

Chapter 1

The Roman Rule in Britain

The Romans conquer Britain, A.D. 43–78

The Romans did not forget Britain, though for some time they were too busy with other things to come back to it. But as they were fond of fighting, and liked always to add new lands to their empire, they would not be content until Britain was a Roman province, for so they called all the different parts of their empire. Caesar had made France, or Gaul as it was then called, a Roman province, and the Britons used sometimes to go over to Gaul in boats and take the things they made or found in their country to give them to the Gauls in exchange for swords and other things the Romans had taught Gauls to make. The Britons saw that the Gauls used Roman money, and so they began to try to copy it and make money for themselves, for before they had only metal rings. The Romans often heard tell of the Britons coming to Gaul, and this helped make them not forget them. At last, about a hundred years after Caesar had been in Britain, another Roman army came. The Britons were not at all pleased to see the Romans come and they fought very hard against them. The Romans won many battles, and at last they cut down some of the woods in which the Britons thought their gods lived, because they wished to show the Britons that their gods could not really help them. In time the Britons learned that it was no good fighting against the Romans any more, and they settled down quietly to do as the Romans told them.

One of the Briton kings, who was called Caratacus, was taken as a prisoner to Rome, and when he saw all the great buildings in that splendid city he said to the Roman emperor, “How is it that you who dwell in such grand palaces envy us poor Britons our thatched cots?” Certainly the Romans could not hope to get much out of Britain, and most likely they only wanted to conquer it, and give their soldiers something to do, and to gain new glory, so that men might say that the Romans ruled every known land.

Boadicea fights against the Romans, A.D. 59–62

Sometimes the Romans were very cruel to the Britons. There was a queen called Boadicea, whose husband had been a very good friend to the Romans, but when he died the Romans took away Boadicea’s lands, and when she complained they scourged her. Then Boadicea was filled with hatred of the Romans, and she called round her all the other Britons whom

the Romans treated badly, and they formed a great army. Boadicea led them against some of the towns that the Romans had built, and they burned them and killed all the folk in them, and the Romans were very frightened and fled before Boadicea. But at last the chief Roman general in the land, who was called Suetonius, gathered an army and came against Boadicea, and they fought a great battle. Boadicea was in the midst of her Britons with her daughters in a war chariot. She wore a gold collar around her neck, and her long yellow hair covered her shoulders; over it she wore a helmet, and in her hand she carried a spear. She spoke brave words to the Britons and bade them fight well for her sake and their own. They heeded her words and it was a fierce battle; but the Romans were too strong for the Britons. The Britons would not fly, and fought until there was not a man left; they would rather die fighting bravely than live the life of slaves. Boadicea took poison that she might die too rather than become a prisoner of the hated Romans.

After this there was peace between the Britons and the Romans. A wise Roman called Gaius Julius Agricola came to rule in the land, and taught the Britons many things. He built many small castles, called forts, in the north of England, and put soldiers in them to keep out the wild Scottish folk, who used to come down from their hills and kill all whom they could find, and carry away the cattle and waste the land. Agricola treated the Britons kindly, and this made them willing to do as he bade them and to leave off fighting against the Romans.

How the Romans ruled in Britain, A.D. 85–409

After the Roman conquest over the Britons, a great change came over the island. The Romans were the best builders and the best road makers that there have ever been. They built cities with walls around them all over England. Their chief city was York, and London too began to be an important place, for merchants used to come there to offer their goods for sale. Then they made splendid roads from one part of the country to another. Many of the great roads that remain today were first made by the Romans. They built bridges too, and country houses for the rich men, and theatres and public baths for the amusement and health of the people. They knew how to build so strongly that many parts of their buildings have stood until now. In many parts of the country we can still see traces where the Romans made camps for their soldiers with walls built around them to keep the enemy from attacking them unawares.

The greatest of all the works of the Romans was *Hadrian's Wall*. This mighty stone structure was built across Britain from Newcastle to Carlisle to keep out the savage Scottish tribes. There were forts all along this wall, and it

was so strong that many parts of it remain today.

The Romans taught the Britons how to dig iron and lead and tin out of the earth, and how to make swords and spears and knives and other things, and how to mould clay and bake it into pots of many shapes. The Britons too tilled the land and grew a great deal of grain. Much of their grain and the things that they made, and the horses and dogs which were bred in their land, were taken to other parts of the Roman Empire by the merchants who came to London.

Though the Britons learned much from the Romans, still they did not grow quite like them. After a time, many of the Britons began dressing like the Romans and liked to be called Romans themselves, but they still spoke their own language, which was called *Welsh*; only the rich Britons and those who lived in the towns learned the Latin language. The Romans stayed in Britain nearly four hundred years, and during this time a great change came over the Roman Empire, for the Romans at last learned to know the true God.

How the Gospel was spread over the world

Jesus Christ was born about fifty years after Julius Caesar came to Britain. The Romans did not hear much about Jesus while He lived, but after He had gone back again to heaven, the Apostles went to preach the Gospel in all lands. St. Paul himself went to Rome and died there a prisoner. Many people learned to be Christians, but they were mostly very humble folk at first. The Roman emperors did not like men to be Christians, and some of them were very cruel to the Christians and used to put them in prison and torment them cruelly and kill them. But the Christians did not fear death, for they remembered how their Lord Jesus had died for them. They went on meeting together to pray to God even though they had to do it in churches dug out in the earth so that Roman rulers might not find them. They sent teachers into all lands to tell all men about Jesus, and some of these teachers came to Britain and many of the Britons became Christians.

St. Albanus the Martyr

In Britain also the Christians were sometimes treated very cruelly. There was a Roman soldier named Albanus who, though not a Christian himself, was sorry for the way in which he saw the Christians treated, and he hid one of them in his house. When Albanus saw how holy this Christian teacher was, and how he prayed to God, his heart was touched and he learned from the holy man and became a Christian too. But the Roman ruler heard that there was a Christian teacher hidden in Albanus' house and he sent his soldiers to

fetch him. When the soldiers came to the house Albanus himself came out and bade them take him before the ruler. When the ruler spoke to him angrily Albanus said boldly that he had learned to know the true God and would worship Him only. Then the ruler bade the soldiers scourge him cruelly, but Albanus bore the stripes gladly, for he thought how Roman soldiers had scourged Jesus. But the ruler only grew angrier, and he bade them take Albanus and cut off his head. They led him out to a little hill covered with flowers, and many people came together to see him, and there he died calling upon the name of God, and all the people wondered at his courage and his holiness. In after days men counted him a saint, and a great church was built on the spot where he died and was called after his name, and men honored the church and made it very beautiful; a town grew up around it, and town and church still keep the name St. Albans to this day.

At last one of the Roman emperors called Constantine became a Christian himself, and after that the Christians were not more tormented and put to death. Soon all the people in the Roman Empire became Christians, and churches were built everywhere. In Britain too many churches were built, and the Britons were very earnest Christians, and believed in God with all their hearts. After the Romans became Christians they began to mark the time according to the number of years which had passed since the birth of Christ, and we do so still.

The German peoples make war on the Roman Empire

The Romans ruled in Britain for about three hundred and fifty years; but about four hundred years after the birth of Christ, the Roman soldiers who were in Britain were sent for by the Roman emperor, who wanted them to help him to fight against his enemies. These enemies of Rome were the German peoples, whom the Romans called barbarians, as they called all the people who were not Romans. The Germans were a very brave and warlike people. They came in great hosts into the Roman Empire and drove away the cattle and burned the cities. Sometimes they settled down in the lands they had conquered, and the Romans could not keep them out. They mixed with the Romans and learned their language and learned to be Christians, but they had kings of their own and did not obey the Roman emperor. These German peoples had different names. Some of them who were called the Franks settled in Gaul and made it France. After a time there was no longer an emperor in Rome at all. Then the chief man in Rome was the Pope or Bishop of Rome, and he was soon looked upon as the head of the Church in all Europe. In the lands of the Roman Empire the different peoples, whom we now know in Europe, began to settle. But all these peoples learned much

from Rome, and those who settled in the countries we call France, Italy, and Spain, took their language from the Latin language and are called the Romance peoples.

Our German forefathers

We belong to the German peoples. While the Romans were ruling in our land, our forefathers, the English, were living in the northern part of Germany around the mouth of the river Elbe. They were called Angles and Saxons then, and the name English is the same as the name Angle. They were a free folk, who had never been conquered by the Romans, and, like English people ever since, cared more for their freedom than for anything else. They were a very brave people and fond of fighting, but they cared for other things as well. They tilled the ground and grew grain, and had a great many cattle and were clever fishers. They knew how to build good boats, and could make arms of bronze and iron, and were good carpenters. The women too were clever with their needle and could embroider beautifully and make fine linen. The women were treated very kindly, and the men paid them great honor, and let them order the houses as they liked. Our forefathers did not care to live in cities; they lived on their farms, and several farms together made a village. They had no kings; in each village the men used to meet together to settle their affairs, and if any man had done wrong they listened to what was to be said against him and decided how he was to be punished, for they were just and wished all people to do right.

Sometimes there were great meetings of all the chief men from each village, and there they would talk about the business of the whole people. When they made war they chose their bravest men to lead them, and when they gained lands from their enemies they used to divide them, so that each of the free men had his share, for there was no king to take all the new land for his own.

They were a merry folk, and liked all kinds of games in which the men could show their strength and their cleverness. They used to meet together in a great hall which they built in the middle of their village, and the men would sit and feast while the women carried around the bowls of ale and gleemen sang songs to them about the deeds that their brave men had done.

Our forefathers did not know anything about the true God; they prayed to a great many strange gods, chiefly to one whom they called Woden, the god of war.

They were clever sailors. They did not care to stay at home quietly, but liked to go away to seek adventures. Sometimes they went to catch whales. Sometimes they travelled in their flat-bottomed boats rowed by fifty men to

seek new lands and bring home plunder. In some of their wanderings they came to Britain, and the land pleased them, for it was much richer and more fertile than their own home.