CELTIC BRITAIN.

CHAPTER I.

BRITAIN IN THE TIME OF JULIUS CÆSAR.

THE Celts form a branch of the great family of nations which has been variously called Aryan, Indo-European, Indo-Germanic, Indo-Celtic, and Japhetic, its other branches being represented by the Italians, the Greeks, the Teutons, the Litu-Slaves, the Armenians, the Persians, and the chief peoples of Hindustan. The respective places of these nations in the geography of the Old World give, roughly speaking, a very fair idea of their relative nearness to one another in point of speech. Thus the gulf is widest between the Celtic languages and Sanskrit or Zend, and narrowest between Celtic and Latin, while it is comparatively narrow between the Celtic and Teutonic languages, among which is included English, the speech destined in time to supersede the idioms of the insular Celt which are still living. The Celts of antiquity who appeared first and oftenest in history were those of Gallia, which, having been made by the French into Gaule, we term Gaul. It included the France and Switzerland of the present day, and much

territory besides. This people had various names. One of them was *Galli*, which in their language meant warriors or brave men, and seems to have been always used by the Romans to designate them; but the Gauls themselves in Cæsar's time appear to have preferred the name which he wrote *Celtæ*. This was synonymous with the other, and appears to have meant warriors, the origin of the word being probably the same as that of the Old Norse *hildr*, war, battle. Some archæologists are of opinion that the terms Galli and Celtæ argue a distinction of race, but most historians treat them, and rightly we think, as synonymous. From the name of the ancient Celtæ modern writers have derived the terms Celt and Celtic, which are employed in speaking of the family in its widest sense. This is an extension of the meaning of the old word, as Britain was considered to be outside the Celtic world. It was an island beyond Celtica, or over against it, as the ancients were wont to say.

It is a long time ago since the first Celts crossed the sea to settle in Britain. Nobody knows how long, and the guesses which have been made as to the date are hardly worth recording. And when they did come the immigration was not all over in one year or even in one century. The invasions may, however, be grouped into two, and looked at as made by peoples of both groups of the Celtic family. For as the Teutonic nations divide themselves into High Dutch, Nether Dutch, and Scandinavians, so the Celtic family, so far back as we can trace it into the darkness of anti-

quity, consisted of two groups or branches with linguistic features of their own which marked them off from one another. To the one belonged the ancestors of the people who speak Gaelic in Ireland, the Isle of Man, and the Highlands of the North, a language which existed also in Wales and Devon in the sixth century, and probably later. The national name which the members of this group have always given themselves, so far as one knows, is that of Gaidhel, pronounced and spelt in English Gael, but formerly written by themselves Goidel. So, as there is a tendency in this country now to understand by the word Gael the Gael of the North alone, we shall speak of the group generally as Goidels and Goidelic. The other group is represented in point of speech by the people of Wales and the Bretons; formerly, one might have added the Welsh of Cumbria, and till the last century some of those of Cornwall. The national name of those speaking these dialects was that of Briton; but, since that word has now no precise meaning, we take the Welsh form of it, which is *Brython*, and call this group Brythons and Brythonic, whenever it is needful to be exact. The ancient Gauls must also be classified with them, since the Brythons may be regarded as Gauls who came over to settle in Britain. Moreover, the language of most of the inhabitants south of the Forth, where English now prevails, differed probably but slightly at the time of the Roman conquest from that of the Gauls of the Continent. This form of Celtic afterwards spread itself in time among the Goidels

in the west of the island; so that the later Brythons there cannot be regarded as wholly such in point of blood, a very considerable proportion of them being probably Goidels using the language of the other Celts. Roughly speaking, however, one may say that the whole Celtic family was made up of two branches or groups, the Goidelic group and the Gallo-Brythonic one; and as Gaulish is long since dead, every Celt of the United Kingdom is, so far as language is concerned, either a Goidel or a Brython. The Goidels were undoubtedly the first Celts to come to Britain as their geographical position to the west and north of the others would indicate, as well as the fact that no trace of them on the Continent can now be identified. They had probably been here for centuries when the Brythons, or Gauls, came and drove them westward. The Goidels, it is right to say, had done the same with another people, for when they came here they did not find the country without inhabitants. Thus we get at least three peoples to deal with—two Celtic and one pre-Celtic; and one of the great difficulties in writing the history of early Britain arises from the circumstance that the ancient authors on whom we have to rely for our information, seldom troubled themselves to make nice distinctions between these races, though they were probably in different stages of civilization from one another. We shall, therefore, proceed at once to give the substance of what they have put on record respecting this country, and make what use we can of ancient coins or other relics of the

past to supplement that information about the island, seizing as we go on every opportunity of distinguishing between the different races peopling it. When the reader has thus become acquainted with the leading facts, something will be added by way of a more detailed account of our ethnology.

No such islands as Britain and Ireland were known to Herodotus in the fifth century before the Christian era; but some time afterwards one of the Scipios of Rome visited Marseilles[1] and Narbonne to find out whether trade could not be established with the region beyond southern Gaul, so as to injure the Carthaginians, whose sailors used to bring tin, not only from Spain and the Cassiterides or the tin islands on the north-west of that peninsula, but also from Gaul. The Roman could not, however, get any information about the north, but the idea of a voyage of discovery took form among the merchants of Marseilles, and the result was, that they fitted out an expedition accompanied by an eminent mathematician of that city, with whose name the reader should be familiar as that of one of the most intrepid explorers the world has seen. This was Pytheas,[2] who lived in the time of Alexander the Great and Aristotle, the latter of whom died in the year 322 B.C., while the year 330 is guessed as the date of the *floruit* of Pytheas. The publication of the history

[1] Strabo, Δ, 2, 1 (C. 190).

[2] For a fuller account of Pytheas see Elton's "Origins of Eng. Hist." (London, 1882), pp. 13, &c., and the extracts at the end of that volume.

of his travels is supposed to have taken place soon after the death of Aristotle; and fragments of the diary of his voyage have been preserved to us in the works of various ancient authors. He sailed round Spain to Brittany, and thence to Kent and other parts of Britain; next he set out from the Thames to the mouth of the Rhine, and thence he rounded Jutland, proceeding east so far as the mouth of the Vistula: he turned back from there and coasted Norway until he reached the arctic circle, whence he made for the Shetlands and the north of Scotland. Then he returned to Brittany, whence he reached the mouth of the Garonne, where he found an overland route home to Marseilles. Thus Pytheas was in Britain twice, and paid more attention to it than any of the other countries he visited; but he does not seem to have been so far as the tin districts in the west, and it is remarkable that he gives no hint which would lead one to suppose that there was any communication between them and the Continent. That intercourse, it would seem, was confined to the south-east of the island, where the Channel was narrowest. Pytheas took a great many observations in Britain; but, owing to the nature of the instruments which were then in use, they are of no value. It is quite otherwise with regard to what he says of the inhabitants: he saw plenty of corn in the fields in the south-east, and he noticed that the farmers gathered the sheaves into large barns, in which the threshing was done. They had so little sun that the open threshing-floors of the sunnier south would not

have done in a land of clouds and rain like Britain. He likewise found that they made a drink[1] by mixing wheat and honey, which is the mead still known in certain parts of Wales; and he is supposed to have been the authority for their use of another drink, which Greek writers[2] speak of as made of barley, and drank instead of wine. The name by which it was known to them is still the Celtic word for beer: it was formerly *curmi*, and it now makes *cuirm* in Irish, and *cwrw* in Welsh. Thus we have ample evidence that in the fourth century before our era the Aryan farmer had made himself thoroughly at home in Britain. Now the expedition of Pytheas had been got up for practical purposes by his fellow-citizens, the Greeks of Marseilles, and it resulted undoubtedly in the extension across Gaul of their trade, directly or indirectly, to the corner of Britain nearest to the Continent. Some light, it may be added, is shed on this by the fact, that the first coins supposed to have been struck in the island, long as that happened after Pytheas's time, were all modelled after Greek coins made during his time. This points to a trade then opened with the north.[3]

Some two centuries later another Greek of note extended his travels to the island and visited Belerion,[4] as he called the district in Cornwall where

[1] Strabo, Δ, 5, 5 (C. 201).

[2] Among others, Athenæus and Dioscorides: see Diefenbach's "Origines Europææ," s. v. *cervesia*.

[3] See Evans's "Coins of the Ancient Britons," p. 24.

[4] Diod. Siculus's "Bibliotheca Historica," v. 21, 22.

tin was found. This was Posidonius, with whom Cicero studied at Rhodes. Besides his description of the people and their method of working the tin, Posidonius is supposed to have been the authority of Diodorus Siculus[1] for stating, that the inhabitants of Britain lived in mean dwellings made for the most part of reeds or wood, and that harvest with them meant the cutting off the ears of corn and storing them in pits underground, whence were fetched day by day those that had been longest in keeping to be dressed for food. This appears to have been a way of preparing the cereal for food, which was well understood in the last century in the Western Islands of Scotland, where one proceeded so skilfully to prepare the corn with the aid of a flame, that it might be dressed, winnowed, ground, and baked within an hour after reaping.[2] Posidonius would seem to have been speaking of a part of the country more remote than the south-east corner, to which the words of Pytheas probably applied. But we have now come down to the time when the Romans began to acquaint themselves with the island in a very tangible fashion.

Late in the summer of the year 55 B.C., Julius Cæsar resolved to cross over to Britain,[3] from which he understood the Gauls to have had repeated help in

[1] "Bibl. Hist.," v. 21, 22.

[2] See Elton's "Origins of Eng. Hist.," p. 33, where he quotes from Martin's "Description of the Western Islands of Scotland," published in 1703, a passage illustrative of this practice. See also, with regard to Ireland, Tylor's "Primitive Culture," (2nd ed.) i. p. 44.

[3] Cæsar, "De Bello Gallico," iv. 20–38.

their wars with him. The season for waging war was, it is true, nearly over for that year, but he thought it desirable to visit the island, to see the people, and ascertain, so to say, how the land lay before him. So he tried first to extract information from traders about the size of the island, and the kind of people that lived there, together with their mode of warfare and manner of life; also as to what harbours they had for a number of ships of the larger size; but it was all in vain, and he says that no one but merchants readily crossed over, and that they only knew the coast and the districts opposite Gaul. He therefore sent Volusenus, one of his officers, out in a war-ship, to get as much information as possible respecting the coast of Britain, whence he was to return as soon as he could. In the meantime Cæsar collected vessels from all parts, together with the fleet which had been engaged the summer before against the Veneti, to a port in the country of the Morini, from which the passage to Britain could be most readily made. News of this had been at once carried across, and ambassadors from many of the states in the island came to Cæsar, which shows that there was a much readier and more intimate communication between it and Gaul than Cæsar's words would have led one to anticipate. The ambassadors promised him hostages, and that their states would obey the Roman people. Cæsar, after making liberal promises and exhorting them to continue of that mind, sent them home, accompanied by Commios. This man was one of the Atrebates, whom Cæsar had made king over that Belgic people when

they were conquered by the legions, and whose rule he afterwards extended to the Morini. Commios was chosen for his supposed fidelity to Roman interests, and because he had great influence in the south of Britain, where a portion of the people of the Atrebates had settlements. He had also, in Cæsar's opinion, proved himself a man of valour and prudence. His orders were to visit as many states as possible, and to exhort them to embrace the alliance of the Roman people; but no sooner had Commios landed, and his business become known, than he was placed in bonds. On the return of Volusenus with such information as a man who had not ventured to land was able to procure, Cæsar, at midnight on the 24th of August or one of the two succeeding days, embarked with two legions or about 12,000 men, in about eighty ships, together with a number of galleys, leaving eighteen ships detained at a neighbouring port by a contrary wind: these were to follow with the cavalry as soon as they could. Cæsar reached the British shore betimes in the morning, but, finding the point touched not a favourable place to land in the face of the enemy that mustered in force on the cliffs around, he coasted about seven Roman miles to a spot where there was an open beach and a level strand. The native cavalry and charioteers, closely followed by the rest of the British forces, were there in time to contest the landing of the legions. A severe engagement followed, in which the Roman soldiers showed considerable hesitation, and were thrown into much confusion by the British charioteers, with whose movements they were not