

THE AGE OF CAESAR

King Alfred. Book VI Chap XII

In the year of Rome 677, the Romans gave Julius Caesar the command of seven legions to carry on the war for five winters in Gaul, and after he had conquered these nations, he went into the island of Brittonie, where fighting with the Bryttas, he was defeated in that part of the country which is called Centland. Soon after this he had a second engagement with the Bryttas, in Centland, who were put to flight. Their third battle was near the river that men call the Temese (near those fords which are called Welingaford); after which, not only all the inhabitants of Cynrceastre submitted, but the whole island.

NENNIUS

The Romans, having obtained the dominion of the world, sent legates or deputies to the Britons to demand of them hostages and tribute, which they received from all other countries and islands; but they, fierce, disdainful, and haughty, treated the legation with contempt. Then Julius Caesar, the first who had acquired absolute power at Rome, highly incensed against the Britons, sailed with sixty vessels to the mouth of the Thames, where they suffered shipwreck whilst he fought against Dolobellus, (the proconsul of the British king, who was called Belinus, and who was the son of Minocannus who governed all the islands of the Tyrrhene Sea), and thus Julius Caesar returned home without victory, having had his soldiers slain, and his ships shattered.

. But after three years he again appeared with a large army, and three hundred ships, at the mouth of the Thames, where he renewed hostilities. In this attempt many of his soldiers and horses were killed; for the same consul had placed iron pikes in the shallow part of the river, and this having been effected with so much skill and secrecy as to escape the notice of the Roman soldiers, did them considerable injury; thus Caesar was once more compelled to return without peace or victory. The Romans were, therefore, a third time sent against the Britons; and under the command of Julius, defeated them near a place called Trinovantum (London), forty-seven years before the birth of Christ, and five thousand two hundred and twelve years from the creation.

Julius was the first exercising supreme power over the Romans who invaded Britain: in

honour of him the Romans decreed the fifth month to be called after his name. He was assassinated in the Curia, in the ides of March, and Octavius Augustus succeeded to the empire of the world. He was the only emperor who received tribute from the Britons, according to the following verse of Virgil: "Purpurea intexti tollunt aulaea Britanni."

BEDE CHAP. II. How Caius Julius Caesar was the first Roman Britain.

Now Britain had never been visited by the Romans, and was entirely unknown to them before the time of Caius Julius Caesar, who, in the year 693 after the foundation of Rome, but the sixtieth year before the Incarnation of our Lord, was consul with Lucius Bibulus. While he was making war upon the Germans and the Gauls, who were divided only by the river Rhine, he came into the province of the Morini, whence is the nearest and shortest passage into Britain. Here, having provided about eighty ships of burden and fast-sailing vessels, he sailed over into Britain; where, being first roughly handled in a battle, and then caught in a storm, he lost a considerable part of his fleet, no small number of foot-soldiers, and almost all his cavalry. Returning into Gaul, he put his legions into winter-quarters, and gave orders for building six hundred sail of both sorts. With these he again crossed over early in spring into Britain, but, whilst he was marching with the army against the enemy, the ships, riding at anchor, were caught in a storm and either dashed one against another, or driven upon the sands and wrecked. Forty of them were lost, the rest were, with much difficulty, repaired. Caesar's cavalry was, at the first encounter, defeated by the Britons, and there Labienus, the tribune, was slain. In the second engagement, with great hazard to his men, he defeated the Britons and put them to flight. Thence he proceeded to the river Thames, where a great multitude of the enemy had posted themselves on the farther side of the river, under the command of Cassobellaunus, and fenced the bank of the river and almost all the ford under water with sharp stakes: the remains of these are to be seen to this day, apparently about the thickness of a man's thigh, cased with lead, and fixed immovably in the bottom of the river. This being perceived and avoided by the Romans, the barbarians, not able to stand the charge of the legions, hid themselves in the woods, whence they grievously harassed the Romans with repeated sallies. In the meantime, the strong state of the Trinovantes, with their commander Androgius, surrendered to Caesar, giving him forty hostages. Many other cities, following their example, made a treaty with the Romans. Guided by them, Caesar at length, after severe fighting, took the town of Cassobellaunus, situated between two marshes, fortified by sheltering woods, and plentifully furnished with all necessaries. After this, Caesar returned from Britain into Gaul, but he had no sooner put his legions into winter quarters, than he was suddenly beset and

distracted with wars and sudden risings on every side.

LIBER BRITANNICUS.

But after many ages the Romans took the sovereignty of the world, and they sent an ambassador to the island of Britain, to demand hostages and pledges, such as they had taken from every other country. The ambassadors, however, went away displeased without hostages; and the king, viz., Julius Caesar, was enraged with the Britons, and came with sixty ships to the mouth of the river Tames. Now Bellinus was king of the island of Britain at that time. And Dolabellus, pro-consul of the King of Britain, went to meet Julius Caesar, and the soldiers of the king were cut down; in the *meantime* tempestuous weather and storm broke his ships, and the king was driven back without victory to his country. He came again, however, at the end of three years, with three hundred ships, to the same bay; but Dolobellus put spikes of iron in the fording place of the river, in preparation for the battle, so that the Roman soldiers fell by this invisible stratagem, i. e., by the seeds of battle.

Notwithstanding, a rally was made by Julius, and battle was given in the land which is called Tinnandrum, so that he broke that battle before him, and took the sovereignty of the island, forty-seven years before the birth of Christ, ab initio mundi 5035.

Now Julius, the first king of the Romans, who took the island of Britain, was killed in his own senate; and it was in his *honour* that the Romans gave the month of July its name, at the end of seven and forty years after the birth of Christ.

PLUTARCH PLUTARCH'S LIVES.

LIFE OF POMPEIUS.

Pompeius being appointed to look after the management and the supply of corn, sent his deputies and friends to many places, and he himself sailed to Sicily and Sardinia and Libya and collected grain. When he was about to set sail, there was a violent wind on the sea, and the masters of the ships were unwilling to put out, but Pompeius embarking first and bidding them raise the anchor, cried, "It is necessary to sail; there is no necessity to live." By such boldness and zeal, and the help of good fortune, Pompeius filled the markets with grain and the sea with ships, so that the superfluity of what he got together sufficed even for those who were without, and there was as from a spring an abundant overflowing for all.

LI. During this time the Celtic wars raised Caesar to great distinction; and though he

was considered to be a very long way from Rome, and to be occupied with Belgae and Suevi and **Britanni**, he contrived, by his skilful management, without being perceived, in the midst of the popular assemblies, and in the most important matters, to frustrate the political measures of Pompeius. For Caesar's military force was like a body that invested him, and he was training it to toil, and making it invincible and formidable, not to oppose the barbarians, but he was disciplining his men in these contests just as if it were merely hunting wild beasts and pursuing them with dogs; and in the meantime he was sending to Rome gold and silver, and the rest of the spoil and wealth which he got in abundance from so many enemies, and by tempting people there with gifts, and assisting aediles in their expenses, and generals and consuls and their wives, he was gaining over many of them; so that when he had crossed the Alps and was wintering in Luca, there was a great crowd of men and women who vied with one another in their eagerness to visit him, besides two hundred of the Senatorian class, among whom were Pompeius and Crassus; and one hundred and twenty fasces of proconsuls and praetors were seen at Caesar's doors.

PLUTARCH - LIFE OF CAESAR.

In **Britannia** on one occasion the natives had attacked the foremost centurions who had got into a marshy spot full of water, upon which, in the presence of Caesar who was viewing the contest, a soldier rushed into the midst of the enemy, and after performing many conspicuous acts of valour, rescued the centurions from the barbarians, who took to flight. The soldier, with difficulty attempting to cross after all the rest, plunged into the muddy stream, and with great trouble and the loss of his shield, sometimes swimming, sometimes walking, he got safe over. While those who were about Caesar were admiring his conduct and coming to receive him with congratulations and shouts, the soldier, with the greatest marks of dejection and tears in his eyes, fell down at Caesar's feet and begged pardon for the loss of his shield.

His expedition against the **Britanni** was notorious for its daring: for he was the first who entered the western Ocean with an armament and sailed through the Atlantic sea, leading an army to war; and by attempting to occupy an island of incredible magnitude, which furnished matter for much dispute to numerous writers, who affirmed that the name and the accounts about it were pure inventions, for it never had existed and did not then exist, he extended the Roman supremacy beyond the inhabited world. After twice crossing over to the island from the opposite coast of Gaul, and worsting the enemy in many battles rather than advantaging his own men, for there was nothing worth taking from men who

lived so wretched a life and were so poor, he brought the war to a close not such as he wished, but taking hostages from the king and imposing a tribute, he retired from the island.

Suetonius Tranquillus. Life of Julius Caesar

XXV. During nine years in which he held the government of the province, his achievements were as follows: he reduced all **Gaul**, bounded by the Pyrenean forest, the Alps, mount Gebenna, and the two rivers, the Rhine and the Rhone, and being about three thousand two hundred miles encompass, into the form of a province, excepting only the nations in alliance with the republic, and such as had merited his favour; imposing upon this new acquisition an annual tribute of forty millions of sesterces. He was the first of the Romans who, crossing the Rhine by a bridge, attacked the Germanic tribes inhabiting the country beyond that river, whom he defeated in several engagements. He also invaded the **Britons**, a people formerly unknown, and having vanquished them, exacted from them contributions and hostages. Amidst such a series of successes, he experienced thrice only any signal disaster; once in **Britain**, when his fleet was nearly wrecked in a storm; in **Gaul**, at Gergovia, where one of his legions was put to the rout; and in the territory of the Germans, his lieutenants Titurius and Aurunculeius were cut off by an ambuscade.

XLVII. They likewise report that he invaded **Britain** in hopes of finding pearls, the size of which he would compare together, and as certain the weight by poising them in his hand; that he would purchase, at any cost, gems, carved works, statues, and pictures, executed by the eminent masters of antiquity; and that he would give for young and handy slaves a price so extravagant, that he forbade its being entered in the diary of his expenses.

LVIII. In his expeditions, it is difficult to say whether his caution or his daring was most conspicuous. He never marched his army by roads which were exposed to ambuscades, without having previously examined the nature of the ground by his scouts. Nor did he cross over to **Britain**, before he had carefully examined, in person, the navigation, the harbours, and the most convenient point of landing in the island. When intelligence was brought to him of the siege of his camp in Germany, he made his way to his troops, through the enemy's stations, in a Gaulish dress. He crossed the sea from Brundisium and Dyrrachium, in the winter, through the midst of the enemy's fleets; and the troops, under orders to join him, being slow in their movements, notwithstanding repeated messages to hurry them, but to no purpose, he at last went privately, and alone, aboard a small vessel in the night time, with his head muffled up; nor did he make himself known, or

suffer the master to put about, although the wind blew strong against them, until they were ready to sink.

Velleius Paterculus:

Meanwhile, in Gaul, Gaius Caesar was carrying on his gigantic task, which could scarcely be covered in many volumes. Not content with his many fortunate victories, and with slaying or taking as prisoners countless thousands of the enemy, he even crossed into **Britain**, as though seeking to add another world to our empire and to that which he had himself won. Gnaeus Pompeius and Marcus Crassus, who had once been consuls together, now entered upon their second consulship, which office they not only won by unfair means, but also administered without popular approval. In a law which Pompey proposed in the assembly of the people, Caesar's tenure of office in his provinces was continued for another five years, and Syria was decreed to Crassus, who was now planning to make war upon Parthia. Although Crassus was, in his general character, entirely upright and free from base desires, in his lust for money and his ambition for glory he knew no limits, and accepted no bounds. On his departure for Asia the tribunes of the people made ineffectual efforts to detain him by the announcement of baleful omens. If the curses which they called down upon him had affected Crassus alone, the loss of the commander would not have been without advantage to the state, had but the army been saved. He had crossed the Euphrates and was now marching toward Seleucia when he was surrounded by King Orodes with his innumerable bands of cavalry and perished together with the greater part of his army. Remnants of the legions were saved by Gaius Cassius — (he was later the perpetrator of a most atrocious crime, but was at that time quaestor) — who not only retained Syria in its allegiance to the Roman people, but succeeded, by a fortunate issue of events, in defeating and putting to rout the Parthians when they crossed its borders.

During this period, including the years which immediately followed and those of which mention has already been made, more than four hundred thousand of the enemy were slain by Gaius Caesar and a greater number were taken prisoners. Many times had he fought in pitched battles, many times on the march, many times as besieger or besieged. Twice he penetrated into **Britain**, and in all his nine campaigns there was scarcely one which was not fully deserving of a triumph. His feats about Alesia were of a kind that a mere man would scarcely venture to undertake, and scarcely anyone but a god could carry through.

Eutropius

In the six hundred and ninety-third year from the founding of the city, Caius Julius Caesar, who was afterwards emperor, was made consul with Lucius Bibulus; and Gaul and Illyricum, with ten legions, were decreed to him. He first subdued the Helvetii, who are now called Sequani; and afterwards, by conquering in most formidable wars, proceeded as far as the **British** ocean. In about nine years he subdued all that part of Gaul which lies between the Alps, the river Rhone, the Rhine, and the Ocean, and extends in circumference nearly three thousand two hundred miles. He next made war upon the Britons, to whom not even the name of the Romans was known before his time; and having subdued them, and received hostages, sentenced them to pay a tribute. On Gaul, under the name of tribute, he imposed the yearly sum of forty thousand sestertia; and invading the Germans on the other side of the Rhine, defeated them in several most sanguinary engagements. Among so many successes, he met with three defeats, once in person among the Arverni, and twice in Germany during his absence; for two of his lieutenant-generals, Titurius and Aurunculeius, were cut off by ambuscades.

At no period was the Roman state more flourishing; for, to say nothing of the civil wars, in which he (Octavianus Augustus) was unconquered, he added to the Roman empire Egypt, Cantabria, Dalmatia, often before conquered but only then entirely subdued, Pannonia, Aquitania, Illyricum, Rhaetia, the Vindelici and Salassi on the Alps, and all the maritime cities of Pontus, among which the two most noble were Bosphorus and Panticapaeon. He also conquered the Dacians in battle; put to the sword numerous forces of the Germans; and drove them beyond the river Elbe, which is in the country of the barbarians far beyond the Rhine. This war however he carried on by the agency of his step-son Drusus, as he had conducted the Pannonian war by that of his other step-son Tiberius, in which he transplanted **forty thousand prisoners from Germany**, and settled them in Gaul on the bank of the Rhine. He recovered Armenia from the Parthians; the Persians gave him hostages, which they had given to no one before; and also restored the Roman standards, which they had taken from Crassus when he was defeated.

Cassius Dio

Such was the end of these wars. After this, when the winter had passed in which Cornelius Spinther and Metellus Nepos began their consulship, a third war burst upon them. The Belgae, dwelling near the Rhine with many mingled tribes and extending to the ocean opposite **Britain**, had been during the previous epoch at peace with the Romans so far as concerned a part of their nation, while the rest paid no heed to them: but now, noting

Caesar's prosperity and fearing that he might advance against them, they made a change of front and by common agreement (except on the part of the Remi) took counsel against the Romans and conspired, making Galba their head.

Caesar learned this from the Remi and was on his guard against them: subsequently he encamped at the river Axona, collected his soldiers all together and exercised them. He did not venture to come into close quarters with the enemy, though they were overrunning Roman territory, until they felt contempt for him, thinking him afraid, and undertook to destroy the bridge and put a stop to the conveyance of grain, which the allies brought across it. He was made aware beforehand by deserters that this was to be done, and by night sent against the foe the light-armed troops and the cavalry. So they, unexpectedly assaulting the barbarians, killed many of them, so that the following night they all withdrew thence to their own land, especially since the Aeduans were reported to have invaded it. Caesar perceived what was going on, but through ignorance of the country did not dare to pursue them immediately. At daybreak, however, he took the cavalry, bade the infantry follow behind, and came up with the fugitives. They proceeded to give battle, for he was thought to have come with his cavalry alone, and he delayed them until the infantry arrived. In this way he surrounded them with his whole force, cut down the majority, and made terms with the survivors. Later he brought into allegiance some of the peoples without fighting and some by war.

The Rhine issues from the Celtic Alps, a little outside of Rhaetia, and proceeding westward, with Gaul and its inhabitants on the left, it bounds the Celts on the right, and finally empties into the ocean. This has always, even till now, been considered the boundary, from which they came to the difference in names, since very anciently both the peoples dwelling on each side of the river were called Celts.

Caesar, then, first of Romans crossed the Rhine at this time, and later in the consulship of Pompey and Crassus he traversed the channel of **Britain**. This country is distant from the Belgic mainland, opposite the Morini, three hundred and fifty stades at the shortest computation, and extends alongside the rest of Gaul and nearly all of Spain, reaching out into the sea. To the very first of the Greeks and Romans it was not even known; to their descendants it was a matter of dispute whether it was a continent or an island. And its history was written from both points of view by many who knew nothing about it, because they had not seen with their own eyes nor heard from the natives with their own ears, but

indulged in guesses according as each had leisure or fondness for talk. As time went on, first under Agricola as propraetor and now under Severus as emperor, it has been clearly proven to be an island.

To this land then, Caesar, since he had won over the Morini and the rest of Gaul was quiet, desired to cross. He made the voyage with infantry by the most desirable course, but did not select the best landing-place. For the **Britons**, having ascertained in advance that he was sailing against them, had secured all the landings on the main coast. Accordingly, he sailed around a kind of projecting headland and coasted along on the other side of it. There he disembarked in shoal water, conquered those who joined battle with him and got a footing on dry land before more numerous assistance could come, after which he repulsed their attack also. Not many of the barbarians fell, for they had chariot drivers, and being mounted easily escaped the Romans whose cavalry had not yet arrived; but alarmed at the reports about them from the mainland and because they had dared to cross at all and had managed to set foot upon the land, they sent to Caesar some of the Morini who were friends of theirs, to see about terms of peace. On this occasion he demanded hostages, which they were willing to give.

But as the Romans meanwhile began to encounter difficulties by reason of a storm which damaged their fleet that was present and also the one on the way, they changed their minds and though not attacking the invaders openly (for their camp was strongly guarded), they received some who had been sent out to bring in provisions on the assumption that the country was friendly, and destroyed them all, save a few, to whose rescue Caesar came with speed. After that they assaulted the very camp of the invaders. Here they accomplished nothing, but fared badly; they would not, however, make terms until they had been often defeated. And Caesar properly did not intend to make peace with them, but since the winter was approaching and he was not equipped with a sufficient force to continue fighting at that season,--moreover because his supplies had failed and the Gauls in absence had begun an uprising,--he somewhat unwillingly concluded a truce with them, demanding this time still more hostages, but obtaining only a few.

So he sailed back to the mainland and put an end to the disturbances. From Britain he had won nothing for himself or for the City except the glory of having conducted an expedition against that land. But on this he prided himself greatly and the Romans at home magnified it to a remarkable degree. Seeing that the formerly unknown had become

certain and the previously unheard of accessible, they regarded the hope arising from these facts as already realized and exulted over their expected achievements as if the latter were already within their grasp.

In Cath Catharda: The Civil War of the Romans (Author: [unknown])

Caesar's Hosting in the Island of Britain.

In the six-hundred-and-ninety-third year from the building of Rome by Romulus, and in the sixtieth year before the birth of Christ, Caesar was appointed to the dictatorship by the Romans, with full-many legions of the loveless youths of Italy, at the rough land of Gaul and of the broad-long country of Lochlann, for those are one country save for the intervention of the very pure river Rhine which divides and separates the two lands.

In those countries he fought great battles, and he came forward westward into the territory of the Morini and into the island of **Britain**. Never before had the might of the Romans reached that island. Caesar came to the arm of the sea that is there, and on its brink eighty ships were built by him that he might convey the army in them over it westward into the neighbouring harbours of the territory of **Britain**.

That expedition was not easy for him, for a great storm fell on his fleet, and most of his ships foundered. Moreover the folk of the country slew a multitude of his foot-soldiers, and almost all his cavalry was killed. A huge tempest and the intolerable storm of the rough weather of winter came thereunder, so Caesar turned his hosts and dismissed his soldiers to their winter-quarters. He trusted and enjoined them to build six hundred wide, full-spacious vessels, so that they might be ready for sea on the return of the following spring. They were all made ready, as Caesar said.

During the season of winter he waited in the Alps, and at the beginning of the vernal serenity he came, having a great host from his son-in-law Pompey the Great; and his army was taken in those six hundred ships again to the island of Britain.

That night he himself pitched a camp on the shore of the haven, with his ships at anchor in front of him; and he sent his cavalry to raid the country, with Labienus, a tribune of the Romans, at their head. On that night there came on the sea the movement of a mighty tempest, and the storm struck Caesar's vessels, and sixty of them were shattered so that they could never be repaired. The folk of the country routed the cavalry, and Labienus fell at their hands.

Thereafter Caesar himself encountered the folk of the island of **Britain**. A bloody battle was fought between them: the **Britons** were vanquished: their slaughter was inflicted upon them; and Caesar on that occasion avenged all his people, and ravaged the country

before him up to the river Thames westward. There was a large army of Britons on the banks of that river, awaiting him. Cassivellaunus was the name of their leader. Great rows of sharp spikes were planted by him in the banks of the river on the path by which they desired the Romans to come. Still are seen certain butt-ends of those spikes on the strand in summer, and each of the butts is as thick as a warrior's thigh, and (there are) wraps of lead around them in the deep of the river.

Caesar turned from the ford when he knew of the preparation that was (made) there, and he crossed by another ford on the river, and hunted the host of **Britons**, and took not (his) hands away from them until the shelter of the woods hid them from him.

Then on that night forty hostages were brought to him out of the city called Trinovantum, and thereout came guides, so that after a great contest he took the city of the chief named Cassivellaunus.

Thereafter he conquered the whole of the island of **Britain**, and thence returned to the lands of Gaul.

For the space of five years Caesar was subduing and violently seizing that land of the northwest of the world. And yet there were certain tribes there who were not obedient to him during that time.

VIRGIL The Georgics

Amid my shrine shall Caesar's godhead dwell.
To him will I, as victor, bravely light
In Tyrian purple, drive along the bank
A hundred four-horse cars. All Greece for me,
Leaving Alpheus and Molorchus' grove,
On foot shall strive, or with the raw-hide glove;
Whilst I, my head with stripped green olive crowned,
Will offer gifts. Even 'tis present joy
To lead the high processions to the fane,
And view the victims felled; or how the scene
Sunders with shifted face, and **Britain's** sons
Inwoven thereon with those proud curtains rise.