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978-1-108-08395-9 - The History of the Roman Wall, : Which Crosses the Island of Britain from the German Ocean to the Irish Sea: Describing its Antient State, and its Appearance in the Year 1801

William Hutton

Excerpt

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THE
HISTORY
OF THE
ROMAN WALL, &c.

THIS first, and most remarkable piece of Antiquity in the whole Island, is known by several names, some of them erroneous. It bore that of *Agricola*, which is now lost. *The Picts Wall*; but this seems inconsistent, for they had no concern with the Wall, except to pull it down; and I think it should rather bear the name of the man who built it up. Sometimes *Hadrian's Wall*; but I can-

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2

HISTORY OF

not see why a bank of earth should bear the name of *a Wall*. Our idea of a wall comprehends an erection of brick or stone. Perhaps Hadrian's *Bank* would be more in character, as agreeing with the materials of which it is composed. *Severus's Wall* is more proper, because he erected the stone wall, part of which is remaining. It is often called *The Roman Wall*, and, by way of pre-eminence, *The Wall*.

That *man* is born a savage, there needs no other proof than Severus's Wall. It characterizes two nations as robbers, and murderers. Nineteen in twenty of our race sustain half this character during life. Some individuals correct the crude passions, adhere to justice, and avoid whatever is worthy of blame.

The first intentional act of a child is an attempt to scratch the eyes of its mother ;

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THE ROMAN WALL.

3

ther ; the next, wilfully to disobey orders ; another, to gripe a young cat round the neck, and enjoy with a smile the agonies of death ; a fourth, forcibly to take the play-things from a boy less than himself, and, should the loser complain, toss his hat into the street, and kick his posteriors. To punish the brute creation opens a wide field for ferocity ; as, impaling insects, winging butterflies, and, if possessed of a whip, never to let a dog pass without using the lash.

The next step, as he rises into years, is to hunt after property not his own, which he tries to acquire by deceit, chicane, finesse, and, if he cannot accomplish it, would take a pleasure in destroying it, that another may not possess it. Should pride, or influence, prompt him to act fairly, only increase

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4

HISTORY OF

the temptation, and you find the rogue. Thus nineteen in twenty declare war against the creation.

This Wall is also a clear proof, that every species of cruelty that one man can practise to another was here, and pronounces the human being as much a savage as the brute. This place has been the scene of more plunder and murder, than any part of the Island, of equal extent. During four hundred years, while the Wall continued a barrier, this was the grand theatre of war, as well as during ages after its destruction.

Some learned and worthy men, pry-ers into human nature, have contended, “that civilization increases, and that the world is advancing towards perfection.” — Light, and knowledge, I allow, have

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THE ROMAN WALL.

5

have made an amazing progress during the last ages ; but that is owing to commerce, and the printing press. This, however, comes under the word *polished* society, not *honest*. Man may be better informed, but not mended ; or why did the Spaniards, and Portuguese, in latter ages, butcher the natives in South America by millions, and take their property ? And why did we, though in a small degree, follow their example in the North ?

Perhaps a Scotsman would consider this mighty bulwark a compliment paid to his country ; and infer, “ it was designed to bar a superiour power, and was the effect of fear ; for, if two nations could meet upon equal terms, there would be no need to raise a wall between them.”

A Roman

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6

HISTORY OF

A Roman would reply, “ Your country is mountainous, barren, and difficult to conquer. The rough *land* is your safeguard, not the people ; and the inhabitants are so poor, they are not worth conquering. On these rests your security.” There may be, in both these remarks, a wider opening for truth than for boasting.

Our old historians always term the Scots *Barbarians* : to this I assent. They surprized the innocent, murdered them, laid waste their country, took the property, and *left the place*. Allow me, without the aid of Dr. Johnson, to illustrate the word *Barbarian*. Julius Cæsar, Agricola, Antonine, Severus, &c. went one step farther than the Scots ; they surprised, murdered, plundered, and *kept possession*. Our venerable ancestors
too,

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THE ROMAN WALL.

7

too, the Saxons, Danes, and Normans, who came over in swarms, butchered, robbed, and possessed ; although they had no more right than I have to your coat. Whoever deprives an unoffending man of his right, comes under this word. It follows, no war can be justified but that of defence.

It is an old remark, that “ idleness is introductive of mischief.” The *Picts*, now Highlanders, confirm this remark. Strangers to commerce, to the arts, and, from the barrenness of the country, almost to agriculture, they led a life of indolence. Their chief avocations were hunting, basking in the sun, procuring fuel from the heath, and fish from the water. In some of these, the women bore a part.

Idleness of body promotes idleness of mind. They were savage, voracious, domineering,

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8

HISTORY OF

mineering, except to their chiefs, who were as savage as themselves, but to them they paid implicit obedience. Servility is the attendant upon a mind debased.

Men thus situated must feel the effects of want. Nature and necessity made them courageous. At the beck of the chief, they entered the Lowlands, which they sometimes robbed; but oftener joined the inhabitants in partnership, and penetrated the borders between Scotland and England; and, when not opposed, killed, burnt, and pilfered, at pleasure; then returned, singing in Erse, their native tongue.

While the Britons were supine, or quarrelling with each other; or while their power was withdrawn from the frontiers, and employed against other enemies; the Scots and Picts made their inroads. Booty was

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THE ROMAN WALL.

9

was the word ; but this could not be had without blood.

This astonishing rampart, the production of three eminent persons, and at three different periods, was designed to remedy the mischiefs described.

AGRICOLA'S WORK.

WHEN Agricola, the ablest general, and most accomplished statesman of the age, commanded the Romans in Britain, he led them into Scotland, in the year eighty-four, to punish the depredations of the natives. He found *Galgacus*, their general, with an army of thirty thousand men, encamped upon the

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the Grampian hills, ready to receive him. He gave them battle, defeated them, and drove them back into the Highlands.

Being master of the country, and willing to prevent such evils as had occurred for ages, he erected what our historians call a *Wall*, as a bar against the Picts. This was principally a bank and a ditch ; on the borders of which he built, at unequal distances, a range of castles. This work extends from sea to sea, about seventy-four miles, beginning three miles and a half East of Newcastle, and ending twelve West of Carlisle, which, while guarded, curbed the enemy : the spot suited, as being the narrowest part of the Island.

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