mention of the tin-miners near the promontory of Belerion, and characterises them as more civilised than the other inhabitants, owing to their intercourse with strangers. Those who were regarded as the aborigines are represented as living in mean dwellings made of reeds or timbers, and leading a simple, frugal, and virtuous life. With regard to the method of harvesting, he makes the curious statement that they merely cut off the ears of corn, which were stored in underground cellars till required to be dressed for food. This suggests a speedy method of preparing a meal—a method which was probably the same as that practised on emergencies in Scotland up to recent times.¹

Not till the year 79 A.D. did the Romans extend their conquests as far north as the borders of Scotland. In

¹ See 'The Past in the Present,' by Sir Arthur Mitchell, pp. 46, 238.

Romans to retire from that part of the country. Tacitus thus describes the events which led to this rising :—

“In the summer which began the sixth year of Agricola’s administration (A.D. 83), extending his views to the countries situated beyond Bodotria, as a general insurrection of the remoter nations was apprehended, and the enemy’s army rendered marching unsafe, he caused the harbours to be explored by his fleet, which, now first acting in aid of the land-forces, gave the formidable spectacle of war at once pushed on by sea and land. The cavalry, infantry, and marines were frequently mingled in the same camp, and recounted with mutual pleasure their several exploits and adventures ; comparing, in the boastful language of military men, the dark recesses of woods and mountains, with the horrors of waves and tempests ; and the land and enemy subdued, with the conquered ocean. It was also discovered from the captives that the Britons had been struck with consternation at the view of the fleet, conceiving the last refuge of the vanquished to be cut off, now the secret retreats of their seas were disclosed. The various inhabitants of Caledonia immediately took up arms, with great preparations, magnified, however, by report, as usual where the truth is unknown ; and by beginning hostilities, and attacking our fortresses, they inspired terror as daring to act offensively ; insomuch that some persons, disguising their timidity under the mask of prudence, were for instantly retreating on this side the firth, and relinquishing the country rather than waiting to be driven out.”¹

To prevent being surrounded Agricola distributed his army into three divisions, an arrangement which induced the Britons to make a sudden attack in the night-time on the 9th Legion, it being the weakest. So skilfully was this

¹ Life of Agricola, chap. 25 (Bohn’s Classical Library).

manœuvre carried out that, having killed the sentinels, they were actually fighting inside the camp when Agricola, who had received information from his scouts of the movement of the enemy, came up just in time to save his friends. The enemy was routed; and, according to the historian, "had not the woods and marshes sheltered the fugitives, that day would have terminated the war."

This victory completely restored the drooping spirits of the Roman soldiers, and henceforth they became eager "to penetrate into the heart of Caledonia."

In the beginning of next summer (A.D. 84) both armies prepared for the impending struggle. Agricola, having sent his fleet to various parts along the coast in order to cause alarm among the natives, advanced northwards as far as a hill called "Graupius," where the enemy, to the number of upwards of 30,000, was already encamped. There being no description of Agricola's march, nor of the locality in which the hostile armies met, we have no clue to the precise situation of the field of conflict, beyond the vague topographical allusions in the account of the battle. We need not be surprised, therefore, to find that historians differ on this point. General Roy places Agricola's headquarters at the camp of Ardoch, while Dr Skene contends that they were at Cleaven Dyke, on the peninsula formed by the junction of the Isla with the Tay.

Agricola arranged his troops as follows: 8000 auxiliaries occupied the centre, supported right and left by 3000 horse, while the legions were stationed in the rear before the intrenchments. "The British troops, for the greater display of their numbers, and more formidable appearance, were ranged upon the rising grounds, so that the first line stood upon the plain, the rest, as if linked together, rose above one another upon the ascent. The charioteers and horse-

men filled the middle of the field with their tumult and careering."

The following extract is interesting as showing that the Highland broadsword dates to pre-Roman times: "The Britons, armed with long swords and short targets, with steadiness and dexterity avoided or struck down our missile weapons, and at the same time poured in a torrent of their own. Agricola then encouraged three Batavian and two Tungrian cohorts to fall in and come to close quarters—a method of fighting familiar to these veteran soldiers, but embarrassing to the enemy from the nature of their armour; for the enormous British swords, blunt at the point, are unfit for close grappling, and engaging in a confined space. When the Batavians, therefore, began to redouble their blows, to strike with the bosses of their shields and mangle the faces of the enemy, and, bearing down all those who resisted them on the plain, were advancing their line up the ascent, the other cohorts, fired with ardour and emulation, joined in the charge, and overthrew all who came in their way."

Professor Rolleston,¹ in narrating a somewhat similar incident² in a contest between the Romans and the Gauls, makes the following remarks on the Gaulish method of fighting with their long pointless broadswords: "The same tactics succeeded at Culloden, as the tactic of thrusting and giving point always will succeed when masses of men in rows, not isolated individuals merely, are pitted against each other on the thrusting *versus* the slashing plan, though the slashing sword at Culloden was of good steel enough." That the Caledonians should be defeated at Mons Graupius and Culloden—the first and last of their battles since they appeared

¹ "On the Iron, Bronze, and Stone Ages," p. 3: reprint from 'Trans. of the Bristol and Gl. Arch. Society.'

² Polyb., Hist. ii. c. 33

in history—through a peculiarity of their celebrated *claymore* is certainly very remarkable.

The actual result of the memorable battle of Mons Graupius was that Agricola withdrew his entire army to winter quarters south of the line of forts which he had erected between the Firths of Forth and Clyde, thus relinquishing all the fortresses previously held by his soldiers to the north of this line. It does not therefore appear that the victory was such a crushing defeat of the Caledonians as might, *primâ facie*, be inferred from the words of the narrative. Whatever may have been the motive for abandoning the garrisons north of the firths, it is only natural that Tacitus, being the son-in-law of Agricola, would give as much renown and *éclat* to the battle as possible. The recall of Agricola, shortly after the defeat of the Caledonians became known in Rome, owing, according to his biographer, to the jealousy of the Emperor Domitian, was quickly followed by the abandonment of all the fruits of his northern victories. How the Caledonians settled their affairs is not known, but we do know that when Hadrian became emperor, thirty-three years afterwards, he had to resort to the construction of a wall across the island, from the Solway to Newcastle, in order to check the ravages of the northern barbarians: nor was it till about the year 142 A.D. that the Roman frontier was extended to Agricola's original line of forts between the Forth and Clyde.

The remarkable march of the Emperor Severus (208 A.D.), in the course of which he penetrated as far north as the shores of the Moray Firth, appears to have been on so large a scale as to preclude the natives from contesting the progress of his army in any pitched engagement; but yet, according to Dio, he lost 50,000 men during that expedition. He explains, however, that this loss was caused by the hewing of woods, the building of bridges, the draining

of marshes, and especially by the ambuscades of the natives, who kept up a kind of guerilla warfare against the parties so engaged. The same author also states that the Romans were often entrapped into the lifting of cattle which had been purposely put in their way by the Caledonians themselves; and while the former were thus occupied the latter fell upon them from their ambuscades, so that the Romans, rather than become a prey to these people, often entreated their own companions to slay them.

At this time we read of the North Britons being divided into two tribes, the *Mæatæ* and *Caledonii*, the former inhabiting the parts near the Roman Wall and the latter the regions beyond. It was a century and a half later before the Picts and Scots made their first appearance in history.

As to the religion of the Britons, little is said directly by any of the earlier classical writers. Cæsar (book vi. chaps. xiii.-xvi.) informs us that throughout Gaul there were two orders among the people of rank and dignity—viz., the Druids and the Knights—the commonality being held in the condition of slaves. The institution of the Druids he regarded as devised in Britain and brought over from it into Gaul; and he states that those who desired to gain a more accurate knowledge of the system were generally in the habit of going to Britain for the purpose of studying it. He represents these Druids as having great influence, both in religious and civil affairs. They conducted public and private sacrifices, gave decisions in all controversies, decreed rewards and punishments, and had the power of excommunicating criminals and law-breakers from all social and religious privileges.

The description given by Tacitus¹ of an attack, made by the Roman army under Suetonius Paulinus, on the Isle of

¹ Annals, book xiv. chaps. xxix., xxx. (Bohn's Classical Library).

Mona, and the destruction of the Druids who accompanied the native forces, throws a lurid light on the ceremonies of this mysterious cult :—

“He therefore prepared to attack the Isle of Mona, remarkable for the valour of its inhabitants, and a common receptacle for fugitives ; he built, for that end, boats with flat bottoms, to meet the difficulties of a sea abounding in shallows and subject to variations ; in these the foot were embarked ; the horse followed, partly by fording and partly swimming by the side of their horses, where the water was deep.

“On the shore stood the forces of the enemy, a dense array of arms and men, with women dashing through the ranks like furies ; their dress funereal, their hair dishevelled, and carrying torches in their hands. The Druids around the host, pouring forth dire imprecations, with their hands uplifted towards the heavens, struck terror into the soldiers by the strangeness of the sight ; insomuch that, as if their limbs were paralysed, they exposed their bodies to the weapons of the enemy, without an effort to move. Afterwards, at the earnest exhortations of the general, and from the effect of their own mutual importunities that they would not be scared by a rabble of women and fanatics, they bore down upon them, smote all that opposed them to the earth, and wrapped them in the flames themselves had kindled. A garrison was then established to overawe the vanquished, and the groves dedicated to sanguinary superstitions destroyed ; for they deemed it acceptable to their deities to make their altars fume with the blood of captives, and to seek the will of the gods in the entrails of men.”

That the Britons practised mystic ceremonies of a religious character is also stated by Pliny, as may be seen from the

following passage :¹ "There is a plant in Gaul, similar to the plantago in appearance, and known there by the name 'glastum'; with it both matrons and girls among the people of Britain are in the habit of staining the body all over, when taking part in the performance of certain sacred rites ; rivalling hereby the swarthy hue of the Ethiopians, they go in a state of nature."

The result of the above clippings from historical sources is to show that the whole island of Britain was thickly populated, prior to the Roman invasion, by the descendants of different races of people distinguished, even then, from each other by racial and physical characteristics. From the small swarthy Silures to the large red-haired Caledonians there was a wide gap, which may have been since filled up by cross-breeding, and may thus account for the intermediate physiognomic shading of the present day. There appears also to have been a difference in degree in their culture, the people of the south and east being more refined than the aborigines. Their villages are described as wooden huts, located within woods, and rudely fortified with stakes and felled trees. The Caledonians depended for their living on finding pasturage for cattle rather than on the cultivation of the soil. On the whole, the British people were brave, proud, and superstitious. They fought in chariots with shield, sword, spear, and dagger, and painted or tattooed their bodies, especially when going to battle. The stories about cannibalism and laxity of morals are probably mere gossip, deriving at any rate little or no support from archæological evidence.

Within the historic borderland the historian and the archæologist meet on a common platform, and their respective researches become for a short time contemporary ; and as

¹ Nat. Hist., book xxii. chap. ii. (Bohn's Classical Library).

the methods of the historian do not conduct him beyond the historic fringe, the archæologist is bound to bring his general conclusions into harmony with the most approved interpretations of the historical materials. Both investigators are virtually dealing with one and the same subject—viz., the story of the culture and civilisation of the people of Scotland since their arrival on its shores up to the present time—the only break in the narrative being due merely to the different means by which the information is gathered. But with the advent of written records—the true starting-point of the historian—the methods of the archæologist are not necessarily to be discarded, and, indeed, they may be continued profitably, *pari passu* with the former, a long way down the stream of human progress.

Having thus parted from my fellow-workers—the historians—it may be well to cast a *coup-d'œil* on the special work before us. Half a century ago the unwritten records of man were scarcely recognisable through the impenetrable mists which had settled on the prehistoric horizon. Now, through the industry, researches, and scientific methods of modern archæologists, this happily is no longer the case. Numerous explorers have made incursions into the domain of prehistoric archæology, with the result that its highways and by-ways are being rapidly opened up. Already much of its materials has been gathered together, carefully surveyed, and parcelled out into the pigeon-holes of progressive civilisation. Definite landmarks in the various phases of culture have been laid down as on a chart; and the chronological sequence in the evolution of primitive tools and weapons is steadily pursued with increasing means of precision.

Although the prehistoric materials collected and annotated within the Scottish area do not comprise objects of any striking or exceptional character—such as hieroglyphs, archi-

tectural ornamentation, art products like those of the Dordogne Troglodytes, &c.—yet, rude and commonplace as many of them are, they have yielded some deductions of the greatest importance to the history of Scottish civilisation. During the centuries covered by the prehistoric period that portion of Britain now known as Scotland differed greatly as regards the social condition of its inhabitants, and even in its physical features. The vegetative garb which clothes its more permanent skeleton of mountain-ridges and winding river-valleys, has varied from time to time with the vicissitudes of climate and other changes in the environments. The low-lying plains of sedimentary deposits which stretch along the shores of our river estuaries, and the numerous filled-up lake basins, are comparatively recent additions to the cultivable soil. Immense fields of heath and peat-bogs have taken the place of equally extensive areas of primeval forests. Between the flora, fauna, and physical conditions of all these successive panoramas there has always been a close relationship. To such fluctuations of his environment man, being the most adaptable of all animals, readily accommodated himself. But, *en revanche*, the environment affected him most powerfully, not only partially moulding his organic constitution but to some extent regulating his actions. Scotland is only part of an island, and that the most distant from the old-world civilisations on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean; hence it is manifest that many of the physical and social changes which have taken place within its area were common to the whole island. The southern portion of Britain having been first occupied by the Neolithic immigrants, it took them some time to extend their hunting expeditions to the primeval forests and mountain recesses of its northern extremity. No description of the prehistoric inhabitants of Scotland which excludes their previous

wanderings and relationship to contemporary races can, therefore, be regarded as adequately dealing with the ethnological problems involved. And this remark applies *a fortiori* to their handicraft products and racial characteristics. There is, therefore, no alternative but to treat the whole subject in its wider aspects. Accordingly, the first few chapters of this volume are devoted to a review of the physical phenomena which obtained in North Britain when the first Neolithic wanderers appeared on the scene. Concurrent and subsequent changes, such as the natural decay of forests, the growth of peat, and the alterations in the relative level of sea and land, are briefly described. After a few notes on the contemporary fauna we pass on to the more important subject of the culture and civilisation of the people who, by degrees, settled in these regions. Both in the inception of the work and in the filling in of the details, the twofold object of describing the salient features of the archæological materials found within the present Scottish border, and of showing their connection with analogous remains in outside areas, has been steadily kept in view. Western Europe was partitioned in Neolithic times among various races and nationalities, whose spheres of influence may still be traced by their well-defined antiquarian remains; but the areas thus defined do not correspond with the political divisions of the present day. Also within the range of these wider influences there were often smaller archæological areas, whose characteristics depended on local developments. From the latter point of view it is possible that a few Scottish relics may present some local peculiarities; but, in their *tout ensemble*, they cannot be separated from the wider area of early British civilisation. This volume is not, therefore, intended to be a handbook to Scottish archæology, nor does it encroach on the domain of special treatises on that subject.

It goes further afield, and deals with the antiquarian *débris* of a bygone civilisation and the sources from which its culture elements were derived. The picture which exhibits the prehistoric people of Scotland in the foreground is not less instructive because we have also figured in the background those from whom they inherited their culture and civilisation.

Antiquaries who restrict their investigations to mere local relics may look askance at the wide range thus extended to the field of our inquiry. But let me remind such critics that the unwritten records of man have no defined limitations, for they spread their absorbent radicles into all departments of knowledge. Consequently, no evidence bearing on any of the past phases of human civilisation can be of permanent value until it has been subjected to, and tested by, the side-lights and methods of comparative archæology.