THE SAXONS IN BRITAIN

THOMAS MILLER

A history of Britain from prehistoric and Roman times, through the arrival of the Saxons, the development of the Octarchy, and up to the arrival of the Vikings and the reign of Aethelwulf, father of Alfred the Great.

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BEFORE THE SAXONS

1 THE DAWN OF HISTORY

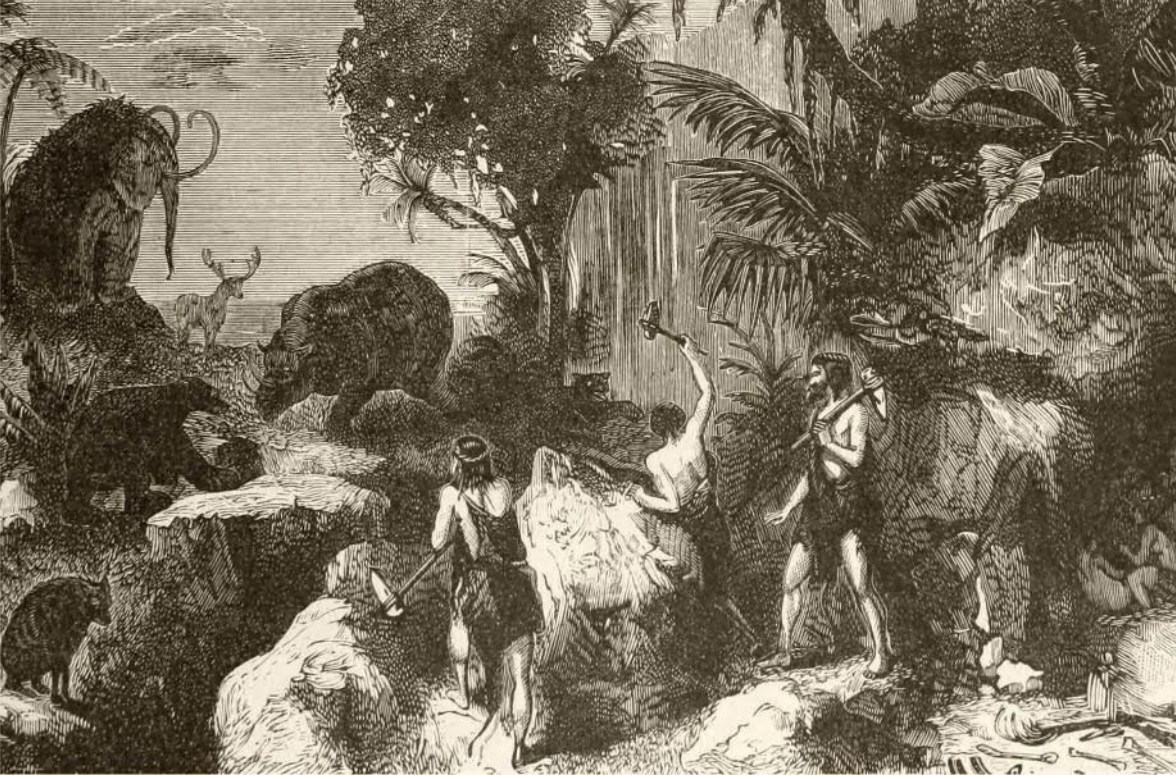
This fortress, built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This earth of majesty – this little world –
This precious stone set in the silver sea –
England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
Whose rocky shore beats back the envious surge
Of watery Neptune.

– Shakespeare

ALMOST EVERY HISTORIAN regrets how little is known of the early inhabitants of Great Britain – a fact which all lovers of antiquity can deplore, since among all we can with certainty glean from the pages of contemporary history, we can find little more than if we possessed written records of the remotest origin of the American Indians; for both would alike be the history of an unlettered and largely unknown race.

The same obscurity, with scarcely an exception, hangs over the primeval inhabitants of every other country. If we lift the mysterious curtain which has so long fallen over and concealed the past, we obtain glimpses only of obscure hieroglyphics; and from the fables of monsters and giants, to which all nations trace their origin, we glance backward and backward, to find that Rome and Greece can produce no better authorities than old undated traditions, teeming with fabulous accounts of gods and goddesses.

What we can see of the remote past through the twilight of time is like a great and unknown sea, on which some solitary ship is afloat, whose course we cannot trace through the shadows which everywhere deepen around her; nor can we tell what strange land



lies beyond the dim horizon to which she seems bound.

The dark night of mystery has forever settled down upon the early history of our island, and the first dawn which throws the shadow of man upon the scene reveals a rude hunter, clad in the skins of beasts, whose path is disputed by the maned and shaggy bison, whose rude hut in the forest is pitched beside the lair of the hungry wolf, and whose first conquest is found among these formidable animals.

And so, in as few words, might the early history of many a country or race be written.

The shores of Time are strewn with the remains of extinct animals, which, when living, the eye of man never looked upon – as if from the deep sea of Eternity a great wave had heaved up, which washed over and blotted out forever all that was coeval with her silent and ancient reign, leaving a monument upon the confines of this old and obliterated world, for man in a far and future day to read, and on which stands engraved the solemn words: *This far you shall come, but no further – beyond this boundary all is Mine!*

Neither does this mystery end here, for around the monuments

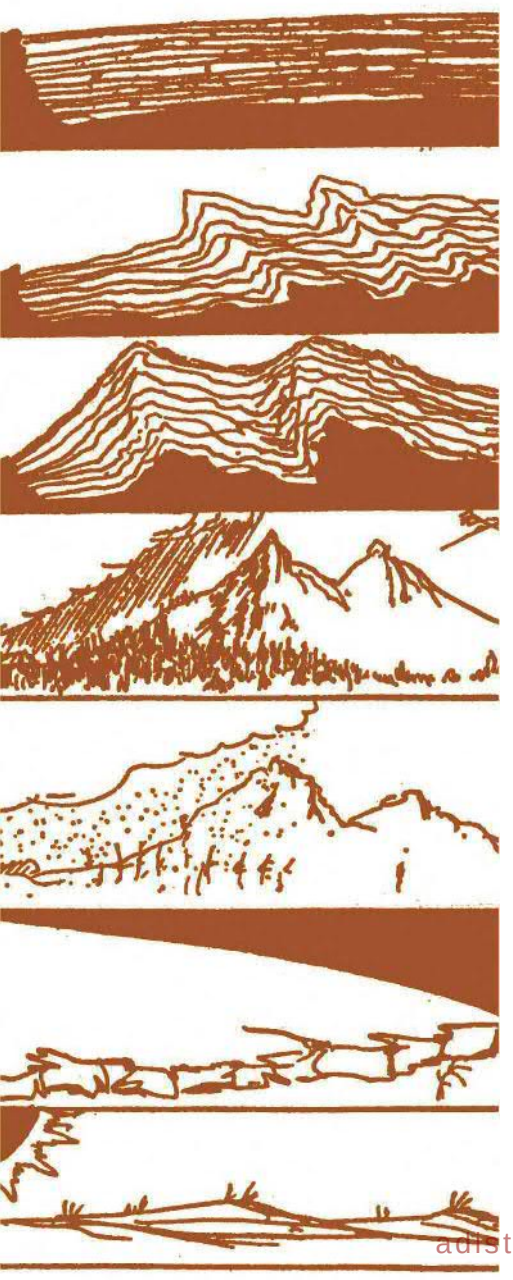
which were raised by the earliest inhabitants of Great Britain, there still reigns a deep darkness. We have no idea what hand piled together the rude remains of Stonehenge; and we have very few records of the manners, the customs, or the religion of the early Britons. Here and there a colossal barrow heaves up above the dead; we look within, and find a few bones, a few rude weapons, either used in war or the chase, and these are all. And we gaze in wonder at such remains.

Who those ancient voyagers were that first called England 'the country of sea cliffs', we do not know; and while we sit and brood over the rude fragments of the Welsh Triads, we become so entangled in doubt and mystery as to look upon the son of Aedd the Great, and the Island of Honey to which he sailed, and wherein he found no man alive, as the pleasing dream of some old and forgotten poet; and we set out again, with no more success, to

1. The Welsh Triads (Welsh: *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*) are a group of related texts in medieval manuscripts which preserve fragments of Welsh folklore, mythology and traditional history in groups of three. The triad is a rhetorical form whereby objects are grouped together in threes, with a heading indicating the point of likeness; for example "Three things not easily restrained, the flow of a torrent, the flight of an arrow, and the tongue of a fool." The texts include references to King Arthur and other semi-historical characters.

discover who were the earliest inhabitants of England, leaving the ancient Cymri and the country of Summer behind, and the tall, silent cliffs, to stand as they had done for ages, looking over a wide and mastless sea.

We then look among the ancient names of the headlands, and harbours, and mountains, and hills, and valleys, and endeavour to trace any resemblance to a language spoken by some neighbouring nation, and we find only a few scattered words, which leave us still in doubt, like a confusion of echoes, one breaking in upon the other – a mixture of Celtic, Pictish, Gaulish, and Saxon sounds, where if for a moment one is audible and distinct, it is soon drowned by other successive clamours which come panting up with a still louder claim, and eventually, in despair, we are compelled to step back again into the old primeval silence.



There we find Geology looking daringly into the formation of the early world, and boldly proclaiming that there was a period of time when our island heaved up bare and desolate amid the silence of the surrounding ocean – when on its ancient promontories and grey granite peaks not a green branch waved, nor a blade of grass grew, and no living thing, saving the tiny corals, as they piled dome upon dome above the naked foundations of this early world, stirred in the 'deep profound' which reigned over those sleeping seas.

Onward they go, boldly discoursing of undated centuries that have passed away, during which they tell us the ocean swarmed with huge, monstrous forms; and that all those countless ages have left

to record their flight are but the remains of a few extinct reptiles and fishes, whose living likenesses never again appeared in the world.

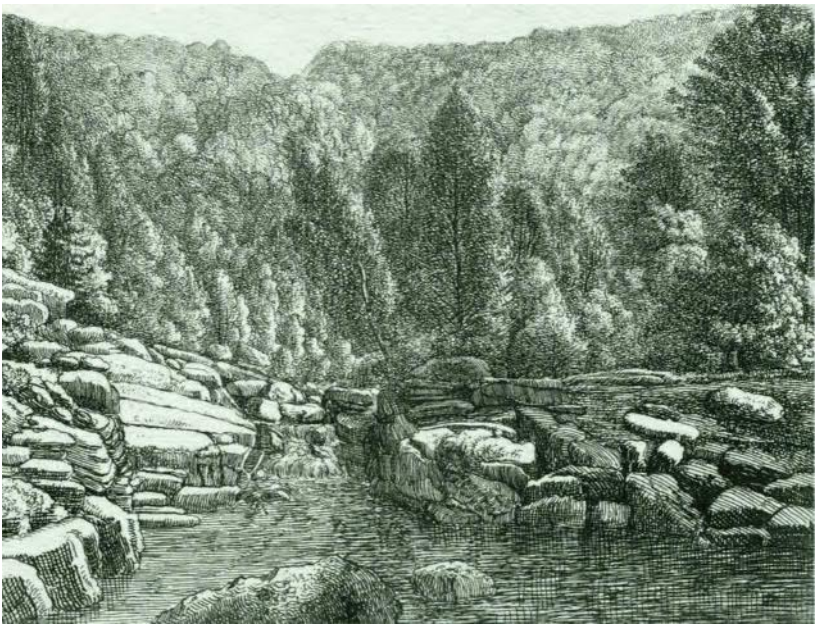
Then to another measureless period are we fearlessly carried – so long as to be numbered only in the account of Time which Eternity keeps – and other forms, we are told, moved over the floors of dried-up oceans – vast animals which no human eye ever looked upon alive; these, they say, also were swept away, and their ponderous remains had long mingled with and enriched the earth; but man had not as yet appeared; nor in any corner of the whole wide world do we discover in the deep-buried layers of the earth even a single vestige of the remains of the human race.

*

What historian, then, with such facts as these before him, will not hesitate before identifying the first inhabitants of any country, where they came from, or at what period that country was first inhabited? The historian might as well attempt a description of the scenery over which the mornings of the early world first broke – of summits and peaks which ages ago have been hurled down, and ground and powdered into dust.

Of what importance is the date when such things were, or at what time or place they first appeared? We can gaze upon the gigantic remains of the mastodon or mammoth, or on the grey, silent ruins of Stonehenge, but at what period of time the one roamed over our island, or in what year the other was first reared, will for ever remain a mystery.

The earth beneath our feet is full of proofs that there was an age in which these extinct monsters existed, and that period is empty



of any evidence of the existence of man on our island. And during those periods when oceans were emptied and dried up, amid the heaving up and burying of rocks and mountains – when volcanoes reddened the dark midnights of the world, when 'the earth was without form, and void' and the Spirit 'moved upon the face of the waters' – what mortal eye might have looked upon the rocking and reeling of those chaotic ruins when their rude forms first heaved up into the light?

Is not such a world stamped with the imprint of the Omnipotent, from when He first paved its foundation with enduring granite, and roofed it over with the soft blue of heaven, and lighted it by day with the glorious sun, and hung out the moon and stars to gladden the night – until at last He fashioned a world beautiful enough for the abode of His own image to dwell in – all before He created man?

And what does it matter whether or not we believe in all these mighty epochs? Surely it is enough for us to discover throughout every change of time the loving-kindness of God for mankind; we see how fitting this globe was at last for his dwelling place; that before the Great Architect had put this last finish to His mighty

work, instead of leaving us to starve amid the Silurian sterility, He prepared the world for man, and in place of the naked granite, spread out a rich carpet of verdure for him to tread upon, then flung upon it a profusion of the sweetest flowers.

Let us not, then, say 'thus it was fashioned', and 'so it was formed', but with our silence acknowledge that it has never yet entered into the heart or mind of man to understand how the Almighty Creator laid the foundation of the world.

To His great works we must come with reverential knee, and bow before them; for the grey rocks, and the high mountain summits, and the wide-spreading plains, and the ever-sounding

seas, are stamped with the image of Eternity – a mighty shadow hangs over them. The grey and weather-beaten headlands still look over the sea, and the solemn mountains still slumber under their old midnight shadows – but what human ear first heard the murmur of the waves upon the beach; or what human foot first climbed those high-piled summits? We can never know.

What would it help us if we knew the date when our island was buried beneath the ocean? Or when what was dry land in one age became the sea in another? When volcanoes glowed angrily under the dark skies of the early world, and huge extinct monsters bellowed, and roamed and swam through the old forests and the ancient rivers which have perhaps ages ago been swept away? What could we find more to interest us were we in possession of the names, the ages, and the numbers, of the first adventurers who were perchance driven by some storm upon our sea-beaten coast, than what is said in the ancient Triad before alluded to –

> "There were no more men alive, nor anything but bears,
> wolves, beavers, and the oxen with the high prominence..."

when Aedd landed upon the shores of England.

What few traces we have of the religious rites of the early inhabitants of Britain vary little from those that have been seen by modern travellers who have visited newly-discovered countries in our own age.

We have yet to learn by what hands the round towers of Ireland were raised, and by what race the few ancient British monuments that still remain were piled together. We cannot enter those mysterious gates which open upon the true History of the Past.

We find the footprint of man there, but who he was, or from where he came, we do not know. He lived and died, and whether or not history would ever remember the monuments he left behind did not concern him. Whether the stones would mark the temple in which he worshipped, or tumble down and cover his grave, did not concern him. With his stone axe, and spear-head of flint, he hewed his way from the cradle to the tomb, and under the steep barrow he knew that he should sleep his last sleep – and with his arms folded upon his breast, he left the past to bury its dead.

He did not live for us.

2 The Ancient Britons

Where the maned bison and the wolf did roam,
The ancient Briton reared his wattled home,
Paddled his coracle across the mere,
In the dim forest chased the antlered deer;
Pastured his herds within the open glade,
Played with his 'young barbarians' in the shade;
And when the new moon o'er the high hills broke,
Worshipped his heathen gods
beneath the sacred oak.

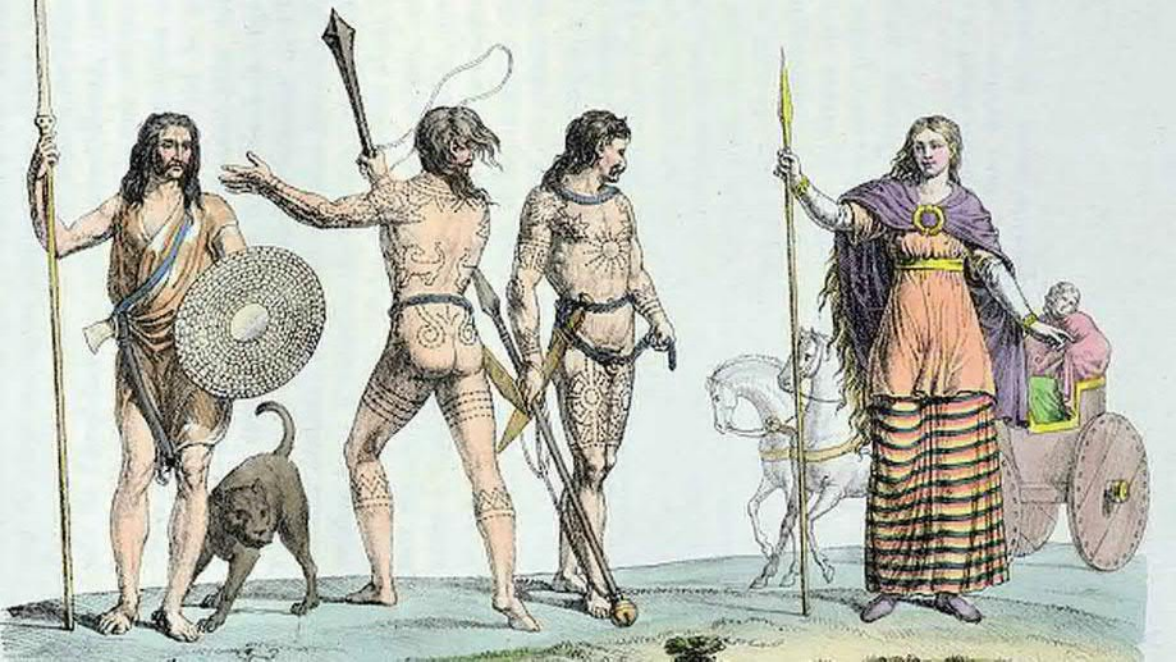
– The Old Forest

Although the origin of the early inhabitants of Great Britain is still open to many doubts, we have good evidence that in the remote past the descendants of the ancient Cimmerii, or Cymry, dwelt in Britain, and that from the same great family sprang the Celtic tribe; a portion of which at that early period inhabited the opposite coast of France.

At what time the Cymry and Celts first peopled England we have no written record, though there is evidence that they were known to the early Phœnician voyagers many centuries before the Roman invasion, and that the ancient Greeks were acquainted with the British Islands by the name of the Cassiterides, or the 'Islands of Tin'.

Thus both the Greeks and Romans indirectly traded with the very race whose ancestors had shaken the imperial city with their arms, and brought the tide of battle close to the shores of Greece.

They were the undoubted offspring of the dark Cimmerii of antiquity, those dreaded inhabitants of caves and forests, whose formidable helmets were surmounted by the figures of gaping and hideous monsters; who wore high crests to make them look taller



and more terrible in battle, and who considered death in battle as the crowning triumph of all earthly glory.

From this race sprang those ancient British tribes who presented a bold front to Julius Cæsar, when his Roman galleys first ploughed the waves that washed their storm-beaten shores.

Beyond this, history has nothing for us; and the Welsh traditions go no further back than to state that when the son of Aedd first sailed over the ocean, the island was uninhabited – which we may take to mean that the portion on which he and his followers landed was empty, for it seems unlikely that Britain would have been entirely empty, visible as it is on a clear day from the opposite coast of Gaul, and beyond which great nations had for centuries flourished.

What few records we possess of the ancient Britons reveal a wild and hardy race. They had their chiefs and rulers who wore armour, and ornaments of gold and silver; and these held in subjection the poorer races who lived upon the produce of the chase, the wild fruits and roots which the forest and the field produced, and wore skins, and dwelt in caverns which they hewed out of the old grey rocks.

They were priest-ridden by the ancient druids, who cursed and excommunicated without the aid of either bell, book, or candle. They burned and slaughtered all unbelievers just as well as

Mahomet does, or the bigoted fanatics who in later times would perform the same deeds under the mask of the Romish religion.

For centuries after, mankind had not undergone so great a change as they at the first appear to have done; there was the same love of power, the same shedding of blood, and those who had not courage to take the field openly and seize upon what they could boldly, burnt, and slew, and sacrificed their fellow-men under the plea that such offerings were acceptable to the gods.

By the aid of the few hints which are scattered over the works of the Greek and Roman writers, the existence of a few remaining monuments, and the discoveries which have many a time been made through numberless excavations, we can just make out, in the hazy evening of the past, enough of the dim forms of the ancient Britons to see their mode of life, their habits in peace and war, as they move about in the twilight shadows which have settled down over two thousand years.

That they were a tall and muscular race, we have the authority of the Roman writers to prove; who, however, add but little in praise of the symmetry of their figures, though they were near half a foot higher than their distant kindred the Gauls. They wore their hair long and thrown back from the forehead, which must have given them a wild look in the excitement of battle, when their long curling locks would heave and fall with every blow they struck; the upper lip of the males was unshaven, and the long tufts drooped over the mouth, thus adding greatly to their grim and warlike appearance. Added to this, they cast aside their upper garments when they fought, as the brave Highlanders were wont to do a century or two ago, and on their naked bodies were punctured all kinds of monsters, such as no human eye had ever beheld. Claudian mentions the "fading figures on the dying Pict" – the dim deathly blue that they would fade into, as the life-blood of the rude warrior ebbed out upon the field of battle.

How different must have been the landscape which the fading rays of the evening sunset gilded in that rude and primitive age. Instead of the tall towers and walled

cities, whose glittering windows now flash back the golden light, the sinking rays gilded a barrier of felled trees in the centre of the forest which surrounded the wattled and thatched huts of those ancient herdsmen, throwing its crimson rays upon the clear space behind, in which his herds and flocks were pastured for the night; while all around heaved up the grand and gloomy old forest, with its shadowy thickets, and dark dingles, and woody valleys untrodden by the foot of man.

There was then the dreaded wolf to guard against, the unexpected rush of the wild boar, the growl of the grizzly bear, and the bellowing of the maned bison to startle him from his slumber. Nor less to be feared was the midnight marauder from some neighbouring tribe, whom neither the dreaded fires of the heathen druids, nor the awful sentence which held accursed all who communicated with him after the doom was uttered, could keep from plunder, whenever an opportunity presented itself. The subterranean chambers in which their corn was stored might be emptied before morning; the wicker basket which contained their salt (brought from far over the distant sea by the

Phœnicians or some adventurous voyager) might be carried away; and no trace of the robber could be found through the pathless forest, and the reedy morass by which he would escape, while he startled the badger with his tread, and drove the beaver into his ancient home; for beside the druids there were those who sowed no grain, who drank up the beverage their neighbours brewed from their own barley, and ate up the curds which they had made from the milk of their own herds.

These were such as dug up the 'pig-nuts,' still eaten by the children in the northern counties at the present day; who struck down the deer, the boar, and the bison in the wild unenclosed forest – kindled a fire with the dried leaves and dead branches, then threw themselves down at the foot of the nearest oak, when their rude repast was over, and with their war-hatchet, or hunting-spear, firmly grasped, even in sleep, awaited the first beam of morning, unless awoke before by the howl of the wolf, or the thundering of the boar through the thicket. They left the fish in their vast rivers untouched, as if they preferred only that food which could be won by danger; from the timid hare they turned away, to give chase to the antlered monarch of the forest; they let the wild goose float upon the lonely mere, and the plumed duck swim about the broad lake undisturbed. There was a wild independence in their forest life – they had but few wants, and where nature no longer supplied these from her own uncultivated stores, they looked abroad and harassed the more civilized and industrious tribes.

Although there is but little doubt that the British chiefs, and those who dwelt on the sea coast, and opened a trade with the Gaulish merchants, lived in a state of comparative luxury, when contrasted with the wilder tribes who inhabited the interior of the island, still there is something simple and primitive in all that we can collect of their domestic habits.

Their seats consisted of three-legged stools, no doubt sawn crossways from the stem of the tree, and three holes made to hold the legs, like the seats which are called 'crickets,' that may be seen in the huts of the English peasantry in the present day. Their beds consisted of dried grass, leaves, or rushes spread upon the floor –

their covering, the dark blue cloak or sagum which they wore out of doors; or the dried skins of the cattle they slew, either from their own herds or in the chase. They ate and drank from off wooden trenchers, and out of bowls rudely hollowed: they were not without a rough kind of red earthenware, badly baked, and roughly formed. They kept their provisions in baskets of wicker-work, and made their boats of the same material, over which they stretched skins to keep out the water. They kindled fires on the floors of their thatched huts, and appear to have been acquainted with the use of coal as fuel, though there is little doubt that they only dug up such as lay near the surface of the earth; but it was from the great forests which covered their island that they principally gathered their fuel.

They had also boats, not unlike the canoes still in use amongst the Indians, which were formed out of the hollow trunk of a tree; and some of which have been found upwards of thirty feet in length; and in these, no doubt, they ventured over to the opposite coast of France, and even Ireland, when the weather was calm.

Diodorus says that amongst the Celtic tribes there was a simplicity of manners very different to that craft and wickedness

which mankind then exhibited – that they were satisfied with frugal sustenance, and avoided the luxuries of wealth. The boundaries of their pastures consisted of such primitive marks as upright stones, reminding us of the patriarchal age and the scriptural anathema of 'cursed is he who removeth his neighbour's land-mark.'

Their costume was similar to that worn by their kindred the Gauls, consisting of loose lower garments, a kind of waistcoat with wide sleeves, and over this a cloak, or sagum, made of cloth or skin; and when of the former, dyed blue or black, for they were acquainted with the art of dyeing; and some of them wore a cloth, chequered with various colours.

The chiefs wore rings of gold, silver, or bronze, on their

forefingers; they had also ornaments, such as bracelets and armlets of the same metal, and a decoration called the torque, which was either a collar or a belt formed of gold, silver, or bronze, and which fastened behind by a strong hook. Several of these ornaments have been discovered, and amongst them, one of gold, which weighed 25 ounces. It seems to have been something like the mailed gorget of a later day, worn above the cuirass or coat of mail, to protect the neck and throat in battle; their shoes appear to have been only a sole of wood or leather, fastened to the foot by thongs cut from off the raw hides of oxen they had slaughtered.

The war weapons of the wilder tribes in the earlier times were hatchets of stone, and arrows headed with flint, and long spears pointed with sharpened bone; but long before the Roman invasion, the more civilized were in possession of battle-axes, swords, spears, javelins, and other formidable instruments of war, made of a mixture of copper and tin. Many of these instruments have been discovered in the ancient barrows where they buried their dead; and were, no doubt, at first procured from the merchants with whom they traded – ignorant, perhaps, for a long

period, that they were produced from the very material they were giving for them in exchange. In battle they also bore a circular shield, coated with the same metal; this they held in the hand by the centre bar that went across the hollow inner space from which the boss projected.

But the war-chariots which they brought into battle were of all things the most dreaded by the Romans. From the axles projected those sharp-hooked formidable scythes, which appalled even the bravest legions, and made such gaps in their well-trained ranks, as struck their boldest generals aghast. These were drawn by such horses as, by their fire and speed, won the admiration of the invaders; for fleet on foot as deer, and with their dark manes streaming out like banners, they rushed headlong, with thundering tramp, into the armed ranks of the enemy; the sharp scythes cutting down every obstacle they came in contact with.

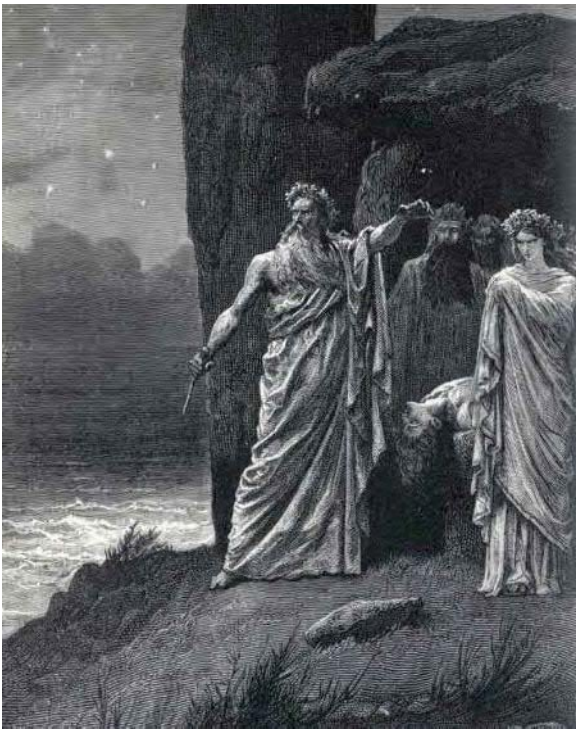
With fixed eyes the fearless warrior hurled his pointed javelins in every direction as he rushed thundering on – sometimes making a thrust with his spear or sword, as he swept by with lightning-speed, or dragged with him for a few yards the affrighted enemy he had grasped while passing, and whose limbs those formidable weapons mangled at every turn until the dreaded

Briton released his hold. Now stepping upon the pole, he aimed a blow at the opponent who attempted to check his speed – then he stopped his quick-footed coursers in a moment, as if a bolt from heaven had alighted, and struck them dead, while some warrior who was watching their onward course fell dead beneath so unexpected a blow; and ere the sword of his companion was uplifted to revenge his death, the Briton and his chariot were far away, hewing a new path through the centre of veteran ranks, which the stormy tide of battle had never before broken.

The form of the tall warrior, leaning over his chariot with glaring eye and clenched teeth, would, by his valour and martial deportment, have done honour to the plains of Troy, and won an immortal line from Homer himself, had he but witnessed those deeds achieved by the British heroes in a later day. What fear of death had they before their eyes who believed that their souls passed at once into the body of some brave warrior, or that they but quitted the battlefield to be admitted into the abodes of the gods?

They sprang from a race whose mothers and wives had many a time hemmed in the back of battle, and with their own hands struck down the first of their tribe who fled – sparing neither father, husband, brother, nor son, if he once turned his back upon the enemy: a race whose huge war drums had, centuries before, sounded in Greek and Roman combats.

And to this hardy stock, which drooped awhile beneath the weight of Rome, was the Gothic grandeur of the Saxon stem grafted, and when its antique roots had been manured by the bones of thousands of Danes, and then its exuberant shoots lopped by the swords of the Norman invaders, there sprang up that mighty tree, the shadows of whose branches today stretch far away over the pathless ocean, reaching to the uttermost ends of the earth.



3 THE DRUIDS

You Druids now maintain
Your barbarous rites, and sacrifice again;
You know what heaven is, and gods alone can tell,
Or else alone are ignorant: you dwell
In vast and desert woods; you teach no spirit,
Pluto's pale kingdom can by death inherit:
They in another world inform again,
The space betwixt two lives is all the death.

– Lucan's *Pharsalia*

To Julius Cæsar, we are indebted for the clearest description of the religious rites and ceremonies of the Druids; and as he beheld them administered by these priests to the ancient Britons, so they had no doubt existed for several centuries before the Roman invasion, and are therefore matters of history, prior to that period.

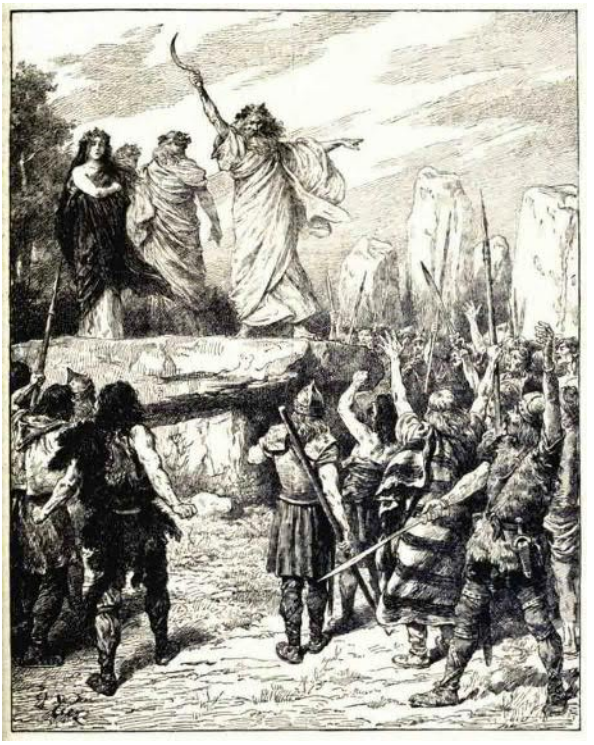
There was a wild poetry about their heathenish creed, something gloomy, and grand, and supernatural in the dim, dreamy old forests where their altars were raised: in the deep shadows which hung over their rude grey cromlechs, on which the sacred fire burned. We catch glimpses between the gnarled and twisted stems of those magnificent and aged oaks of the solemn-looking druid, in his white robe of office, his flowing beard blown for a moment aside, and breaking the dark green of the underwood with the lower portion of his sweeping drapery, while he stands like a grave enchanter, his deep sunk and terrible eyes fixed upon the blue smoke as it curls upward amid the foliage – fixed, yet only to appearance; for let but a light and wandering expression pass over one single countenance in that assembled group, and those deep grey piercing eyes would be seen glaring in anger upon the culprit, and whether it were youth or maiden, they would be

banished from the sacrifice, and all held accursed who dared to commune with them – a curse more terrible than that which knelled the doom of the excommunicated in a later day.

There were none bold enough to extinguish the baleful fire which was kindled around the wicker idol, when its angry flames went crackling above the heads of the human victims who were offered up to appease their brutal gods. In the centre of their darksome forests were their rich treasures piled together, the plunder of war; the wealth wrested from some neighbouring tribe; rich ornaments brought by unknown voyagers from distant countries in exchange for the tin which the island produced; or trophies won by the British warriors who had fought in the ranks of the Gauls on the opposite shore – all piled without order together, and guarded only by the superstitious dread which they threw around everything they possessed; for there ever hung the fear of a dreadful death over the head of the plunderer who dared to touch the treasures which were allotted to the awful druids.

They kept no written record of their innermost mysteries, but amid the drowsy rustling of the leaves and the melancholy murmuring of the waters which ever flowed around their wooded abodes, they taught the secrets of their cruel creed to those who for long years had aided in the administration of their horrible ceremonies, who without a blanched cheek or a quailing heart had grown grey beneath the blaze of human sacrifices, and fired the wicker pile with an unshaken hand – these alone were the truly initiated.

They left the younger disciples to mumble over matters of less import – written doctrines which taught how the soul passed into other bodies in never-ending succession; but they permitted them



not to meddle in matters of life and death; and many came from afar to study a religion which armed the druids with more than sovereign power. All law was administered by the same dreaded priests; no one dared to appeal from their awful decree; he who was once sentenced had but to bow his head and obey – rebellion was death, and a curse was thundered against all who ventured to approach him; from that moment he became an outcast amongst mankind.

To impress the living with a dread of their power even after death, they hesitated not in their doctrines to proclaim that they held control over departed and rebellious souls; and in the midnight winds that went wailing through the shadowy forests, they bade their believers listen to the cry of the disembodied spirits who were moaning for forgiveness, and were driven by every blast that blew against the opening arms of the giant oaks; for they gave substance to shadows, and pointed out forms in the dark-moving clouds to add to the terrors of their creed. They worshipped the sun and moon, and ever kept the sacred fire burning upon some awful altar which had been reddened by the blood of sacrifice.

They headed the solemn processions to springs and fountains, and muttered their incantations over the moving water, for, next to fire, it was the element they held in the highest veneration. But their grand temples – like Stonehenge – stood in the centre of light, in the midst of broad, open, and spacious plains, and there the great Beltian fire was kindled; there the distant tribes congregated together, and unknown gods were evoked, whose

very names have perished, and whose existence could only be found in the wooded hill, the giant tree, or the murmuring spring or fountain, over which they were supposed to preside.

There sat the arch-druid, in his white surplice, the shadow of the mighty pillars of rough-hewn stone chequering the stony rim of that vast circle – from his neck suspended the wonderful egg which his credulous believers said fell from twined serpents, that vanished hissing high in the air, after having in vain pursued the mounted horseman who caught it, then galloped off at full speed – that egg, cased in gold, which could by its magical virtues swim against the stream. He held the mysterious symbol of office, in his hands more potent than the sceptre swayed by the most powerful of monarchs that ever sat upon our island throne, as he sat with his brow furrowed by long thought, and ploughed deep by many a meditated plot, while his soul spurned the ignorant herd who were assembled around him, and he bit his haughty lip at the thought that he could devise no further humiliation than to make them kneel and lick the sand on which he stood.

They held the mistletoe which grew on the oak sacred, and on the sixth day of the moon came in solemn procession to the tree on which it grew, and offered up sacrifice, and prepared a feast beneath its hallowed branches, adorning themselves with its leaves, as if they could never sufficiently reverence the tree on which the mistletoe grew, although they named themselves druids after the oak.

White bulls were dragged into the ceremony; their stiff necks bowed, and their broad foreheads bound to the stem of the tree, while their loud bellowings came in like a wild chorus to the rude anthem which was chaunted on the occasion: these were slaughtered, and the morning sacrifice went streaming up among the green branches.

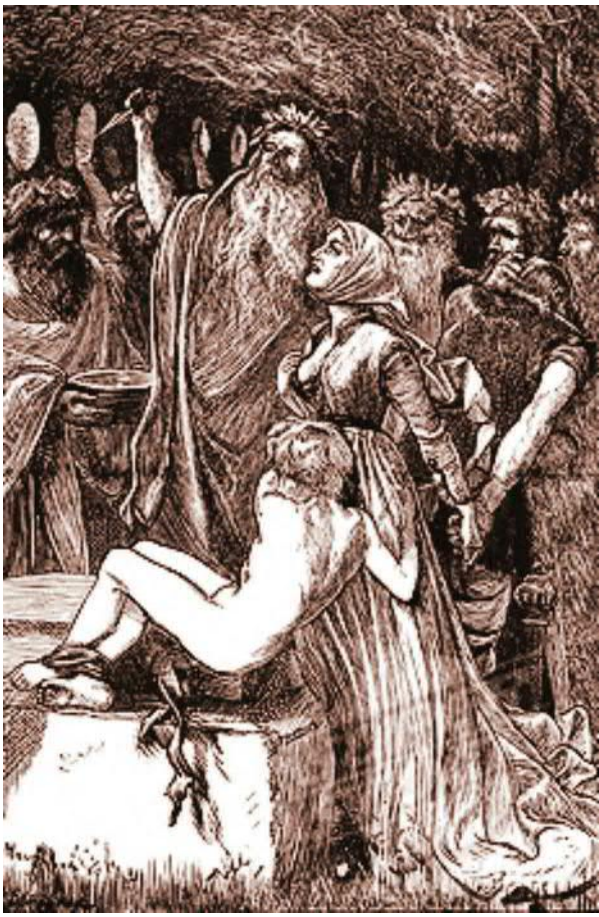
The chief druid ascended the oak, treading haughtily upon the bended backs and broad shoulders of the blinded slaves, who struggled to become stepping-stones beneath his feet, and eagerly bowed their necks that he might trample upon them, while he gathered his white garment in his hand, and drew it aside, lest it should become sullied by touching their homely apparel.

Below him stood his brother idolators, their spotless garments outspread ready to catch the falling sprigs of the mistletoe as they dropped beneath the stroke of the golden pruning-knife. Doubtless the solemn mockery ended by the assembled multitude carrying home with them a leaf or a berry each, of the all-healing plant, as it was called, while the druids lingered behind to consume the fatted sacrifice, and forge new fetters to bind down their ignorant followers to their heathenish creed.

Still it is on record that they taught their disciples many things concerning the stars and their motion; that they

pretended to some knowledge of distant countries, and the nature of the gods they worshipped. Gildas, one of the earliest of our British historians, seeming to write from what he saw, tells us that their idols almost surpassed in number those of Egypt, and that monuments were then to be seen (in his day) of

> "hideous images, whose frigid, ever-lowering, and depraved countenances still frown upon us both within and outside the walls of deserted cities. We shall not recite the names that once were heard on our mountains, that were repeated at our fountains, that were echoed on our hills, and were pronounced over our rivers, because the honours due to the Divinity alone were paid to them by a blinded people."



That their religion was but a system of long-practised imposture admits not of a doubt; and as we have proof that they possessed considerable knowledge for that period, it is evident that they had recourse to these devices to delude and keep in subjection their fellow-men, thereby obtaining a power which enabled them to live in comparative idleness and luxury. Such were the ancient Egyptian priests; and such, with but few exceptions, were all who, for many centuries, held mighty nations in thrall by the mystic powers with which they cunningly clothed idolatry. True, there might be amongst their

number a few blinded fanatics, who were victims to the very deceit which they practised upon others, whose faculties fell prostrate before the imaginary idols of their own creation, and who bowed down and worshipped the workmanship of their own hands.

All the facts we are in possession of show that they contributed nothing to the support of the community; they took no share in war, though they claimed their portion of the plunder obtained from it; they were amenable to no tribunal but their own, but only sat apart in their gloomy groves, weaving their dangerous webs in darker folds over the eyes of their blinded worshippers. We see dimly through the shadows of those ancient forests where the druids dwelt; but amongst the forms that move there we catch glimpses of women sharing in their heathen rites; it may be of young and beautiful forms, who had the choice offered them, whether they would become sacrifices in the fires which so often blazed before their grim idols, or share in the solemn mockeries which those darksome groves enshrouded – those secrets which but to whisper abroad would have been death.

The day of reckoning at last came – as it is ever sure to come – and heavy was the vengeance which alighted upon those bearded druids; instead of such living and moving evils, the mute marble of the less offensive gods which the Romans worshipped usurped the places where their blood-stained sacrifices were held.

Jupiter frowned coldly down in stone, but he injured not. Mars held his pointed spear aloft, but the dreaded blow never descended.

They saw the form of man worshipped, and though far off, it was still a nearer approach to the true Divinity than the wicker idol surrounded with flames, and filled with the writhing and shrieking victims who expired in the midst of indescribable agonies.

Hope sat there mute and sorrowful, with her head bowed, and her finger upon her lip, listening for the sound of those wings which she knew would bring Love and Mercy to her aid. She turned not her head to gaze upon those heathenish priests as they were dragged forward to deepen the inhuman stain which sunk deep into the dyed granite of the altar, for she knew that the atmosphere their breath had so long poisoned must be purified before the Divinity could approach; for that bright star which was to illume the world had not yet arisen in the east.

The civilized heathen was already preparing the way in the wilderness, and sweeping down the ruder barbarism before him. There were Roman galleys before, and the sound of the gospel-trumpet behind; and those old oaks jarred again to their very roots, and the huge circus of Stonehenge shook to its broad centre; for the white cliffs that looked out over the sea were soon to echo back a strange language, for Roman cohorts, guided by Julius Cæsar, were riding upon the waves.

4 THE LANDING OF JULIUS CÆSAR

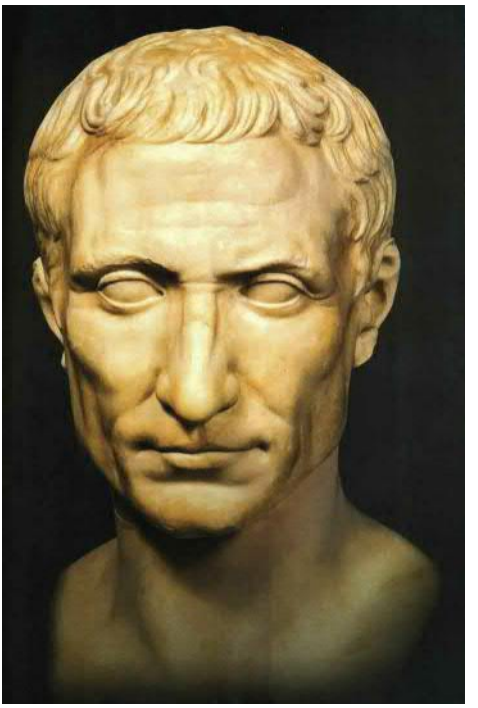
The cliffs themselves are bulwarks strong: the shelves
And flats refuse great ships: the coast so open
That every stormy blast may rend their cables,
Put them from anchor: suffering double war –
Their men pitched battle – their ships stormy fight;
For charges 'tis no season to dispute,
Spend something, or lose all.

– *The True Trojans,* 1633

Few generals could put in a better plea for invading a country than that advanced by Julius Cæsar, for long before he landed in this island, he had had to contend with a covert enemy in the Britons, who frequently threw bodies of armed men upon the opposite coasts, and by thus strengthening the enemy's ranks, protracted the war he had so long waged with the Gauls.

To chastise the hardy islanders, overawe and take possession of their country, were but common events to the Roman generals, and Cæsar no doubt calculated that to conquer, he had only to show his well-disciplined troops. He was also well aware that the language and religion of the Britons and Gauls were almost the same, and that the island on which his eye was fixed was the great centre and stronghold of the druids; and, not ignorant of the power of these heathen priests, whose mysterious rites banded nation with nation, he doubtless thought that if he could but once overthrow their altars, he could the more easily march over the ruins to more extended conquests.

He had almost the plea of self-defence for setting out to invade England as he did, and such, in reality, is the reason he assigns; and not to possess the old leaven of ambition to strengthen his purpose, was to lack that which, in a Roman general, swelled into the glory of fame.



Renown was the pearl Julius Cæsar came in quest of; he was not a general to lead his legions back to the imperial city, when, after having humbled the pride of the Gauls, he still saw from the opposite coast the island of the presumptuous Britons – barbarians, who had dared to hurl their pointed javelins in the very face of the Roman eagle; – not a man to return home, when, by stretching his arm over that narrow sea, he could gather such laurels as had never yet decked a Roman brow.

The rumour of his intended invasion had already reached the Britons, who, well aware of the victories he had won in the opposite continent, and probably somewhat shaken by the terror which was attached to the name of the Roman conqueror, lost no time in sending over ambassadors with an offer of submission, and hostages.

But although Cæsar received the messengers kindly, and sent back with them Comius, a Gaul, in whose talent and integrity he had the greatest confidence, still his attention was not to be diverted from the object he had in view; and much as he commended their pacific promises, he but waited the return of the galley he had sent out to reconnoitre, before he embarked.

Nor had he to wait long, for on the fifth day after his departure, Volusenus returned from his expedition, with the meagre information he had been able to glean about the coast without landing; though, such as it was, it induced Cæsar to set sail at once, and, with twelve thousand men and eighty transports, he started from the sea coast which stretches between Calais and Boulogne, and steered for the pale-faced cliffs of Albion.

It was in a morning early in autumn, and before the Britons had gathered in their corn-harvest, when the Roman general first

reached the British shore; nor can we, from the force which accompanied him, suppose that he was at all surprised to see the white cliffs of Dover covered with armed men ready to oppose his landing.

But he was too wary a commander to attempt this in so unfavourable a spot, and in the face of such a force, and therefore resolved to lie by, until past the hour of noon, and await the arrival of the remainder of his fleet; for beside the force which we have already enumerated, there were eighteen transports in which his cavalry were embarked, but these were not destined to take a share in his first victory; so finding both wind and tide in his favour, he, without their aid, sailed six or seven miles further down the coast, until he reached the low and open shore which stretches between Walmer Castle and Sandwich.

This manœuvre, however, was not lost upon the Britons, for as he measured his way over the sea, so they kept pace with him upon the land, and when he reached the spot which was so soon to be the scene of slaughter, he found the British army drawn up ready

to receive him, with their cavalry and war-chariots placed in the order of battle, while many a half-naked and hardy soldier stood knee-deep amongst the breakers, which beat upon the beach, with pointed javelin, and heavy club, and rough-hewn war-hatchet, eager to oppose his landing.

The proud Roman himself confesses that they presented a bold front, and made a brave defence. Superior military skill, and long-practised discipline, together with the formidable war-engines which he brought over in his galleys, and from which showers of missiles were projected that spread death and consternation around, were all too much for the Britons, few of whom, except such as had fought in the ranks of the Gauls on the opposite shore, had ever before looked upon such terrible instruments of destruction; and under cover of these, after a short contest, the Roman general managed to disembark two of his legions.

If not for this mode of warfare, and those dreadful engines opening so suddenly upon them, Cæsar would probably never have been able to land his forces; for we may readily imagine that, unaccustomed as they were to such a mode of attack, the consternation that it spread could scarcely be exceeded by a first-class line-of-battle ship pouring in a broadside amongst the startled savages of the South Sea Islands, whose shores had never before echoed back the thunder of a cannon.

Although Cæsar himself states that for a time the Roman soldiers were reluctant to leave their ships, owing to the extent of

water which flowed between them and the shore, still there is but little doubt that the fearless front presented by the Britons, as they stood knee-deep among the waves, in spite of the missiles which were sent forth in showers from the Roman galleys, somewhat appalled their highly disciplined invaders.

Cæsar has left it on record that his soldiers hesitated to land, until one of his standard-bearers, belonging to the tenth legion, sprang from the side of the galley into the sea, and waving the ensign over his head, exclaimed, "Follow me, my fellow-soldiers! unless you will give up your eagle to the enemy. I, at least, will do my duty to the republic and to our general!" It was then, roused by the example of the courageous standard-bearer, that the Roman soldiers quitted their ships, and the combatants met hand to hand.

Although upon that ancient battle-ground have the winds and waves for nearly two thousand years beaten, and scarcely a name is left of those who fought, and fell, and dyed the stormy sea-beach with their blood; still, as we gaze down the dim vista of years, the mind's eye again catches glimpses of the unknown combatants – of the warm autumn sunshine falling upon those white and distant cliffs – of the high-decked Roman galleys rising above the ever-moving waves, and we seem to hear the deep voice of the Roman general rising beyond the murmur of the ocean; we see the gilded eagle rocking and swaying over the contending ranks, as they are driven forward or repulsed, just as the tide of battle ebbs and flows; and ever upon the beaten beach where the waves come and go, they wash over some mangled and prostrate form, throwing up here a helmet and there a shield, while figures of the mailed Roman, and the half-naked Briton, lie dead and bleeding side by side, their deep sleep unbroken by the shout, and tramp, and tumult of war. The javelin with its leather thong lies useless beside the bare brawny arm that could hurl it to within an inch of its mark, then recover it again without stepping from out the ranged rank; the dreaded spear lies broken, and the sharp head trodden deep into the sand by a Roman footstep.

Higher up the beach, we hear the thunder of the scythe-wheeled war-chariots of the Britons, and catch glimpses of the glittering and outstretched blades, as they sparkle along in their

swift career like a silvery meteor, and all we can trace of their course is the zig-zag pathway streaked with blood. Faint, and afar off, we hear the voices of the bearded druids hymning their war-chaunt, somewhere beyond the tall summits of the bald-faced cliffs.

Anon, the roar of battle becomes more indistinct – slowly and reluctantly the Britons retreat, the Roman soldiers pursue them not, but fall back again upon their galleys, and we hear only a few groans, and the lapping of the waves upon the sea-shore.

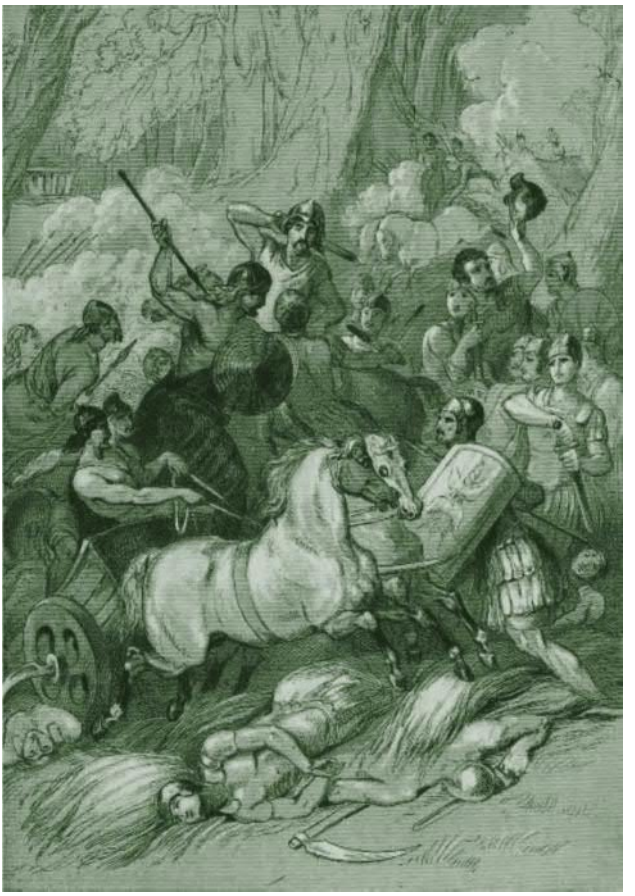
And such might have been a brief summary of that combat, interspersed here and there with the daring deeds of warriors whose names will never be known; and then the eye of the imagination closes upon the scene, and all again is enveloped in the deep darkness of nearly two thousand years.

As the Roman cavalry had not yet arrived, Cæsar was prevented from following up the advantage he had gained over the Britons, and marching to where they were encamped, a little way within the island.

The natives, however, doubtless to gain time, and better prepare themselves for a second attack, sent messengers to the Roman general, who were deputed to offer hostages as a guarantee of their submission to the Roman arms. They also liberated Comius, whom he had sent over with offers of alliance; and after a sharp rebuke, in which the Roman invader no doubt attempted to show how wrong it was on their part to attempt to oppose his landing and seizing upon their island, he forgave them, on condition that they would send him a given number of hostages, and allow him, without interference, to act as he chose for the future.

Such, in spirit, were the terms on which the haughty conqueror dismissed the British chiefs, who probably returned with the determination of breaking them whenever an opportunity presented itself. A few hostages were, however, delivered, and several of the British leaders presented themselves before Cæsar, perhaps as covert spies, although they came with avowed offers of allegiance, smarting as they were under their recent defeat.

The Roman general was not destined to accomplish his conquest without meeting with some disasters. The vessels which



contained his cavalry, and were unable to accompany the first portion of his fleet, were again doomed to be driven back by a tempest upon the coast of Gaul, even after they had approached so near the British shore as to be within view of Cæsar's encampment.

The fatal night that saw his cavalry dashed back upon the opposite coast also witnessed the destruction of several of his galleys, which were drawn up on the beach behind his encampment; while those that were lying at anchor in the distant roadstead were either wrecked or cast upon the shore, and so battered by the winds and waves as to be wholly unfit for sea-service; for a high tide seemed to have rushed over his galleys; and this, together with the storm, scarcely left him in the possession of a vessel in which he could put out to sea with his troops.

Without either provisions to feed his soldiers, or materials to repair his shattered ships, and his whole camp deeply dispirited by these unforeseen calamities, the Roman general found himself, at the close of autumn, on a stormy and unfriendly coast, and in possession of but little more of the island than the barren beach on which he had won his hitherto useless victory.

The Britons were not long before they discovered the full extent of these disasters; frequent visits to the Roman encampment had also made them better acquainted with the number of the troops; and as they had already measured their strength against the Roman arms, and the Roman weapons had doubtless lost much of their former terror in their eyes, they began to make preparations for sweeping off the whole force of the invading army, for they clearly saw that it was without either provisions, cavalry, or ships; and though they commenced their work cautiously, they made sure of obtaining an easy victory, and such as they thought would intimidate the hearts of all future invaders.

Cæsar was too wary a general not to see through their designs, for he perceived that the visits of the chiefs to his encampment were less frequent than formerly; that they were also slow in sending in the hostages they had promised to give up; so, Roman-like, he determined to arm himself against the worst.

He ordered some of his troops to repair such ships as were sea-worthy, out of the wreck of those which were useless; these, when ready, he sent over to Gaul for stores; others of his soldiers he sent out to scour the country in search of provisions, and to gather in whatever corn they could find, which must have been very trifling, as he states that, except in one field, all beside in the neighbourhood had been harvested. In this field, which stood at a short distance from one of those old primeval forests which everywhere abounded in the island, one of his legions were busily engaged gathering in corn, when they were suddenly attacked by the armed islanders, who rushed out of their hiding-places from the neighbouring thicket. Fortunately for the Roman soldiers, this chanced to be no great distance from their encampment; and as the ever-watchful eye of Cæsar was open while he stood looking out from his strong fortifications, he saw a huge cloud of dust

rising in the air in the direction of the distant corn-field, and sallying out of the encampment, at the head of two of his cohorts, he bade the remainder of the legion follow him with the utmost speed, and rushed off to the rescue of his soldiers.

A few more minutes and he would have arrived too late to save any of them, for he found his legion, which had already suffered considerable loss, hemmed in on every side by the cavalry and war-chariots of the Britons; and he had no sooner succeeded in withdrawing his engaged forces from the corn-field, than he hurried back to his strong entrenchments, the brave islanders having compelled him to make a hasty retreat.

Several days of heavy rain followed, during which the Roman general confined his soldiers to the camp. But the hardy Britons were not to be deterred by the elements from following up the slight advantage which they had gained; so mustering a strong force of both horse and foot, they drew up and surrounded the Roman entrenchments.

Cæsar was too brave to sit quietly and be trapped in his own stronghold by an army of barbarians; so watching a favourable moment, he marshalled forth his mailed legions, which were by this time strengthened by a small body of cavalry that had returned with Comius from Gaul; and with these he fell upon the Britons and dispersed them with great slaughter, also pursuing them into the country, and setting fire to many of their huts, before he again returned to his encampment.

The Britons, as before, sued for peace, which Cæsar readily granted, as he was anxious to return to Gaul with his leaky ships and wearied troops; nor did he wait to receive the offered hostages, but with the first fair wind set sail, having gained little more than hard blows by this, his first invasion.

The warm spring days which brought back the swallow from over the sea saw the Roman galleys again riding on the sunny waves that broke upon our rock-girt coast. From the surrounding heights and smooth slopes which dipped gently down into the sea, the assembled Britons beheld eight hundred vessels of various sizes hastening shoreward from the opening ocean.

Amid waving crests and glittering coats of mail, and Roman eagles blazing like gold in the distance, and long javelins whose points shone like silver in the sunlight, as they rose high above the decks of the galleys, they came rolling along like a moving forest of spears, swayed aside for a moment as some restive war-steed, impatient to plant his sharp hoof upon the earth, jerked his haughty neck, and shook out his long dark mane upon the refreshing breeze, while his shrill neigh came ringing upon the beach above the hoarse murmur of the breakers, which rolled at the feet of the terrified Britons.

On those decks were assembled more than thirty thousand Roman soldiers, headed again by Julius Cæsar, and now strengthened by two thousand cavalry.

It is said that the excuse offered by the Roman general for this second invasion was that hostages had not been sent in according to treaty, though the truth beyond doubt is that his ambition was dissatisfied with the hasty retreat he had been compelled to make. His pride had been mortified at the bold front the islanders had presented, for he must have felt, in his hurried departure to Gaul,

that he bore back but little to entitle him to the much-coveted name of Conqueror, a name which his wars with the Britons never won him, for even Tacitus deigned to honour him with little more than the title of Discoverer, after all his exploits in our island had terminated.

Unlike his former reception, he this time landed without having to strike a blow, for the sight of such an armed host struck terror into the hearts of the natives, and they fled in the direction of the Stour, or near to that neighbourhood where Canterbury now stands.

A proof of how earnestly Cæsar commenced his second campaign in the island, and how resolved he was to bring the war to a speedy end, is found in his setting out at midnight to pursue the Britons, scarcely leaving a sixth part of his army behind to protect his shipping and encampment.

Perchance, the haughty Roman had boasted how soon he would bring over a few of the barbaric chiefs for his friends, and would add to their stock of foreign curiosities a few dozen war-chariots, and he had laughed amongst his officers at the joke of their being picked up by some island warrior, and carried off in his scythe-armed car by a couple of swift-footed steeds. He frequently wrote to Rome, and perhaps occasionally boasted in his epistles, about the speedy work he would make of the conquest of Britain.

Be this as it may, there is proof in the strength of the force which landed this time that he had already begun to appreciate the brave blood that flowed through those ancient British veins.

In the still depth of midnight did the measured tramp of Roman infantry ring upon the silence, as they strode inland towards the heart of Kent, and beside those old forests and reedy morasses was the heavy tread of Cæsar's cavalry heard; the rattle of their mail, and the jingling of their harness, broken by the short answers of the scouts as they rode hastily in and out, announcing a clear course, or with low obeisance receiving the commands of the general.

We may picture some poor peasant startled from his sleep by that armed throng, dragged out of his wattled hut by the side of the wild forest, and rudely handled by the Roman soldiers, because he

either refused to tell, or was ignorant of the position his countrymen had taken up. We may picture the herdsman hurrying his flocks into the forest fastnesses as he heard that solemn and distant tramp coming like subdued thunder upon the night breeze, so unlike the wild shoutings and mingled rolling of his own war-chariots, amid which the voices of women and children were ever mingled; so solemn, deep, and orderly would march along those well-disciplined Roman troops, contrasted with the irregular movements of the Britons.

Cæsar reached the reedy margin of a river in the cold grey dawn of a spring morning; and as the misty vapour cleared up from the face of the water, he beheld the hardy islanders drawn up on the rising ground beyond the opposite bank, ready to dispute the passage if he ventured across.

The charge was sounded, and at the first blast of the Roman trumpets, the cavalry dashed into the river, and the well-tempered steel blades of the invaders soon began to hew a path through the opposing ranks, for almost at the first stroke the swords of the Britons, which were made of tin and copper, bent, and became useless, while those wielded by their assailants were double-edged, and left a gash every time they descended. The horses broke through the British infantry as if they had been but a reed fence; and as their cavalry was the heaviest, they met in full career the rush of the island war-chariots, plunged their long javelins into the chests of the horses, and received the shock of the British cavalry on the points of their highly-tempered and strong-shafted spears.

The whole affray seemed more like a skirmish than a regular engagement, as if the war-chariots and cavalry of the Britons were only employed to check the advance of the Roman columns, while the remainder of their force retreated to a strong fortification, which stood at some distance in the woods, and which was barricaded by felled trees, fastened together and piled one above another. Thither the remainder of the army also fled, leaving the Romans to follow after they had regained the order of march, and sent back to their camp those who were wounded in the skirmish on the river bank. These marches through wild, uncultivated forests were very harassing to the heavily-armed Roman legions,

who made but slow progress compared to the light-footed troops of the Britons, for they were inured to this woodland warfare, and as familiar with the forest passes as the antlered deer.

Pursuit was again the order of the day; the stronghold in the forest was taken by the Romans, and amongst the legions which distinguished themselves in the contest was the one which, but for the timely arrival of Cæsar, would probably have left their bones to whiten in the harvest-field from which they had had so narrow an escape in the preceding autumn.

Another evening darkened over the forest, under cover of which the Britons again retreated further inland, without being pursued; for the Roman general seemed to have a dread of those gloomy old woods through which the paths, even in the open noon-day, were rugged, uncertain, and difficult, and were as likely to lead towards some bog, lake, or dangerous morass, as to any of the British fortifications. The Roman soldiers were therefore employed in throwing up intrenchments, and strengthening their position in case of a surprise.

It came, but not until morning, and instead of the Britons, was brought by a party of Roman horsemen from the camp; the galleys were again driven upon the shore by the waves, and many of them wrecked; the angry ocean had once more risen up against the fortunes of Cæsar. These unwelcome tidings arrived just as he had

given the order to advance; a few minutes more, and he would have been off in full pursuit after the Britons. The unexplored forest stretched before him; his eagles glittered in the morning sunshine; the trumpets had sounded the march, when the order was given to halt, and more than twenty thousand armed Romans were compelled to return at the bidding of the waves. The mound they had thrown up was deserted; the river, which had but a few hours before been reddened by the blood of many a brave warrior, was repassed without opposition; and both cavalry and infantry now commenced a rapid retreat in the direction of the Roman encampment.

When Cæsar reached the sea-shore, he beheld a sight discouraging enough to blanch even a Roman cheek; many of his finest galleys had become total wrecks; others it seemed almost impossible to repair; the few that were saved he despatched at once to Gaul for assistance. He set every hand that could use a saw, axe, or mallet, immediately to work, and instead of sitting down and bemoaning his ill-fortune, he, like the brave-hearted Roman that he was, began to make up for his loss, and gave orders for building several new ships. Added to this, he had the remainder drawn onto shore, and ran up a barrier to protect them from the ravages of the ocean, thus including a dry-dock within his fortified encampment. All these preparations necessarily consumed some time, during which the islanders remained undisturbed.

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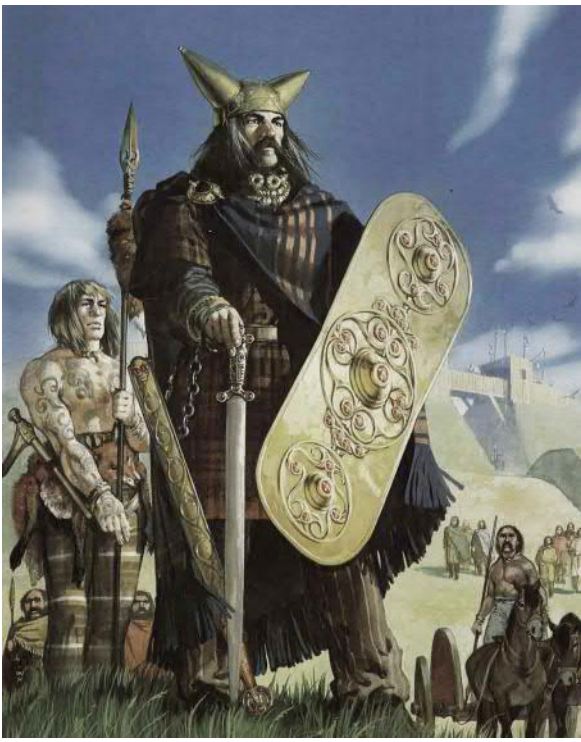
Returning to the Britons, who had not been idle during this brief interval, we find their army greatly increased, and a renowned prince, named Cassivellaunus, placed as commander at their head – they wisely judging that one who had so distinguished himself in his wars with the neighbouring tribes was best fitted to lead them on, now that they were banded together for mutual protection against the Romans. Nobly did the barbaric chief acquit himself; he waited not to be attacked; but having selected his own battle-ground, charged upon the Roman cavalry at once, with his horsemen and war-chariots.

Although Cæsar did at last gain a slight victory – and, as he

himself says, drove the Britons into the woods, and lost several of his soldiers through venturing too far – still it does not appear that he obtained the day, for the Britons already began to find the advantages they obtained through occasional retreats, which enabled them to draw the enemy either nearer to, or into the woods – a stratagem which in this skirmish they availed themselves of; for while the Romans were busy, as was their custom, in protecting their camp for the night, by throwing up ramparts and digging trenches around it, the Britons sallied out from another opening in the wood, and slaughtered the outer guard.



The Roman general ordered two cohorts to advance to the rescue; they were also repulsed, and a tribune was slain; fresh troops were summoned into action, and the Britons betook themselves to their old leafy coverts with but very little loss.

On this occasion, the Roman general was compelled to acknowledge, that his heavy-armed soldiers were no match for an enemy who only retreated one moment to advance with greater force the next, and would, whenever an opportunity presented itself, dismount from their horses, or leap out of their chariots, and renew the battle on foot, and that, too, on the very edge of some dangerous bog, where an armed horseman was sure to founder if he but made a leap beyond the boundary line with which they were so familiar.

Another day, a disastrous one for the Britons, and the battle was renewed, and they, as before, commenced the attack, waiting, however, until the Roman general had sent out a great portion of his cavalry and infantry to forage – a body amounting to more than

half his army, no mean acknowledgment of the estimation in which the island force was held, while it required from ten to fifteen thousand men to collect the supplies he needed for one day; a tolerable proof that he had not forgotten the all but fatal skirmish in the corn-field when he first landed.

Emboldened by their success on the previous day, the Britons this time charged up to the solid body of the Roman legions, rushing fearlessly against the wall which their well-disciplined ranks presented – a firm phalanx, the formation that had withstood the shock of the bravest armies in Europe without being broken; an array strengthened every moment by the return of the foragers.

One solid, impenetrable mass now bore down, like a mighty avalanche, upon the congregated Britons; a vast sea of spears, and shields, and swords, all heaving onward without resistance, Cæsar heralding the way, like the God of the storm, the armed cavalry thundering onward like the foremost wave, until the whole mass struck upon the iron stems of the gnarled oaks which stood at the edge of the forest, then rolled back again into the plain, leaving a line of wounded and dead to mark their destructive course. It was the first open shore on which the full tide of the Roman arms had flowed on the islanders. The waves had many a time before gathered together and broken, but here the full surge of battle swept uninterrupted upon the beach. Although the sun still sets over that great graveyard of the dead, not a monument remains to tell of its whereabouts, or to point out the spot where many a brave soldier took his rest.

Through Kent, and along the valley which stretches at the foot of the Surrey hills, Cæsar pursued the shattered army of the British prince, his march probably extending over that level line of beautiful meadow-land on which the old palace of Eltham still

stands, along the wooded neighbourhood of Penge and Sydenham, and out at the foot of the Norwood hills, to where, far beyond, the Thames still glitters like a belt of silver as it goes winding round near Chertsey.

Here the British leader had rallied; on the opposite bank stood his forces, and in the bed of the river he had caused pointed stakes to be planted, to prevent his pursuers from crossing the ford. These were but slight obstacles in the path of Cæsar; he ordered his cavalry to advance, commanded the infantry to follow at their heels, or at their sides, as they best could; and so they passed, some grasping the manes of the war-horses with one hand to steady their steps in the current, while with the other they held the double-edged sword, ready to hew or thrust, the moment they came within arm's length of the enemy.

Cassivellaunus was once more compelled to retreat, though never so far but that he was always in readiness to fall upon any detached cohorts, and with his five thousand war-chariots to hang upon and harass any party of foragers.

Cæsar was at last compelled to send out his legions to protect the horsemen while they gathered in provisions. Even then, the island prince drove and carried off all the cattle and corn which was pastured or garnered in the neighbourhood of the Roman encampment.

The invaders were never safe except when within their own entrenchments; for they had now to deal with an enemy who had grown too wary to trust himself again in the open field, but contented himself by harassing and attacking any detached Roman units which he could waylay. He was well acquainted with all the secret passes and intricate roads, and kept the Roman guards in a continual state of alarm. When it was not safe to attack, the Britons would at times assemble at the

outskirts of the woods, and shaking their javelins, to the foot of which a hollow ball of copper containing lumps of metal or pebbles was affixed, commence such a sudden thundering and shouting as startled the horses, and caused them to run affrighted in every direction; they then seized upon the forage, and before the heavy legions could overtake them, they were off at full speed far away in the forest passes, along paths known only to themselves. Such a system of warfare was new to Cæsar, and as yet he had only gained the ground he was encamped upon. That which contained his army, for the time, was all he could call his own.

But the Britons could not long remain true to themselves; petty jealousies and long-stifled murmurs began at last to find vent. One tribe after another came to the Roman camp; to all he made fair promises, took their corn and their hostages, sowing no doubt the seeds of dissension deeper amongst them at the same time, and getting them also to inform him where the capital of their warlike chief was situated. This secret they were base enough to betray; for many of the petty princes envied the renown which Cassivellaunus had won by his valour.

Even Cæsar's narrative at this turn of events enlists our sympathies on the side of the British general and the handful of brave followers who still remained true to their country's cause. His capital, which is supposed to have stood on the site of St Albans, and which in those days was surrounded by deep woods and broad marshes, was attacked. Many were slain, some prisoners taken, and numbers of cattle driven away; for the forest town of this courageous chief appears to have been nothing more than a cluster of woodland huts surrounded by a ditch, and strengthened by a rampart of mud and trees, a work which the Roman legions would level to the earth in a brief space of time.

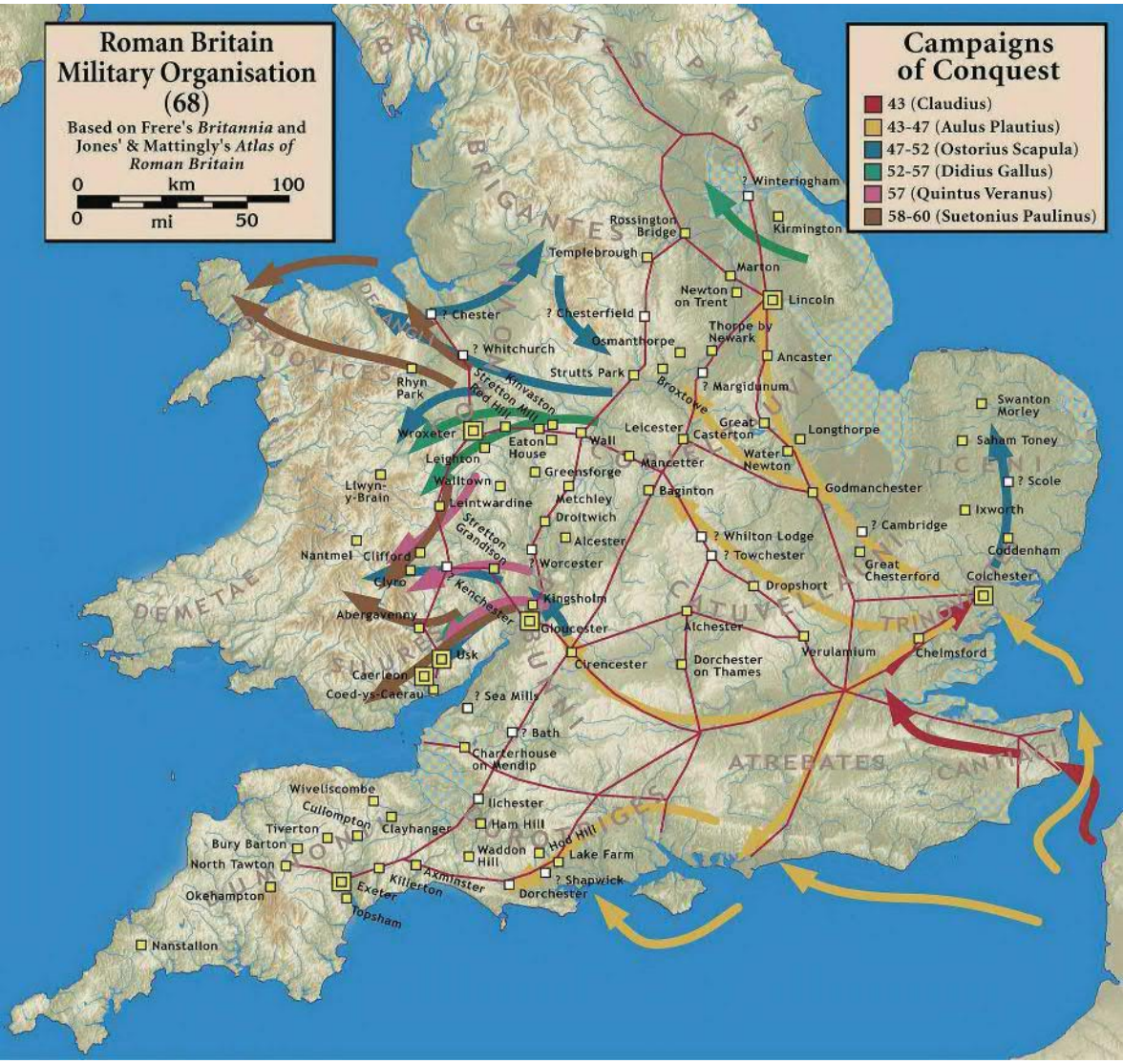
Though beaten and forced from his capital, the British prince retreated upon another fortress further into the wood; from this he was also driven. Yet still his great heart buoyed him up; and although defeated, he determined to have another struggle for the liberty of his unworthy country, and despatched messengers into Kent, bidding the Britons to fall at once upon the Roman camp and fleet.

Had the prince himself been present, it is not improbable that this daring deed would have been executed, for he was unequalled in falling upon the enemy, and carrying his point by surprise – but he was not; and although the attack did honour to the valour of the brave men of Kent, it failed. Many were slain, and the Romans returned victorious to their camp. It wanted but the genius who meditated so bold a stroke to have carried it into effect; had he been there, Cæsar's eagles would never more have spread out their golden wings beneath the triumphal arches of haughty Rome.

Fain would we here drop the curtain over the name of this ancient British warrior, and leave him to sleep in the heart of his high-piled barrow undisturbed. Alas, he was compelled to sue to the Roman general for peace, who no doubt offered it to him willingly, conscious that, had he succeeded in his bold attempt upon the camp and fleet, the Roman would have had to kneel for the same grant at the foot of the Briton.

Cæsar demanded hostages, got them, and hurried off to his ships, and without leaving a Roman troop behind, hastened with all his force to the coast of Gaul, and never again did he set foot upon our island shore.

Over the future career of Cassivellaunus the deep midnight of oblivion has settled; the waves of time have washed no further record upon that vast shore which is strewn over with the wrecks of so many mighty deeds; the assembled druids who chaunted his requiem, and the Cymric or Celtic bard who in rude rhymes broke the forest echoes as he recounted his exploits in battle, have all passed away; and but for the pen of his Roman opponent, we should never have known the bravery of that British heart, which, nearly two thousand years ago, beat with hopes and fears like our own.



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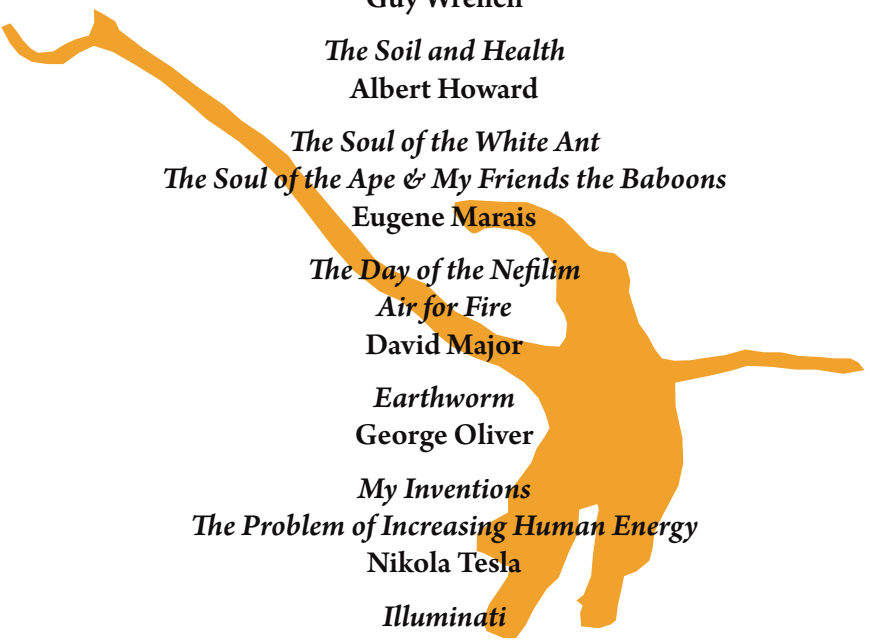

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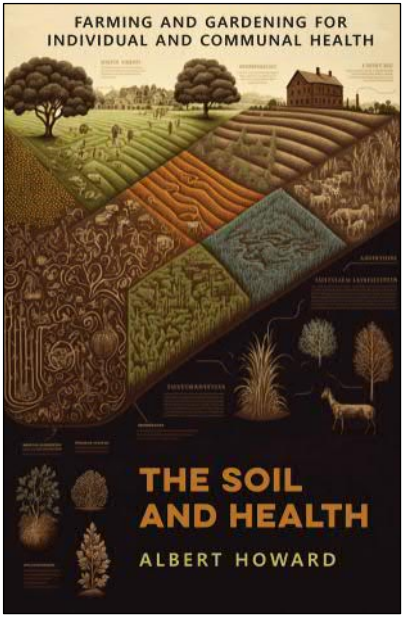

The Soil and Health

Albert Howard

This valuable book is a detailed analysis of the vital role of humus and compost in soil health – and the importance of soil health to the health of crops and the humans who eat them. The author is keenly aware of the dead end which awaits humanity if we insist on growing our food using artificial fertilisers and poisons.

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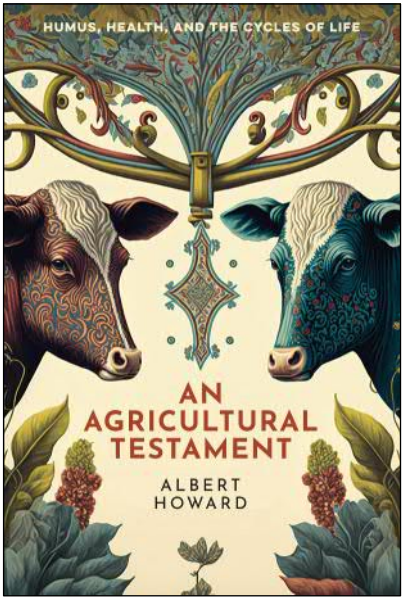

An Agricultural Testament

Albert Howard

A new edition of Howard's classic work from the early days of the organics movement in Britain.

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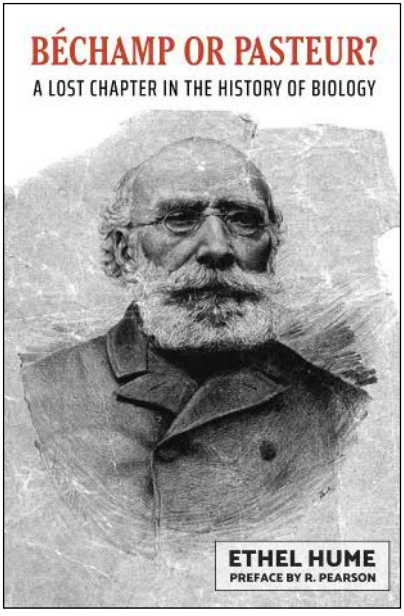

Béchamp or Pasteur?

Ethel Hume / Robert Pearson

Pearson's *Pasteur: Plagiarist, Imposter* was originally published in 1942 and is a succinct introduction to both Louis Pasteur and Antoine Bechamp, and the background to the troubled relationship that they shared for their entire working lives. Ethel Hume documents the evidence in detail, so that there is no escaping the obvious conclusion – Pasteur was a fraud.

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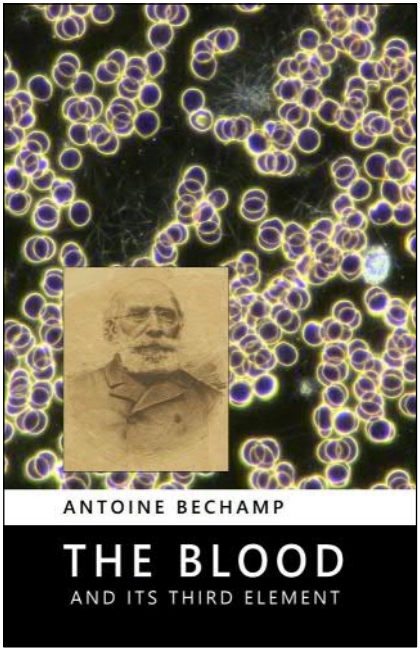

The Blood and its Third Element

Antoine Béchamp

There is no single cause of disease. The ancients knew this. Béchamp proved it with meticulous research, and was written out of history for his trouble. The relevance of his work to the dilemmas that plague the modern medical world remains to this day unrealized by mainstream science and medicine.

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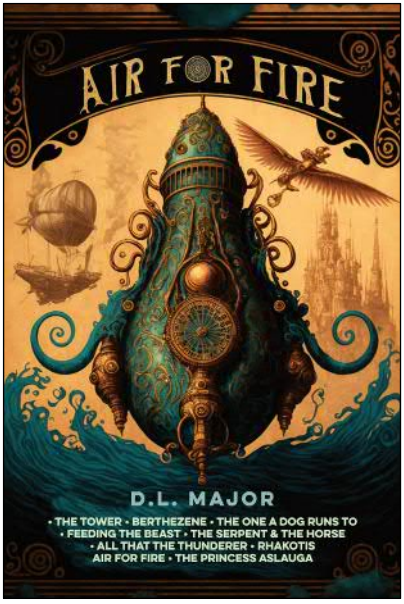

Air for Fire

D.L. Major

A collection of short stories and poetry by the author of *The Day of the Nefilim*. While *The Nefilim* was a meandering trip through some of the world's great conspiracy theories, *Air for Fire* is a collection of short tales that happen in every timeline but this one. Shameless historical revisionism.

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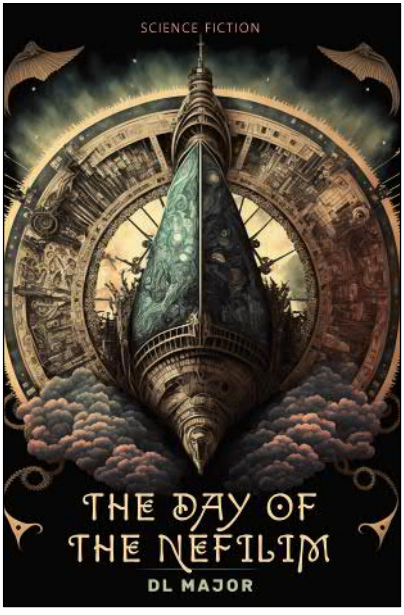

The Day of the Nefilim

D.L. Major

"...one of the best SF novels I have read since I began reading. I read it straight through, in one sitting. Yeah, that's right, I did not put the book down until I finished reading it. Couldn't. Well done, David. Keep writing. Can't wait to read your next book… you would make Robert Anton Wilson proud, and Douglas Adams smile." – *reader review*

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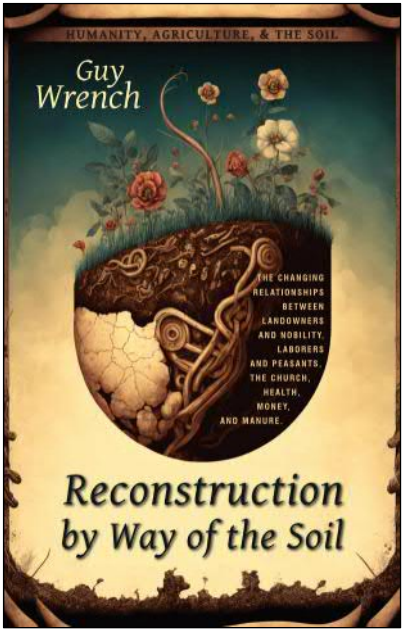

Reconstruction by Way of the Soil

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Includes case studies from Ancient Rome, nomadic societies, medieval England, Africa and Egypt, the West Indies, Russia, Australia and the USA to show that nothing is more important than the relationship between civilization and the soil. The way that the soil is treated has brought about both the rise and fall of civilizations.

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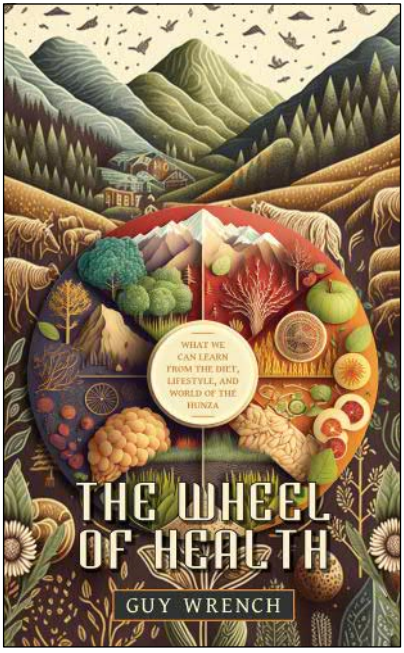

The Wheel of Health

Dr Guy Wrench

The Hunza of northern Pakistan were famous for their extraordinary vitality and health. Dr Wrench argues that in part at least, this is because their food was not made 'sophisticated', by the artificial processes typically applied to modern processed food. How these processes affect our food is dealt with in great detail in this book. What Dr Wrench uncovered in his researches goes deeper than just food, though. It's about water.

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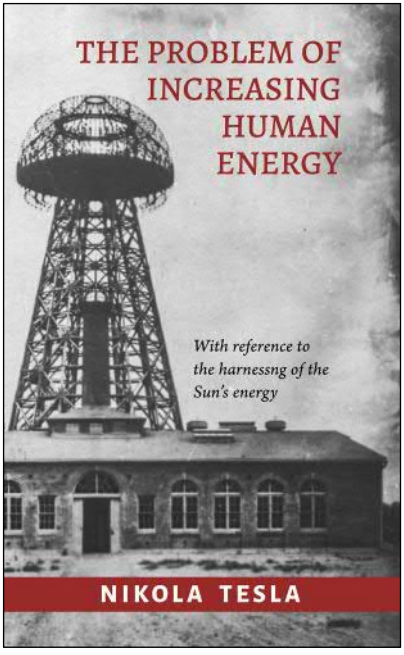

The Problem of Increasing Human Energy

Nikola Tesla

Contains Tesla's thoughts on humanity's relationship with the universe, and also his explanation of the technological wonders embodied in his work.

This text was first published in *Century Illustrated Magazine* in June 1900.

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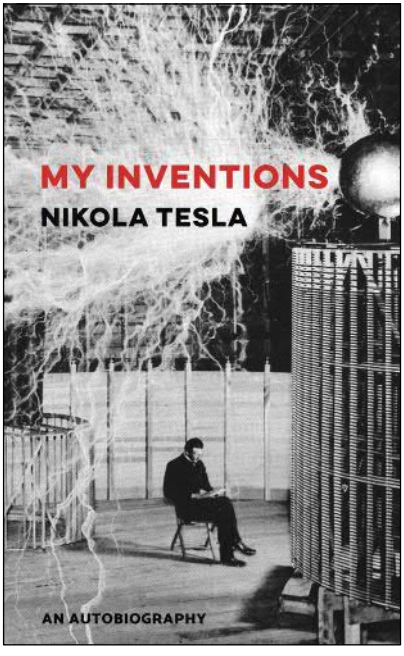

My Inventions

Nikola Tesla

Not only is this book an invitation to meet one of the greatest minds of the last century, and to hear him talk about his inventions; it is also a chance to get to know Tesla as a person, as the book is filled with anecdotes of his early life.

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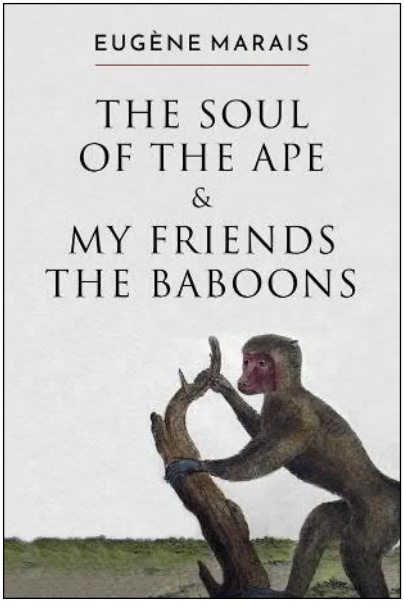

The Soul of the Ape

Eugène Marais

Includes two works by Marais written after his period spent living among a troop of baboons in the South African veldt. *My Friends* was written for a newspaper readership. *The Soul of the Ape* was the more serious scientific document. The excellent introduction by Robert Ardrey was part of the 1969 edition, and adds greatly to an appreciation of the importance of this text.

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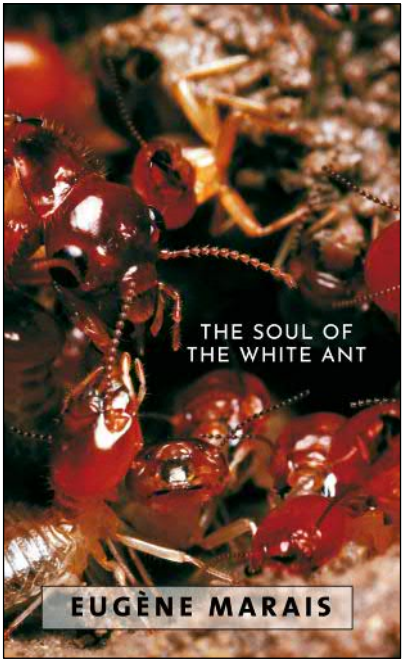

The Soul of the White Ant

Eugène Marais

The amazing results of a long, close study of the lives of termites. Eugène Marais compares the infrastructure of a termitary to that of the human body. Writing from the heart, this scientific author who is also a poet instills a wonder in the reader, of the incredible intricacies of nature, in a light-hearted, easily readable manner.

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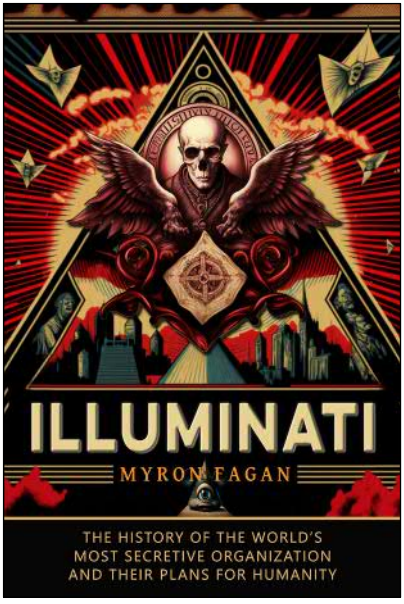

Illuminati

Myron Fagan

This book describes how the Illuminati became the instrument of the Rothschilds to achieve a One World Government, and how every war during the past two centuries has been instigated by this group. This is an historical text with names, dates, organizations and mode of operations, all exposing the octopus gripping the world today.

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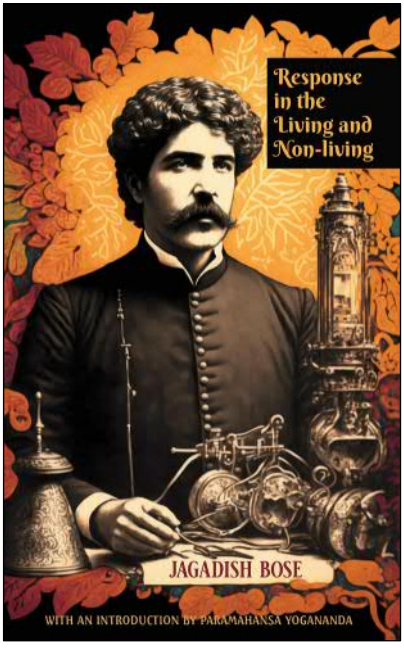

Response in the Living and Non-living

Jagadish Bose

This is one of the great Indian scientist's earlier works. His experiments showed that in the entire range of responses – regardless of whether the subject is metallic, plant or animal – the responses are identical. The living response, in all its diverse modifications, is a repetition of the responses seen in the inorganic. *Everything is alive.*

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Ten Acres is Enough

Edmund Morris

Recently we have seen a great back-to-the-land movement, with many young professional people returning to small scale farming; thus it is useful to read about someone who did exactly the same thing in 1864. In that year, Edmund Morris and his family gave up their business and city life for a farm of ten acres, where they made a go of mixed farming, and then wrote a book about it.

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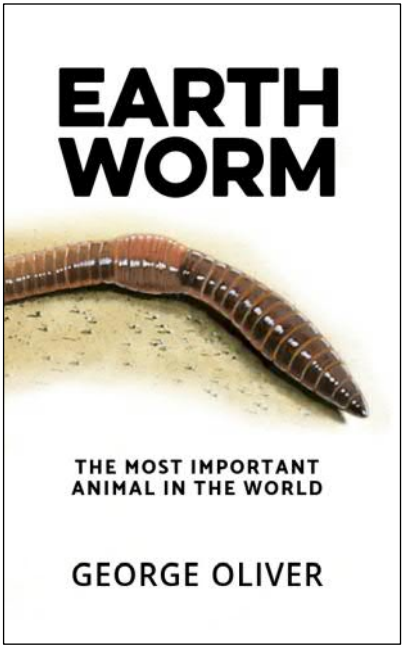

Earthworm

George Oliver

The author returns the reader to a time and methodology where people took responsibility for what they did and what they produced. In this world of spiraling food prices, huge landfills, diminishing food supplies, loss of topsoil, and water pollution, the reader is reminded that the world's most important animal could well be the humble earthworm.

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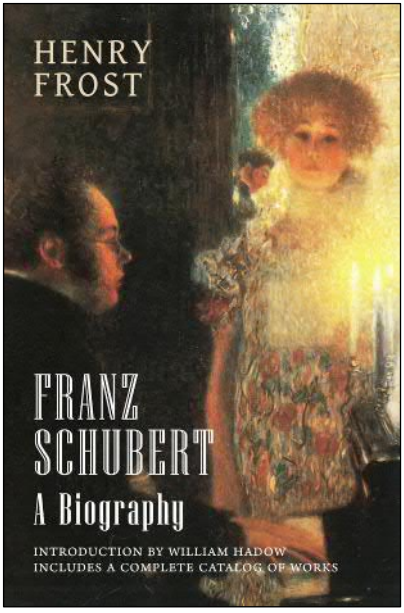

Franz Schubert – a Biography

Henry Frost

"With faith man steps forth into the world. Faith is far ahead of understanding and knowledge; for to understand anything, I must first of all believe something. Faith is the higher basis on which weak understanding rears its first columns of proof; reason is nothing but faith analysed."
– *Franz Schubert*

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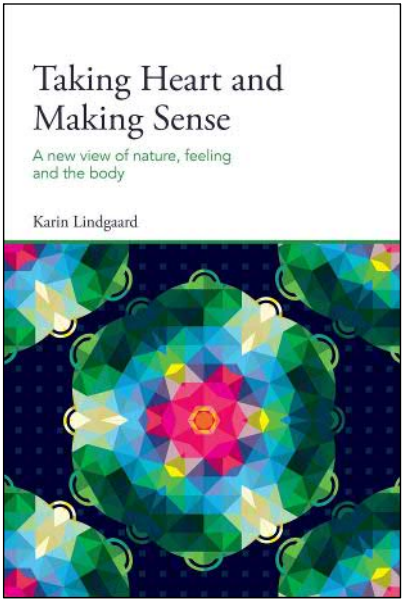

Taking Heart and Making Sense

Karin Lindgaard

What do animals feel? How do living systems become conscious?

The author takes on these and many more questions about the natural world and human experience, helping us to understand our feelings and emotions, and our sense of meaning in life. Lingaard takes readers on a conceptual adventure across psychology, philosophy and cognitive science.

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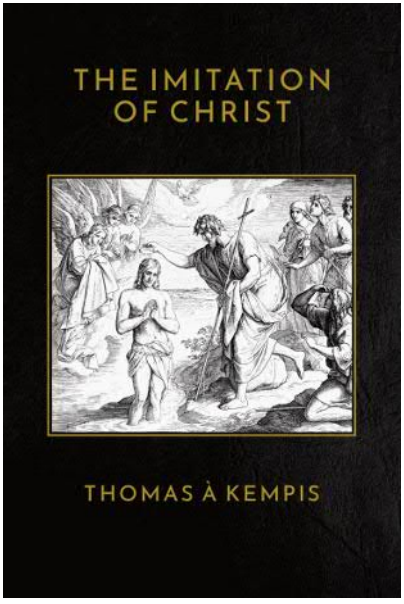

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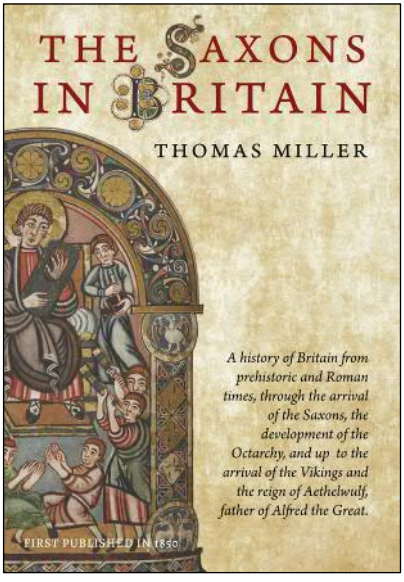

The Saxons in Britain

Thomas Miller

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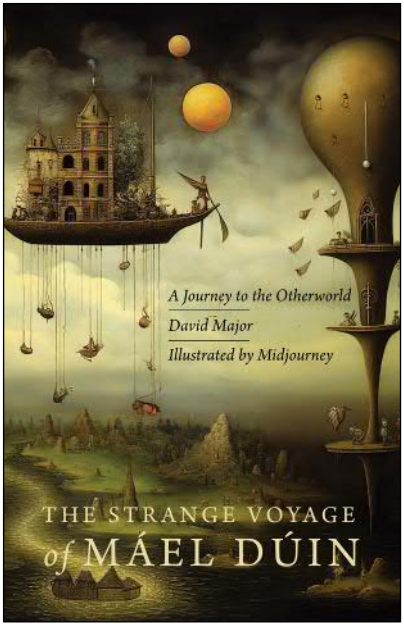

The Strange Voyage of Máel Dúin

David Major & Midjourney

A new edition of one of the great stories of Irish mythology. It is extensively illustrated in full color by Midjourney, at the time of publication the leading AI illustration tool.

A collaboration between human and artificial intelligence, the Strange Voyage of Máel Dúin is a legendary tale from Gaelic literature that holds a significant place in the traditions of myth and history. It recounts the extraordinary maritime journey of the heroic Máel Dúin and his companions as they embark on a perilous quest.

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