Beric the Briton - A Story of the Roman Invasion

G. A. Henty

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Author: G. A. Henty

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PREFACE.

MY DEAR LADS,

My series of stories dealing with the wars of England would be altogether incomplete did it not include the period when the Romans were the masters of the country. The valour with which the natives of this island defended themselves was acknowledged by the Roman historians, and it was only the superior discipline of the invaders that enabled them finally to triumph over the bravery and the superior physical strength of the Britons. The Roman conquest for the time was undoubtedly of immense advantage to the people--who had previously wasted their energies in perpetual tribal wars--as it introduced among them the civilization of Rome. In the end, however, it proved disastrous to the islanders, who lost all their military virtues. Having been defended from the savages of the north by the soldiers of Rome, the Britons were, when the legions were recalled, unable to offer any effectual resistance to the Saxons, who, coming under the guise of friendship, speedily became their masters, imposing a yoke infinitely more burdensome than that of Rome, and erasing almost every sign of the civilization that had been engrafted upon them. How far the British population disappeared under the subsequent invasion and the still more oppressive yoke of the Danes is uncertain; but as the invaders would naturally desire to retain the people to cultivate the land for them, it is probable that the great mass of the Britons were not exterminated. It is at any rate pleasant to believe that with the Saxon, Danish, and Norman blood in our veins, there is still a large admixture of that of the valiant warriors who fought so bravely against Caesar, and who rose under Boadicea in a desperate effort to shake off the oppressive rule of Rome.

Yours truly,

G. A. Henty

CHAPTER I: A HOSTAGE

"It is a fair sight."

"It may be a fair sight in a Roman's eyes, Beric, but nought could be fouler to those of a Briton. To me every one of those blocks of brick and stone weighs down and helps to hold in bondage this land of ours; while that temple they have dared to rear to their gods, in celebration of their having conquered Britain, is an insult and a lie. We are not conquered yet, as they will some day know to their cost. We are silent, we wait, but we do not admit that we are conquered."

"I agree with you there. We have never fairly tried our strength against them. These wretched divisions have always prevented our

making an effort to gather; Cassivelaunus and some of the Kentish tribes alone opposed them at their first landing, and he was betrayed and abandoned by the tribes on the north of the Thames. It has been the same thing ever since. We fight piecemeal; and while the Romans hurl their whole strength against one tribe the others look on with folded hands. Who aided the Trinobantes when the Romans defeated them and established themselves on that hill? No one. They will eat Britain up bit by bit."

"Then you like them no better for having lived among them, Beric?"

"I like them more, but I fear them more. One cannot be four years among them, as I was, without seeing that in many respects we might copy them with advantage. They are a great people. Compare their splendid mansions and their regular orderly life, their manners and their ways, with our rough huts, and our feasts, ending as often as not with quarrels and brawls. Look at their arts, their power of turning stone into lifelike figures, and above all, the way in which they can transfer their thoughts to white leaves, so that others, many many years hence, can read them and know all that was passing, and what men thought and did in the long bygone. Truly it is marvellous."

"You are half Romanized, Beric," his companion said roughly.

"I think not," the other said quietly; "I should be worse than a fool had I lived, as I have done, a hostage among them for four years without seeing that there is much to admire, much that we could imitate with advantage, in their life and ways; but there is no reason because they are wiser and far more polished, and in many respects a greater people than we, that they should come here to be our masters. These things are desirable, but they are as nothing to freedom. I have said that I like them more for being among them. I like them more for many reasons. They are grave and courteous in their manner to each other; they obey their own laws; every man has his rights; and while all yield obedience to their superiors, the superiors respect the rights of those below them. The highest among them cannot touch the property or the life of the lowest in rank. All this seems to me excellent; but then, on the other hand, my blood boils in my veins at the contempt in which they hold us; at their greed, their rapacity, their brutality, their denial to us of all rights. In their eyes we are but savages, but wild men, who may be useful for tilling the ground for them, but who, if troublesome, should be hunted down and slain like wild beasts. I admire them for what they can do; I respect them for their power and learning; but I hate them as our oppressors."

"That is better, Beric, much better. I had begun to fear that the grand houses and the splendour of these Romans might have sapped your patriotism. I hate them all; I hate changes; I would live as we have always lived."

"But you forget, Boduoc, that we ourselves have not been standing still. Though our long past forefathers, when they crossed from Gaul wave after wave, were rude warriors, we have been learning ever since from Gaul as the Gauls have learned from the Romans, and the Romans themselves admit that we have advanced greatly since the days when, under their Caesar, they first landed here. Look at the town on the hill there. Though 'tis Roman now 'tis not changed

so much from what it was under that great king Cunobeline, while his people had knowledge of many things of which we and the other tribes of the Iceni knew nothing."

"What good did it do them?" the other asked scornfully; "they lie prostrate under the Roman yoke. It was easy to destroy their towns while we, who have few towns to destroy, live comparatively free. Look across at Camalodunum, Cunobeline's capital. Where are the men who built the houses, who dressed in soft garments, who aped the Romans, and who regarded us as well nigh savage men? Gone every one of them; hewn down on their own hearthstones, or thrust out with their wives and families to wander homeless--is there one left of them in yonder town? Their houses they were so proud of, their cultivated fields, their wealth of all kinds has been seized by the Romans. Did they fight any better for their Roman fashions? Not they; the kingdom of Cunobeline, from the Thames to the western sea, fell to pieces at a touch and it was only among the wild Silures that Caractacus was able to make any great resistance."

"But we did no better, Boduoc; Ostorius crushed us as easily as Claudius crushed the Trinobantes. It is no use our setting ourselves against change. All that you urge against the Trinobantes and the tribes of Kent the Silures might urge with equal force against us. You must remember that we were like them not so many ages back. The intercourse of the Gauls with us on this eastern sea coast, and with the Kentish tribes, has changed us greatly. We are no longer, like the western tribes, mere hunters living in shelters of boughs and roaming the forests. Our dress, with our long mantles, our loose vests and trousers, differs as widely from that of these western tribes as it does from the Romans. We live in towns, and if our houses are rude they are solid. We no longer depend solely on the chase, but till the ground and have our herds of cattle. I daresay there were many of our ancestors who set themselves as much against the Gaulish customs as you do against those of the Romans; but we adopted them, and benefited by them, and though I would exult in seeing the last Roman driven from our land, I should like after their departure to see us adopt what is good and orderly and decent in their customs and laws."

Beric's companion growled a malediction upon everything Roman.

"There is one thing certain," he said after a pause, "either they must go altogether, not only here but everywhere--they must learn, as our ancestors taught them at their two first invasions, that it is hopeless to conquer Britain--or they will end by being absolute masters of the island, and we shall be their servants and slaves."

"That is true enough," Beric agreed; "but to conquer we must be united, and not only united but steadfast. Of course I have learned much of them while I have been with them. I have come to speak their language, and have listened to their talk. It is not only the Romans who are here whom we have to defeat, it is those who will come after them. The power of Rome is great; how great we cannot tell, but it is wonderful and almost inconceivable. They have spread over vast countries, reducing peoples everywhere under their dominion. I have seen what they call maps showing the world as far as they know it, and well nigh all has been conquered by them; but the farther away from Rome the more difficulty have they in holding

what they have conquered.

"That is our hope here; we are very far from Rome. They may send army after army against us, but in time they will get weary of the loss and expense when there is so little to gain, and as after their first invasions a long time elapsed before they again troubled us, so in the end they may abandon a useless enterprise. Even now the Romans grumble at what they call their exile, but they are obstinate and tenacious, and to rid our land of them for good it would be necessary for us not only to be united among ourselves when we rise against them, but to remain so, and to oppose with our whole force the fresh armies they will bring against us.

"You know how great the difficulties will be, Boduoc; we want one great leader whom all the tribes will follow, just as all the Roman legions obey one general; and what chance is there of such a man arising--a man so great, so wise, so brave, that all the tribes of Britain will lay aside their enmities and jealousies, and submit themselves to his absolute guidance?"

"If we wait for that, Beric, we may wait for ever," Boduoc said in a sombre tone, "at any rate it is not while we are tranquil under the Roman heel that such a man could show himself. If he is to come to the front it must be in the day of battle. Then, possibly, one chief may rise so high above his fellows that all may recognize his merits and agree to follow him."

"That is so," Beric agreed; "but is it possible that even the greatest hero should find support from all? Cassivelaunus was betrayed by the Trinobantes. Who could have united the tribes more than the sons of Cunobeline, who reigned over well nigh all Britain, and who was a great king ruling wisely and well, and doing all in his power to raise and advance the people; and yet, when the hour came, the kingdom broke up into pieces. Veric, the chief of the Cantii, went to Rome and invited the invader to aid him against his rivals at home, and not a man of the Iceni or the Brigantes marched to the aid of Caractacus and Togodamnus. What wonder, then, that these were defeated. Worse than all, when Caractacus was driven a fugitive to hide among the Brigantes, did not their queen, Cartismandua, hand him over to the Romans? Where can we hope to find a leader more fitted to unite us than was Caractacus, the son of the king whom we all, at least, recognized and paid tribute to; a prince who had learned wisdom from a wise father, a warrior enterprising, bold, and indomitable--a true patriot?

"If Caractacus could not unite us, what hope is there of finding another who would do so? Moreover, our position is far worse now than it was ten years ago. The Belgae and Dumnonii in the southwest have been crushed after thirty battles; the Dobuni in the centre have been defeated and garrisoned; the Silures have set an example to us all, inflicting many defeats on the Romans; but their power has at last been broken. The Brigantes and ourselves have both been heavily struck, as we deserved, Boduoc, for standing aloof from Caractacus at first. Thus the task of shaking off the Roman bonds is far more difficult now than it was when Plautius landed here twenty years ago. Well, it is time for me to be going on. Won't you come with me, Boduoc?"

"Not I, Beric; I never want to enter their town again save with a

sword in one hand and a torch in the other. It enrages me to see the airs of superiority they give themselves. They scarce seem even to see us as we walk in their streets; and as to the soldiers as they stride along with helmet and shield, my fingers itch to meet them in the forest. No; I promised to walk so far with you, but I go no farther. How long will you be there?"

"Two hours at most, I should say."

"The sun is halfway down, Beric; I will wait for you till it touches that hill over there. Till then you will find me sitting by the first tree at the spot where we left the forest."

Beric nodded and walked on towards the town. The lad, for he was not yet sixteen, was the son of Parta, the chieftainess of one of the divisions of the great tribe of the Iceni, who occupied the tract of country now known as Suffolk, Norfolk, Cambridge, and Huntingdon. This tribe had yielded but a nominal allegiance to Cunobeline, and had held aloof during the struggle between Caractacus and the Romans, but when the latter had attempted to establish forts in their country they had taken up arms. Ostorius Scapula, the Roman proprietor, had marched against them and defeated them with great slaughter, and they had submitted to the Roman authority. The Sarci, the division of the tribe to which Beric belonged, had taken a leading part in the rising, and his father had fallen in the defence of their intrenchments.

Among the British tribes the women ranked with the men, and even when married the wife was often the acknowledged chief of the tribe. Parta had held an equal authority with her husband, and at his death remained sole head of the subtribe, and in order to ensure its obedience in the future, Ostorius had insisted that her only son Beric, at that time a boy of eleven, should be handed over to them as a hostage.

Had Parta consulted her own wishes she would have retired with a few followers to the swamps and fens of the country to the north rather than surrender her son, but the Brigantes, who inhabited Lincolnshire, and who ranged over the whole of the north of Britain as far as Northumberland, had also received a defeat at the hands of the Romans, and might not improbably hand her over upon their demand. She therefore resigned herself to let Beric go.

"My son," she said, "I need not tell you not to let them Romanize you. You have been brought up to hate them. Your father has fallen before their weapons, half your tribe have been slain, your country lies under their feet. I will not wrong you then by fearing for a moment that they can make a Roman of you.

"You have been brought up to lie upon the bare ground, to suffer fatigue and hardship, hunger and thirst, and the rich food and splendid houses and soft raiment of the Romans should have no attraction for you. I know not how long your imprisonment among them may last. For the present I have little hope of another rising; but should I see a prospect of anything like unity among our people, I will send Boduoc with a message to you to hold yourself in readiness to escape when you receive the signal that the time has come. Till then employ your mind in gaining what good you may by your residence among them; there must be some advantage in their methods of warfare

which has enabled the people of one city to conquer the world.

"It is not their strength, for they are but pigmies to us. We stand a full head above them, and even we women are stronger than Roman soldiers, and yet they defeat us. Learn then their language, throw your whole mind into that at first, then study their military discipline and their laws. It must be the last as much as their discipline that has made them rulers over so vast an empire. Find out if you can the secret of their rule, and study the training by which their soldiers move and fight as if bound together by a cord, forming massive walls against which we break ourselves in vain. Heed not their arts, pay no attention to their luxuries, these did Cunobeline no good, and did not for a day delay the destruction that fell upon his kingdom. What we need is first a knowledge of their military tactics, so that we may drive them from the land; secondly, a knowledge of their laws, that we may rule ourselves wisely after they have gone. What there is good in the rest may come in time.

"However kind they may be to you, bear always in mind that you are but a prisoner among the oppressors of your country, and that though, for reasons of policy, they may treat you well, yet that they mercilessly despoil and ill treat your countrymen. Remember too, Beric, that the Britons, now that Caractacus has been sent a prisoner to Rome, need a leader, one who is not only brave and valiant in the fight, but who can teach the people how to march to victory, and can order and rule them well afterwards. We are part of one of our greatest tribes, and from among us, if anywhere, such a leader should come.

"I have great hopes of you, Beric. I know that you are brave, for single handed you slew with an arrow a great wolf the other day; but bravery is common to all, I do not think that there is a coward in the tribe. I believe you are intelligent. I consulted the old Druid in the forest last week, and he prophesied a high destiny for you; and when the messenger brought the Roman summons for me to deliver you up as a hostage, it seemed to me that this was of all things the one that would fit you best for future rule. I am not ambitious for you, Beric. It would be nought to me if you were king of all the Britons. It is of our country that I think. We need a great leader, and my prayer to the gods is that one may be found. If you should be the man so much the better; but if not, let it be another. Comport yourself among them independently, as one who will some day be chief of a British tribe, but be not sullen or obstinate. Mix freely with them, learn their language, gather what are the laws under which they live, see how they build those wonderful houses of theirs, watch the soldiers at their exercises, so that when you return among us you can train the Sarci to fight in a similar manner. Keep the one purpose always in your mind. Exercise your muscles daily, for among us no man can lead who is not as strong and as brave as the best who follow him. Bear yourself so that you shall be in good favour with all men."

Beric had, to the best of his power, carried out the instructions of his mother. It was the object of the Romans always to win over their adversaries if possible, and the boy had no reason to complain of his treatment. He was placed in the charge of Caius Muro, commander of a legion, and a slave was at once appointed to teach him Latin. He took his meals with the scribe and steward of the

household, for Caius was of noble family, of considerable wealth, and his house was one of the finest in Camalodunum. He was a kindly and just man, and much beloved by his troops. As soon as Beric had learned the language, Caius ordered the scribe to teach him the elements of Roman law, and a decurion was ordered to take him in hand and instruct him in arms.

As Beric was alike eager to study and to exercise in arms, he gained the approval of both his teachers. Julia, the wife of Caius, a kindly lady, took a great fancy to the boy. "He will make a fine man, Caius," she said one day when the boy was fourteen years old. "See how handsome and strong he is; why, Scipio, the son of the centurion Metellus, is older by two years, and yet he is less strong than this young Briton."

"They are a fine race, Julia, though in disposition as fierce as wild cats, and not to be trusted. But the lad is, as you say, strong and nimble. I marked him practising with the sword the other day against Lucinus, who is a stout soldier, and the man had as much as he could do to hold his own against him. I was surprised myself to see how well he wielded a sword of full weight, and how active he was. The contest reminded me of a dog and a wild cat, so nimble were the boy's springs, and so fierce his attacks. Lucinus fairly lost his temper at last, and I stopped the fight, for although they fought with blunted weapons, he might well have injured the lad badly with a downright cut, and that would have meant trouble with the Iceni again."

"He is intelligent, too," Julia replied. "Sometimes I have him in while I am working with the two slave girls, and he will stand for hours asking me questions about Rome, and about our manners and customs."

"One is never sure of these tamed wolves," Caius said; "sometimes they turn out valuable allies and assistants, at other times they grow into formidable foes, all the more dangerous for what they have learned of us. However, do with him as you like, Julia; a woman has a lighter hand than a man, and you are more likely to tame him than we are. Cneius says that he is very eager to learn, and has ever a book in his hand when not practising in arms."

"What I like most in him," Julia said, "is that he is very fond of our little Berenice. The child has taken to him wonderfully, and of an afternoon, when he has finished with Cneius, she often goes out with him. Of course old Lucia goes with them. It is funny to hear them on a wet day, when they cannot go out, talking together --she telling him stories of Rome and of our kings and consuls, and he telling her tales of hunting the wolf and wild boar, and legends of his people, who seem to have been always at war with someone."

After Beric had resided for three years and a half at Camalodunum a great grief fell on the family of Caius Muro, for the damp airs from the valley had long affected Julia and she gradually faded and died. Beric felt the loss very keenly, for she had been uniformly kind to him. A year later Suetonius and the governor of the colony decided that as the Sarci had now been quiet for nearly five years, and as Caius reported that their young chief seemed to have become thoroughly Romanized, he was permitted to return to his tribe.

The present was his first visit to the colony since he had left it four months before. His companion, Boduoc, was one of the tribesmen, a young man six years his senior. He was related to his mother, and had been his companion in his childish days, teaching him woodcraft, and to throw the javelin and use the sword. Together, before Beric went as hostage, they had wandered through the forest and hunted the wolf and wild boar, and at that time Boduoc had stood in the relation of an elder brother to Beric. That relation had now much changed. Although Boduoc was a powerful young man and Beric but a sturdy stripling, the former was little better than an untutored savage, and he looked with great respect upon Beric both as his chief and as possessing knowledge that seemed to him to be amazing.

Hating the Romans blindly he had trembled lest he should find Beric on his return completely Romanized. He had many times, during the lad's stay at Camalodunum, carried messages to him there from his mother, and had sorrowfully shaken his head on his way back through the forest as he thought of his young chief's surroundings. Beric had partially adopted the Roman costume, and to hear him talking and jesting in their own language to the occupants of the mansion, whose grandeur and appointments filled Boduoc with an almost superstitious fear, was terrible to him. However, his loyalty to Beric prevented him from breathing a word in the tribe as to his fears, and he was delighted to find the young chief return home in British garb, and to discover that although his views of the Romans differed widely from his own, he was still British at heart, and held firmly the opinion that the only hope for the freedom of Britain was the entire expulsion of the invaders.

He was gratified to find that Beric had become by no means what he considered effeminate. He was built strongly and massively, as might be expected from such parents, and was of the true British type, that had so surprised the Romans at their first coming among them, possessing great height and muscular power, together with an activity promoted by constant exercise.

Beric had fallen back upon the customs of his people as thoroughly as if he had never dwelt in the stately Roman town. He was as ready as before to undertake the longest hunting expeditions, to sleep in the forest, to go from sunrise to sunset without breaking his fast. When not engaged in hunting he practised incessantly hurling the javelin and other warlike exercises, while of an evening he frequently related stories of Roman history to any chiefs or other guests of his mother, on which occasions the humbler followers would gather thickly in the background, evincing an interest even greater than that which they felt in the songs and legends of the bards.

Beric generally chose stories relating to periods when Rome was hardly pressed by her foes, showing how the intense feeling of patriotism, and the obstinate determination to resist, in spite of all dangers, upon the part of the population, and the discipline and dogged valour of the soldiers, saved her from destruction. He was cautious to draw no parallel openly to the case of Britain. He knew that the Romans were made acquainted, by traitors in their pay, with much that passed among the native tribes, and that at first they were sure to interest themselves in his proceedings. At present there could be no thought of a rising, and the slightest

sign of disaffection might bring disaster and ruin upon his tribe. Only when some unexpected event, some invasion of the rights of the Britons even more flagrant than those that had hitherto taken place, should stir the smouldering fire of discontent, and fan it into a fierce flame of revolt from end to end of Britain, could success be hoped for.

No Roman could have found fault with Beric's relation of their prowess or their valour; for he held them up to the admiration of his hearers. "No wonder Rome is great and powerful," he said, "when its people evince so deep a love of country, so resolute a determination in the face of their enemies, so unconquerable a spirit when misfortune weighs upon them."

To the men he addressed all this was new. It was true that a few princes and chiefs had visited Rome, occasionally as travellers desiring to see the centre of her greatness, more often as exiles driven from Britain by defeat in civil strife, but these had only brought back great tales of Rome's magnificence, and the Britons knew nothing of the history of the invaders, and eagerly listened to the stories that Beric had learned from their books in the course of his studies. The report of his stories spread so far that visits were paid to the village of Parta by chiefs and leading men from other sections of the Iceni to listen to them.

Oratory was among the Britons, as among most primitive tribes, highly prized and much cultivated. Oral tradition among such peoples takes the place of books among civilized nations. Story and legend are handed down from father to son, and the wandering bard is a most welcome guest. Next only to valour oratory sways and influences the minds of the people, and a Ulysses had greater influence than an Ajax. From his earliest childhood Beric had listened to the stories and legends told by bards in the rough palace of his father, and his sole schooling before he went to Camalodunum had been to learn these by heart, and to repeat them with due emphasis and appropriate gesture. His father had been one of the most eloquent and influential of the chiefs of the Iceni, and had early impressed upon him the importance of cultivating the power of speech.

His studies in Roman history, too, had taught him the power exercised by men with the gift of moving multitudes by their words; he had learned from books how clearly and distinctly events could be described by a careful choice of words, and attention to form and expression, so that almost unconsciously to himself he had practised the art in his relations of the tales and legends of British history to Berenice and her mother. Thus, then, the manner no less than the matter of his recitals of Roman story, gained him a high estimation among his hearers, and he was already looked upon as a young chief likely to rise to a very high position among the Iceni. Among the common herd his glowing laudations of Roman patriotism, devotion, and sacrifice, caused him to be regarded with disfavour, and the epithet "the Roman" was frequently applied to him. But the wiser spirits saw the hidden meaning of his stories, and that, while holding up the Romans as an example, he was endeavouring to teach how much can be done by patriotism, by a spirit of self sacrifice, and by unity against a common foe. Parta was also proud of the congratulations that distinguished chiefs, famed for their wisdom throughout the tribe, offered to her on the occasion of their visits.

"Beric will be a great chief," one of the wisest of these said to her; "truly his sojourn among the Romans has done great things for him. It would be well, indeed, if every noble youth throughout the island were to have such schooling, if he had your son's wit in taking advantage of it. He will be a great orator; never among our bards have I heard narrations so clear and so well delivered; although the deeds he praises are those of our oppressors, one cannot but feel a thrill of enthusiasm as he tells them. Yea, for the moment I myself felt half a Roman when he told us of the brave youth who thrust his hand into the flames, and suffered it to be consumed in order to impress the invader with a knowledge of the spirit that animated the Romans, and of the three men who held against a host the bridge that their friends were breaking down behind them.

"If he could stir me thus by his tales of the deeds of our enemies, what will it be when some day he makes the heroes of Britain his theme, and calls upon his countrymen to imitate their deeds! I have heard him called 'the Roman,' Parta. Now that I have listened to him I know that he will, when the time comes, be one of Rome's most formidable foes. I will tell you now that Prasutagus, our king, and his queen Boadicea, spoke to me about Beric, and begged me to come hither to see for myself this youth of whom they had heard reports from others, some saying that he had returned a Roman heart and soul, while others affirmed that, while he had learned much from them, he had forgotten nothing of the injuries he had received at their hands in the death of his father, and the disaster of the tribe. I shall know now what to tell them. To Prasutagus, whose fear of the Romans is even greater than his hatred for them, I shall say that the lad is full of the glories of Roman story, and that there is no fear of his doing or saying aught that will excite the anger or suspicion of the Romans. To Boadicea, who hates the Romans far more than she fears them, I shall tell the truth, and shall inform her that when the time comes, as assuredly it some day will, that the Iceni are called upon to defend their liberties against Rome, in Beric she will find a champion of whom I predict that he will be worthy to take his place in our history by the side of Caractacus and Cassivelaunus. May our gods avert that, like them, he fall a victim to British treachery!"

After leaving Boduoc, Beric crossed the bridge built by the Romans over the Stour, and entered the city. Camalodunum was the chief seat of the Roman power in England. Although but so short a time had elapsed since Claudius had occupied it, it was already a large city. A comparatively small proportion, however, was Roman work, but all bore the impress of Roman art and civilization, for Cunobeline, whose capital it had been, was a highly enlightened king, and had introduced Roman ways and methods among his people. Men instructed in their arts and architecture had been largely employed in the building of the town, and its edifices would have borne comparison with those in minor towns in the Roman provinces.

The conquerors, therefore, found much of their work done for them. The original possessors of the houses and of the highly cultivated lands lying round the town were ejected wholesale, and the Romans, establishing themselves in their abodes and farms, then proceeded to add to, embellish, and fortify the town. The 2nd, 9th, and 14th Legions were selected by Claudius to found what was called the

colony, and to take possession of the surrounding country. Plautius was appointed propraetor, or governor, and establishing himself in the royal palace of Cunobeline, his first step was to protect the city from renewed attacks by the Britons. He accordingly erected vast works to the westward of the town, extending from the sea to the river, by which means he not only protected the city from attack, but gained, in case of an assault by overpowering numbers, the means of retiring safely to Mersea Island, lying a short distance from the shore.

A council house and a tribunal were erected for the Roman magistrates; temples, a theatre, and baths raised. The civilian population increased rapidly. Architects, artists, and musicians, decorators, skilled artisans, and traders were attracted from the mainland to the rising city, which rapidly increased in wealth and importance. Conspicuous on the most elevated position stood a temple erected to the honour of Claudius, who was raised by the grateful legionaries to divine rank. So strong and populous was the city that the Trinobantes, during the years that had elapsed since the Romans took possession of it, remained passive under the yoke of their oppressors, and watched, without attempting to take part in them, the rising of the Iceni and Brigantes, the long and desperate war of the Silures and Ordovices under Caractacus, and the reduction of the Belgae and Dumnonii from Hampshire to Cornwall by Vespasian. Yet, had their spirit remained unbroken, there was an opportunity for revenge, for a large part of the veteran legionaries had been withdrawn to take part in the struggle against the western tribes. The tribe had, however, been disarmed, and with Camalodunum on the north, and the rising towns of London and Verulamium on the south, they were cut off from other tribes, and could not hope for final success, unless the powerful Iceni, who were still semi-independent, rose in the national cause. Whether their easy defeat of this tribe soon after the occupation of Camalodunum had rendered the Romans contemptuous of their fighting powers, or that they deemed it wiser to subdue the southwest and west of England, and to strike a heavy blow at the Brigantes to the north before interfering with a powerful tribe so close to their doors, is uncertain; but doubtless they felt that so long as Prasutagus reigned there was little fear of trouble in that quarter, as that king protested himself the friend and ally of Rome, and occupied himself wholly in acquiring wealth and adding to his personal possessions.

The scene in Camalodunum was a familiar one to Beric. The streets were thronged with people. Traders from Gaul and Italy, Roman artisans and workmen, haughty legionaries with shield and helmet, civil officials, Greek players, artists and decorators, native tribesmen, with the products of their fields or the spoils of the chase, walking with humble mien; and shopkeepers sitting at the open fronts of their houses, while their slaves called the attention of passersby to the merits of the goods. Here were the rich products of Eastern looms, there the cloths and linen of Rome, further on a smith's shop in full work, beyond that a silversmith's, next door to which was a thriving trader who sold unguents and perfumes, dyes for the ladies' cheeks and pigments for their eyebrows, dainty requisites for the toilette, and perfumed soap. Bakers and butchers, vendors of fish and game, of fruit, of Eastern spices and flavourings abounded.

Druggists and dealers in dyes for clothing and in the pigments used

in wall decorations and paintings were also to be found; and, in fact, this Roman capital of a scarcely subjugated country contained all the appliances for luxury and comfort that could be found in the cities of the civilized provinces.

The only shops at which Beric paused were those of the armourers and of the scribes, at some of which were exhibited vellums with the writings of the Greek and Roman poets and historians; and Beric muttered to himself, "If I am ever present at the sack of Camalodunum these shall be my share of the spoil, and I fancy that no one is likely to dispute their possession with me."

But he did not linger long. Boduoc would be waiting for him, and he could not hurry over his visit, the first he had paid since his absence; therefore he pushed on, with scarce a glance at the stately temple of Claudius, the magnificent baths or other public buildings, until he arrived at the villa of Caius Muro, which stood somewhat beyond the more crowded part of the town.

CHAPTER II: CITY AND FOREST

The house of Caius Muro had been built six years before on the model of one owned by him in the Tuscan hills. Passing through the hall or vestibule, with its mosaic pavement, on which was the word of welcome, "Salve!" Beric entered the atrium, the principal apartment in the house. From each side, at a height of some twenty feet from the ground, extended a roof, the fall being slightly to the centre, where there was an aperture of about eight feet square. Through this light and air made their way down to the apartment, the rainfall from the roofs and opening falling into a marble tank, called the impluvium, below the level of the floor, which was paved with squares of coloured marble. On either side of the atrium were the small sleeping chambers, the bed places being raised and covered with thick mats and rugs.

The walls of the bed chambers as well as of the atrium were painted in black, with figures and landscapes in colour. On the centre of the side facing the vestibule was the tablinum, the apartment of Caius Muro himself. This formed his sitting room and study. The floor was raised about a foot above that of the atrium, and it was partly open both on that side and on the other, looking into the peristylium, so that, while at work, he commanded a view of all that was going on in the atrium and in the courtyard. In the centre of this was a fountain surrounded by plants. From the courtyard opened the triclinium, or dining room, and also rooms used as storerooms, kitchen, and the sleeping places of the slaves.

At the back of the peristylium was the oecus, or state apartment, where Caius received distinguished guests, and where, in the lifetime of Julia, entertainments were given to the ladies of the colony. Like the triclinium, this room was also partially open at both ends, affording the guests a view of the graceful fountain on the one side and of the garden on the other. In winter wooden frames, with heavy hangings, were erected across these openings and that of the tablinum, for the Romans soon found the necessity

for modifying the arrangements which, although well suited for an Italian climate, were wholly unfit for that of Britain. The opening in the centre of the atrium was then closed with an awning of oiled canvas, which admitted a certain amount of light to pass, but prevented the passage of rain and snow, and kept out much of the cold. There was a narrow passage between the atrium and the peristylium; this was called the fauces. Above the chambers round the atrium was a second story, approached by a staircase from the peristylium; here were the apartments of the ladies and of the female slaves.

As Beric entered the atrium, a man, who was reading a roll of parchment, rose to his feet.

"Welcome, Beric!" he said warmly.

"All hail, preceptor!" the lad replied. "Are all well here?"

"All well, Beric. We had looked to see you before, and Berenice has been constantly asking me when you were coming."

"I had been absent over four years, you see," Beric replied, "and it was not easy to get away from home again. Now I must speak to Caius." He crossed the apartment, and stood at the entrance to the tablinum. Caius looked up from a military treatise he was perusing.

"Ah, Beric! it is you! I am glad to see you again, though I am sorry to observe that you have abandoned our fashions and taken to the native garb again."

"It was necessary, Caius," Beric said. "I should have lost all influence with the tribe had I not laid aside my Roman dress. As it is, they regard me with some doubt, as one too enamoured of Roman customs."

"We have heard of you, Beric, and, indeed, report says that you speak well of us, and are already famous for your relations of our history."

"I thought it well that my countrymen should know your great deeds," Beric said, "and should see by what means you have come to rule the world. I received nought but kindness at your hands, and no prisoner's lot was ever made more easy than mine. To you and yours I am deeply grateful. If your people all behaved as kindly towards the natives of this country as you did to me, Britain would be conquered without need of drawing sword from scabbard."

"I know not that, Beric; to rule, one should be strong as well as kind. Still, as you know, I think that things might have been arranged far less harshly than they have been. It was needful that we should show ourselves to be masters; but I regret the harshness that has been too often used, and I would that not one of us here, from the governor down to the poorest soldier, was influenced by a desire for gain, but that each was animated, as he assuredly should be, only by a desire to uphold the glory and power of Rome. But that would be expecting too much from human nature, and even among you there are plenty ready to side against their countrymen for the sake of Roman gold. In that they have less excuse than we. Custom and habit have made our wants many, and all aim at attaining the

luxuries of the rich. On the other hand, your wants are few, and I see not that the piling up of wealth adds in any way to your happiness."

"That is true, Caius. I quite agree with you that it is far more excusable for a Roman to covet wealth than for a Briton; and while I blame many officials and soldiers for the harshness with which they strive to wring all their possessions from my countrymen, I deem their conduct as worthy and honourable when compared with that of Britons who sell their country for your gold."

"We must take the world as we find it, Beric. We may regret that greed and the love of luxury should influence men, as we may grieve that they are victims of other base passions; but it is of no use quarrelling with human nature. Certain it is that all vices bring their own punishment, and that the Romans were a far nobler race when they were poor and simple, in the days of the early consuls, than they are now, with all their power, their riches, and their luxuries. Such is the history of all peoples--of Egypt, of Persia, of Greece, and Carthage; and methinks that Rome, too, will run the course of other nations, and that some day, far distant maybe, she will sink beneath the weight of her power and her luxury, and that some younger and more vigorous people will, bit by bit, wrest her dominions from her and rule in her place.

"As yet, happily, I see no signs of failing in her powers. She is still vigorous, and even in the distant outskirts of the empire the wave of conquest flows onward. Happily for us, I think, it can flow no farther this way; there is but one island beyond this to conquer, and then, as in Western Gaul and Iberia, the ocean says to Rome, 'Thou shalt go no farther.' Would that to the south, the east, and north a similar barrier checked our progress, then we could rest and be content, and need no longer waste our strength in fresh conquests, or in opposing the incursions of hordes of barbarians from regions unknown to us even by report. I could wish myself, Beric, that nature had placed your island five days' sail from the coasts of Gaul, instead of placing it within sight. Then I might have been enjoying life in my villa among the Tuscan hills with my daughter, instead of being exposed at any moment to march with the Legion against the savage mountaineers of the west. Ah! here comes Berenice," he broke off, as his daughter, attended by her old nurse, entered the atrium from the vestibule. She hastened her steps as she saw Beric standing before her father in the tablinum.

"I knew you would come back, Beric, because you promised me; but you have been a long time in keeping your word."

"I am not my own master at home, any more than I was here, Berenice," he said, "and my mother would not hear before of my leaving her. I have only come now for an hour's visit, to see that all goes well in this house, and to tell you that I had not forgotten my promise; the next time I hope to pay a longer visit. At daybreak tomorrow we have a party to hunt the wolves, which have so multiplied as to become a danger in the forests of late."

"I should like to go out to see a wolf hunt, Beric."

"I fear that would not be possible," he said; "the woods are thick and tangled, and we have to force our way through to get to their

lair."

"But last winter they came close to the town, and I heard that some came even into the streets."

"Yes, they will do so when driven by hunger; but they were hunting then and not being hunted. No, Berenice, I fear that your wish to see a wolf hunt cannot be gratified; they are savage beasts, and are great trouble and no loss to us. In winter they carry off many children, and sometimes devour grown up people, and in times of long snow have been known to attack large parties, and, in spite of a stout resistance by the men, to devour them. In summer they are only met singly, but in winter they go in packs and kill numbers of our cattle."

"I should like to go into the woods," the girl said earnestly, "I am tired of this town. My father says he will take me with him some day when he goes west, but so far I have seen nothing except this town and Verulamium, and the country was all just as it is here, fields and cultivation. We could see the forests in the distance, but that was all. My father says, that if we went west, we should travel for miles through the forest and should sleep in tents, but that we cannot do it till everything is quiet and peaceful. Oh, Beric! I do wish the Britons would not be always fighting."

Beric smiled. "The British girls, Berenice, say they wish the Romans would not be always fighting."

"It is very troublesome," she said pettishly. "I should like everyone to be friends, and then there would be no need to have so many soldiers in Britain, and perhaps the emperor would order our legions home. Father says that we ought to look upon this as home now, for that the legion may remain here for years and years; but he said the other day that he thought that if everything was quiet here he should, when I am sixteen years old, obtain leave from the governor, and go back to Rome for two or three years, and I think, though he has not said so outright, that he will perhaps retire and settle there."

"It would be much the best for you," Beric said earnestly. "I should be sorry, because you have been very kind to me, and I should grieve were you to leave me altogether; but there may be trouble here again some day, and I think it would be far better for you to be back in Rome, where you would have all the pleasures and delights of the great capital, and live in ease and comfort, without the risk of your father having to march away to the wars. I know that if I were your father I would take you back. He says that his villa there is exactly like this, and you have many relations there, and there must be all sorts of pleasures and grand spectacles far beyond anything there is here. I am sure it would be better for you, and happier."

"I thought that you would be quite sorry," she said gravely.

"So I shall be very sorry for myself," Beric said; "as, next to my own mother, there is no one I care for so much as you and your father. I shall miss you terribly; but yet I am so sure that it would be best for you to be at home with your own people, that I should be glad to hear that your father was going to take you back

to Rome."

But Berenice did not altogether accept the explanation. She felt really hurt that Beric should view even the possibility of her going away with equanimity, and she very shortly went off to her own apartment; while a few minutes later, Beric, after bidding goodbye to Caius, started to rejoin Boduoc, whom he found waiting at the edge of the forest.

That evening Berenice said to her father, "I was angry with Beric today, father."

"Were you, child? what about?"

"I told him that perhaps in another three years, when I was sixteen, you would take me to Rome, and that I thought, perhaps, if we went there you would not come back again; and instead of being very much grieved, as I thought he would, he seemed quite pleased at the idea. Of course he said he was sorry, but he did not really seem to be, and he says he thought it would be very much better for me. I thought he was grateful, father, and liked us very much, and now I am quite disappointed in him."

Caius was silent for a minute or two.

"I do not think Beric is ungrateful," he said, "and I am sure that he likes us, Berenice."

"He said he did, father, that he cared for us more than anyone except his mother; but if he cared for us, surely he would be very, very sorry for us to go away."

"Beric is a Briton, my dear, and we are Romans. By this time he must have thoroughly learned his people's feelings towards us. I have never believed, as some do, that Britain is as yet completely conquered, and that when we have finished with the Silures in the west our work will be completely done.

"Beric, who knows his countrymen, may feel this even more strongly than I do, and may know that, sooner or later, there will be another great effort on the part of the Britons to drive us out. It may be a year, and it may be twenty, but I believe myself that some day we shall have a fierce struggle to maintain our hold here, and Beric, who may see this also, and who knows the feeling of his countrymen, may wish that we should be away before the storm comes.

"There is but little doubt, Berenice, that we despise these people too much, still less that we treat them harshly and cruelly. Were I propraetor of Britain, I would rule them differently. I am but the commander of a legion, and my duty is but to rule my men. I would punish, and punish sternly, all attempts at rising; but I would give them no causes for discontent. We treat them as if their spirit were altogether broken, as if they and their possessions were but our chattels, as if they possessed no rights, not even the right to live. Some day we shall find our mistake, and when the time comes the awakening will be a rude one. It is partly because I see dimly the storm gathering in the distance that I long to be home again. As long as your mother lived this seemed a home to me, now I desire rest and quiet. I have done my share of fighting, I have won honour

enough, and I may look before long to be a general; but I have had enough of it, and long for my quiet villa in the Alban hills, with an occasional visit to Rome, where you can take part in its gaieties, and I can have the use of the libraries stored with the learning of the world. So do not think harshly of Beric, my child; he may see the distant storm more plainly than I do. I am sure that he cares for us, and if he is glad at the news that we are going, it is because he wishes us away and in safety before the trouble comes.

"Nero has come to the imperial throne, and the men he is sending hither are of a widely different stamp from the lieutenants of Claudius. The latter knew that the Britons can fight, and that, wild and untutored as they are, it needed all the skill and courage of Ostorius and Vespasian to reduce them to order. The newcomers regard them as slaves to be trampled upon, robbed, and ill used as they choose. I am sure they will find their mistake. As long as they deal only with the tribes thoroughly subdued, the Trinobantes, the Cantii, the Be1gae, and the Dumnonii, all may be quiet; they dare not move. But the Iceni and Brigantes, although they both have felt the weight of our swords, are still partly independent, and if pressed too severely will assuredly revolt, and if they give the signal all Britain may be up in arms again. I am scoffed at if I venture to hint to these newcomers that there is life yet in Britain. Dwelling here in a Roman city, it seems to them absurd that there can be danger from the savages who roam in the forests that stretch away from beyond the river at our very feet to the far distant north, to regions of which we are absolutely ignorant. I regard what Beric has said as another warning."

"But I thought that Beric was our friend, father, and you told me you had heard that he was teaching his countrymen how great is our history."

"Beric is a Briton in the midst of Britons, child. He is a partially tamed wolf cub, and had he been sent to Rome and remained there he would have done credit to our teaching. He is fond of study, and at the same time fond of arms; he might have turned out a wise citizen or a valiant soldier. But this was not done. He has gone back again among the wolves, and whatever his feelings towards us personally may be, he must side with his own people. Did they suspect him of being Roman at heart they would tear him in pieces. I believe that as he knows our strength, and that in the end we must conquer, his influence will always be on the side of peace; but if arms are taken up he will have no choice but to side with his countrymen, and should it be another ten years before the cloud bursts, he may be one of our most formidable opponents. Don't blame him, child; he only shows his regard for you, by wishing you back safely in Rome before trouble arises."

"You are just in time, Beric," Boduoc said as the young chief joined him. "The sun is but a hand's breadth above that hill. Here are your spear and sword where you hid them, though why you should have done it I know not, seeing that they have not yet ventured to order us to disarm."

"And if they did we should not obey them, Boduoc; but as the Trinobantes have long been forbidden to carry arms, it might have caused trouble had I gone armed into the town, and we don't want

trouble at present. I went on a peaceful visit, and there was no occasion for me to carry my weapons. But give me a piece of that deer flesh and an oaten cake; we have a long march before us."

"Why, did you not eat with them?"

"No. I was, of course, invited, but I had but a short time to stop and did not wish it to seem as if I had come for a taste of Roman dainties again."

As soon as the meal was eaten they set out. It was but a track through the forest, for although the trees had been cleared away for a width of twenty feet there was but little traffic, for the road was seldom traversed, save by an occasional messenger from Prasutagus. It had been used by the legions at the time that Ostorius had built a line of forts stretching from the Nen to the Severn, and by it they had advanced when the Iceni had risen; but from that time it had been unused by them, as the Iceni had paid their tribute regularly, and held aloof from all hostile movements against them. Prasutagus was always profuse in his assurance of friendship towards Rome, and save that the Roman officers visited his capital once a year to receive their tribute, they troubled but little about the Iceni, having their hands occupied by their wars in the south and west, while their main road to the north ran far to the west of Camalodunum.

"We shall arrive about midnight," Beric said as they strode along.

"We may or we may not," Boduoc said curtly.

"What is to prevent us, Boduoc?"

"Well, the wolves may prevent us, Beric; we heard them howling several times as we came along this morning. The rapacious brutes have not been so bold for years, and it is high time that we hunted them down, or at any rate made our part of the country too hot to hold them. I told Borgon before I started that if we did not return by an hour after midnight it would be because we had been obliged to take to a tree, and that he had better bring out a party at the first break of day to rescue us."

"But we have never had any trouble of that kind while we have been hunting, Boduoc."

"No; but I think there must have been some great hunts up in Norfolk, and that the brutes have come south. Certain it is that there have in the last week been great complaints of them, and, as you know, it was for that reason that your mother ordered all the men of the tribe to assemble by tomorrow morning to make war against them. The people in the farms and villages are afraid to stay out after nightfall. No man with arms in his hands fears a wolf, or even two or three of them, in the daytime; but when they are in packs they are formidable assailants, even to a strong party. Things are getting as bad now as they were twenty years ago. My father has told me that during one hard winter they destroyed full half our herds, and that hundreds of people were devoured by them. They had to erect stockades round the villages and drive in all the cattle, and half the men kept guard by turns, keeping great fires alight to frighten them away. When we have cleared the land of those two

legged wolves the Romans, we shall have to make a general war upon them, for truly they are becoming a perfect scourge to the land. It is not like the wild boar, of which there might with advantage be more, for they do but little harm, getting their food for the most part in the woods, and furnishing us with good eating as well as good sport. But the wolves give us nothing in return, and save for the sport no one would trouble to hunt them; and it is only by a general order for their destruction, or by the offer of a reward for their heads, that we shall get rid of them."

"Well, let us press on, Boduoc. I would not that anything should occur to prevent us starting with the rest in the morning."

"We are walking a good pace now," Boduoc said, "and shall gain but little by going faster. One cannot run for six hours; and besides it is as much as we can do to walk fast in the dark. Did we try to run we should like enough fall over a stump or root, and maybe not arrive there even though the wolves stopped us not."

For two hours more they strode along. Boduoc's eyes had been trained by many a long night spent among the woods, and dark as it was beneath the overarching trees, he was able to discern objects around him, and kept along in his regular stride as surely and almost as noiselessly as a wild beast; but the four years spent in the Roman town had impaired Beric's nocturnal vision; and though he had done much hunting since his return home, he was far from being able to use his eyes as his companion did, and he more than once stumbled over the roots that crossed the path.

"You will be on your head presently," Boduoc growled.

"It is all very well for you, Boduoc, who have the eyes of a cat; but you must remember we are travelling in the dark, and although I can make out the trunks on either hand the ground is all black to me, and I am walking quite at hazard."

"It is not what I should call a light night," Boduoc admitted.

"Well, no, considering that there is no moon, and that the clouds that were rising when the sun went down have overspread all the sky. I don't see that it could well be darker."

"Well we will stop at that hut in the little clearing, somewhere about half a mile on, and get a couple of torches. If you were to fall and twist your foot you would not be able to hunt tomorrow."

"What is that?" Beric exclaimed as a distant cry came to their ears.

"I think it is the voice of a woman," Boduoc said. "Or maybe it is one of the spirits of evil."

Beric during his stay among the Romans had lost faith in most of his superstitions. "Nonsense, Boduoc! it was the cry of a woman; it came from ahead. Maybe some woman returning late has been attacked by wolves. Come along," he shouted, and he started to run, followed reluctantly by his companion.

"Stop, Beric, stop!" he said in a short time, "I hear other sounds."

"So do I," Beric agreed, but without checking his pace. "My eyes may be dull, Boduoc, but they are not so dull as your ears. Why, don't you know the snarling of wolves when you hear them?"

Again the loud cry of distress came on the night air. "They have not seized her yet," Beric said. "Her first cry would have been her last had they done so. She must be in that hut, Boduoc, and they are trying to get at her. Maybe her husband is away."

"It is wolves," Boduoc agreed in a tone of relief. "Since that is all I am ready for them; but sword and spear are of no avail against the spirits of the air. We must be careful though, or instead of us attacking we may be attacked."

Beric paid no attention. They had as they passed the hut that morning stopped for a drink of water there, and he saw now before his eyes the tall comely young woman with a baby in her arms and two children hanging to her skirts. In a short time they stood at the edge of the little clearing by the side of the path. It was lighter here, and he could make out the outline of the rude hut, and, as he thought, that of many dark figures moving round it. A fierce growling and snarling rose from around the hut, with once or twice a sharp yell of pain.

"There are half a dozen of them on the roof," Boduoc said, "and a score or more round the hut. At present they haven't winded us, for the air is in our faces."

"I think we had best make a rush at them, Boduoc, shouting at the top of our voices as we go, and bidding the woman stand in readiness to unbar the door. They will be scared for a moment, not knowing how many of us there may be, and once inside we shall be safe from them."

"Let us get as near as we can before we begin to shout, Beric. They may run back a few paces at our voice, but will speedily rally."

Holding their spears in readiness for action they ran forward. When within thirty yards of the hut Boduoc raised his voice in a wild yell, Beric adding his cry and then shouting, "Unbar your door and stand to close it as we enter."

There was, however, no occasion for haste. Boduoc' s sudden yell completely scared the wolves, and with whimpers of dismay they scattered in all directions. The door opened as Beric and his companion came up, and they rushed in and closed it after them. A fire burned on the hearth. A dead wolf lay on the ground, the children crouched in terror on a pile of rushes, and a woman stood with a spear in her hand.

"Thanks to our country's gods you have come!" she said. "A few minutes later and all would have been over with me and my children. See, one has already made his way through the roof, and in half a dozen places they have scratched holes well nigh large enough to pass through."

"We heard your cry," Beric said, "and hastened forward at the top of our speed."

"It was for you that I called," the woman said. "By what you said this morning I judged you would be returning about this hour, and it was in hopes you might hear me that I cried out, for I knew well that no one else would be likely to be within earshot."

"Where is your husband?" Beric asked.

"He started this afternoon for Cardun. He and all the able bodied men were ordered to assemble there tonight in readiness to begin the war against the wolves at daybreak. There is no other house within a mile, and even had they heard me there they could have given me no assistance, seeing there are but women and children remaining behind."

"They are coming again," Boduoc broke in; "I can hear their feet pattering on the dead leaves. Which shall we do, Beric, pile more wood on the fire, or let it go out altogether? I think that we shall do better without it; it is from the roof that they will attack, and if we have a light here we cannot see them till they are ready to leap down; whereas, if we are in darkness we may be able to make them out when they approach the holes, or as they pass over any of the crevices."

"I don't know, Boduoc; I think we shall do better if we have light. We may not make them out so well, but at least we can use our spears better than we could in the dark, when we might strike them against the rafters or thick branches."

The woman at once gathered some of the pieces of wood that had fallen through as the wolves made the holes and put them on the hearth, where they soon blazed up brightly.

"I will take this big hole," Boduoc said, "it is the only one by which they can come down at present. Do you try and prevent them from enlarging any of the others."

There was a sudden thump overhead, followed almost immediately by several others.

"They get up by the wood pile," the woman said. "It is against that side of the hut, and reaches nearly up to the eaves."

There was a sharp yell as Boduoc thrust his spear up through the hole when he saw a pair of eyes, shining in the firelight, appear at the edge. At the same moment there was a sound of scraping and scratching at some of the other holes. The roof was constructed of rough poles laid at short distances apart, and above these were small branches, on which was a sort of thatch of reeds and rushes. Standing close under one of the holes Beric could see nothing, but from the sound of the scratching he could tell from which side the wolf was at work enlarging it. He carefully thrust the point of his spear through the branches and gave a sudden lunge upwards. A fierce yell was heard, followed by the sound of a body rolling down the roof, and then a struggle accompanied by angry snarling and growling outside.

"That is one less, Beric," Boduoc said. "I fancy I only scratched mine. Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, as without the least warning a

wolf sprang down through the hole. Before it could gather its legs under it for a fresh spring Beric and the woman both thrust their spears deeply into it, Boduoc keeping his eyes fixed on the hole, and making a lunge as another wolf peered down in readiness to spring after the one that had entered.

For hours the fight went on. Gradually the holes, in spite of the efforts of the defenders, were enlarged, and the position became more and more critical. At least twenty of the wolves were slain; but as the attack was kept up as vigorously as at first, it was evident that fresh reinforcements had arrived to the assailants.

"We cannot keep them out much longer, Beric," Boduoc said at last. "It seems to me that our only plan is to fire the hut, and then, each taking a child, to make a rush across to the trees and climb them. The sudden burst of fire will drive them back for a little, and we may make good our retreat to the trees."

"What time is it, think you, Boduoc?"

"It must be two or three hours past midnight, and if Borgon carried out my instructions help ought to be near at hand. I would that we could let them know of our peril."

"There is a cow horn," the woman said, pointing to the corner of the hut. "My husband uses it for calling in the cattle."

Boduoc seized the horn and blew a deep hollow blast upon it. There was a sudden pattering of feet overhead and then silence.

"That has scared them," Beric said. "Blow again, Boduoc; if we can but gain half an hour our friends may be up."

Again and again the hoarse roar of the cow horn rose, but the wolves speedily recovered from their scare and crowded on the roof.

"We can't hold out much longer," Beric said, as two wolves that leapt down together had just been despatched. "Get a brand from the fire." At this moment there was a sudden scuffle overhead, and the three defenders stood, spear in hand, ready to repel a fresh attack; but all was quiet; then a loud shout rose on the air.

"Thank the gods, here they are!" Boduoc said. He listened a moment, but all was still round the hut; then he threw the door open as a score of men with lighted torches came running towards it, and raised a shout of satisfaction as the light fell upon Beric.

"Thanks for your aid, my friends!" he said as they crowded round him; "never was a shout more welcome than yours. You were just in time, as you may see by looking at the roof. We were about to fire it and make for the trees, though I doubt if one of us would have reached them."

As the men entered the hut and looked at the ragged holes in the roof and the bodies of nine wolves stretched on the ground, they saw that they had, indeed, arrived only just in time. Among the rescuing party was the man to whom the hut belonged, whose joy at finding his wife and children unhurt was great indeed; and he poured forth his thanks to Beric and Boduoc when he learned from his wife

that they had voluntarily abandoned the wood, where they could have been secure in the shelter of a tree, in order to assist her in defending the hut against the wolves.

"You must all come with us," Beric said; "the wolves may return after we have gone. When our hunt is over I will send some men to help you to repair your roof. Where are the cattle?"

"They are safe in a stockade at the next village," the man said. "We finished it only yesterday, and drove in all the cattle from the forests, and collected great quantities of wood so that the women might keep up great bonfires if the wolves tried to break in."

A few minutes later the party started on their return. As they walked they could sometimes hear the pattering of footsteps on the falling leaves, but the torches deterred the animals from making an attack, and after three hours' walking they arrived at Cardun. The village stood on a knoll rising from swamps, through which a branch of the Stour wound its way sluggishly. Round the crest of the knoll ran two steep earthen banks, one rising behind the other, and in the inclosed space, some eight acres in extent, stood the village. The contrast between it and the Roman city but two-and-twenty miles away was striking. No great advance had been made upon the homes that the people had occupied in Gaul before their emigration. In the centre stood Parta's abode, distinguished from the rest only by its superior size. The walls were of mud and stone, the roof high, so as to let the water run more easily off the rough thatching. It contained but one central hall surrounded by half a dozen small apartments.

The huts of the people consisted but of a single room, with a hole in the roof by which the smoke of the fire in the centre made its way out. The doorway was generally closed by a wattle secured by a bar. When this was closed light only found its way into the room through the chinks of the wattle and the hole in the roof. In winter, for extra warmth, a skin was hung before the door. Beyond piles of hides, which served as seats by day and beds at night, there was no furniture whatever in the rooms, save a few earthen cooking pots.

Parta's abode, however, was more sumptuously furnished. Across one end ran a sort of dais of beaten earth, raised a foot above the rest of the floor. This was thickly strewn with fresh rushes, and there was a rough table and benches. The walls of the apartment were hidden by skins, principally those of wolves.

The fireplace was in the centre of the lower part of the hall, and arranged on a shelf against the wall were cooking pots of iron and brass; while on a similar shelf on the wall above the dais were jugs and drinking vessels of gold. Hams of wild boar and swine hung from the rafters, where too were suspended wild duck and fish, and other articles of food. Parta's own apartment led from the back of the dais. That of Beric was next to it, its separate use having been granted to him on his return from Camalodunum, not without some scoffing remarks upon his effeminacy in requiring a separate apartment, instead of sleeping as usual on the dais; while the followers and attendants stretched themselves on the floor of the hall.

CHAPTER III: A WOLF HUNT

Shouts of welcome saluted Beric as with his party he crossed the rough bridge over the stream and descended the slope to the village. Some fifteen hundred men were gathered here, all armed for the chase with spears, javelins, and long knives. Their hair fell over their necks, their faces were, according to the universal custom, shaved with the exception of the moustache. Many of them were tattooed--a custom that at one time had been universal, but was now dying out among the more civilized. Most of them were, save for the mantle, naked from the waist up, the body being stained a deep blue with woad--a plant largely cultivated for its dye. This plant, known as Isatis tinctoria, is still grown in France and Flanders. It requires rich ground and grows to a height of three or four feet, bearing yellow flowers. The dye is obtained from the leaves, which are stripped two or three times in the season. They are partially dried, and are then pounded or ground, pressed into a mass with the hands or feet, and piled in a heap, when fermentation takes place. When this process is completed the paste is cut up, and when placed in water yields a blue dye. It can also be prepared by laying it in the water in the first place and allowing it to ferment there. The water, which becomes a deep blue, is drawn off and allowed to settle, the dye remaining at the bottom. Fresh water is then added to the leaves, which are again stirred up and the operation is repeated.

Passing through the crowd of tribesmen, Beric entered his mother's abode, walked up to the dais, and saluted her by a deep bow. Parta was a woman of tall stature and of robust form. Her garment was fastened at each shoulder by a gold brooch. A belt studded and clasped by the same metal girded it in at the waist, and it then fell in loose folds almost to her feet. She had heavy gold bracelets on her arms.

"You are late, Beric," she said sternly. "Our tribesmen have been waiting nigh an hour for you. I only heard at daybreak that Borgon had gone out to search for you with a party."

"It was well that he did, mother, for Boduoc and I were besieged in a hut by a pack of wolves, who would shortly have made an end of us had not rescue arrived."

"What were you doing in the hut?" she asked. "You told me you should leave the Romans' town before sunset and make your way straight back here."

Beric shortly related the circumstances of the fight.

"It is well that it is no worse," she said; "but Boduoc ought to have known better than to have allowed you to leave the trees, where you would at least have been safe from the wolves. What mattered the life of a woman in comparison to yours, when you know my hopes and plans for you? But stay not talking. Magartha has some roasted kid in readiness for you. Eat it quickly, and take a horn of mead, and be gone. An hour has been wasted already."

A few minutes sufficed for Beric to satisfy his hunger. Then he went out and joined two or three minor chiefs of experience who had charge of the hunt. The greater portion of the tribesmen had already started. Almost every man had brought with him one or more large dogs trained in hunting the wolf and boar, and the woods beyond the swamp rang with their deep barking. Instructions had already been given to the men. These proceeded in parties of four, each group taking its post some fifty yards from the next. Those who had the farthest to go had started before daybreak, and it was another two hours before the whole were in position, forming a long line through the forest upwards of ten miles in length. A horn was sounded in the centre where the leaders had posted themselves, and the signal was repeated at points along the line, and then, with shouts on the part of the men and fierce barkings on that of the dogs, the whole moved forward. The right of the line rested on the Stour, the left upon the Orwell; and as they passed along through the forest the line contracted. At times wild boars made a dash to break through it. Many of these were slain, till the chiefs considered that there was a sufficient supply of food, and the rest were then allowed to pass through.

No wolves were seen until they neared the point where the two rivers unite, by which time the groups were within a few paces of each other. Then among the trees in front of them a fierce snarling and yelping was heard. The dogs, which had hitherto been kept in hand, were now loosed, and with a shout the men rushed forward both on the bluffs in the centre and along the low land skirting the rivers on either side. Soon the wolves came pouring down from the wooded bluff, and engaged in a furious conflict with the dogs. As the men ran up, a few of the wolves in their desperation charged them and endeavoured to break through, but the great majority, cowed by the clamour and fierce assault, crouched to the earth and received their death blow unresistingly. Some took to the water, but coracles had been sent down to the point the evening before, and they were speedily slain. Altogether some four or five hundred wolves were killed.

It was now late in the afternoon. Wood was collected and great fires made, and the boars' flesh was soon roasting over them. At daybreak they started again, and retracing their steps formed a fresh line at the point where the last beat had begun, this time beating in a great semicircle and driving the wolves down on to the Stour. So for a fortnight the war went on. Only such deer and boar as were required for food were killed; but the wolves were slain without mercy, and at the end of the operations that portion of the country was completely cleared of these savage beasts, for those who had escaped the beating parties had fled far away through the forest to more quiet quarters.

The work had been laborious; for each day some forty miles had been traversed in the march from the last place of slaughter to the next beat, and in the subsequent proceedings. It had, however, been full of interest and excitement, especially during the second week, when, having cleared all the country in the neighbourhood of the rivers, the men were ranged in wide circles some ten miles in diameter, advancing gradually towards a centre. Occasionally many of the wolves escaped before the lines had narrowed sufficiently for the men to be near enough to each other to oppose a successful resistance, but

in each case the majority continued to slink from the approaching noises until the cordon was too close for them to break through.

Altogether over four thousand wolves were slain. All those whose coats were in good condition were skinned, the skins being valuable for linings to the huts, for beds, and winter mantles. Many men had been bitten more or less severely by them, but none had been killed; and there was much rejoicing at the complete clearance from the district of a foe that had, since the arrival of the large packs from the north, made terrible inroads among the herds of cattle and swine, and had killed a considerable number of men, women, and children. The previous winter had been a very severe one, and had driven great numbers of wolves down from North Britain. The fighting that had been going on for years in the south and west, and at times in the midlands, had put a stop to the usual chases of wolves in those districts, and they had consequently multiplied exceedingly and had become a serious scourge even before the arrival of the fresh bands from the north. However, after so great a slaughter it was hoped that for a time at least they would not again make their appearance in that neighbourhood.

Returning home at the end of their expedition Beric was surprised as he entered the hall to see a Druid standing upon the dais conversing with his mother, who was pacing up and down with angry gestures. That their conference was an important one he did not doubt; for the Druids dwelt in the recesses of the forests or near their temples, and those who wished to consult them must journey to them to ask their counsel beneath a sacred oak or in the circle of the magic stones. When great events were impending, or when tribes took up arms against each other, the Druids would leave their forest abodes, and, interposing between the combatants, authoritatively bid them desist. They acted as mediators between great chiefs, and were judges upon all matters in dispute. He was sure, therefore, that the Druid was the bearer of news of importance. He stood waiting in the centre of the hall until his mother's eye fell upon him.

"Come hither, Beric," she said, "and hear the news that the holy Druid has brought. Think you not that the Romans have carried their oppression far enough when they have seized half the land of our island, enslaved the people, and exacted tribute from the free Britons? What think you, now? The Roman governor Severus, knowing that it is our religion as well as love of our country that arms us against them, and that the Druids ever raise their voices to bid us defend our altars and our homes, have resolved upon an expedition against the Sacred Island, and have determined to exterminate our priests, to break down our altars, and to destroy our religion. Ten days since the legion marched from Camalodunum to join the army he is assembling in the west. From all other parts he has drawn soldiers, and he has declared his intention of rooting out and destroying our religion at its centre."

"The news is terrible," the Druid said, "but our gods will fight for us, and doubtless a terrible destruction will fall upon the impious men who thus dream of profaning the Sacred Island; but it may be otherwise, or perchance the gods may see that thus, and thus only, can the people of Britain be stirred to take up arms and to annihilate the worshippers of the false gods of Rome. Assuredly we are on the eve of great events, and every Briton must prepare to

take up arms, either to fall upon the legions whom our gods have stricken or to avenge the insult offered to our faith."

"It is terrible news, indeed," Beric said; "and though I am but a lad, father, I am ready when the call comes to fight in the front ranks of the Iceni with our people. My father fell fighting for his country by the sword of the Romans, and I am ready to follow his example when my mother shall say, 'Go out to war.'"

"For the present, Beric, we must remain quiet; we must await news of the result of this expedition; but the word has gone round, and I and my brethren are to visit every chief of the Iceni, while the Druids of the north stir up the Brigantes; the news, too, that the time of their deliverance is at hand, and that they must hold themselves in readiness to rise against the oppressors, is passing through the Trinobantes and the tribes of the south and southwest. This time it must be no partial rising, and we must avoid the ruinous error of matching a single tribe against the whole strength of the Romans. It must be Britain against Rome--a whole people struggling for their homes and altars against those who would destroy their religion and reduce them to slavery."

"I would that it could have been postponed for a time, father," Beric said. "During the four years I passed as a hostage at Camalodunum I have been learning the tactics that have enabled the Romans to conquer us. I have learned their words of command, and how the movements were executed, and I hope when I become a man to train the Sarci to fight in solid order, to wheel and turn as do the Romans, so that we might form a band which might in the day of battle oppose itself to the Roman onset, check pursuit, and perhaps convert a reverse into a victory."

"Heed not that," the Druid said enthusiastically. "It would be useful indeed, but there is but scant time for it now. Our gods will fight for us. We have numbers and valour. Our warriors will sweep their soldiers aside as a wave dashes over a rock."

The conversation between the Druid and Parta had been heard by others in the hall, and the news spread rapidly among the tribesmen as they returned from the chase. Shouts of fury and indignation rose outside, and several of the minor chiefs, followed by a crowd of excited men, poured into the hall, demanding with loud shouts that war should be declared against the Romans. The Druid advanced to the edge of the dais.

"Children," he said, "the time has not yet come, nor can the Sarci do aught until the word is given by Prasutagus, and the whole of the Iceni rise in arms, and not the Iceni alone, but Britons from sea to sea. Till then hold yourselves in readiness. Sharpen your arms and prepare for the contest. But you need a chief. In the ordinary course of things years would have elapsed before Beric, the son of your last brave prince, would have been associated with his mother in the rule of the tribe; but on the eve of such a struggle ordinary customs and usages must be set at nought. I therefore, in virtue of my sacred authority, now appoint Beric as chief next to his mother in the tribe, and I bid you obey him in all things relating to war. He has learned much of Roman ways and methods, and is thus better fitted than many far older than he to instruct you how best to stand their onset, and I prophesy that under him no

small honour and glory will fall to the tribe, and that they will bear a signal share in avenging our gods and winning our freedom. Come hither, Beric;" and the Druid, laying a hand upon the lad's head, raised the other to heaven and implored the gods to bestow wisdom and strength upon him, and to raise in him a mighty champion of his country and faith. Then he uttered a terrible malediction upon any who should disobey Beric's orders, or question his authority, who should show faint heart in the day of battle, or hold his life of any account in the cause of his country.

"Now," he concluded, "retire to your homes. We must give no cause or pretext for Roman aggression until the signal is given. You will not be idle. Your young chief will teach you somewhat of the discipline that has rendered the Roman soldiers so formidable, so that you may know how to set yourselves in the day of battle, how to oppose rank to rank, to draw off in good order, or to press forward to victory. The issue is ever in the hands of the gods, but we should do all we can to deserve it. It is good to learn even from our enemies. They have studied war for ages, and if they have conquered brave peoples, it has not been by superior valour, but because they have studied war, while others have trusted solely to their native valour. Therefore deem not instruction useless, or despise methods simply because you do not understand them. None could be braver than those who fought under Caractacus, yet they were conquered, not by the valour, but by the discipline of the Romans. It was the will of the gods that your young chief should dwell for four years a hostage among the Romans, and doubtless they willed it should be so in order that he might be fitted to be a worthy champion of his country, and so to effect what even the valour of Caractacus failed to do. The gods have spoken by me. See that you obey them, and woe to the wretch who murmurs even in his own heart against their decrees!"

As he concluded a loud shout was raised throughout the crowded hall, and swelled into a mighty roar outside, for those at the open door had passed his words to the throng of tribesmen outside. When the shout subsided, Beric added a few words, saying, that although he regretted he had not yet come to his full strength, and that thus early he should be called upon to lead men, he accepted the decree of the gods, and would strive not to be wanting in the day of trial. In matters connected with war he had learned much from the Romans, who, oppressors as they were and despisers of the gods of Britain, were skilled beyond all others in such matters. In all other respects he had happily his mother's counsel and guidance to depend upon, and before assuming any civil authority he should wait until years had taught him wisdom, and should then go through all the usual ceremonies appointed by their religion, and receive his instalment solemnly in the temple at the hands of the Druids.

That night there was high feasting at Cardun. A bullock and three swine were slain by order of Parta, and a number of great earthen jars of mead broached, and while the principal men of the tribe feasted in the hall, the rest made merry outside. The bard attached to Parta's household sang tales of the glories of the tribe, even the women from the villages and detached huts for a large circle round came in, happy that, now the wolves had been cleared away, they could stir out after nightfall without fear. After entertaining their guests in the hall, Parta and her son went round among the tribesmen outside and saw that they had all they needed, and spoke

pleasantly even to the poorest among them.

It was long before Beric closed his eyes that night. The events of the day had been a complete surprise to him. He had thought that in the distant future he should share with his mother in the ruling of the tribe, but had never once dreamed of its coming for years. Had it not been for the news that they had heard of the intended invasion of the Holy Isle he should not have regretted his elevation, for it would have given him the means and opportunity to train the tribesmen to fight in close order as did the Romans. But now he could not hope that there would be time to carry this out effectually. He knew that throughout Britain the feeling of rage and indignation at this outrage upon the gods of their country would raise the passions of men to boiling point, and that the slightest incident would suffice to bring on a general explosion, and he greatly feared that the result of such a rising would in the end be disastrous.

His reading had shown him how great was the power of Rome, and how obstinately she clung to her conquests. His countrymen seemed to think that were they, with a mighty effort, to free Britain of its invaders, their freedom would be achieved; but he knew that such a disaster would arouse the Roman pride, and that however great the effort required, fresh armies would be despatched to avenge the disaster and to regain the territory lost.

"The Britons know nothing of Roman power," he said to himself. "They see but twenty or thirty thousand men here, and they forget that that number have alone been sent because they were sufficient for the work, and that Rome could, if need be, despatch five times as many men. With time to teach the people, not of the Sarci tribe only, but all the Iceni, to fight in solid masses, and to bear the brunt of the battle, while the rest of the tribes attacked furiously on all sides, we might hope for victory; but fighting without order or regularity, each man for himself, cannot hope to prevail against their solid mass.

"If I could have gained a name before the time came, so that my voice might have had weight and power in the councils of the chiefs, I might have done something. As it is, I fear that a rising now will bring ruin and slavery upon all Britain."

Beric thought but little of himself, or of the personal danger he should encounter. The Britons were careless of their lives. They believed implicitly in a future life, and that those who fell fighting bravely for their country would meet with reward hereafter; hence, as among the Gauls, cowardice was an almost unknown vice.

Beric had faith in the gods of his country, while he had none whatever in those of Rome, and wondered how a mighty people could believe in such deities; but, unlike the Britons in general, he did not believe that the gods interfered to decide the fate of battles.

He saw that the Romans, with their false gods, had conquered all other nations, and that so far they had uniformly triumphed over his own. Therefore, mighty as he believed the gods to be, he thought that they concerned themselves but little in the affairs of the world, and that battles were to be won solely by valour, discipline, and numbers. Numbers and valour the British had, but of discipline they were absolutely ignorant, and it was this that gave so tremendous

an advantage to the Romans. Hence Beric felt none of the exultation and excitement that most British lads of his age would have done on attaining to rank and command in the tribe to which they belonged.

The Britons despised the Romans as much for their belief in many gods as for their luxury, and what they considered their effeminacy. The religion of the Britons was a pure one, though disfigured by the offering of human sacrifices. They believed in one great Supreme Spirit, whose power pervaded everything. They thought of him less as an absolute being than as a pervading influence. They worshipped him everywhere, in the forests and in the streams, in the sky and heavenly bodies. Through the Druids they consulted him in all their undertakings. If the answer was favourable, they followed it; if unfavourable, they endeavoured to change it by sacrifices and offerings to the priests. They believed firmly in a life after death, when they held that the souls of all brave and good men and women would be transported at once to an island far out in the Atlantic, which they called the Happy Island. The highest places would be theirs who had fought valiantly and died in battle; but there was room for all, and all would be happy. Holding this idea firmly, the Britons sought rather than avoided death. Their lives in their separate tribes were quiet and simple, except when engaged in the chase or war. They were averse to labour. They were domestic, virtuous, frank, and straightforward. The personal property of a stranger was sacred among them, and the most lavish hospitality was exercised. It was not strange that a simple hardy people, believing firmly in the one supreme god, should have regarded with contempt alike the luxury of the Romans and their worship of many gods in the likenesses of men and women, and that the more Beric had seen of the learning and wisdom of the Romans in other directions, the more he should wonder that such a people should be slaves to what seemed to him childish superstitions.

The next morning, after a consultation with some of the minor chiefs, a hundred men were summoned to attend on the following day. They were picked out from families where there were two or more males of working age, so that there would be as little disturbance of labour as possible. It was principally in companies of a hundred that Beric had seen the Romans exercised, and he had learned every order by heart from first to last. The manoeuvres to be taught were not of a complicated nature. To form in fighting order six deep, and to move in column, were the principal points; but when the next day the band assembled, Beric was surprised and vexed to find that the operations were vastly more difficult than he expected. To begin with, every man was to have his place in the line, and the tribesmen, though eager to learn, and anxious to please their young chief, could not see that it mattered in what order they stood. When, however, having arranged them at first in a line two deep, Beric proceeded to explain how the spears were to be held, and in what order the movements were to be performed,--the exercise answering to the manual and platoon of modern days,--the tribesmen were unable to restrain their laughter. What difference could it make whether the hands were two feet apart or three, whether the spears were held upright or sloped, whether they came down to the charge one after another or all together? To men absolutely unaccustomed to order of any kind, but used only to fight each in the way that suited him best, these details appeared absolutely ludicrous.

Beric was obliged to stop and harangue them, pointing out to them that it was just these little things that gave the Romans their fighting power; that it was because the whole company moved as one man, and fought as one man, each knowing his place and falling into it, however great the confusion, however sudden the alarm, that made them what they were.

"Why do they conquer you?" he said. "Chiefly because you can never throw them into confusion. Charge down upon them and break them, and they at once reunite and a solid wall opposes your scattered efforts. You know how cattle, when wolves attack them, gather in a circle with their horns outwards, and so keep at bay those who could pull them down and rend them separately. At present it seems ridiculous to you that every position of the hand, every movement of the arm, should be done by rule; but when you have practised them these will become a second nature; so with your other movements. It seems folly to you to do with measured steps what it seems you could do far more quickly by running together hastily; but it is not so. The slowest movement is really the quickest, and it has the advantage that no one is hurried, that everything is done steadily and regularly, and that even in the greatest heat and confusion of a battle every man takes his place, as calm and ready to fight as if no foe were in sight. Now let us try this again. At the end of the day I shall pick out some of those who are quickest and most attentive, and make of them officers under me. They will have more work to do, for they will have to understand and teach my orders, but also they will gain more honour and credit."

For hours the drill went on; then they broke off for dinner and again worked until evening, and by that time had made sufficient progress in their simple movements to begin to feel that there was after all something more in it than they had fancied. For the first hour it had seemed to them a sort of joke--a mere freak on the part of their young chief; but they were themselves surprised to find by the end of the day how rapidly they were able to change from their rank two deep into the solid formation, and how their spears rose and fell together at the order. Beric bade them by the next morning provide themselves with spears six feet longer. Britons were more accustomed to fight with javelin than with spear, and the latter weapons were shorter and lighter than those of the Romans. Beric felt that the advantage should be the other way, for the small shields carried by the Britons were inferior as defensive weapons to those of the Romans, and to preserve the balance it was necessary therefore to have longer spears; the more so since the Britons were taller, and far more powerful men than their foes, and should therefore be able, with practice, to use longer weapons.

The next day Beric chose Boduoc as his second in command, and appointed ten men sub-officers or sergeants. After a week of almost incessant work that would have exhausted men less hardy and vigorous, Beric was satisfied. The company had now come to take great interest in their work, and were able to go through their exercises with a fair show of regularity. Even the older chiefs, who had at first shaken their heads as they looked on, acknowledged that there was a great deal to be gained from the exercises. Parta was delighted. It was she who had foreseen the advantages that might be derived from Beric's stay among the Romans, and she entered heartily into his plans, ordering the men engaged to be fed from the produce of her flocks and herds.

When the week was over two hundred more men were summoned, a sufficient number of the brightest and most intelligent of the first company being chosen as their sub-officers. Before the drill commenced, however, the first company were put through their exercises in order that the newcomers might see what was expected of them, and how much could be done. This time several of the chiefs joined the companies in order that they might learn the words of command and be fitted to lead. This greatly encouraged Beric, who had foreseen that while he himself could command a company, he could do nothing towards controlling ten or fifteen companies unless these had each officers of rank and influence enough to control them.

The exercises after the first company had been drilled were carried on in the forest some miles away from the village, the men assembling there and camping beneath the trees, so that no rumour of gatherings or preparations for war should reach the Romans, although at present these were not in a position to make any eruption from Camalodunum, as the greater portion of the legionaries had marched with Suetonius.

Returning one day to Cardun with Boduoc, Beric was surprised to hear loud cries of lamentation. The women were running about with dishevelled hair and disordered garments. Fearful that something might have happened to his mother, he hurried on to the hall. Parta was sitting on the ground rocking herself to and fro in her grief, while the women were assembled round her uttering cries of anguish.

"What is the matter?" Beric asked as he hurried forward. The bard stepped forward to answer the question.

"My son," he said, "misfortune has fallen on the land. The gods have hidden their faces and refused to fight for their children. Woe and desolation have come upon us. The altars are thrown down and the priests slaughtered."

"Mona is taken!" Beric exclaimed.

"Yes, my son, Mona is taken. The Druid Boroc but an hour ago brought the news. The Romans having reached the strait, constructed flat bottomed boats, and in these approached the island, the horsemen towing their horses behind them. There were assembled the women of the Silures and the Druids from all parts of Britain, with many fugitives who had fled for shelter to the island. The Druids remained by their altars offering up human sacrifices, the men and women assembled on the beach waving torches, hurling imprecations upon the invaders, and imploring the gods to aid them and to crush the impious foe. For a time the Romans paused in mid channel, terrified at the spectacle, and the hopes of all that the gods had paralysed their arms rose high; but, alas! the halt was but temporary. Encouraging each other with shouts, they again advanced, and, leaping from their boats, waded through the water and set foot on the sacred soil.

"What was there to do? The men were few, and though the women in their despair rushed wildly at the enemy, it was all in vain; men and women were alike slaughtered; and then, moving forward, they advanced against the holy circle and slew the Druids upon the altars of the gods they served, and yet the gods were silent. They saw, they heard, but answered not; neither the clouds rained fire upon

the invaders nor the earth shook. Ah! my son, evil days have fallen upon the land. What will be the end of them?"

Throughout the length and breadth of Britain a thrill of horror was felt at the news of the massacre of Druids at Mona, and everywhere it was followed by a stern determination to prepare for battle to clear the land of the Romans. The Druids went from tribe to tribe and from village to village stirring up men's hearts; the women, even more deeply excited than the men at the news of the calamity, behaved as if possessed, many going about the country calling upon the men to take up arms, and foretelling victory to the Britons and destruction to the Romans; even in the streets of Camalodunum at night their voices were heard crying out curses upon the Romans and predicting the destruction of the city.

A week after the news came, Beric, in fulfilment of the promise he had given to Berenice, paid another visit to Camalodunum. There were no signs in its busy streets of uneasiness or fear. The new propraetor Catus Decianus, who commanded in the absence of Suetonius, was holding a sort of court there, and the bearing of the Romans seemed even more arrogant and insolent than usual. The news of the destruction of the Druids at Mona had by them been hailed as a final and most crushing blow to the resistance of the Britons. Since their gods could not protect their own altars what hope could there be for them in the future? Decianus, a haughty tyrant who had been sent to Britain by Nero as a mark of signal favour, in order that he might enrich himself by the spoils of the Britons, was levying exactions at a rate hitherto unknown, treating the people as if they were but dirt under his feet. His lieutenants, all creatures of Nero, followed his example, and the exasperation of the unfortunate Trinobantes, who were the chief victims, had reached such a point that they were ready for revolt whensoever the signal might come.

On arrival at the house of Caius Muro, Beric found Berenice at home; she received him with joy. "I am glad that you have come, Beric; it is so dull now that father has gone away to the war. I have been expecting you here for the last fortnight. I suppose you have been amusing your-self too much to give a thought to me."

"I have been very busy, Berenice. I am a chief now, and have had much to do in the tribe. Among other things we have been having great war with the wolves."

"Yes, you told me when you were last here that you were going to set out next day on an expedition against them."

"They began first, as it turned out," he said smiling, "and very nearly made a meal of me that night on my way homeward."

"Sit down and tell me all about it," she said. "You know I love stories."

Beric recited to her the story of the fight at the hut.

"And there was a woman there! How terrible it must have been for her to be alone with her children before you arrived, and to think of her killing wolves with the spear. How different your women must be from us, Beric, for we are only taught to embroider, to dress

ourselves, and to care for pretty things. Why, I should be frightened out of my life at the sight of a wolf if I were all alone and had no one to protect me."

"Our women are brought up differently, Berenice. We regard them as altogether our equals, and many of our tribes are ruled by women. My own, you know, for example. They do not go into battle with the men; but when a camp is attacked they are ready to fight in its defence, and being brought up to lead a vigorous life, they are well nigh as strong as we are. Among all the Gaulish nations the women are held in high respect. Of course with you this is so sometimes. Your father was wont to listen to the opinions of your mother; but you know that is not often so, and that with many Romans women are looked upon as inferior creatures, good only for dress and pleasure, useful in ordering a house and in managing the slaves, but unfit to take part in public life, and knowing nothing of aught save domestic affairs. And what has been going on here, Berenice?"

"Nothing," the girl said; "at least I have been doing nothing. I went to the footraces the other day, and saw the propraetor, but I don't like him. I think that he is a bad man, and I hear stories among the ladies of his being cruel and greedy; and there have been mad women going about at night shrieking and crying; I have heard them several times myself. Some of the ladies said they wish that my father was back here with his legion, for that there are but few soldiers, and if Decianus continues to treat the people so badly there may be trouble. What do you think, Beric?"

"I cannot say," he replied. "It seems to me that the Romans are bent upon crushing us down altogether. They have just captured our Holy Island, slaying the priests and priestesses, and overthrowing the altars, while Nero's officers wring from the people the last coin and the last animal they possess. I fear that there will be trouble, Berenice. No men worthy of the name could see their gods insulted and themselves despoiled of all they possess without striking a blow in defence."

"But they will only bring more trouble upon themselves," the girl said gravely. "I have heard my father lament that they forced us to fight against them, though you know he held that it was our fault more than theirs, and that if they were ruled kindly and wisely, as were the people in Southern Gaul, where the legion was stationed before it came over here, they would settle down and live peaceably, and be greatly benefited by our rule."

"If you treat a man as you would a dog you must not be surprised if he bites you," Beric said. "Some of your people not only think that we are dogs, but that we are toothless ones. Mayhap they will find their mistake some day."

"But you will never fight against us, Beric," the girl said anxiously, "after living so long among us?"

"I would not fight against your father or against those who have treated me well," he replied; "but against those who ill treat and abuse us I would fight when my countrymen fought. Yet if I could ever do you a service, Berenice, I would lay down my life to do it."

The event seemed so improbable to the girl that she passed over the promise without comment.

"So you are a chief, Beric! But I thought chiefs wore golden bracelets and ornaments, and you are just as you were when you came here last."

"Because I come here only as a visitor. If I came on a mission from the queen, or as one of a deputation of chiefs, I should wear my ornaments. I wear them at home now, those that my father had."

Beric stayed for some hours chatting with Berenice, and his old instructor, who had been left by Caius in charge of the household. As he walked home he wondered over the careless security of the Romans, and vowed that should opportunity occur he would save Berenice from the fate that was likely to fall upon all in Camalodunum should the Britons rise.

CHAPTER IV: AN INFURIATED PEOPLE

"A fresh misfortune has occurred," was the greeting with which Beric's mother met him on his return home. "Prasutagus is dead; and this is not the worst, he has left half his estates to the Roman Emperor."

"To the Roman Emperor!" Beric repeated; "is it possible, mother?"

"It is true, Beric. You know he has always tried to curry favour with the Romans, and has kept the Iceni from joining when other tribes rose against Rome. He has thought of nothing but amassing wealth, and in all Britain there is no man who could compare with him in riches. Doubtless he felt that the Romans only bided their time to seize what he had gathered, and so, in order that Boadicea and his daughters should enjoy in peace a portion of his stores, he has left half to Nero. The man was a fool as well as a traitor. The peasant who throws a child out of the door to the wolves knows that it does but whet their appetite for blood, and so it will be in this case. I hear Prasutagus died a week since, though the news has come but slowly, and already a horde of Roman officials have arrived in Norfolk, and are proceeding to make inventories of the king's possessions, and to bear themselves as insolently as if they were masters of all. Trouble must come, and that soon. Boadicea is of different stuff to her husband; she will not bear the insolence of the Romans. It would have been well for the Iceni had Prasutagus died twenty years ago and she had ruled our country."

"The gods have clearly willed, mother, that we should rise as one people against the Romans. It may be that it was for this that they did not defend their shrines from the impious hands of the invaders. Nought else stirred the Britons to lay aside their jealousies and act as one people. Now from end to end of the island all are burning for vengeance. Just at this moment, comes the death of the Romans' friend Prasutagus, and the passing of the rule of the Iceni into the hands of Boadicea. With the Romans in her capital the occasion will assuredly not long be wanting, and then there will be such a rising as the Romans have never yet seen; and then, their purpose

effected, the gods may well fight on our side. I would that there had been five more years in which to prepare for the struggle, but if it must come it must. This Catus Decianus is just the man to bring it on. Haughty, arrogant, and greedy, he knows nothing of us, and has never faced the Britons in arms. Had Suetonius been here he would not have acted thus with regard to the affairs of Prasutagus. Had Caius Muro not been absent his voice might have been raised in warning to the tyrant; but everything seems to conspire together, mother, to bring on the crisis."

"The sooner the better," Parta exclaimed vehemently. "It is true that in time you might teach the whole Iceni to fight in Roman methods, but what is good for the Romans may not be good for us. Moreover, every year that passes strengthens their hold on the land. Their forts spring up everywhere, their cities grow apace; every month numbers flock over here. Another five years, my son, and their hold might be too strong to shake off."

"That is so, mother. Thinking of ourselves I thought not of them; it may be that it were better to fight now than to wait. Well, whenever the signal is given, and from wheresoever it comes, we are ready."

Since the news of the capture of Mona had arrived, the tribesmen had drilled with increased alacrity and eagerness. Every man saw that the struggle with Rome must ere long take place, and was eager to take a leading share in the conflict. It was upon them that the blow had fallen most heavily in the former partial rising, and they knew that the other tribes of the Iceni held that their defence of their camp should not have been overborne by the Romans as it was; hence they had something of a private wrong as well as a national one to avenge. Another fortnight was spent in constant work, until one day the news came that Boadicea's daughters had been most grossly insulted by the Roman officers, and that the queen herself had started for Camalodunum to demand from Decianus a redress of their wrongs and the punishment of the offenders. The excitement was intense. Every man felt the outrage upon the daughters of their queen as a personal injury, and when Beric took his place before the men of the tribe, who were drawn up in military order, a shout arose: "Lead us to Camalodunum! Let us take vengeance!"

"Not yet," Beric cried. "The queen has gone there; we must wait the issue. Not until she gives the orders must we move. A rising now would endanger her safety. We must wait, my friends, until all are as ready as we are; when the time comes you will not find me backward in leading you."

Three days later came news that seemed at first incredible, but which was speedily confirmed. Decianus had received the queen, had scoffed at her complaints, and when, fired with indignation, she had used threats, he had ordered his soldiers to strip and scourge her, and the sentence had actually been carried into effect. Then the rage of the tribesmen knew no bounds, and it needed the utmost persuasions of Parta herself to induce them to wait until news came from the north.

"Fear not," she said, "that your vengeance will be baulked. Boadicea will not submit to this double indignity, of that you maybe sure. Wait until you hear from her. When measures are determined upon

in this matter the Iceni must act as one man. We are all equally outraged in the persons of our queen and her daughters; all have a right to a share in avenging her insults. We might spoil all by moving before the others are ready. When we move it must be as a mighty torrent to overwhelm the invaders. Not Camalodunum only, but every Roman town must be laid in ruins. It must be a life and death struggle between us and Rome; we must conquer now or be enslaved for ever."

It was not long before messengers arrived from Boadicea, bidding the Sarci prepare for war, and summoning Parta and her son to a council of the chiefs of the tribe, to be held under a well known sacred oak in the heart of the forest, near Norwich. Parta's chariot was at once prepared, together with a second, which was to carry Boduoc and a female attendant of Parta, and as soon as the horses were harnessed they started. Two long days' journey brought them to the place of meeting. The scene was a busy one. Already fully two score of the chiefs had arrived. Parta was received with great marks of respect. The Sarci were the tribe lying nearest to the Romans, and upon them the brunt of the Roman anger would fall, as it had done before; but her appearance in answer to the summons showed, it was thought, their willingness to join in the general action of the tribe.

Beric was looked at curiously. His four years' residence among the Romans caused him to be regarded with a certain amount of suspicion, which had been added to by rumours that he had been impressing upon the tribe the greatness and power of Rome. Of late there had been reports brought by wandering bards that the Sarci were being practised in the same exercises as those of the Roman soldiers, and there were many who thought that Beric, like Cogidinus, a chief of the Regi of Sussex, had joined himself heart and soul to Rome, and was preparing his tribe to fight side by side with the legions. On the other hand many, knowing that Parta had lost her husband at the hands of the Romans, and hated them with all her heart, held that she would never have divided her power with Beric, or suffered him to take military command of the tribe, had she not been assured of his fidelity to the cause of Britain.

Beric was dressed in the full panoply of a chief. He wore a short skirt or kilt reaching to his knees. Above it a loose vest or shirt, girt in by a gold belt, while over his shoulders he wore the British mantle, white in colour and worked with gold. Around his neck was the torque, the emblem of chieftainship. On his left arm he carried a small shield of beaten brass, and from a baldric covered with gold plates hung the straight pointless British sword that had been carried by his father in battle. Even those most suspicious of him could not deny that he was a stalwart and well built youth, with a full share of pith and muscle, and that his residence among the Romans had not given him any airs of effeminacy. The only subject of criticism was that his hair was shorter than that of his countrymen, for although he had permitted it to grow since he left Camalodunum, where he had worn it short, in Roman fashion, it had not yet attained its full length.

Beric felt a stranger among the others. Since his return home there had been no great tribal gathering, for Prasutagus had for some time been ill, and had always discouraged such assemblages both because they were viewed with jealousy by the Romans and because he

begrudged the expenses of entertaining. Parta, who was personally known to almost all present, introduced Beric to them.

"My son is none the less one of the Iceni for his Roman training," she said; "he has learned much, but has forgotten nothing. He is young, but you will find him a worthy companion in arms when the day of battle comes."

"I am glad to hear what you say, Parta," Aska, one of the older chiefs, said. "It would be unfair to impute blame to him for what assuredly was not his fault, but I feared that they might have taught him to despise his countrymen."

"It is not so, sir," Beric said firmly. "Happily I fell into good hands. Caius Muro, the commander of the 12th Legion, in whose charge I was, is a just as well as a valiant man, and had me instructed as if I had been his own son, and I trust that I am none the less a true Briton because I except him and his from the hatred I bear the Romans. He never said a word to me against my countrymen, and indeed often bewailed that we were not treated more wisely and gently, and were not taught to regard the Romans as friends and teachers rather than oppressors."

"Well spoken, young chief!" the other said; "ingratitude is, of all sins, the most odious, and you do well to speak up boldly for those who were kind to you. Among all men there are good and evil, and we may well believe, even among the Romans, there are some who are just and honourable. But I hear that you admire them greatly, and that you have been telling to your tribe tales of their greatness in war and of their virtues."

"I have done so," Beric replied. "A race could not conquer the world as the Romans have done unless they had many virtues; but those that I chiefly told of are the virtues that every Briton should lay to heart. I spoke of their patriotism, of the love of country that never failed, of the stern determination that enabled them to pass through the gravest dangers without flinching, and to show a dauntless face to the foe even when dangers were thickest and the country was menaced with destruction. Above all, how in Rome, though there might be parties and divisions, there were none in the face of a common enemy. Then all acted as one man; there was no rivalry save in great deeds. Each was ready to give life and all he possessed in defence of his country. These were lessons which I thought it well that every Briton should learn and take to heart. Rome has conquered us so far because she has been one while we are rent into tribes having no common union; content to sit with our arms folded while our neighbours are crushed, not seeing that our turn will come next. It was so when they first came in the time of our forefathers, it has been so in these latter times; tribe after tribe has been subdued; while, had we been all united, the Romans would never have obtained a footing on our shore. No wonder the gods have turned away their faces from a people so blind and so divided when all was at stake. Yes, I have learned much from the Romans. I have not learned to love them, but I have learned to admire them and to regret that in many respects my own countrymen did not resemble them."

There was a murmur of surprise among the chiefs who had by this time gathered round, while angry exclamations broke from some of

the younger men; but Aska waved his hand.

"Beric speaks wisely and truly," he said; "our dissensions have been our ruin. Still more, perhaps, the conduct of those who should have led us, but who have made terms with Rome in order to secure their own possessions. Among these Prasutagus was conspicuous, and we ourselves were as much to blame as he was that we suffered it. If he knows what is passing here he himself will see how great are the misfortunes that he has brought upon his queen, his daughters, and the tribe. Had we joined our whole forces with those of Caractacus the Brigantes too might have risen. It took all the strength of the Romans to conquer Caractacus alone. What could they have done had the Brigantes and we from the north, and the whole of the southern tribes, then unbroken, closed down upon them? It is but yesterday since Prasutagus was buried. The grass has not yet begun to shoot upon his funeral mound and yet his estates have been seized by the Romans, while his wife and daughters have been insulted beyond measure.

"The young chief of the Sarci has profited by his sojourn among the Romans. The Druids have told me that the priest who has visited the Sarci prophesies great things of him, and for that reason decided that, young as he was, he should share his mother's power and take his place as leader of the tribe in battle, and that he foresaw that, should time be given him to ripen his wisdom and establish his authority, he might some day become a British champion as powerful as Cunobeline, as valiant as Caractacus. These were the words of one of the wisest of the Druids. They have been passed round among the Druids, and even now throughout Britain there are many who never so much as heard of the name of the Sarci, who yet believe that, in this young chief of that tribe, will some day be found a mighty champion of his country. Prasutagus knew this also, for as soon as Beric returned from Camalodunum he begged the Druids to find out whether good or evil was to be looked for from this youth, who had been brought up among the Romans, and their report to him tallied with that which I myself heard from them. It was for that reason that Boadicea sent for him with his mother, although so much younger than any here, and belonging to a tribe that is but a small one among the Iceni. I asked these questions of him, knowing that among some of you there were doubts whether his stay with the Romans had not rendered him less a Briton. He answered as I expected from him, boldly and fearlessly, and, as you have heard wisely, and I for one believe in the predictions of the Druids. But here comes the queen."

As he spoke a number of chariots issued from the path through the forest into the circular clearing, in the centre of which stood the majestic oak, and at the same moment, from the opposite side, appeared a procession of white robed Druids singing a loud chant. As the chariots drew up, the queen and her two daughters alighted from them, with a number of chiefs of importance from the branches of the tribe near her capital. Beric had never seen her before, and was struck with her aspect. She was a tall and stately woman, large in her proportions, with her yellow hair falling below her waist. She wore no ornaments or insignia of her high rank; her dress and those of her daughters were careless and disordered, indicative of mourning and grief, but the expression of her face was that of indignation and passion rather than of humiliation.

Upon alighting she acknowledged the greeting of the assembled chiefs with a slight gesture, and then remained standing with her eyes fixed upon the advancing Druids. When these reached the sacred tree they encircled it seven times, still continuing their chanting, and then ranged themselves up under its branches with the chief Druid standing in front. They had already been consulted privately by the queen and had declared for war; but it was necessary that the decision should be pronounced solemnly beneath the shade of the sacred oak.

"Why come you here, woman?" the chief priest asked, addressing the queen.

"I come as a supplicant to the gods," she said; "as an outraged queen, a dishonoured woman, and a broken hearted mother, and in each of these capacities I call upon my country's gods for vengeance." Then in passionate words she poured out the story of the indignities that she and her daughters had suffered, and suddenly loosening her garment, and suffering it to drop to her waist, she turned and showed the marks of the Roman rods across her back, the sight eliciting a shout of fury from the chiefs around her.

"Let all retire to the woods," the Druids said, "and see that no eye profanes our mysteries. When the gods have answered we will summon you."

The queen, followed by all the chiefs, retired at once to the forest, while the Druids proceeded to carry out the sacred mysteries. Although all knew well what the decision would be, they waited with suppressed excitement the summons to return and hear the decision that was to embark them in a desperate struggle with Rome. Some threw themselves down under the trees, some walked up and down together discussing in low tones the prospects of a struggle, and the question what tribes would join it. The queen and her daughters sat apart, none venturing to approach them. Parta and three other female chiefs sat a short distance away talking together, while two or three of the younger chiefs, their attitude towards Beric entirely altered by the report of the Druids' predictions concerning him, gathered round him and asked questions concerning the Romans' methods of fighting, their arms and power. An hour after they had retired a deep sound of a conch rose in the air. The queen and her daughters at once moved forward, followed by the four female chiefs, behind whom came the rest in a body. Issuing from the forest they advanced to the sacred oak and stood in an attitude of deep respect, while the chief Druid announced the decision of the gods.

"The gods have spoken," he said. "Too long have the Iceni stood aloof from their countrymen, therefore have the gods withdrawn their faces from them; therefore has punishment and woe fallen upon them. Prasutagus is dead; his queen and his daughters have suffered the direst indignities; a Roman has seized the wealth heaped up by inglorious cowardice. But the moment has come; the gods have suffered their own altars to be desecrated in order that over the whole length and breadth of the land the cry for vengeance shall arise simultaneously. The cup is full; vengeance is at hand upon the oppressors and tyrants, the land reeks with British blood. Not content with grasping our possessions, our lives and the honour of our women are held as nought by them, our altars are cold, our priests slaughtered. The hour of vengeance is at hand. I see the

smoke of burning cities ascending in the air. I hear the groans of countless victims to British vengeance. I see broken legions and flying men.

"To arms! the gods have spoken. Strike for vengeance. Strike for the gods. Strike for your country and outraged queen. Chiefs of the Iceni, to arms! May the curse of the gods fall upon an enemy who draws back in the day of battle! May the gods give strength to your arms and render you invincible in battle! The gods have spoken."

A mighty shout was raised by his hearers; swords were brandished, and spears shaken, and the cry "To arms! the gods have spoken," was repeated unanimously. As the Druids closed round their chief, who had been seized with strong convulsions as soon as he had uttered the message of the gods, Boadicea turned to the chiefs and raised her arm for silence.

"I am a queen again; I reign once more over a race of men. No longer do I feel the smart of my stripes, for each shall ere long be washed out in Roman blood; but before action, counsel, and before counsel, food, for you have, many of you, come from afar. I have ordered a feast to be prepared in the forest."

She led the way across the opposite side of the glade, where, a few hundred yards in the forest, a number of the queen's slaves had prepared a feast of roasted sheep, pig, and ox, with bread and jars of drink formed of fermented honey, and a sort of beer. As soon as the meal was concluded the queen called the chiefs round her, and the assembly was joined by the Druids.

"War is declared," she said; "the question is shall we commence at once, or shall we wait?"

There was a general response "At once!" but the chief Druid stepped forward and said: "My sons, we must not risk the ruin of all by undue haste; this must be a national movement if it is to succeed. For a fortnight we must keep quiet, preparing everything for war, so that we may take the field with every man capable of bearing arms in the tribe. In the meantime we, with the aid of the bards, will spread the news of the outrages that the Romans have committed upon the queen and her daughters far and wide over the land. Already the tribes are burning with indignation at the insults to our gods and the slaughter of our priests at Mona, and this news will arouse them to madness, for what is done here today may be done elsewhere tomorrow, and all men will see that only in the total destruction of the Romans is there a hope of freedom. All will be bidden to prepare for war, and, when the news comes that the Iceni have taken up arms, to assemble and march to join us. On this day fortnight, then, let every chief with his following meet at Cardun, which is but a short march from Camalodunum. Then we will rush upon the Roman city, the scene of the outrage to your queen, and its smoke shall tell Britain that she is avenged, and Rome that her day of oppression is over."

The decision was received with satisfaction. A fortnight was none too long for making preparations, assembling the tribesmen, and marching to the appointed spot.

"One thing I claim," Boadicea said, "and that is the right to fall

upon and destroy instantly the Romans who installed themselves in my capital, and who are the authors of the outrages upon my daughters. So long as they live and lord it there I cannot return."

"That is right and just," the Druid said. "Slay all but ten, and hand them over bound to us to be sacrificed on the altars of the gods they have insulted."

"I will undertake that task, as my tribe lies nearest the capital," one of the chiefs said. "I will assemble them tonight and fall upon the Romans at daybreak."

"See that none escape," the Druid said. "Kill them and all their slaves and followers. Let not one live to carry the news to Camalodunum."

"I shall be at the meeting place and march at your head," the queen said to the chiefs; "that victory will be ours I do not doubt; but if the gods will it otherwise I swear that I shall not survive defeat. Ye gods, hear my vow."

The council was now over, and the queen mingled with the chiefs, saying a few words to each. Beric was presented to her by his mother, and Boadicea was particularly gracious to him. "I have heard great things predicted of you, Beric. The gods have marked you out for favour, and their priests tell me that you will be one day a great champion of the Britons. So may it be. I shall watch you on the day of battle, and am assured that none among the Iceni will bear themselves more worthily."

An hour later the meeting broke up, and Parta and Beric returned to Cardun, where they at once began to make preparations for the approaching conflict. Every man in the tribe was summoned to attend, and the exercises went on from daybreak till dusk, while the women cooked and waited upon the men. Councils were held nightly in the hall, and to each of the chiefs was assigned a special duty, the whole tribe being treated as a legion, and every chief and fighting man having his place and duty assigned to him.

In Camalodunum, although nothing was known of the preparations that were being made, a feeling of great uneasiness prevailed. The treatment of Boadicea had excited grave disapproval upon the part of the great majority of the inhabitants, although new arrivals from Gaul or Rome and the officials in the suite of Decianus lauded his action as an act of excellent policy.

"These British slaves must be taught to feel the weight of our arm," they said, "and a lesson such as this will be most useful. Is it for dogs like these to complain because they are whipped? They must be taught to know that they live but at our pleasure; that this island and all it contains is ours. They have no rights save those we choose to give them."

But the older settlers viewed the matter very differently. They knew well enough that it was only after hard fighting that Vespasian had subdued the south, and Ostorius crushed Caractacus. They knew, too, that the Iceni gave but a nominal submission to Rome, and that the Trinobantes, crushed as they were, had been driven to the verge of madness by extortion. Moreover the legions were far away; Camalodunum was well nigh undefended, and lay almost at the mercy

of the Britons should they attack. They, therefore, denounced the treatment of Boadicea as not only brutal but as impolitic in the extreme.

The sudden cessation of news from the officials who had gone to take possession of the estate of Prasutagus caused considerable uneasiness among this section of the inhabitants of Camalodunum. Messengers were sent off every day to inquire as to what had taken place after the return of Boadicea, but none came back. The feeling of uneasiness was heightened by the attitude of the natives. Reports came in from all parts of the district that they had changed their attitude, that they no longer crouched at the sight of a Roman but bore themselves defiantly, that there were meetings at night in the forest, and that the women sang chants and performed dances which had evidently some hidden meaning.

Decianus, conscious perhaps that his action was strongly disapproved by all the principal inhabitants of the town, and that, perhaps, Suetonius would also view it in the same light when it was reported to him, had left the city a few days after the occurrence and had gone to Verulamium. His absence permitted the general feeling of apprehension and discontentment more open expression than it would otherwise have had. Brave as the Romans were, they were deeply superstitious, and a thrill of horror and apprehension ran through the city when it was reported one morning that the statute of Victory in the temple had fallen to the ground, and had turned round as if it fled towards the sea. This presage of evil created a profound impression.

"What do you think of it, Cneius?" Berenice asked; "it is terrible, is it not? Nothing else is spoken of among all the ladies I have seen today, and all agree it forbodes some terrible evil."

"It may, or it may not," the old scribe said cautiously; "if the statue has fallen by the action of the gods the omen is surely a most evil one."

"But how else could it have fallen, Cneius?"

"Well, my dear, there are many Britons in the town, and you know they are in a very excited state; their women, indeed, seem to have gone well nigh mad with their midnight singing and wailing. It is possible--mind, I do not for a moment say that it is so, for were the suggestion to occur to the citizens it would lead to fresh oppressions and cruelties against the Britons--but it is just possible that some of them may have entered the temple at night and overthrown Victory's image as an act of defiance. You know how the women nightly shriek out their prophecies of the destruction of this town."

"But could they destroy it, Cneius? Surely they would never dare to attack a great Roman city like this!"

"I don't know whether they dare or not, Berenice, but assuredly Decianus is doing all in his power to excite them to such a pitch of despair that they might dare do anything; and if they dare, I see nothing whatever to prevent them from taking the city. The works erected after Claudius first founded the colony are so vast that they would require an army to defend them, while there are but

a few hundred soldiers here. What could they do against a horde of barbarians? I would that your father were back, and also the two legions who marched away to join Suetonius. Before they went they ought to have erected a central fort here, to which all could retire in case of danger, and hold out until Suetonius came back to our assistance; but you see, when they went away none could have foreseen what has since taken place. No one could have dreamt that Decianus would have wantonly stirred up the Iceni to revolt."

"But you don't think they have revolted?"

"I know nothing of it, Berenice, but I can put two and two together. We have heard nothing for a week from the officials who went to seize the possessions of Prasutagus. How is it that none of our messengers have returned? It seems to me almost certain that these men have paid for their conduct to the daughters of Boadicea with their lives."

"But Beric is with the Iceni. Surely we should hear from him if danger threatened."

"He is with them," Cneius said, "but he is a chief, and if the tribe are in arms he is in arms also, and cannot, without risking the forfeit of his life for treachery, send hither a message that would put us on our guard. I believe in the lad. Four years I taught him, and I think I know his nature. He is honest and true. He is one of the Iceni and must go with his countrymen; but I am sure he is grateful for the kindness he received here, and has a real affection for you, therefore I believe, that should my worst fears be verified, and the Iceni attack Camalodunum, he will do his utmost to save you."

"But they will not kill women and girls surely, even if they did take the city?"

"I fear that they will show slight mercy to any, Berenice; why should they? We have shown no mercy to them; we have slaughtered their priests and priestesses, and at the storm of their towns have put all to death without distinction of age or sex. If we, a civilized people, thus make war, what can you expect from the men upon whom we have inflicted such countless injuries?"

The fall of the statue of Victory was succeeded by other occurrences in which the awestruck inhabitants read augury of evil. It was reported that strange noises had been heard in the council house and theatre, while men out in boats brought back the tale that there was the appearance of a sunken town below the water. It was currently believed that the sea had assumed the colour of blood, and that there were, when the tide went out, marks upon the sand as if dead bodies had been lying there. Even the boldest veterans were dismayed at this accumulation of hostile auguries. A council of the principal citizens was held, and an urgent message despatched to Decianus, praying that he would take instance measures for the protection of the city. In reply to this he despatched two hundred soldiers from Verulamium, and these with the small body of troops already in the city took possession of the Temple of Claudius, and began to make preparations for putting it into a state of defence.

Still no message had come from Norwich, but night after night the

British women declared that the people of Camalodunum would suffer the same fate that had already overwhelmed those who had ventured to insult the daughters of the queen of the Iceni. A strange terror had now seized the inhabitants of the town. The apprehension of danger weighted upon all, and the peril seemed all the more terrible inasmuch as it was so vague. Nothing was known for certain. No message had come from the Iceni since the queen quitted the town, and yet it was felt that among the dark woods stretching north a host of foes was gathering, and might at any moment pour down upon the city. Orders were issued that at the approach of danger all who could do so were to betake themselves at once to the temple, which was to act as a citadel, yet no really effective measures were taken. There was, indeed, a vague talk of sending the women and children and valuables away to the legion, commanded by Cerealis, stationed in a fortified camp to the south, but nothing came of it; all waited for something definite, some notification that the Britons had really revolted, and while waiting for this nothing was done.

One evening a slave brought in a small roll of vellum to Cneius. It had been given him at the door, he said, by a Briton, who had at once left after placing it in his hands. The scribe opened it and read as follows:--

"To Cneius Nepo, greeting--Obtain British garb for yourself and Berenice. Let her apparel be that of a boy. Should anything unusual occur by night or day, do you and she disguise yourselves quickly, and stir not beyond the house. It will be best for you to wait in the tablinum; lose no time in carrying out this instruction."

There was no signature, nor was any needed.

"So the storm is about to burst," Cneius said thoughtfully when he had read it. "I thought so. I was sure that if the Britons had a spark of manhood left in them they would avenge the cruel wrongs of their queen. I am rejoiced to read Beric's words, and to see that he has, as I felt sure he had, a grateful heart. He would save us from the fate that he clearly thinks is about to overwhelm this place. The omens have not lied then--not that I believe in them; they are for the most part the offspring of men's fancy, but at any rate they will come true this time. I care little for myself, but I must do as he bids me for the sake of the girl. I doubt, though whether Beric can save her. These people have terrible wrongs to avenge, and at their first outburst will spare none. Well, I must do my best, and late as it is I will go out and purchase these garments. It is not likely that the danger will come tonight, for he would have given us longer notice. Still he may have had no opportunity, and may not have known until the last moment when the attack was to take place. He says 'lose no time.'"

Cneius at once went to one of the traders who dealt with the natives who came into the town, and procured the garments for himself and Berenice. The trader, who knew him by sight, remarked, "Have you been purchasing more slaves?"

"No, but I have need for dresses for two persons who have done me some service."

"I should have thought," the trader said, "they would have preferred

lighter colours. These cloths are sombre, and the natives, although their own cloths are for the most part dark, prefer, when they buy of me, brighter colours."

"These will do very well," Cneius said, "just at present Roman colours and cloths are not likely to be in demand among them."

"No, the times are bad," the trader said; "there has been scarce a native in my shop for the last ten days, and even among the townspeople there has been little buying or selling."

Cneius returned to the house, a slave carrying his purchases behind him. On reaching home he took the parcel from him, and carried it to his own cubicule, and then ordered a slave to beg Berenice to come down from her apartment as he desired to speak with her.

CHAPTER V: THE SACK OF CAMALODUNUM

Upon the morning of the day fixed for the gathering of the Iceni preparations were begun early at Cardun. Oxen and swine were slaughtered, great fires made, and the women in the village were all employed in making and baking oaten cakes upon the hearth. For some days many of them had been employed in making a great store of fermented honey and water. Men began to flock in from an early hour, and by midday every male of the Sarci capable of bearing arms had come in. Each brought with him a supply of cooked meat and cakes sufficient to last for three or four days. In the afternoon the tribes began to pour in, each tribe under its chiefs. There was no attempt at order or regularity; they came trooping in in masses, the chiefs sometimes in chariots sometimes on horseback, riding at their head. Parta welcomed them, and food was served out to the men while the chiefs were entertained in the hall. Beric, looking at the wild figures, rough and uncouth but powerful and massive in frame, was filled with regret that these men knew nothing of discipline, and that circumstances had forced on the war so suddenly.

The contrast between these wild figures and the disciplined veterans of Rome, whom he had so often watched as they performed their exercises, was striking indeed. Far inferior in height and muscular power to the tribesmen, the legionaries bore themselves with a proud consciousness in their fighting power that alone went a long way towards giving them victory. Each man trusted not only in himself, but on his fellows, and believed that the legion to which he belonged was invincible. Their regular arms, their broad shields and helmets, all added to their appearance, while their massive formation, as they stood shoulder to shoulder, shield touching shield, seemed as if it could defy the utmost efforts of undisciplined valour. However, Beric thought with pride that his own tribe, the sixteen hundred men he had for six weeks been training incessantly, would be a match even for the Roman veterans. Their inferiority in the discipline that was carried to such perfection among the Romans would be atoned for by their superior strength and activity. His only fear was, that in the excitement of battle they would forget their teaching, and, breaking their ranks, fight every man for himself. He had, however, spared no pains in impressing

upon them that to do this would be to throw away all that they had learned.

"I have not taught you to fight in Roman fashion," he said, "merely that you might march in regular order and astonish the other tribesmen, but that you should be cool and collected, should be able patiently to stand the shock of the Roman legion, and to fight, not as scattered units, but as a solid whole. You will do well to bear this in mind, for to those who disobey orders and break the line when engaged with the foe I will show no mercy. My orders will be given to each sergeant of ten men to run a spear through any man who stirs from his post, whether in advance or in retreat, whether to slay or to plunder. The time may come when the safety of the whole army depends upon your standing like a wall between them and the Romans, and the man who advances from his place in the ranks will, as much as the man who retreats, endanger the safety of all."

Over and over again had he impressed this lesson upon them. Sometimes he had divided them in two parts, and engaged in mimic fight. The larger half, representing the tribesmen, advanced in their ordinary fashion with loud shouts and cries, while the smaller section maintained their solid formation, and with levelled spears, five deep, waited the attack. Even those who were least impressed with the advantages of the exercises through which they had been going, could not but feel how immensely superior was the solid order, and how impossible would it have been for assailants to burst through the hedge of pointed weapons.

By sunset well nigh thirty thousand men had arrived, each subtribe passing through the village and taking up its post on the slopes around it, where they were at once supplied with food by the women.

With the fighting men were large numbers of women, for these generally accompanied the Britons on their warlike expeditions. Just at sunset a shout arose from the tribesmen on the north side of the village, and Boadicea, with her daughters and chief councillors, drove into the village. Her mien was proud and lofty. She carried a spear in her hand and a sword in her girdle. She had resumed her royal ornaments, and a fillet of gold surrounded her head. Her garments were belted in with a broad girdle of the same metal, and she wore heavy gold armlets and bracelets. She looked with pride upon the tribesmen who thronged shouting to greet her, and exclaimed as she leapt from her chariot, "The day of vengeance is at hand."

The fires blazed high all that night round Cardun. Numbers of bards had accompanied the tribes, as not only had those who lived in the households of the principal chiefs come in, but many had been attracted from the country lying near their borders. At every fire, therefore, songs were sung and tales told of the valour and glory of the heroes of old. Mingled with these were laments over the evil days that had befallen Britain, and exhortations to their hearers to avenge the past and prove themselves worthy of their ancestors.

In similar manner the night was passed in Parta's hall. Here the chief bards were assembled, with all the tribal leaders, and vied with each other in their stirring chants. Beric moved about among the guests, seeing that their wants were supplied, while Parta

herself looked after those who were gathered on the dais. Beric learned from the old chief Aska, who had first spoken to him on the day of their arrival at the sacred oak, that all Britain was ripe for the rising, and that messengers had been received not only from the Brigantes, but from many of the southern and western tribes, with assurances that they would rise as soon as they heard that the Iceni had struck the first blow.

"The Trinobantes will join us at Camalodunum. All goes well. Suetonius, with the legions, is still in the far west. We shall make an end of them here before he can return. By that time we shall have been joined by most of the tribes, and shall have a force that will be sufficient to destroy utterly the army he is leading. That done, there will be but the isolated forts to capture and destroy, and then Britain will be free from the invader. You think this will be so, Beric?"

"I hope and trust so," Beric replied. "I think that success in our first undertakings is a certainty, and I trust we may defeat Suetonius. With such numbers as we shall put in the field we ought surely to be able to do so. It is not of the present I think so much as of the future. Rome never submits to defeat, and will send an army here to which that of Suetonius would be but a handful. But if we remain united, and utilize the months that must elapse before the Romans can arrive in preparing for the conflict, we ought to be victorious."

"You feel sure that the Romans will try to reconquer Britain?"

"Quite sure. In all their history there is not an instance where they have submitted to defeat. This is one of the main reasons of their success. I am certain that, at whatever sacrifices, they will equip and send out an army that they will believe powerful enough for the purpose."

"But they were many years after their first invasion before they came again."

"That is true; but in those first two invasions they did not conquer. In the first they were forced to retire, and therefore came again; in the second they had success enough to be able to claim a victory and so to retire with honour. Besides, Rome is vastly stronger and more powerful now than she was then. Believe me, Aska, the struggle will be but begun when we have driven the last Roman from the island."

"We must talk of this again," Aska said, "as it is upon us that the brunt of this struggle will fall. We shall have the chief voice and influence after it is over, and Boadicea will stand in the place that Cunobeline held, of chief king of the island. Then, as you say, much will depend on the steps we take to prepare to resist the next invasion; and young as you are, your knowledge of Roman ways will render your counsels valuable, and give great weight to your advice."

"I do not wish to put myself in any way in the foreground," Beric said. "I am still but a boy, and have no wish to raise my voice in the council of chiefs; but what I have learned of Roman history and Roman laws I would gladly explain to those who, like yourself,

speak with the voice of authority, and whose wisdom all recognize."

In the morning Boadicea said that reports had been brought to her of the manner in which Beric had been teaching the Sarci to fight in Roman fashion, and that she should be glad to see the result.

Accordingly the tribesmen proceeded to the open fields a mile away, where they had been accustomed to drill, and they were followed by the whole of those gathered round the village. The queen and Parta drove out in their chariots. When they reached the spot the chiefs of the other tribes, at Beric's request, called upon their men to draw off and leave a space sufficient for the exercises. This left the Sarci standing in scattered groups over the open space, at one end of which Boadicea and all the chiefs were gathered.

"They are now in the position, queen," Beric said, "of men unsuspecting danger. I shall now warn them that they are about to be attacked, and that they are to gather instantly to repel the enemy."

Taking the conch slung over his shoulder Beric applied it to his lips and blew three short notes. The tribesmen ran together; there was, as it seemed to the lookers on, a scene of wild confusion for a minute, and then they were drawn up in companies, each a hundred strong, in regular order. A short blast and a long one, and they moved up together into a mass five deep; a single note, and the spears fell, and an array of glistening points shone in front of them.

A shout of surprise and approval rose from the tribesmen looking on. To them this perfect order and regularity seemed well nigh miraculous.

Beric now advanced to the line. At his order the two rear ranks stepped backwards a few feet, struck their spears in the ground, and then discharged their javelins--of which each man carried six --over the heads of the ranks in front, against the enemy supposed to be advancing to attack them. Then seizing their spears they fell into line again, and at another order the whole advanced at a quick pace with levelled spears to the charge, and keeping on till within a few paces of where the queen was standing, halted suddenly and raised their spears. Again a roar of applause came from the tribesmen.

"It is wonderful," the queen said. "I had not thought that men could be taught so to move together; and that is how the Romans fight, Beric?"

"It is, queen," Beric said. "The exercises are exactly similar to those of the Romans. I learnt them by heart when I was among them, and the orders are exactly the same as those given in the legions --only, of course, they are performed by trained soldiers more perfectly than we can as yet do them. It is but two months since we began, and the Romans have practised them for years. Had I time you would have seen them much more perfect than at present."

"You have performed marvels," she said. "I wish that you had had more time, and that all the Iceni, and not the Sarci only could have thus learned to meet the enemy. Do you not think so, chiefs?"

"It is wonderful," one of the chiefs said; "but I think that it is

not so terrifying to a foe as the rush of our own men. It is better for resistance, but not so good for attack. Still it has great merits; but I think it more suited for men who fight deliberately, like the Romans, than for our own tribesmen, who are wont to rely for victory each upon his own strength and valour."

"What say you, Beric?" the queen asked.

"It would be presumptuous for me to give my opinion against that of a great chief," Beric said quietly; "But, so far, strength and valour have not in themselves succeeded. The men of Caractacus had both, but they were unavailing against the solid Roman line. We have never yet won a great victory over the Romans, and yet we have fought against them valiantly. None can say that a Briton is not as brave and as strong as a Roman. In our battles we have always outnumbered them. If we have been beaten, therefore, it has been surely because the Roman method of fighting is superior to our own."

There was a murmur of assent from several of the chiefs.

"Beric's argument is a strong one," the queen said to the one who had spoken; "and I would that all the Iceni had learnt to fight in this fashion. However, we shall have opportunities of seeing which is right before we have finished with the Romans. March your men back again, Beric."

Beric sounded his horn, and the line, facing half round, became a column, and marched in regular order back to the village. The morning meal was now taken, and at midday the march began. Boadicea with her daughters, Parta and other women of rank, went first in their chariots; and the Sarci, who, as lying next to the enemy's country, were allowed the post of honour, followed in column behind her, while the rest of the tribesmen made their way in a miscellaneous crowd through the forest. They halted among the trees at a distance of four miles from Camalodunum, and then rested, for the attack was not to take place until daybreak on the next morning.

Late that evening two or three women of the Trinobantes came out, in accordance with a preconcerted arrangement, to tell them that there was no suspicion at Camalodunum of the impending danger; and that, although there was great uneasiness among the inhabitants, no measures for defence had been taken, and that even the precaution of sending away the women and children had not been adopted.

No fires had been lighted; the men slept in the open air, simply wrapping themselves in their mantles and lying down under the trees. Beric had a long talk with Boduoc and ten of the tribesmen of the latter's company.

"You understand," Beric said at last, "that if, as I expect, the surprise will be complete and no regular resistance be offered, I shall sound my horn and give the signal for the tribe to break ranks and scatter. You ten men will, however, keep together, and at once follow Boduoc and myself. As soon as we enter the house to which I shall lead you, you will surround the two persons I shall place in your charge, and will conduct them to the spot where the chariot will be waiting. You will defend them, if necessary, with your lives, should any disobey my order to let you pass through

with them. As soon as they are placed in the chariot you will be free to join in the sack, and if you should be losers by the delay, I will myself make up your share to that of your comrades. You are sure, Boduoc, that all the other arrangements are perfect?"

"Everything is arranged," Boduoc said. "My brother, who drives the chariot that brought your mother's attendants, quite understands that he is to follow as soon as we move off, and keeping a short way behind us is to stop in front of the last house outside the gate until we come. As soon as he has taken them up he will drive off and give them into the charge of our mother, who has promised you to have everything in readiness for them; the skins for beds, drinking vessels, food, and everything else necessary was taken there two days ago. My sisters will see to the comfort of the young lady, and you can rely upon my mother to carry out all the orders you have given her. Our hut lies so deeply in the forest that there is little chance of anyone going near it, especially as the whole of the men of the tribe are away."

Two hours before daylight the Iceni moved forward. They were to attack at a number of different points, and each chief had had his position allotted to him. The Sarci were to move directly against the northern gate and would form the centre of the attack. Each man, by Beric's order, carried a faggot so that these could be piled against the wall by the gate and enable them to effect an entrance without the delay that would be incurred in breaking down the massive gates. They passed quietly through the cultivated fields, and past the houses scattered about outside the walls, whose inhabitants had withdrawn into the city since the alarm spread. They halted at a short distance from the gate, for sentries would be on guard there, and remained for nearly an hour, as many of the other tribesmen had a considerably longer distance to go to reach their appointed stations. A faint light was beginning to steal over the sky when, far away on their right, a horn sounded. It was repeated again and again, each time nearer, and ran along far to the left; then, raising their war cry, the Sarci dashed forward to the gate.

The shouts of the sentinels on the walls had arisen as soon as the first horn sounded, and had scarcely died away when the Sarci reached the gate. Each man as he arrived threw down his faggot, and the pile soon reached the top of the wall. Then Beric led the way up and stood on the Roman work. The sentries, seeing the hopelessness of resistance, had already fled, and the Sarci poured in. A confused clamour of shouts and cries rose from the town, above which sounded the yells of the exulting Iceni. Beric gave the signal for the Sarci to scatter, and the tribesmen at once began to attack the houses. Placing himself at the head of Boduoc's chosen party, Beric ran forward. Already from some of the houses armed men were pouring out, but disregarding these Beric pressed on until he reached the house of Caius Muro. His reason for haste was that, standing rather on the other side of the town, it was nearer the point assailed by one of the other divisions of the tribe than to the north gate, and he feared that others might arrive there before him. Reaching the door he beat upon it with the handle of his sword.

"Open, Cneius," he shouted, "it is I, Beric."

The door was opened at once, and he ran forward into the atrium,

which was filled with frightened slaves, who burst into cries of terror as, followed by his men, he entered. "Where are you, Cneius?" Beric shouted.

"I am here," the scribe replied from his cubicule, "I will be with you in a moment; it is but a minute since we were awoke by the uproar."

"Be quick!" Beric said, "there is not a moment to be lost.

"Run up to the women's apartments," he said to a slave, "and tell your mistress to hurry down, for that every minute is precious."

Almost immediately Berenice came down the stairs in her disguise as a British boy, and at the same moment Cneius issued from his room.

"Come, Berenice," Beric said, "there is not a moment to be lost; the town is in our hands, and if others of the tribe arrive I might not be able to save you."

Hurrying them from the house he ordered the men to close round them, and then started on his way back. A terrible din was going on all round; yells, shouts, and screams arising from every house. Flames were bursting up at a dozen points. To his great satisfaction Beric reached the point where the Sarci were at work, breaking into the houses, before he encountered any of the other Iceni. The men were too busy to pay any attention to the little group of their own tribesmen; passing through these they were soon at the gate. It already stood open, the bolts having been drawn by those who first entered. Fifty yards from the wall stood the chariot.

"Now you can leave us," Beric said to his followers, "I will rejoin you soon."

Berenice was crying bitterly, horror stricken at the sounds she had heard, though happily she had seen nothing, being closely shut in by the tall forms of her guard.

"Thanks be to the gods that I have saved you, Berenice," Beric said, "and you also, Cneius! Now I must commit you to the care of the driver of the chariot, who is one of my tribesmen. He will take you to a retreat where you will, I trust, be in perfect safety until the troubles are over. His mother has promised to do all in her power for your comfort. You will find one of our huts but a rough abode, but it will at least be a shelter."

"Cannot you come with us, Beric?" the girl sobbed.

"That I cannot do, Berenice. I am a Briton and a chief, and I must be with my tribe. And now I must away. Farewell, Berenice! may your gods and mine watch over you! Farewell, my kind teacher!"

He took off the torque, the collar formed of a number of small metal cords interlaced with each other, the emblem of rank and command, and handed it to the driver. "You will show this, Runoc, to any you meet, for it may be that you will find parties of late comers on the road. This will be a proof that you are journeying on my business and under my orders. Do not stop and let them question you, but drive quickly along, and if they should shout and bid

you stop, hold up the torque and shout, 'I travel at speed by my chief's orders.'

"Do you both sit down in the chariot," he said to the others. "Then as you journey rapidly along it will be supposed that you are either wounded or messengers of importance. Farewell!"

Cneius and the girl had already mounted the chariot, and the driver now gave the horses rein and started at full speed. Beric turned and re-entered the town slowly. In those days pity for the vanquished was a sentiment but little comprehended, and he had certainly not learned it among the Romans, who frequently massacred their prisoners wholesale. Woe to the vanquished! was almost a maxim with them. But Beric shrank from witnessing the scene, now that the tables were turned upon the oppressors. Nationally he hated the Romans, but individually he had no feeling against them, and had he had the power he would at once have arrested the effusion of blood. He wished to drive them from the kingdom, not to massacre them; but he knew well that he had no power whatever in such a matter. Even his own tribesmen would not have stayed their hand at his command. To slay a Roman was to them a far more meritorious action than to slay a wolf, and any one who urged mercy would have been regarded not only as a weakling but as a traitor.

Already the work was well nigh done. Pouring in on all sides into the city the Iceni had burst into the houses and slain their occupants whether they resisted or not. A few men here and there sold their lives dearly, but the great majority had been too panic stricken with the sudden danger to attempt the slightest resistance. Some of the inhabitants whose houses were near the temple had fled thither for refuge before the assailants reached them, but in half an hour from the striking of the first blow these and the troops there were the sole survivors of the population of Camalodunum. For the present the temple was disregarded. It was known that the garrison did not exceed four hundred men, and there was no fear of so small a body assuming the offensive.

The work of destruction had commenced. There was but little plundering, for the Britons despised the Roman luxuries, of the greater part of which they did not even comprehend the use. They were Roman, and therefore to be hated as well as despised. Save, therefore, weapons, which were highly prized, and gold ornaments, which were taken as trinkets for the women at home, nothing was saved. As the defenders of each house were slain, fire was applied to hangings and curtains, and then the assailants hurried away in search of fresh victims. Thus the work of destruction proceeded concurrently with that of massacre, and as the sun rose vast columns of smoke mounting upwards conveyed the news to the women of the Iceni and Trinobantes for a circle of many miles round, that the attack had been successful, and that Camalodunum, the seat of their oppressors, was in flames. Beric, as he made his way towards the centre of the town, sighed as he passed the shop where two months before he had stopped a moment to look at the rolls of vellum.

The destruction of the monuments of Roman luxury; the houses with their costly contents; and even the Palace of Cunobeline, which had been converted into the residence of the Roman governor, had not affected him; but he mourned over the loss of the precious manuscripts which had contained such a wealth of stored up learning.

Already the house was wrapped in flames, which were rushing from the windows, and the prize which he had looked upon as his own special share of the plunder had escaped him.

At the edge of the broad open space that surrounded the Temple of Claudius the Britons were gathering thickly. Beric applied his horn to his lips, and in a few minutes the Sarci gathered round him. Bidding them stand in order he moved away to see what disposition was being made for the attack on the temple, but at present all were too excited with their success for any to assume the lead or give orders. At the first rush parties of the Britons had made for the temple, but had been received with showers of darts and stones, and had been met on the steps by the Roman soldiers and roughly repulsed. Walking round he came upon the chariot of Boadicea. The queen was flushed with excitement and gratified vengeance, and was shaking her spear menacingly towards the temple; her eye presently fell upon Beric.

"The work has begun well, my young chief, but we have still to crush the wolves in their den. It is a strong place, with its massive walls unpierced save by the doorway at each end; but we will have them out if to do so we are forced to tear it down stone by stone."

"I trust that we shall not be as long as that would take, queen," Beric said, "for we have other work to do."

Just at this moment one of the chiefs of the Trinobantes came up. "Queen Boadicea," he said, "we crave that we may be allowed to storm the temple. It is built on our ground as a sign of our subjection, and we would fain ourselves capture it."

"Be it so," the queen replied. "Do you undertake the task at once."

The Trinobantes, who had joined the Iceni in the attack on the town, presently gathered with loud shouts, and under their chiefs rushed at the temple. From the roof darts and stones were showered down upon them; but though many were killed they swarmed up the broad steps that surrounded it on all sides and attacked the doors. Beric shook his head, and returning to his men led them off down one of the broad streets to an open space a short distance away.

"This will be our gathering place," he said. "Do not wander far away, and return quickly at the sound of my horn. We may be wanted presently. I do not think that the Trinobantes will take the temple in that fashion."

They had indeed advanced entirely unprovided with proper means of assault. The massive gates against which the Romans had piled stones, casks of provisions, and other heavy articles were not to be broken down by such force as the Britons could bring against them. In vain these chopped with their swords upon the woodwork. The gates were constructed of oak, and the weapons scarce marked them. In vain they threw themselves twenty abreast against them. The doors hardly quivered at the shock, and in the meantime the assailants were suffering heavily, for from openings in the roof, extending from the building itself to the pillars that surrounded it, the Romans dropped missiles upon them.

For some time the Trinobantes persevered, and then their chiefs,

seeing that the attempt was hopeless, called off their followers. No fresh attempt was made for a time, and Boadicea established herself in one of the few houses that had escaped the flames, and there presently the chiefs assembled. Various suggestions were made, but at last it was decided to batter in the doors with a heavy tree, and a strong party of men were at once despatched to fell and prepare two of suitable size. The operation was a long one, as the trees when found had to be brought down by lighting fires against the trunks, and it was nightfall before they fell and the branches were cut off. It was decided, therefore, to postpone the attack until the next day.

Beric had not been present at the council, to which only a few of the leading chiefs had been summoned; but he doubted, when he heard what had been decided upon, whether the attack would be successful. It was settled that the Trinobantes were to attack the door at one end of the temple, and the Iceni that at the other. Late in the evening the chariot returned, and Beric was greatly relieved to hear that the fugitives had been placed in safety and that the journey had been made without interference. He was glad to recover his torque, for its absence would have excited surprise when men's minds were less occupied and excited. Not until he recovered it could he go to see Parta, who was lodged with the queen, but as soon as he recovered it he went in. Every sign of Roman habitation and luxury had been, as far as possible, obliterated by order of Boadicea before she entered the house. Hangings had been pulled down, statues overthrown, and the paintings on the plaster chipped from the walls.

"What have you been doing all day, Beric?" his mother asked. "I looked to see you long before this, and should have thought that some accident had befallen you had I not known that the news would have been speedily brought me had it been so."

"I have been looking after the tribesmen, mother. I should have come in to see you, but did not wish to intrude among the chiefs in council with the queen. You represented the Sarci here, and had we been wanted you would have sent for me. Who are to attack the temple tomorrow?"

"Not the Sarci, my son. Unser begged that he and his tribe might have the honour, and the queen and council granted it to him."

"I am glad of it, mother. The duty is an honourable one, but the loss will be heavy, and others can do the work as well as we could, and I want to keep our men for the shock of battle with the legions. Moreover, I doubt whether the doors will be battered down in the way they propose."

"You do, Beric! and why is that?" The speaker was Aska, who had just left the group of chiefs gathered round the queen at the other end of the apartment, and had come close without Beric hearing him.

The lad coloured. "I spoke only for my mother's hearing, sir," he said. "To no one else should I have ventured to express an opinion on a course agreed upon by those who are older and wiser than myself."

"That is right, Beric; the young should be silent in the presence of their elders; nevertheless I should like to know why you think the assault is likely to fail."

"It was really not my own opinion I was giving, sir. I was thinking of the manner in which the Romans, who are accustomed to besiege places with high walls and strong gates, proceed. They have made these matters a study, while to us an attack upon such a place is altogether new, seeing that none such exist in Britain save those the Romans have erected."

"How would they proceed, Beric?"

"They would treat an attack upon such a place as a serious matter, not to be undertaken rashly and hastily, but only after great preparation. In order to batter down a gate or a wall they use heavy beams, such as those that have been prepared for tomorrow, but they affix to the head a shoe of iron or brass. They do not swing it upon men's arms, seeing that it would be most difficult to get so many men to exercise their strength together, and indeed could not give it the momentum required."

"But we propose to have the beam carried by fifty men, and for all to rush forward together and drive it against the door."

"If the door were weak and would yield to the first blow that might avail," Beric said; "but unless it does so the shock will throw down the tree and the men bearing it. Many will be grievously hurt. Moreover, if, as will surely be the case, many of the bearers fall under the darts of the Romans as they approach, others will stumble over their bodies, and the speed of the whole be greatly checked."

"Then can you tell me how the Romans act in such a case, Beric?"

"Yes, sir. I have frequently heard relations of sieges from soldiers who have taken part in them. They build, in the first place, movable towers or sheds running on wheels. These towers are made strong enough to resist the stones and missiles the besieged may hurl

against them. Under cover of the shelter men push up the towers to the door or wall to be battered; the beam is then slung on ropes hanging from the inside of the tower. Other ropes are attached; numbers of men take hold of these, and working together swing the beam backwards and forwards, so that each time it strikes the wall or door a heavy blow. As the beam is of great weight, and many men work it, the blows are well nigh irresistible, and the strongest walls crumble and the most massive gates splinter under the shock of its iron head."

"The Romans truly are skilled warriors," Aska said. "We are but children in the art of war beside them, and methinks it would be difficult indeed for us to construct such a machine, though mayhap it could be done had we with us many men skilled in the making of chariots. But sometimes, Beric, they must have occasion to attack places where such machines could not well be used."

"In that case, sir, they sometimes make what they call a tortoise. The soldiers link their broad shields together, so as to form a complete covering, resembling the back of a tortoise, and under shelter of this they advance to the attack. When they reach the foot of the wall all remain immovable save those in the front line, who labour with iron bars to loosen the stones at the foot of the

wall, protected from missiles from above by the shields of their comrades. From time to time they are relieved by fresh workers until the foundations of the wall are deeply undermined. As they proceed they erect massive props to keep up the wall, and finally fill up the hole with combustibles. After lighting these they retire. When the props are consumed the wall of course falls, and they then rush forward and climb the breach."

"Truly, Beric, you have profited by your lessons," Aska said, laying his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder. "The Druids spoke wisely when they prophesied a great future for you. Before we have done we may have many Roman strongholds to capture, and when we do I will see that the council order that your advice be taken as to how they shall be attacked; but in this matter tomorrow things must remain as they are. Unser is a proud chief, and headstrong, and would not brook any interference. Should he be repulsed in the assault, I will advise the queen to call up the Sarci, and allow you to proceed in your own manner."

"I will do my best, sir; but time is needed for proceeding according to the first Roman method, and our shields are too small for the second. The place should be taken by tomorrow night, for Cerealis will assuredly move with his legion to relieve it as soon as he hears the news of our attack."

"That is what has been in our minds," Aska said. "Well, what do you say, Beric? After what I saw the other day of the movements you have taught your tribe I should be sorry to have their ranks thinned in a hopeless attack upon the temple. I would rather that we should leave it for the present and march out to meet Cerealis, leaving a guard here to keep the Romans hemmed in until we have time to deal with them."

Beric stood for a minute or two without answering, and then said, "I will undertake it, sir, with the Sarci should Unser's attack fail."

CHAPTER VI: FIRST SUCCESSES

Upon leaving his mother, Beric returned to the spot where the Sarci were lying. Some of the chiefs were sitting round a fire made of beams and woodwork dragged from the ruins of the Roman houses.

"We must be up an hour before daybreak; I think that there will be work for us tomorrow. If Unser and his tribe fail in capturing the temple we are to try; and there will be preparations to make." And he explained the plan upon which he had determined.

Daylight was just breaking when the Sarci entered the forest four miles from Camalodunum. Here they scattered in search of dry wood. In two hours sufficient had been gathered for their purpose, and it was made up into two hundred great faggots nearly four feet across and ten in length, in weight as much as a strong man could carry on his head. With these they returned to the city. It needed no questions as to the result of the attack, which had just terminated with the same fortune that had befallen that on the day previous.

Unser had been killed, and large numbers of his men had fallen in their vain attempts to hew down the gates. The battering rams had proved a complete failure. Many of the fifty men who carried the beam had fallen as they advanced. The others had rushed at the gate door, but the recoil had thrown them down, and many had had their limbs broken from the tree falling on them. Attempts had been made to repeat the assault; but the Romans having pierced the under part of the roof in many places, let fall javelins and poured down boiling oil; and at last, having done all that was possible, but in vain, the tribesmen had fallen back.

Beric proceeded at once to the queen's. A council was being held, and it had just been determined to march away to meet Cerealis when Beric entered. Aska left his place in the circle of chiefs as soon as he saw him enter the door.

"Are you ready to undertake it, Beric? Do not do so unless you have strong hopes of success. The repulses of yesterday and today have lowered the spirits of our men, and another failure would still further harm us."

"I will undertake it, Aska, and I think I can answer for success; but I shall need three hours before I begin."

"That could be spared," the chief said. "Cerealis will not have learned the news until last night at the earliest--he may not know it yet. There is no fear of his arriving here until tomorrow." Then he returned to his place.

"Before we finally decide, queen," he said, "I would tell you that the young chief Beric is ready to attack the place with the Sarci. He has learned much of the Roman methods, and may be more fortunate than the others have been. I would suggest that he be allowed to try, for it will have a very ill effect upon the tribes if we fail in taking the temple, which is regarded as the symbol of Roman dominion. I will even go so far as to say that a retreat now would go very far to mar our hopes of success in the war, for the news would spread through the country and dispirit others now preparing to join us."

"Why should Beric succeed when Unser has failed?" one of the chiefs said. "Can a lad achieve a success where one of our best and bravest chiefs has been repulsed?"

"I think that he might," Aska replied. "At any rate, as he is ready to risk his life and his tribe in doing so, I pray the queen to give her consent. He demands three hours to make his preparations for the attack."

"He shall try," Boadicea said decidedly. "You saw the other day, chiefs, how well he has learned the Roman methods of war. He shall have an opportunity now of turning his knowledge to account. Parta, you are willing that your son should try?"

"Certainly I am willing," Parta said. "He can but die once; he cannot die in a nobler effort for his country."

"Then it is settled," the queen said. "The Sarci will attack in three hours."

As soon as Beric heard the decision he hurried away and at once ordered the tribesmen to scatter through the country and to kill two hundred of the cattle roaming at present masterless, to strip off their hides, and bring them in. They returned before the three hours expired, bringing in the hides. In the meantime Beric had procured from a half consumed warehouse a quantity of oil, pitch, and other combustibles, and had smeared the faggots with them. On the arrival of the men with the hides, these were bound with the raw side upwards over the faggots.

Two hundred of the strongest men of the tribe were then chosen and divided into two parties, and the rest being similarly divided, took their station at the ends of the square facing the gates. When Beric sounded his horn the faggot bearers raised their burdens on to their heads and formed in a close square, ten abreast, with the faggots touching each other. Beric himself commanded the party facing the principal entrance, and holding a blazing torch in each hand, took his place in the centre of the square, there being ample room for him between the lines of men. The rest of the tribe were ordered to stand firmly in order until he gave the signal for the advance. Then he again sounded his horn, and the two parties advanced from the opposite ends of the square.

As soon as they came within reach the Romans showered down darts and javelins; but these either slipped altogether from the surface of the wet hides, or, penetrating them, went but a short distance into the faggots; and the British tribesmen raised shouts of exultation as the two solid bodies advanced unshaken to the steps of the temple. Mounting these they advanced to the gates. In vain the Romans dropped their javelins perpendicularly through the holes in the ceiling of the colonnade, in vain poured down streams of boiling oil, which had proved so fatal to the last attack. The javelins failed to penetrate, the oil streamed harmless off the hides. The men had, before advancing, received minute instructions. The ten men in the front line piled their faggots against the door, and then keeping close to the wall of the temple itself, slipped round to the side colonnade.

The operation was repeated by the next line, and so on until but two lines remained. Then the two men at each end of these lines mounted the pile of faggots and placed their burdens there, leaving but six standing. In their centre Beric had his place, and now, kneeling down under their shelter, applied his torches to the pile. He waited till he saw the flames beginning to mount up. Then he gave the word; the six men dropped their faggots to the ground, and with him ran swiftly to the side colonnade, where they were in shelter, as the Romans, knowing they could not be attacked here, had made no openings in the ceiling above. The Britons were frantic with delight when they saw columns of smoke followed by tongues of flames mounting from either end of the temple. Higher and higher the flames mounted till they licked the ceiling above them.

For half an hour the fire continued, and by the end of that time there was but a glowing mass of embers through which those without could soon see right into the temple. The doors and the obstacles behind them had been destroyed. As soon as he was aware by the shouts of his countrymen that the faggots were well in a blaze, Beric had sounded his horn, and he and the tribesmen from both

colonnades had run across the open unmolested by the darts of the Romans, who were too panic stricken at the danger that threatened them to pay any heed to their movements. Beric was received with loud acclamations by the Iceni, and was escorted by a shouting multitude to the queen, who had taken her place at a point where she could watch the operations. She held out her hand to him. "You have succeeded, Beric," she said; "and my thanks and those of all here--nay, of all Britain--are due to you. In half an hour the temple will be open to attack."

"Hardly in that time, queen," he replied. "The faggots will doubtless have done their work by then, but it will be hours before the embers and stonework will be sufficiently cool to enable men to pass over them to the assault."

"We can wait," the queen said. "A messenger, who left the camp of Cerealis at daybreak, has just arrived, and at that hour nothing was known to the Romans of our attack here. They will not now arrive until tomorrow."

Not until the afternoon was it considered that the entrances would be cool enough to pass through. Then the Sarci prepared for the attack, binding pieces of raw hide under their feet to protect them from the heated stonework. They were formed ten abreast. Beric took his place before the front line of one of the columns, and with levelled spears they advanced at a run towards the doors. A shower of missiles saluted them from the roof. Some fell, but the rest, pressing on in close order, dashed through the gateway and flung themselves upon the Roman soldiers drawn up to oppose their passage. The resistance was feeble. The Romans had entirely lost heart and could not for a moment sustain the weight of the charge. They were swept away from the entrance, and the Britons poured in.

Standing in groups the Romans defended themselves in desperation; but their efforts were vain, and in five minutes the last defender of the place was slain. As soon as the fight was over the whole of the Iceni rushed tumultuously forward with exultant shouts and filled the temple; then a horn sounded and a lane was made, as Boadicea, followed by her chiefs and chieftainesses, entered the temple. The queen s face was radiant with triumph, and she would have spoken but the shouting was so loud that those near her could not obtain silence. They understood, however, when advancing to the statues of the gods that stood behind the altars, she waved her spear. In an instant the tribesmen swarmed round the statues, ropes were attached to the massive figures, and Jupiter, Mars, and Minerva fell to the ground with a crash, as did the statue of the Emperor Claudius.

A mighty shout hailed its downfall. The gods of the Britons, insulted and outraged, were avenged upon those of Rome; the altars of Mona had streamed with the blood of the Druids, those of Camalodunum were wet with the gore of Roman legionaries. The statues were broken to pieces, the altars torn down, and then the chiefs ordered the tribesmen to fetch in faggots. Thousands went to the forest, while others pulled down detached houses and sheds that had escaped the flames, and dragged the beams and woodwork to the temple. By nightfall an enormous pile of faggots was raised round each of the eight interior columns that in two lines supported the roof. Torches were applied by Boadicea, her two daughters and some of the

principal Druids, and in a short time the interior of the temple was a glowing furnace. The beams of the ceiling and roof soon ignited and the flames shot up high into the air.

All day the Trinobantes had been pouring in, and a perfect frenzy of delight reigned among the great crowd looking on at the destruction of the temple that had been raised to signify and celebrate the subjugation of Britain. Women with flowing hair performed wild dances of triumph; some rushed about as if possessed with madness, uttering prophecies of the total destruction of the Romans; others foamed at the mouth and fell in convulsions, while the men were scarcely less excited over their success. Messengers had already brought in news that at midday Cerealis had learned that Camalodunum had been attacked, and that the legion was to start on the following morning to relieve the town.

The news had been taken to him by one of the Trinobantes, who had received his instructions from Aska. He was to say that the town had suddenly been attacked and that many had fallen; but the greater portion of the population had escaped to the temple, which had been vainly attacked by the Iceni. The object of this news was to induce Cerealis to move out from his fortified camp. The chiefs felt the difficulty of assaulting such a position, and though they had dreaded the arrival of Cerealis before the temple was taken, they were anxious that he should set out as soon as they saw that Beric's plan of attack had succeeded, and that the temple was now open to their assault.

At midnight the roof of the temple fell in, and nothing remained but the bare walls and the columns surrounding them. The chiefs ordered their followers to make their way through the still burning town and to gather by tribes outside the defensive works, and there lie down until morning, when they would march to meet the legion of Cerealis. At daybreak they were again afoot and on the march southward, swollen by the accession of the Trinobantes and by the arrival during the last two days of tribes who had been too late to join the rest at Cardun. The British force now numbered at least fifty thousand.

"It is a great army, Beric," Boduoc said exultingly as they moved forward.

"It is a great host," Beric replied. "I would that it were an army. Had they all even as much training as our men I should feel confident in the future."

"But surely you are confident now, Beric; we have begun well."

"We have scarcely begun at all," Beric said. "What have we done? Destroyed a sleeping town and captured by means of fire a temple defended by four hundred men. We shall win today, that I do not doubt. The men are wrought up by their success, and the Romans are little prepared to meet such a force--I doubt not that we shall beat them, but to crush a legion is not to defeat Rome. I hope, Boduoc, but I do not feel confident. Look back at the Sarci and then look round at this disordered host. Well, the Romans in discipline and order exceed the Sarci as much as we exceed the rest of the Iceni. They will be led by generals trained in war; we are led by chiefs whose only idea of war is to place themselves at the head of

their tribe and rush against the enemy. Whether courage and great numbers can compensate for want of discipline remains to be seen. The history of Rome tells me that it has never done so yet."

After five hours' marching some fleet footed scouts sent on ahead brought in the news that the Romans were approaching. A halt was called, and the chiefs assembled round the queen's chariot in council. Beric was summoned by a messenger from the queen.

"You must always attend our councils," she said when he came up. "You have proved that, young as you are, you possess a knowledge of war that more than compensates for your lack of years. You have the right, after capturing the temple for us, to take for the Sarci the post of honour in today's battle. Choose it for yourself. You know the Romans; where do you think we had better fight them?"

"I think we could not do better than await them here," he said. "We stand on rising ground, and one of the Trinobantes to whom I have just spoken says that there is a swamp away on the left of our front, so that the Roman horsemen cannot advance in that direction. I should attack them in face and on their left flank, closing in thickly so as to prevent their horsemen from breaking out on to the plain at our right and then falling upon us in our rear. Since you are good enough to say that I may choose my post for the Sarci, I will hold them where they stand; then, should the others fail to break the Roman front, we will move down upon them and check their advance while the rest attack their flanks."

This answer pleased some of the chiefs, who felt jealous of the honour the small tribe had gained on the previous day. They were afraid that Beric would have chosen to head the attack.

"Does that plan please you?" Boadicea asked.

"It is as well as another," one of the chiefs said. "Let the Sarci look on this time while we destroy the enemy. I should have thought Beric would have chosen for his tribe the post of honour in the attack."

"The Romans always keep their best troops in reserve," Beric said quietly; "in a hard fight it is the reserve that decides the fate of the battle."

"Then let it be so," Boadicea said. "Is the swamp that you speak of deep?"

"It is not too deep for our men to cross," one of the chiefs of the Trinobantes said; "but assuredly a horseman could not pass through it."

"Very well, then, let the Trinobantes attack by falling upon the Romans on our right; the Iceni will attack them in front; and the Sarci will remain where they stand until Beric sees need for them to advance."

In a few minutes the Roman legion was seen advancing, with a portion of the cavalry in front and the rest in the rear. The queen, whose chariot was placed in front of the line, raised her spear. A tremendous shout was raised by the Britons, and with wild cries

the tribes poured down to the attack, while the women, clustered on the slopes they had left, added their shrill cries of encouragement to the din. The Romans, who, believing that the Britons were still engaged in the attack on Camalodunum, had no expectation of meeting them on the march, halted and stood uncertain as the masses of Britons poured down to the attack. Then their trumpets sounded and they again advanced, the cavalry in the rear moving forward to join those in the advance, but before they accomplished this the Britons were upon them. Showers of darts were poured in, and the horsemen, unable to stand the onslaught, rode into the spaces between the companies of the infantry, who, moving outwards and forming a solid column on either flank, protected them from the assaults of their foes.

The Britons, after pouring in showers of javelins, flung themselves, sword in hand, upon the Roman infantry; but these with levelled spears showed so solid a front that they were unable to break through, while from behind the spearmen, the light armed Roman troops poured volleys of missiles among them. Boadicea called Beric to her side.

"It is as you said, Beric; the order in which the Romans fight is wonderful. See how steadily they hold together, it is like a wild boar attacked by dogs; but they will be overwhelmed, see how the darts fly and how bravely the Iceni are fighting."

The tribesmen, indeed, were attacking with desperate bravery. Seizing the heads of the spears they attempted to wrest them from their holders, or to thrust them aside and push forward within striking distance. Sometimes they partially succeeded, and though the first might fall others rushing in behind reached the Romans and pressed them backwards, but reserves were brought up and the line restored. Then slowly but steadily the Romans moved forward, and although partial success had at some points attended those who attacked them in flank, the front of the column with serried spears held its way on in spite of the efforts of the Britons to arrest the movement. Presently the supply of javelins of their assailants began to fail, and the assaults upon the head of the column to grow more feeble, while the shouts of the Roman soldiers rose above the cries of their assailants.

"Now it is time for us to move down," Beric said; "if we can arrest the advance their flanks will be broken in before long. Now, men," he shouted as he returned to his place at the head of the Sarci, "now is the time to show that you can meet the Romans in their own fashion. Move slowly down to the attack, let no man hasten his pace, but let each keep his place in the ranks. Four companies will attack the Romans in front, the others in column five deep will march down till they face the Roman flank, then they will march at it, spears down, and break it in."

Beric sounded his bugle, and ten deep the four hundred men moved steadily down to the attack of the Romans. The five front ranks marched with levelled spears, those behind prepared to hurl their darts over their heads. When within fifty yards of the enemy the Sarci raised their battle cry, and the Iceni engaged with the Romans in front, seeing the hedge of spears advancing behind them, hurriedly ran off at both flanks and the Sarci advanced to the attack.

The Romans halted involuntarily, astonished at the spectacle. Never before had they encountered barbarians advancing in formation similar to their own, and the sight of the tall figures advancing almost naked to the assault--for the Britons always threw off their garments before fighting--filled them with something like consternation. At the shouts of their officers, however, they again got into motion and met the Britons firmly. The additional length Beric had given to the spears of the Sarci now proved of vital advantage, and bearing steadily onward they brought the Romans to a standstill, while the javelins from the British rear ranks fell thick and fast among them. Gradually the Romans were pressed backwards, quickly as the gaps were filled up by those behind, until the charging shout of the Sarci on their flank was heard. Beric blew his horn, and his men with an answering shout pressed forward faster, their cries of victory rising as the Romans gave way.

Still the latter fought stubbornly, until triumphant yells and confused shouts told them that the flank had given way under the attack of the Britons. Then Beric's horn sounded again, the slow advance was converted into a charge, the ranks behind closed up, and before the weight and impetus of the rush the Roman line was broken. Then the impetuosity of the Sarci could no longer be restrained, in vain Beric blew his horn. Flinging down their spears and drawing their swords the Britons flung themselves on the broken mass, the other tribesmen pouring in tumultuously behind them.

For a few minutes a desperate conflict raged, each man fighting for himself, but numbers prevailed, the Roman shouts became feebler, the war cries of the Britons louder and more triumphant. In ten minutes the fight was over, more than two thousand Roman soldiers lay dead, while Cerealis and the cavalry, bursting their way through their assailants, alone escaped, galloping off at full speed towards the refuge of their fortified camp. The exultation of the Britons knew no bounds. They had for the first time since the Romans set foot on their shore beaten them in a fair fight in the open. There was a rush to collect the arms, shields, and helmets of the fallen Romans, and two of the Sarci presently brought the standards of the legion to Beric.

"Follow me with them," he said, and, extricating himself from the throng, ascended the slope to where Boadicea, surrounded with women who were dancing and joining in a triumphant chant of victory, was still standing in her chariot.

"Here are the Roman standards, the emblems of victory," Beric said as he approached the chariot.

Boadicea sprang down, and advancing to him, embraced him warmly. "The victory is yours, Beric," she said. "Keep these two eagles, and fix them in your hall, so that your children's children may point to them with pride and say, 'It was Beric, chief of the Sarci, who first overthrew the Romans in the field.' But there is no time to be lost;" and she turned to her charioteer, who carried a horn. "Sound the summons for the chiefs to assemble."

There were several missing, for the Britons had suffered heavily in their first attack.

"Chiefs," she said, "let us not lose an instant, but press on after the Romans. Let us strike before they recover from their confusion and surprise. Catus Decianus may be in their camp, and while I seek no other spoil, him I must have to wreak my vengeance on. See that a party remain to look to the wounded, and that such as need it are taken to their homes in wagons." The horns were at once sounded, the tribesmen flocked back to the positions from which they had charged, and resumed their garments. Then the march was continued.

They presented a strange appearance now. Almost every man had taken possession of some portion or other of the Romans' arms. Some had helmets, others shields, others breastplates, swords, or spears. The helmets, however, were speedily taken off and slung behind them, the heads of the Iceni being vastly larger than those of the Romans, the tallest of whom they overtopped by fully six inches. The arms of the officer who commanded under Cerealis were offered to Beric, but he refused them.

"I fight to drive the Romans from our land," he said, "and not for spoil. Nothing of theirs will I touch, but will return to the forest when all is over just as I left it."

By evening they approached the Roman camp. A portion of the legion had been left there when Cerealis set out, and in the light of the setting sun the helmets and spearheads could be seen above the massive palisades that rose on the top of the outworks. The Britons halted half a mile away, fires were lighted, and the men sat down to feast upon the meat that had been brought in wagons from Camalodunum. Then a council was held. As a rule, the British councils were attended by all able bodied men. The power of the chiefs, except in actual war, was very small, for the Britons, like their Gaulish ancestors, considered every man to be equal, and each had a voice in the management of affairs. Thus every chief had, before taking up arms, held a council of his tribesmen, and it was only after they had given their vote for war that he possessed any distinct power and control.

When the council began, one of the chiefs of the Trinobantes was asked first to give a minute description of the Roman camp. The works were formidable. Surrounding it was a broad and deep fosse, into which a stream was turned. Beyond this there was a double vallum or wall of earth so steep as to be climbed with great difficulty. In the hollow between the two walls sharp stakes were set thickly together. The second wall was higher than the first, and completely commanded it. Along its top ran a solid palisade of massive beams, behind which the earth was banked up to within some three and a half feet from the top, affording a stand for the archers, slingers, and spearmen.

The council was animated, but the great majority of chiefs were in favour of leaving this formidable position untouched, and falling upon places that offered a chance of an easier capture. The British in their tribal wars fought largely for the sake of plunder. In their first burst of fury at Camalodunum they had, contrary to their custom, sought only to destroy; but their thirst for blood was now appeased, they longed for the rich spoils of the Roman cities, both as trophies of victory and to adorn their women. The chiefs represented that already many of their bravest tribesmen had fallen,

and it would be folly to risk a heavy loss in the attack upon such a position.

What matter, they argued, if two or three hundred Romans were left there for the present? They could do no harm, and could be either captured by force or obliged to surrender by hunger after Suetonius and the Roman army had been destroyed. Not a day should be lost, they contended, in marching upon Verulamium, after which London could be sacked, for, although far inferior in size and importance to Camalodunum and Verulamium, it was a rising town, inhabited by large numbers of merchants and traders, who imported goods from Gaul and distributed them over the country.

Beric's opinion was in favour of an instant assault, and in this he was supported by Aska and two or three of the older chiefs; but the majority were the other way, and the policy of leaving altogether the fortified posts garrisoned by the Romans to be dealt with after the Roman army had been met and destroyed was decided upon. One of the arguments employed was that while the capture of these places would be attended with considerable loss, it would add little to the effect that the news of the destruction of the chief Roman towns would have upon the tribes throughout the whole country, and would take so long that Suetonius might return in time to succour the most important places before the work was done. Aska walked away from the council with Beric.

"They have decided wrongly," he said.

"I do not think it much matters," Beric replied. "Everything hangs at present upon the result of our battle with Suetonius. If we win, all the detached forts must surrender; if we lose, what matters it?"

"You think we shall lose, Beric?"

"I do not say that," Beric said; "but see how it was today. The Iceni made no more impression upon the Roman column than if they had been attacking a wall. They hindered themselves by their very numbers, and by the time we meet the Romans our numbers will be multiplied by five, perhaps by ten. But shall we be any stronger thereby? Will not rather the confusion be greater? Today the Roman horse fled; but had they charged among us, small as was their number, what confusion would they have made in our ranks! A single Briton is a match for a single Roman, and more. Ten Romans fighting in order might repel the assault of a hundred, and as the numbers multiply so does the advantage of discipline increase. I hope for victory, Aska, but I cannot say that I feel confident of it."

Marching next morning against Verulamium, they arrived there in the afternoon and at once attacked it. The resistance was feeble, and bursting through in several places the Iceni and Trinobantes spread over the town, slaughtering all they found. Not only the Romans, but the Gauls settled in the city, and such Britons as had adopted Roman customs were put to the sword. The city was then sacked and set on fire. It was now decided that instead of turning towards London they should march west in order that they might be joined by other tribes on their way and meet Suetonius returning from Wales.

There was no haste in their movements. They advanced by easy stages, their numbers swelling every day, tribe after tribe joining them, as the news spread of the capture and destruction of the two chief Roman towns, and the defeat and annihilation of one of the legions. So they marched until, a fortnight after the capture of Verulamium, the news arrived that Suetonius, marching with all speed towards the east, had already passed them, gathering up on his way the garrisons of all the fortified posts. Then the great host turned and marched east again. Beric regretted deeply the course that had been taken. Had the garrisons all been attacked and destroyed separately, the army they would have to encounter would have been a little more than half the strength of that which Suetonius would be able to put into the field when he collected all the garrisons.

But the Britons troubled themselves in no way. They regarded victory as certain, and expressed exultation that they should crush all the Romans at one blow in the open field, instead of being forced to undertake a number of separate sieges. Still marching easily, they came down upon the valley of the Thames and followed it until they arrived at London. They had expected that Suetonius would give battle before they arrived there. He had indeed passed through the town a few days previously, but had disregarded the prayers of the inhabitants to remain for their protection. He allowed all males who chose to do so to enlist in the ranks and permitted others to accompany the army, but he wished before fighting to be joined by Cerealis and the survivors of his legion, and by the garrisons of other fortified posts. The Britons therefore fell upon London, slaughtered all the inhabitants, and sacked and burned the town. It was calculated that here and in the two Roman cities no less than 80,000 persons had been slain. This accomplished, the great host again set out in search of Suetonius. They were accompanied now by a vast train of wagons and chariots carrying the women and spoil.

Beric was not present at the sack of London. As they approached the town and it became known that Suetonius had marched away, and that there would be no resistance, he struck off north. Since they had left Verulamium the tribesmen had given up marching in military order. They were very proud of the credit they had gained in the battle with the Romans, but said that they did not see any use in marching tediously abreast when there was no enemy near. Beric having no power whatever to compel them, told them that of course they could do as they liked, but that they would speedily forget all they had learned. But the impatience of restraint of any kind, or of doing anything unless perfectly disposed to do it, which was a British characteristic, was too strong, and many were influenced by the scoffs of the newcomers, who, not having seen them in the day of battle, asked them scornfully if the Sarci were slaves that they should obey orders like Roman soldiers.

Boduoc, although he had objected to the drill at first, and had scoffed at the idea of men fighting any better because they all kept an even distance from each other, and marched with the same foot forward, had now become an enthusiast in its favour and raged at this falling away. But Beric said, "It is no use being angry, Boduoc. I was surprised that they consented at first, and I am not surprised that they have grown tired of it. It is the fault of our people to be fickle and inconstant, soon wearying of anything they undertake; but I do not think that it matters much now. We alone were able to decide the fight when there were but two thousand Roman

spearmen; but when we meet Suetonius, he will have ten thousand soldiers under him, and our multitude is so great that the Sarci would be lost in the crowd. If the Britons cannot beat them without us, we should not suffice to change the fortunes of the day."

It was partly to escape the sight of the sack of London, partly because he was anxious to know how Berenice and Cneius Nepo were faring that Beric left the army, and drove north in a chariot. After two days' journey he arrived at the cottage of Boduoc's mother. The door stood open as was the universal custom in Britain, for nowhere was hospitality so lavishly practised, and it was thought that a closed door might deter a passerby from entering. His footsteps had been heard, for two dogs had growled angrily at his approach. The old woman was sitting at the fire, and at first he saw no one else in the hut.

"Good will to all here!" he said.

"It is the young chief!" the old woman exclaimed, and at once two figures rose from a pile of straw in a dark corner of the room.

"Beric?"

"Yes, it is I," he said. "How fares it with you, Berenice? You are well, Cneius, I hope? You have run no risks, I trust, since you have been here?"

"We are well, Beric," the girl said; "but oh the time has seemed so long! It is not yet a month since you sent us here, but it seems a year. She has been very kind to us, and done all that she could, and the girls, her daughters, have gone with me sometimes for rambles in the wood; but they cannot speak our language. Not another person has been here since we came."

"What is the news, Beric?" Cneius asked. "No word has reached us. The old woman and her daughters have learned something, for the eldest girl goes away sometimes for hours, and I can see that she tells her mother news when she returns."

Beric briefly told them what had happened, at which Berenice exclaimed passionately that the Britons were a wicked people.

"Then there will be a great battle when you meet Suetonius, Beric," Cneius said. "How think you will it go?"

"It is hard to say," Beric replied; "we are more than one hundred and fifty thousand men against ten thousand, but the ten thousand are soldiers, while the hundred and fifty thousand are a mob. Brave and devoted, and fearless of death I admit, but still a mob. I cannot say how it will go."

"How long shall we stay here, Beric?" Berenice asked. "When will you take me to my father?"

"If we are beaten, Berenice, you will rejoin him speedily; if we win--"

"He will not be alive," she broke in.

Beric did not contradict her, but went on, "I will see that you are placed on board a ship and sent to Gaul; it is for this I come here today. Cneius, in two or three days we shall meet Suetonius; if we win, I will return to you myself, or if I am killed, Boduoc or his brother, both of whom I shall charge with the mission, will come in my place and will escort you to the coast and see that you are placed on board ship. If we lose, it is likely that none of us will return. I shall give the old woman instructions that in that case her daughter is to guide you through the forest and take you on until you meet some Roman soldiers, or are within sight of their camp, then you will only have to advance and declare yourself."

Then he turned and spoke for some time to Boduoc's mother in her own language, thanking her for the shelter that she had given the fugitives, and giving instructions as to the future. He took a hasty meal, and started at once on his return journey in order to rejoin the Sarci as the army advanced from London. Berenice wept bitterly when he said goodbye, and Cneius himself was much affected.

"I view you almost as a son," he said; "and it is terrible to know that if you win in the battle, my patron Caius and my countrymen will be destroyed, while if they win, you may fall."

"It is the fortune of war, Cneius. You know that we Britons look forward to death with joy; that, unlike you, we mourn at a birth and feast at a burial, knowing that after death we go to the Happy Island where there is no more trouble or sorrow, but where all is peace and happiness and content; so do not grieve for me. You will know that if I fall I shall be happy, and shall be free from all the troubles that await this unfortunate land."

CHAPTER VII: DEFEAT OF THE BRITONS

London was but a heap of ashes when Beric arrived there. It had been a trading place rather than a town. Here were no Roman houses or temples with their massive stone work; it consisted only of a large collection of wooden structures, inhabited by merchants and traders. It lay upon a knoll rising above the low swampy ground covered by the sea at high water, for not till long afterwards did the Romans erect the banks that dammed back the waters and confined them within their regular channel. The opposite shore was similarly covered with water at high tide, and forests extended as far as the eye could reach. London, in fact, occupied what was at high water a peninsula, connected with the mainland only by a shoulder extending back to the hills beyond it, and separated by a deep channel on the west from a similar promontory.

It was a position that, properly fortified by strong walls across the isthmus, could have been held against a host, but the Romans had not as yet taken it in hand; later, however, they recognized the importance of the position, and made it one of the chief seats of their power. Even in the three days that he had been absent Beric found that the host had considerably increased. The tribes of Sussex and Kent, as they heard of the approach of the army, had flocked in to join it, and to share in the plunder of London.

Another day was spent in feasting and rejoicing, and then the army moved northward. It consisted now of well nigh two hundred thousand fighting men, and a vast crowd of women, with a huge train of wagons. Two days later, news reached them of the spot where Suetonius had taken up his position and was awaiting their attack, and the army at once pressed forward in that direction. At nightfall they bivouacked two miles away from it, and Beric, taking Boduoc with him, went forward to examine it. It was at a point where a valley opened into the plain; the sides of the valley were steep and thickly wooded, and it was only in front that an attack could well be delivered.

"What think you of it, Beric?" Boduoc asked.

"Suetonius relies upon our folly," Beric said; "he is sure that we shall advance upon him as a tumultous mob, and as but a small portion can act at once our numbers will count but little. The position would be a bad one had we any skill or forethought. Were I commander tomorrow I should, before advancing to the attack, send a great number round on either side to make their way through the woods, and so to attack on both flanks, and to pour down the valley in their rear, at the same time that the main body attacked in the front. Then the position would be a fatal one; attacked in front and rear and overwhelmed by darts from the woods on the flanks, their position would be well nigh desperate, and not a man should escape."

"But we must overwhelm them," Boduoc said. "What can ten thousand men do against a host like ours?"

"It may be so, Boduoc. Yet I feel by no means sure of it. At any rate we must prepare for defeat as well as victory. If we are beaten the cause of Britain will be lost. As we advance without order we shall fly without order, and the tribes will disperse to their homes even more quickly than they have gathered. Of one thing you may be sure, the Roman vengeance will be terrible. We have brought disgrace and defeat upon them. We have destroyed their chief cities. We have massacred tens of thousands. No mercy will be shown us, and chiefly will their vengeance fall upon the Iceni. When we return to the camp, go among the men and ask them whether they mean to fight tomorrow as they fought Cerealis, or whether they will fight in the fashion of the rest. I fear that, wild as all are with enthusiasm and the assurance of victory, they will not consent to be kept in reserve, but will be eager to be in the front of the attack. I will go with you, and will do my best to persuade them; but if they insist on fighting in their own way, then we will go to them one by one, and will form if we can a body, if only a hundred strong, to keep, and if needs be, retreat together. In speed we can outrun the heavy armed Roman soldiers with ease, but their cavalry will scour the plain. Keeping together, however, we can repel these with our lances, and make good our escape. We will first make for home, load ourselves with grain, and driving cattle before us, and taking our women and children, make for the swamps that lie to the northwest of our limits. There we can defend ourselves against the Romans for any length of time."

"You speak as if defeat were certain," Boduoc said reproachfully.

"Not at all, Boduoc; a prudent man prepares for either fortune, it

is only the fool that looks upon one side only. I hope for victory, but I prepare for defeat; those who like to return to their homes and remain there to be slaughtered by the Romans, can do so. I intend to fight to the last."

Upon rejoining the Sarci, Beric called them together, and asked them whether they wished on the following day to rush into the battle, or to remain in solid order in reserve. The reply was, that they wished for their share of glory, and that did they hold aloof until the battle was done and the enemy annihilated they would be pointed out as men who had feared to take their share in the combat. When the meeting had dispersed Beric and Boduoc went among them; they said nothing about the advantage that holding together would be in case of defeat, but pointed out the honour they had gained by deciding the issue of the last battle, and begged them to remain in a solid body, so that possibly they might again decide the battle. As to disgrace, they had already shown how well they could fight, and that none could say that fear had influenced their decision. Altogether two hundred agreed to retain their ranks, and with this Beric was satisfied. He then went off to find his mother, who was as usual with the queen. She would not hear of any possibility of defeat.

"What!" she said. "Are Britons so poor and unmanly a race, that even when twenty to one they cannot conquer a foe? I would not believe it of them."

"I don't expect it, mother, but it is best to be prepared for whatever may happen." He then told her of the arrangements he had made.

"You may be right, Beric, in preparing for the worst, but I will take no part in it. The queen has sworn she will not survive defeat, nor shall I. I will not live to see my country bound in Roman chains. A free woman I have lived, and a free woman I will die, and shall gladly quit this troubled life for the shores of the Happy Island."

Beric was silent for a minute. "I do not seek to alter your determination, mother, but as for myself, so long as I can lift a sword I shall continue to struggle against the Romans. We shall not meet tomorrow; when the battle once begins all will be confusion, and there would be no finding each other in this vast crowd. If victory is ours, we shall meet afterwards; if defeat, I shall make for Cardun, where, if you change your mind, I shall hope to meet you, and then shall march with those who will for the swamps of Ely, where doubtless large numbers of fugitives will gather, for unless the Romans drive their causeways into its very heart they can scarce penetrate in any other way."

So sure were the Britons of victory that no council was held that night. There were the enemy, they had only to rush upon and destroy them. Returning to his men, Beric met Aska.

"I have just been over to your camp to see you, Beric. I have talked with Boduoc, who told me frankly that you did not share the general assurance of an easy victory. Nor do I, after what I saw the other day--how we dashed vainly against the Roman line. He tells me that your men, save a small party, have determined to fight tomorrow in

the front line with the rest, and I lament over it."

"It would make no difference in the result," Beric said; "in so great a mass as this we should be lost, and even if we could make our way to the front, and fall upon the Romans in a solid body, our numbers are too small to decide the issue; but at least we might, had the day gone against us, have drawn off in good order."

"I will take my station with you," Aska said; "I have, as all the Iceni know, been a great fighter in my time; but I will leave it to the younger men tomorrow to win this battle. My authority may aid yours, and methinks that if we win tomorrow, none can say that you were wrong to stand aloof from the first charge, if Aska stood beside you."

Thanking the chief warmly for the promise, Beric returned to the Sarci. Feasting was kept up all night, and at daybreak the Britons were on foot, and forming in their tribes advanced within half a mile of the Roman position. Then they halted, and Boadicea with her daughters and the chiefs moved along their front exhorting them to great deeds, recalling to them the oppression and tyranny of the Romans, and the indignity that they had inflicted upon her and her daughters; and her addresses were answered by loud shouts from the tribesmen. In the meantime the wagons had moved out and drew up in a vast semicircle behind the troops, so as to enable the women who crowded them to get a view of the victory. So great was the following that the wagons were ranged four or five deep. Beric had drawn up the men who had agreed to fight in order, in a solid mass in front of the tribe. He was nearly on the extreme left of the British position. Aska had taken his place by his side. His mother, as in her chariot she passed along behind Boadicea, waved her hand to him, and then pointed towards the Romans.

"Look, Aska," he said presently; "do you see that deep line of wagons forming all round us? In case of disaster they will block up the retreat. A madness has seized our people. One would think that this was a strife of gladiators at Rome rather than a battle between two nations. There will be no retreat that way for us if disaster comes. We must make off between the horn of the crescent and the Romans. It is there only we can draw off in a body."

"That is so, Beric," the chief said; "but see! the queen has reached the end of the lines, and waves her spear as a signal."

A thundering shout arose, mingled with the shrill cries of encouragement from the women, and then like a torrent the Britons rushed to the attack in confused masses, each tribe striving to be first to attack the Romans. The Sarci from behind the company joined in the rush, and there was confusion in the ranks, many of the men being carried away by the enthusiasm; but the shouts and exhortations of Beric, Aska, and Boduoc steadied them again, and in regular order they marched after the host. In five minutes the uproar of battle swelled high in front. Beric marched up the valley until he arrived at the rear of the great mass of men who were swarming in front of the Roman line, each man striving to get to the front to hurl his dart and join in the struggle. The Romans had drawn up twelve deep across the valley, the heavy armed spearmen in front, the lighter troops behind, the latter replying with their missiles to the storm of darts that the Britons poured upon them.

With desperate efforts the assailants strove to break through the hedge of spears; their bravest flung themselves upon the Roman weapons and died there, striving in vain to break the line.

For hours the fight continued, but the Roman wall remained unbroken and immovable. Fresh combatants had taken the place of those in front until all had exhausted their store of javelins. In vain the chiefs attempted to induce their followers to gather thickly together and to make a rush; the din was too great for their voices to be heard, and the tribesmen were half mad with fury at the failure of their own efforts to break the Roman line. Beric strove many times to bring up his company in a mass through the crowd to the front. The pressure was too great, none would give way where all sought to get near their foes, and rather than break them up he remained in the rear in spite of the eager cries of the men to be allowed to break up and push their way singly forward.

"What can you do alone," he shouted to them, "more than the others are doing? Together and in order we might succeed, broken we should be useless. If this huge army cannot break their line, what could two hundred men do?" At last, as the storm of javelins began to dwindle, a mighty shout rose from the Romans, and shoulder to shoulder with levelled spears they advanced, while the flanks giving way, the cavalry burst out on both sides and fell upon the Britons. For those in front, pressed by the mass behind them, there was no falling back, they fell as they stood under the Roman spears. Stubbornly for a time the tribesmen fought with sword and target; but as the line pressed forward, and the horsemen cut their way through the struggling mass, a panic began to seize them.

The tribes longest conquered by the Romans first gave way, and the movement rapidly spread. Many for some time desperately opposed the advance of the Romans, whose triumphant shouts rose loudly; but gradually these melted away, and the vast crowd of warriors became a mob of fugitives, the Romans pressing hotly with cries of victory and vengeance upon their rear. Beric's little band was swept away like foam before the wave of fugitives. For a time it attempted to stem the current; but when Beric saw that this was in vain he shouted to his tribesmen to keep in a close body and to press towards the left, which was comparatively free. Fortunately the Roman horse had plunged in more towards the centre, and the ground was open for their retreat.

Thousands of flying men were making towards the rear, but with a great effort they succeeded in crossing the tide of fugitives, and in passing through outside the semicircle of wagons. Here they halted for a moment while Beric, climbing on the end wagon, surveyed the scene. There was no longer any resistance among the Britons. The great semicircle within the line of wagons was crowded by a throng of fugitives behind whom, at a run now, the Roman legions were advancing, maintaining their order even at that rapid pace. Outside the sweep of wagons women with cries of terror were flying in all directions, and the horses, alarmed by the din, were plunging and struggling, while their drivers vainly endeavoured to extricate them from the close line of vehicles.

"All is lost for the present," he said to Aska, "let us make for the north; it is useless to delay, men; to try to fight would be to throw away our lives uselessly, we shall do more good by preserving

them to fight upon another day. Keep closely together, we shall have the Roman cavalry upon us before long, and only by holding to our ranks can we hope to repel them."

Many of the women from the nearest wagons rushed in among the men, and, placing them in their centre, the band went off at a steady trot, which they could maintain for hours. The din behind was terrible, the shouts of the Romans mingled with the cries of the Britons and the loud shrieks of women. The plain was already thick with fugitives, consisting either of women from the outside wagons or men who had made their way through the mass of struggling animals. Here and there chariots were dashing across the plain at full gallop. Looking back from a rise of the ground a mile from the battlefield, they saw a few parties of the Roman horse scouring the plain; but the main body were scattered round the confused mass by the wagons.

"There will be but few escape," Aska said, throwing up his arms in despair; "the wagons have proved a death trap; had it not been for them the army would have scattered all over the country, and though the Roman horse might have cut down many, the greater number would have gained the woods and escaped; but the wagons held them just as a thin line of men will hold the wolves till the hunters arrive and hem them in."

The carts crowded with women, the plunging horses in lines three or four deep had indeed checked the first fugitives; then came the others crowding in upon them, and then before a gap wide enough to let them through could be forced, the Roman horse were round and upon them.

The pause that Beric made had been momentary, and the band kept on at their rapid pace until the woods were reached, and they were safe from pursuit; then, as they halted, they gave way to their sorrow and anguish. Some threw themselves down and lay motionless; others walked up and down with wild gestures; some broke into imprecations against the gods who had deserted them. Some called despairingly the names of wives and daughters who had been among the spectators in that fatal line of wagons. The women sat in a group weeping; none of them belonged to the Iceni, and their kinsfolk and friends had, as they believed, all perished in the fight.

"Think you that the queen has fallen?" Aska asked Beric.

"She may have made her way out," Beric said; "we saw chariots driving across the plain. She would be carried back by the first fugitives, and it may be that they managed to clear a way through the wagons for her and those with her. If she is alive, doubtless my mother is by her side."

"If the queen has escaped," Aska said, "it will be but to die by her own hand instead of by that of the Romans. I am sure that she will not survive this day. There is nothing else left for her, her tribe is destroyed, her country lost, herself insulted and humiliated. Boadicea would never demand her life from the Romans."

"My mother will certainly die with her," Beric said, "and I should say that all her party will willingly share her fate. For the chiefs and leaders there will be no mercy, and for a time doubtless all will be slaughtered who fall into the Roman hands; but after a

time the sword will be stayed, for the land will be useless to them without men to cultivate it, and when the Roman hands are tired of slaying, policy will prevail. It were best to speak to the men, Aska, for us to be moving on; will you address them?"

The old chief moved towards the men, and raising his hand, called them to him. At first but few obeyed the summons, but as he proceeded they roused themselves and gathered round him, for his reputation in the tribe was great, and the assured tone in which he spoke revived their spirits.

"Men of the Sarci," he said, "this is no time for wailing or lamentation; the gods of Britain have deserted us, but of this terrible day's defeat none of the disgrace rests upon you. The honour of the victories we won was yours, and though but a small subtribe, the name of the Sarci rang through Britain as that of the bravest in the land. Had all of your tribe obeyed their young chief and fought together today as they have fought before, it may be that the defeat would have been averted; but you stood firmly by him when the others fell away, and you stand here without the loss of a man, safe in the forest and ready to meet the Roman again. You are fortunate in having such a leader. I may tell you that had his counsel prevailed you would not now be mourning a defeat. I, an old chief with long years of experience, believed what he said, young though he is, and saw that to fight in a confused multitude on such a field was to court almost certain defeat.

"Thus then I placed myself by his side, relying upon his skill in arms and your bravery, and throwing my fortune in with yours. I was not mistaken. Had you not firmly kept together and followed his instructions you too would have been inclosed in that vast throng of fugitives hemmed in among the wagons, slaughtered by the Roman footmen in their rear and cut down by their horse if they broke through the line of wagons. You may ask what is there to live for; you may say that the cause of Britain is lost, that your tribe is well nigh destroyed, that many of you have lost your wives and families as well. All this is true, but yet, men, all is not lost. Great as may have been the slaughter, large numbers must have escaped, and many of you have still wives and families at home. Before aught else is thought of these must be taken to a place of safety until the first outburst of Roman vengeance has passed.

"Had Beric been the sole leader of the Britons from the first there would be no need of fearing their vengeance, for in that case none of their women and children would have been slain, and they would be now in our hands as hostages; but that is past. I say it only to show you how wise and far seeing as well as how brave a leader in battle is this young chief of yours. While all others were dreaming only of an easy victory over the Romans he and I have been preparing for what had best be done in case of defeat. To return to your homes would be but to court death, and if we are to die at the hands of the Romans it is best that we should die fighting them to the end. We have therefore arranged that we will seek a refuge in the Fen country that forms the western boundary of the land of the Iceni; there we can find strongholds into which the Romans can never force their way; thence we can sally out, and in turn take vengeance. There will rally round you hundreds of other brave men till we grow to a force that may again make head against the Romans. There at least we shall live as free men and die as

free men."

A shout of approval broke from the men.

"You need not starve," Aska went on. "The rivers abound with fish and the swamps with waterfowl. There are islands among the swamps where the land is dry, and we can construct huts. Three days since, when he foresaw that it might be that a refuge would be needed, Beric despatched a messenger home with orders that a herd of three hundred cattle and another of as many swine should be driven to the spot near the swamps for which we propose to make, and they will there be found awaiting you."

There was again a chorus of approval, and one of the men stepping forward said, "Beric is young, but he is a great chief. We will follow him wherever he will take us, and will swear to be faithful and obedient to him." Every man raised his right arm towards the sky, and with a loud shout swore to be faithful to Beric.

"You are right," Aska said. "It is of no use to obey a chief only when ranged in battle; it is that which has ruined our country. There is nothing slavish in recognizing that one man must rule, and in obeying when obedience is necessary for the sake of all. As one body led by one mind you may do much; as two hundred men swayed by two hundred minds you will do nothing. I shall be with Beric, and my experience may be of aid to him. And if I, a chief of high standing among the Iceni, am well content to recognize in him the leader of our party, you may well do the same. Now, Beric, step forward and say what is next to be done."

"I thank you," Beric said when the shout of acclamation that greeted him when he stepped forward had subsided, "for the oath you have sworn to be faithful to me. I pretend not to more wisdom than others, and feel that in the presence of one so full of years and experience as Aska it is a presumption for one of my age to give an opinion; but in one respect I know that I am more fitted than others to lead you. I have studied the records of the Romans, of their wars with the Gauls and other peoples, and I know that their greatest trouble was not in defeating armies in the field but of overcoming the resistance of those who took refuge in fastnesses and harassed them continually by sorties and attacks. I know where the Romans are strong and where they are weak; and it is by the aid of such knowledge that I hope that we may long retain our freedom, and may even in time become so formidable that we may be able to win terms not only for ourselves but for our countrymen.

"The first step is to gather at our place of refuge those belonging to us. Therefore do you choose among yourselves twenty swift runners and send them to our villages, bidding the wives and families of all here to leave their homes at once, taking only such gear as they can carry lightly, and to make with all speed for Soto, a village in the district of the Baci, and but a mile or two from the edge of the great swamp country. It is there that the herds have been driven, and there they will find a party ready to escort them. Let all the other women and children be advised to quit their homes also, and to travel north together with the old men and boys. Bid the latter drive the herds before them. It may be months before they can return to their homes. It were best that they should pass altogether beyond the district of our people, for it is upon the

Iceni that the vengeance of the Romans will chiefly fall. By presents of cattle they can purchase an asylum among the Brigantes, and had best remain there till they hear that Roman vengeance is satisfied.

"Let them as they journey north advise all the people in our villages to follow their example. Let those who will not do this take shelter in the hearts of the forests. To our own people my orders are distinct: no herd, either of cattle or swine, is to be left behind. Let the Romans find a desert where they can gather no food; let the houses be burnt, together with all crops that have been gathered. Warn all that there must be no delay. Let the boys and old men start within five minutes from the time that you deliver my message, to gather the herds and drive them north. Let the women call their children round them, take up their babes, make a bundle of their garments, and pile upon a wagon cooking pots and such things as are most needed, and then set fire to their houses and stacks and granaries and go. Warn them that even the delay of an hour may be fatal, for that the Roman cavalry will be spreading like a river in flood over the country. Beg them to leave the beaten tracks and journey through the woods, both those who go north and those who will meet us at Soto. Quick! choose the messengers; and such of you as choose had best hand to the one who is bound for his village a ring or a bracelet, or some token that your wives will recognize, so that they may know that the order comes from you."

Twenty young men were at once chosen, and Boduoc and two of the older men divided the district of the Sarci among them, allotting to each the hamlets they should visit. As soon as this was decided the rest of the band gave the messengers their tokens to their families, and then the runners started at a trot which they could maintain for many hours. The rest of the band then struck off in the direction in which they were bound. With only an occasional half hour for food and a few hours at night for sleep they pressed northward. Fast as they went the news of the disaster had preceded them, carried by fugitives from the battle.

At each hamlet through which they passed, Aska repeated the advice that had been sent to the Iceni. "Abandon your homes, drive the swine and the cattle before you, take to the forests, journey far north, and seek refuge among the Brigantes. A rallying place for fighting men will be found at Soto, on the edge of the great swamps; let all who can bear arms and love freedom better than servitude or death gather there."

Upon the march swine were taken and killed for food without hesitation. Many were found straying in the woods untended, the herdsmen having fled in dismay when the news of the defeat reached them. As yet the full extent of the disaster was unknown. Some of the fugitives had reported that scarce a man had escaped; but the very number of fugitives who had preceded the band showed that this was an exaggeration. But it was not until long afterwards that the truth was known. Of the great multitude, estimated at two hundred and thirty thousand, fully a third had fallen, among whom were almost all the women and children whose presence on the battlefield had proved so fatal, and of whom scarce one had been able to escape; for the Romans, infuriated by the massacres at Camalodunum, Verulamium, and London had spared neither age nor sex.

On their arrival at Soto they obtained for the first time news of

the queen. A chief of one of the northern subtribes of the Iceni had driven through on his chariot and had told the headman of the hamlet that he had been one of the few who had accompanied Boadicea in her flight.

At the call of the queen, he said, the men threw themselves on the line of wagons in such number and force that a breach was made through them, horses and wagons being overthrown and dragged bodily aside. The chariot with the queen and her two daughters passed through, with four others containing the ladies who accompanied her. Three or four chiefs also passed through in their chariots, and then the breach was filled by the struggling multitude, that poured out like a torrent. The chariots were well away before the Roman horse swept round the wagons, and travelled without pursuit to a forest twenty miles away. As soon as they reached this the queen ordered the charioteers to dig graves, and then calling upon the god of her country to avenge her, she and her daughters and the ladies with them had all drunk poison, brewed from berries that they gathered in the wood. The chiefs would have done so also, but the queen forbade them.

"It is for you," she said, "to look after your people, and to wage war with Rome to the last. We need but two men to lay us in our graves and spread the sods over us; so that after death at least we shall be safe from further dishonour at the hands of the Romans."

When they had drunk the poison the men were ordered to leave them for an hour and then to return. When they did so the ladies were all dead, lying in a circle round Boadicea. They were buried in the shallow holes that had been dug, the turf replaced, and dead leaves scattered over the spot, so that no Roman should ever know where the queen of the Iceni and her daughters slept.

Although Beric had given up all hope of again seeing his mother alive, the news of her death was a terrible blow to him, and he wept unrestrainedly until Aska placed a hand on his shoulder. "You must not give way to sorrow, Beric. You have her people to look to. She has gone to the Green Island, where she will dwell in happiness, and where your father has been long expecting her. It is not at a death that we Britons weep, knowing as we do that those that have gone are to be envied. Arouse yourself! there is much to be done. The cattle will probably be here in the morning. We have to question the people here as to the great swamps, and get them to send to the Fen people for guides who will lead us across the marshes to some spot where we can dwell above the level of the highest waters."

Beric put aside his private grief for the time, and several of the natives of the village who were accustomed to penetrate the swamps in search of game were collected and questioned as to the country. None, however, could give much useful information. There was a large river that ran through it, with innumerable smaller streams that wandered here and there. None had penetrated far beyond the margin, partly because they were afraid of losing their way, partly because of the enmity of the Fen people.

These were of a different race to themselves, and were a remnant of those whom the Iceni had driven out of their country, and who, instead of going west, had taken refuge in the swamps, whither the invaders had neither the power nor inclination to follow them.

"It is strange," Aska said, "that just as they fled before us centuries ago, so we have now to fly before the Romans. Still, as they have maintained themselves there, so may we. But it will be necessary that we should try and secure the goodwill of these people and assure them that we do not come among them as foes."

"There is no quarrel between us now," the headman of the hamlet said. "There has not been for many generations. They know that we do not seek to molest them, while they are not strong enough to molest us. There is trade between all the hamlets near the swamps and their people; they bring fish and wildfowl, and baskets which they weave out of rushes, and sell to us in exchange for woven cloth, for garments, and sometimes for swine which they keep upon some of their islands.

"It is always they who come to us, we go not to them. They are jealous of our entering their country, and men who go too far in search of game have often been shot at by invisible foes. They take care that their arrows don't strike, but shoot only as a warning that we must go no farther. Sometimes some foolhardy men have declared that they will go where they like in spite of the Fenmen, and they have gone, but they have never returned. When we have asked the men who come in to trade what has become of them they say 'they do not know, most likely they had lost their way and died miserably, or fallen into a swamp and perished there;' and as the men have certainly lost their lives through their own obstinacy nothing can be done."

"Then some of these men speak our tongue, I suppose?" Aska said.

"Yes, the men who come are generally the same, and these mostly speak a little of our language. From time to time some of our maidens have taken a fancy to these Fenmen, and in spite of all their friends could do have gone off. None of these have ever returned, though messages have been brought saying they were well. We think that the men who do the trading are the children of women who went to live among them years ago."

"Then it is through one of these men that we must open communications with them," Aska said.

"Some of them are here almost daily. No one has been today, and therefore we may expect one tomorrow morning. This is one of the chief places of trade with them. The women of the hamlets round bring here the cloth they have woven to exchange it for their goods, others from beyond them do the same, so that from all this part of the district goods are brought in here, while the fish and baskets of the Fenmen go far and wide."

CHAPTER VIII: THE GREAT SWAMPS

Soon after daybreak next morning the headman came into the hut he had placed at the disposal of Aska and Beric with news that two of the Fenmen had arrived. They at once went out and found that the two men had just laid down their loads, which were so heavy that

Beric wondered they could possibly have been carried by them. One had brought fish, the other wildfowl, slung on poles over their shoulders. These men were much shorter than the Iceni, they were swarthier in complexion, and their hair was long and matted. Their only clothing was short kilts made of the materials for which they bartered their game.

"They both speak the language well," the headman said, "I will tell them what you want."

The men listened to the statement that the chiefs before them desired to find with their followers a refuge in the Fens, and that they were willing to make presents to the Fenmen of cattle and other things, so that there should be friendship between them, and that they should be allowed to occupy some island in the swamps where they might live secure from pursuit. The men looked at each other as the headman began to speak, shaking their heads as if they thought the proposal impossible.

"We will tell our people," they said, "but we do not think that they will agree; we have dwelt alone for long years without trouble with others. The coming of strangers will bring trouble. Why do they seek to leave their land?"

"Our people have been beaten in battle by the Romans," Aska said, taking up the conversation, "and we need a refuge till the troubles are over."

"The Romans have won!" one of the men exclaimed in a tone that showed he was no stranger to what was going on beyond the circle of the Fens.

"They have won," Aska repeated, "and there will be many fugitives who will seek for shelter in the Fens. We would fain be friends with your people, but shelter we must have. Our cause after all is the same, for when the Romans have destroyed the Iceni, and conquered all the countries round, they will hunt you down also, for they let none remain free in the lands where they are masters. The Fen country is wide, there must be room for great numbers to shelter, and surely there must be places where we could live without disturbance to your people."

"There is room," the man said briefly. "We will take your message to our people, our chiefs will decide."

Aska and Beric wore few other ornaments than those denoting their position and authority. Many of their followers, however, had jewels and bracelets, the spoil of the Roman towns. Beric left the group and spoke to Boduoc, who in two or three minutes returned with several rings and bracelets.

"You could have a score for every one of these," he said; "they are of no value to the men now, and indeed their possession would bring certain death upon any one wearing them did he fall into the hands of the Romans."

Beric returned to the Fenmen. "Here," he said, "are some presents for your chiefs, tell them that we have many more like them."

The men took them with an air of indifference.

"They are of no use," they said, "though they may please women. If you want to please men you should give them hatchets and arms."

"We will do that," Aska said, "we have more than we require;" for indeed after the battle with Cerealis and the sack of the towns all the men had taken Roman swords and carried them in addition to their own weapons, regarding them not only as trophies but as infinitely superior to their own more clumsy implements for cutting wood and other purposes. At a word from Beric four of these were brought and handed to the men, who took them with lively satisfaction.

"Could you take us with you to see your chiefs?" Beric asked.

They shook their heads. "No strangers can enter the swamps; but the chiefs will come to see you."

"It is very urgent that no time shall be lost," Beric said, "the Romans may be here very shortly."

"By the time the sun is at its highest the chiefs will be here or we will bring you an answer," they said. "Come with us now, we will show you where to expect them, for they will not leave the edge of our land."

After half an hour's walking through a swampy soil they arrived at the edge of a sluggish stream of water. Here tied to a bush was a boat constructed of basket work covered with hide. In it lay two long poles. The men took their places in the coracle, pushed out into the stream, and using their poles vigorously were soon lost to sight among the thick grove of rush and bushes. Aska and Beric returned to the hamlet.

"Have you any idea of the number of these people?" they asked the headman.

"No," he said, "no one has any idea; the swamps are of a vast extent from here away to the north. We know that long ago when the Iceni endeavoured to penetrate there they were fiercely attacked by great numbers, and most of those who entered perished miserably, but for ages now there has been no trouble. The land was large enough for us, why should we fight to conquer swamps which would be useless to us? We believe that there are large numbers, although they have, from the nature of the country, little dealings with each other; but live scattered in twos and threes over their country, since, living by fishing and fowling, they would not care to dwell in large communities. They never talk much about themselves, but I have heard that they say that parts of the swamps are inhabited by strange monsters, huge serpents and other creatures, and that into these none dare penetrate."

"All the better," Beric said; "we are not afraid of monsters of any kind, and they might therefore let us settle in one of these neighbourhoods where we could clear out these enemies of theirs for them. It strikes me that our greatest difficulty will be to get our cattle across the morasses to firm ground. We shall have to contrive some plan for doing so. It will be no easy matter to feed so large a number as we shall be on fish and wildfowl."

At noon the two chiefs returned to the spot where the men had left them, taking with them Boduoc and another of their followers. A few minutes after they arrived there they heard sounds approaching, and in a short time four boats similar to those they had seen, and each carrying two men in addition to those poling, made their way one after another through the bushes that nearly met across the stream. Most of the men were dressed like the two who had visited the village, but three of them were in attire somewhat similar to that of the Iceni. These were evidently the chiefs. Several of the men were much shorter and darker than those they had first seen, while the chiefs were about the same stature. All carried short bows and quivers of light arrows, and spears with the points hardened in the fire, for the Iceni living near the swamps had been strictly forbidden to trade in arms or metal implements with the Fenmen. The chiefs, however, all carried swords of Iceni make. Before the chiefs stepped ashore their followers landed, and at once, to the surprise of Beric, scattered among the bushes. In two or three minutes they returned and said something in their own language to their chiefs, who then stepped ashore.

"They were afraid of an ambush," Aska muttered, "and have satisfied themselves that no one is hidden near."

The chiefs were all able to speak the language of the Iceni, and a long conversation ensued between them and Beric. They protested at first that it was impossible for them to grant the request made; that for long ages no stranger had penetrated the swamps, and that although the intention of those who addressed them might be friendly, such might not always be the case, and that when the secrets of the paths and ways were once known they would never be free from danger of attack by their neighbours.

"There is more room to the north," they said; "the Fen country is far wider there, there is room for you all, while here the dry lands are occupied by us, and there is no room for so many strangers. We wish you well; we have no quarrel with you. Ages have passed now since you drove our forefathers from the land; that is all forgotten. But as we have lived so long, so will we continue. We have no wants; we have fish and fowl in abundance, and what more we require we obtain in barter from you."

"Swords like those we sent you are useful," Aska said. "They are made by the Romans, and are vastly better than any we have. With one of those you might chop down as many saplings in a day as would build a hut, and could destroy any wild beasts that may lurk in your swamps. The people who are coming now are not like us. We were content with the land we had taken, and you dwelt among us undisturbed for ages; but the Romans are not like us, they want to possess the whole earth, and when they have overrun our country they will never rest content till they have hunted you out also. There are thousands of us who will seek refuge in your swamps. You may oppose us, you may kill numbers of us, but in the end, step by step, we shall find our way in till we reach an island of firm land where we can establish ourselves. It is not that we have any ill will towards you, or that we covet your land, but with the Romans behind us, slaying all they encounter, we shall have no choice but to go forward.

"It will be for your benefit as well as ours. Alone what could you do against men who fight with metal over their heads and bodies that your arrows could not penetrate, and with swords and darts that would cut and pierce you through and through? But with us--who have met and fought them in fair battle, and have once even defeated them with great slaughter--to help you to guard your swamps, it would be different, and even the Romans, brave as they are, would hesitate before they tried to penetrate your land of mud and water. Surely there must be some spots in your morasses that are still uninhabited. I have heard that there are places that are avoided because great serpents and other creatures live there, but so long as the land is dry enough for our cattle to live and for us to dwell we are ready to meet any living thing that may inhabit it."

The chiefs looked awestruck at this offer on the part of the strangers, and then entered into an animated conversation together.

"The matter is settled," Aska said in a low voice to Beric. "There are places they are afraid to penetrate, and I expect that, much as they object to our entering their country, they would rather have us as neighbours than these creatures that they are so much afraid of."

When the chiefs' consultation was finished, the one who had before spoken turned to them and said: "What will you give if we take you to such a place?"

"How far distant is it?" Aska asked.

"It is two days' journey from here," the chief said. "The distance is not great, but the channels are winding and difficult. There is land many feet above the water, but how large I cannot say. Three miles to the west from here is the great river you call the Ouse, it is on the other side of that where we dwell. None of us live on this side of that river. Three hours' walk north from here is a smaller river that runs into the great one. At the point where the two rivers join you will cross the Ouse, and then journey west in boats for a day; that will take you near the land we speak of."

"But how are we to get the boats? We have no time to make them."

"We will take you in our boats. This man," and he pointed to one of those who had been with them in the morning, "will go with you as a guide through the swamps to the river to the north. There we will meet you with twenty boats, and will take a party to the spot we speak of. Then we will sell you the boats--we can build more --and you can take the rest of your party over as you like. What will you give us?"

"We will give you twenty swords like those I sent you, and twenty spearheads, and a hundred copper arrowheads, and twenty cattle."

The chiefs consulted together. "We want grain and we want skins," their spokesman said. "We have need of much grain, for if the Romans take your land and kill your people, where shall we buy grain? And we want skins, for it takes two skins to make a boat, and we shall have to build twenty to take the place of those we give you."

"We can give the skins," Aska said, after a consultation with Beric; "and I doubt not we can give grain. How much do you require?"

"Five boat loads filled to the brim."

"To all your other terms we agree," Aska said; "and you shall have as much grain as we can obtain. If we fall short of that quantity we will give for each boat load that is wanting three swords, six spearheads, and ten arrowheads."

The bargain was closed. The Fenmen had come resolved not to allow the strangers to enter their land, but their offer to occupy any spot, even if tenanted by savage beasts, entirely changed the position. In the recesses of the swamps to the east of the Ouse lay a tract of country which they avoided with a superstitious fear. In the memory of man none had dared to approach that region, for there was a tradition among them that, when they had first fled from the Iceni, a large party had penetrated there, and of these but a few returned, with tales of the destruction of their companions by huge serpents, and monsters of strange shapes, some of which were clothed in armour impenetrable to their heaviest weapons. From that time the spot had been avoided. Legends had multiplied concerning the creatures that dwelt there, and it now seemed to the chiefs that they must be gainers in any case by the bargain.

If the monsters conquered and devoured the Iceni, as no doubt they would do, they would be well rid of them. If the Iceni destroyed the monsters a large tract of country now closed would be open for fishing and fowling. They therefore accepted, without further difficulty, the terms the strangers offered. It was, moreover, agreed that any further parties of Iceni should be free to join the first comers without hindrance, and that guides should be furnished to all who might come to the borders of the swamps to join their countrymen. They were to act in concert in case of any attack by the Romans, binding themselves to assist each other to the utmost of their powers.

"But how are we to convey our cattle over?" Beric asked.

The native shook his head. "It is too far for them to swim, and the ground in most places is a swamp, in which they would sink."

"That must be an after matter, Beric," Aska said. "We will talk that over after we have arrived. Evidently we can do nothing now. The great thing is to get to this place they speak of, and to prepare it to receive the women and other fugitives. When will you have the boats at the place you name?"

"Three hours after daylight tomorrow."

"We will be there. You shall receive half the payments we have agreed upon before we start, the rest shall be paid you when you return with the boats and hand them over for the second detachment to go."

The native nodded, and at once he and his companions took their places in their coracles, leaving the native who was to act as guide behind them.

"They are undersized little wretches," Boduoc said, as they started for the village; "no wonder that our forefathers swept them out of the land without any difficulty. But they are active and sturdy, and, knowing their swamps as they do, could harass an invader terribly. I don't think that at present they like our going into their country, but they will be glad enough of our aid if the Romans come."

When they reached the village they found that the herds had just arrived. The headman was surprised when they told him that the Fenmen had agreed to allow them a shelter in the swamps, and he and eight or ten men who had straggled in since Beric's party arrived, expressed their desire to accompany the party with their families. Other women in the village would likewise have gone, but Aska pointed out to them that they had better go north and take shelter among the Brigantes, as all the women of his tribe had done, except those whose men were with them.

"You will be better off there than among the swamps, and we cannot feed unnecessary mouths; nor have we means of transporting you there. We, too, would shelter in the woods, were it not that we mean to harass the Romans, so we need a place where they cannot find us. But as you go spread the news that Aska has sought refuge in the swamps with two hundred fighting Sarci, and that all capable of bearing arms who choose to join them can do so. They must come to the junction of the two rivers, and there they will hear of us."

As the villagers were unable to take away with them their stores of grain, they disposed of them readily to Beric in exchange for gold ornaments, with which they could purchase cattle or such things as they required from the Brigantes; they also resigned all property in their swine and cattle, which were to be left in the woods, to be fetched as required. Aska and Beric having made these arrangements, sat down to discuss what had best be done, as the twenty boats would only carry sixty, and would be away for two days before they returned for the second party. Boduoc was called into the council, and after some discussion it was agreed that the best plan would be for the whole party to go down together to the junction of the rivers, each taking as large a burden of grain as he could carry, and driving their cattle before them.

They heard from the headman that the whole country near the river was densely covered with bushes, and that the ground was swampy and very difficult to cross. They agreed, therefore, that they would form a strong intrenchment at the spot where they were to embark. It was unlikely in the extreme that the Romans would seek to penetrate such a country, but if they did they were to be opposed as soon as they entered the swamps, and a desperate stand was to be made at the intrenchment, which would be approachable at one or two points only. Six men were to be left at the village to receive the women and children when they arrived. The guide was to return as soon as he had led the main party to the point where the boats were to meet them, and to lead the second party to the same point.

That evening, indeed, the women began to arrive, and said that they believed all would be in on the following day. Among them was Boduoc's mother, who told Beric that her eldest daughter had started with Berenice and Cneius to meet the Romans as soon as the

news of the defeat reached them. When day broke, Beric's command, with the women who had arrived, set off laden with as much grain in baskets or cloths as they could carry, and driving the cattle and pigs before them. The country soon became swampy, but their guide knew the ground well, and by a winding path led them dry footed through the bushes, though they could see water among the roots and grass on either side of them. They had, however, great difficulty with the cattle and pigs, but after several attempts to break away, and being nearly lost in the swamps, from which many of them had to be dragged out by sheer force, the whole reached the river. The men of the rear guard in charge of the main body of the swine and cattle did not arrive there until midday.

The spot to which the guide led them was on the river flowing east and west, a mile from its junction with the main stream, as he told them that the swamps were too deep near the junction of the river for them to penetrate there.

Some of the boats were already at the spot. When they reached it Aska and Beric at once began to mark out a semicircle, with a radius of some fifty yards, on the river bank. Ten of the cattle were killed and skinned, and as others of the party came up they were set to work to cut down the trees and undergrowth within the semicircle, and drag them to its edge, casting them down with their heads outwards so as to form a formidable abbatis. Within half an hour of the appointed time the twenty boats had arrived together with as many more, in which the grain, hides, and other articles agreed to be paid were to be carried off. Three of the cattle were cut up, and their flesh divided among the twenty boats, in which a quantity of grain was also placed. The seven remaining carcasses were for the use of the camp, the ten hides, half the grain, swords, spears, and arrowheads agreed upon, were handed over to the natives, and Beric, as an extra gift, presented each of the three chiefs who had come with the boats with one of the Roman shields, picked up on the field of battle.

The chiefs were greatly pleased with the present, and showed more goodwill than they had exhibited at their first interview. Aska had arranged with Beric to remain behind in charge of the encampment. As soon, therefore, as the presents had been handed over, Beric with Boduoc and three men to each boat took their places and pushed from shore. The boats of the Fenmen put off at the same time, and the natives, of whom there was one in each of Beric's boats, poled their way down the sluggish stream until they reached a wide river. The chiefs here shouted an adieu and directed their course up the river, while Beric's party crossed, proceeded down it for two miles, and then turned up a narrow stream running into it. All day they made their way along its windings; other streams came in on either side or quitted it; and, indeed, for some hours they appeared to be traversing a network of water from which rose trees and bushes. The native in Beric's boat, which led, could speak the language of the Iceni, and he explained to Beric that the waters were now high, but that when they subsided the land appeared above them, except in the course of the streams.

"It is always wet and swampy," he said; "and men cannot traverse this part on foot except by means of flat boards fastened to the feet by loops of leather; this prevents them from sinking deeply in."

Late in the afternoon the country became drier, and the land showed itself above the level of the water. The native now showed signs of much perturbation, stopping frequently and listening.

"I have come much farther now," he said, "than I have ever been before, and I dare not have ventured so far were it not that these floods would have driven everything back; but I know from an old man who once ventured to push farther, that this is the beginning of rising ground, and that in a short time you will find it dry enough to land. I advise you to call the other boats up so that in case of danger you can support each other."

The stream they were following was now very narrow, the branches of the trees meeting overhead.

"Can any of the other Fenmen in the boats speak our language?" Beric asked.

The man replied in the negative.

"That is good," he said; "I don't want my men to be frightened with stories about monsters. I don't believe in them myself, though I do not say that in the old time monsters may not have dwelt here. If anything comes we shall know how to fight it; but it is gloomy and dark enough here to make men uncomfortable without anything else to shake their courage."

At last they reached a spot where the bank was two feet above the water, and they could see that it rose further inland. Several of the other Fenmen had been shouting for some time to Beric's boatmen, and their craft had been lagging behind. Beric therefore thought it well to land at once. The boats were accordingly called up, the meat and grain landed, and the men leapt ashore, the boatmen instantly poling their crafts down stream at their utmost speed.

"We will go no farther tonight," Beric said; "but choose a comfortable spot and make a fire. It will be time enough in the morning to explore this place and fix on a spot for a permanent encampment."

A place was soon chosen and cleared of bushes. The men in several of the boats had at starting brought brands with them from the fires. These were carried across each other so as to keep the fire in, and eight or ten of these brands being laid together in the heart of the brushwood and fanned vigorously a bright flame soon shot up. The men's spirits had sunk as they passed through the wild expanse of swamp and water, but they rose now as the fire burned up. Meat was speedily frying in the flames, and this was eaten as soon as it was cooked, nothing being done with the grain, which they had no means of pounding. They had also brought with them several jars of beer from the village, and these were passed round after they had eaten their fill of meat.

"We will place four sentries," Beric said, "there may well be wolves or other wild beasts in these swamps."

After supper was over Boduoc questioned Beric privately as to the monsters of which their boatman had spoken.

"It is folly," Beric said. "You know that we have legends among ourselves, which we learned from the natives who were here before we came, that at one time strange creatures wandered over the country; but if there were such creatures they died long ago. These Fenmen have a story among themselves that such beasts lived in the heart of the swamp here when they first fled before us. It is quite possible that this is true, for although they died ages ago on the land they may have existed long afterwards among the swamps where there were none to disturb them. I have read in some of the Roman writers that there are creatures protected by a coat of scales in a country named Egypt, and that they live hundreds of years. Possibly these creatures, which the legends say were a sort of Dragon, may have lingered here, but as they do not seem to have shown themselves to the Fenmen since their first arrival here, it is not at all likely that there are any of them left; if there are we shall have to do battle with them."

"Do you think they will be very formidable, Beric?"

"I do not suppose so. They might be formidable to one man, but not to sixty well armed as we are; but I have not any belief that we shall meet with them."

The night passed quite quietly, and in the morning the band set out to explore the country. It rose gradually until they were, as Beric judged, from forty to fifty feet above the level of the swamp. Large trees grew here, and the soil was perfectly dry. The ground on the summit was level for about a quarter of a mile, and then gradually sank again. A mile farther they were again at the edge of a swamp.

"Nothing could have suited us better," Beric said. "At the top we can form an encampment which will hold ten thousand men, and there is dry ground a mile all round for the cattle and swine."

Presently there was a shout from some men who had wandered away, and Beric, bidding others follow, ran to the spot. They found men standing looking in wonder at a great number of bones lying in what seemed a confused mass.

"Here is your monster," Beric said; "they are snake bones." This was evident to all, and exclamations of wonder broke from them at their enormous size. One man got hold of a pair of ribs, and placing them upright they came up to his chin. The men looked apprehensively round.

"You need not be afraid," Beric said. "The creature has probably been dead hundreds of years. You see his skin is all decayed away, and it must have been thick and tough indeed. By the way the bones are piled together, he must have curled up here to die. He was probably the last of his race. However, we will search the island thoroughly, keeping together in readiness to encounter anything that we may alight upon."

Great numbers of snakes were found, but none of any extraordinary size.

"No doubt they fled here in the rains," Beric said, "when the water rose and covered the swamps; we shall not be troubled with them

when the morasses dry. Anyhow they are quite harmless, and save that they may kill a chicken or two when we get some, they will give us no trouble. The swine will soon clear them off."

It was late in the day before the search was completed, and they then returned to the camping ground of the night before, quite assured that there was no creature of any size upon the island. Just as evening was falling on the following day they heard shouts.

"Are you alive?" a voice, which Beric recognized as that of his boatman, shouted.

"Yes," he exclaimed, "alive and well. There is nothing to be afraid of here."

A few minutes later the twenty boats again came up. The Fenmen this time ventured to land, but Beric's boatman questioned him anxiously about the monsters. Beric, who thought it as well to maintain the evil reputation of the place, told him that they had searched the island and had found no living monsters, but had come across a dead serpent, who must have been seventy or eighty feet long.

"There are no more of them here," he said, "but of course there may be others that have been alarmed at the noises we made and have taken to the swamps. This creature has been dead for a long time, and may have been the last of his race. However, if one were to come we should not be afraid of it with a hundred and twenty fighting men here."

The Fenmen, after a consultation among themselves, agreed that it would be safer to pass the night with the Iceni than to start in the darkness among the swamps. When they left in the morning Beric sent a message to Aska describing the place, and begging him to send up some of the women with the next party with means of grinding the grain. As soon as the boats were started Beric led the party up to the top of the rise, and then work was begun in earnest, and in a couple of days a large number of huts were constructed of saplings and brushwood cleared off from the centre of the encampment. Some women arrived with the next boat loads, and at once took the preparation of food into their hands. Aska sent a message saying that the numbers at his camp were undiminished, as most of the fighting men belonging to the villages round who had survived the battle had joined him at once with their wives, and that fresh men were pouring in every hour. He urged Beric to leave Boduoc in charge of the island, and to return with the empty boats in order that they might have a consultation. This Beric did, and upon his arrival he found that there were over four hundred men in camp, with a proportionate number of women and children. There were several subchiefs among them, and Aska invited them to join in the council.

"It is evident," he said, "that so large a number as this cannot find food in one place in the swamps, at any rate until we have learned to catch fish and snare wildfowl as the Fenmen do. The swine we can take there, but these light boats would not carry cattle in any numbers, though some might be thrown and carried there, with their legs tied together. At present this place is safe from attack. There is only one path, our guide says, by which it can be approached. I propose that we cut wide gaps through this, and throw beams and planks over them. These we can remove in case of

attack. When we hear of the Romans' approach we can throw up a high defence of trees and bushes behind each gap."

"That will be excellent," Beric agreed, "and you would doubtless be able to make a long defence against them on the causeway. But you must not depend upon their keeping upon that. They will wade through the swamp waist deep, and, if it be deeper still, will cut down bushes and make faggots and move forward on these. So, though you may check them on the causeway, they will certainly, by one means or other, make their way up to your intrenchment, and you must therefore strengthen this in every way. I should build up a great bank behind it, so that if they break through or fire the defences you can defend the bank. There is one thing that must be done without delay; we must build more boats. There must be here many men from the eastern coast, where they have much larger and stronger craft than these coracles. I should put a strong party to work upon them. Then, in case of an attack, you could, when you see that longer resistance would be vain, take to the boats and join me; or, when the Romans approach, send them off to fetch my party from the island. Besides, we shall want to move bodies of men rapidly so as to attack and harass the enemy when they are not expecting us.

"I should say that we ought to have at least twenty great flatboats able to carry fifty men each. Speed would not be of much consequence, as the Romans will have no boats to follow us; besides, except on the Ouse and one or two of the larger streams, there is no room for rowing, and they must be poled along. Let us keep none but fighting men here. As all the villagers fled north there must be numbers of cattle and swine wandering untended in all the woods, and in many of the hamlets much grain must have been left behind, therefore I should send out parties from time to time to bring them in. When the large boats are built we can transport some of the cattle alive to the island; till then they must be slaughtered here; but with each party a few swine might be sent to the island, where they can range about as they choose. What is the last news you have of the Romans?"

"They are pressing steadily north, burning and slaying. I hear that they spare none, and that the whole land of the Trinobantes, from the Thames to the Stour, has been turned into a waste."

"It was only what we had to expect, Aska. Have any more of my people come in since I left?"

"Only a young girl. She arrived last night. It is she that brought the news that I am giving you. She is a sister of your friend Boduoc, and her mother, who had given her up for lost, almost lost her senses with delight when she returned. The family are fortunate, for another son also came in two or three days ago."

Beric at once went in search of Boduoc's mother, whom he found established with her girls in a little bower.

"I am glad indeed that your daughter has returned safe," he said, as the old woman came out on hearing his voice.

"Yes, I began to think that I should never see her face again, Beric; but I am fortunate indeed, when so many are left friendless, that all my four children should be spared.

"Tell the chief how you fulfilled your mission," she said to the girl.

"It was easy enough," she replied. "Had I been by myself I should have returned here three days since, but the little lady could not make long journeys, and it was three days after we left before we saw any of the Romans. At last we came upon a column of horse. When we saw them the little lady gave me this bracelet, and she put this gold chain into my hand and said, 'Beric.' So I knew that it was for you. Then I ran back and hid myself in the trees while they went forward. When they got near the soldiers on horseback the man lifted up his arms and cried something in a loud voice. Then they rode up to them, and for some time I could see nothing. Then the horsemen rode on again, all but two of them, who went on south. The man rode behind one of them, and the little lady before another. Then I turned and made hither, travelling without stopping, except once for a few hours' sleep. There are many fugitives in the woods, and from them I heard that the land of the Trinobantes was lit up by burning villages, and that the Romans were slaughtering all. Some of those I met in the wood had hid themselves, and had made their way at night, and they saw numbers of dead bodies, women and children as well as men, in the burned hamlets."

"You have done your mission well," Beric said. "Boduoc will be glad when I tell him how you have carried out my wish. We must find a good husband for you some day, and I will take care that you go to him with a good store of cattle and swine. Where is your brother?"

"He is there," she said, "leaning against that tree waiting for you."

"I am glad to see you safe among us," Beric said to the young man. "How did you escape the battle?"

"I was driving the chariot with Parta's attendants, as I had from the day we started. I kept close behind her chariot, and escaped with her when the line of wagons was broken to let the queen pass. When we got far away from the battle your mother stopped her chariot and bade me go north. 'I have no more need of attendants,' she said; 'let them save themselves. Do you find my son if he has escaped the battle, and tell him that I shall share the fate of Boadicea. I have lived a free woman, and will die one. Tell him to fight to the end against the Romans, and that I shall expect him to join me before long in the Happy Island. Bid him not lament for me, but rejoice, as he should, that I have gone to the Land where there are no sorrows.' Then I turned my chariot and drove to your home to await your coming there if you should have escaped. It was but a few hours after that the messengers brought the news that you were safe, and that the survivors of your band were to join you at Soto with such men as might have escaped. As Parta's orders were to take the women with me to the north, I drove them two days farther, taking with me a lad, the brother of one of them. Then I handed over the chariot to him, to convey them to the land of the Brigantes, and started hither on foot to join you."

"You shall go on with me tomorrow, you and your mother and sisters. Boduoc will be rejoiced to see you all. We have found a place where even the Romans will hardly reach us."

CHAPTER IX: THE STRUGGLE IN THE SWAMP

That evening Beric had a long talk with Aska and four or five men from the coast accustomed to the building of large boats. The matter would be easy enough, they said, as the boats would not be required to withstand the strain of the sea, and needed only to be put together with flat bottoms and sides. With so large a number of men they could hew down trees of suitable size, and thin them down until they obtained a plank from each. They would then be fastened together by strong pegs and dried moss driven in between the crevices. Pitch, however, would be required to stop up the seams, and of this they had none.

"Then," Beric said, "we must make some pitch. There is no great difficulty about that. There are plenty of fir trees growing near the edges of the swamps, and from the roots of these we can get tar."

The men were all acquainted with the process, which was a simple one. A deep hole was dug in the ground. The bottom of this was lined with clay, hollowed out into a sort of bowl. The hole was then filled with the roots of fir closely packed together. When it was full a fire was lit above it. As soon as this had made its way down earth was piled over it and beaten down hard, a small orifice being left in the centre. In this way the wood was slowly converted into charcoal, and the resin and tar, as they oosed out under the heat, trickled down into the bowl of clay at the bottom. As little or no smoke escaped after the fire was first lighted, the work could be carried on without fear of attracting the attention of any bodies of the enemy who might be searching the country.

Two months passed. By the end of that time the intrenchment on the river bank had been made so strong that it could resist any attack save by a very large body of men. That on the island had also been completed, and strong banks thrown up at the only three points where a landing could be effected from boats.

The swamps had been thoroughly explored in the neighbourhood, and another island discovered, and on this three hundred men had been established, while four hundred remained on the great island, and as many in the camp on the river. There were over a thousand women and children distributed among the three stations. Three hundred men had laboured incessantly at the boats, and these were now finished. While all this work had been going on considerable numbers of fish and wildfowl had been obtained by barter from the Fenmen, with whom they had before had dealings, and from other communities living among the swamps to the north. Many of the Iceni, who came from the marshy districts of the eastern rivers, were also accustomed to fishing and fowling, and, as soon as the work on the defences was finished and the tortuous channels through the swamps became known to them, they began to lay nets, woven by the women, across the streams, and to make decoys and snares of all sorts for the wildfowl.

The framework for many coracles had been woven of withies by

the women, and the skins of all the cattle killed were utilized as coverings, so that by the end of the two months they had quite a fleet of little craft of this kind. As fast as the larger boats were finished they were used for carrying cattle to the islands, and a large quantity of swine were also taken over.

During this time the Romans had traversed the whole country of the Iceni. The hamlets were fired, and all persons who fell into their hands put to death; but the number of these was comparatively small, as the greater part of the population had either moved north or taken to the woods, which were so extensive that comparatively few of the fugitives were killed by the search parties of the Romans. From the few prisoners that the Romans took they heard reports that many of the Iceni had taken refuge in the swamps, and several strong bodies had moved along the edge of the marsh country without attempting to penetrate it.

Aska and Beric had agreed that so long as they were undisturbed they would remain quiet, confining themselves to their borders, except when they sent parties to search for cattle in the woods or to gather up grain that might have escaped destruction in the hamlets, and that they would avoid any collision with the Romans until their present vigilance abated or they attempted to plant settlers in their neighbourhood.

Circumstances, however, defeated this intention. They learned from the Fenmen that numerous fugitives had taken refuge in the southern swamps, and that these sallying out had fallen upon parties of Romans near Huntingdon, and had cut them to pieces. The Romans had in consequence sent a considerable force to avenge this attack. These had penetrated some distance into the swamps, but had there been attacked and driven back with much slaughter. But a fortnight later a legion had marched to Huntingdon, and crossing the river there had established a camp opposite, which they called Godmancastra, and, having collected a number of natives from the west, were engaged in building boats in which they intended to penetrate the swamp country and root out the fugitives.

"It was sure to come sooner or later," Aska said to Beric. "Nor should we wish it otherwise. We came here not to pass our lives as lurking fugitives, but to gather a force and avenge ourselves on the Romans. If you like I will go up the river and see our friends there, and ascertain their strength and means of resistance. Would it be well, think you, to tell them of our strong place here and offer to send our boats to bring them down, so that we may make a great stand here?"

"No, I think not," Beric said. "Nothing would suit the Romans better than to catch us all together, so as to destroy us at one blow. We know that in the west they stormed the intrenchments of Cassivellaunus, and that no native fort has ever withstood their assault. I should say that it ought to be a war of small fights. We should attack them constantly, enticing them into the deepest parts of the morass, and falling upon them at spots where our activity will avail against their heavily weighted men. We should pour volleys of arrows into their boats as they pass along through the narrow creeks, show ourselves at points where the ground is firm enough for them to land, and then falling back to deep morasses tempt them to pursue us there, and then turn upon them. We should give them no rest night

or day, and wear them out with constant fighting and watching. The fens are broad and long, stretching from Huntingdon to the sea; and if they are contested foot by foot, we may tire out even the power of Rome."

"You are right, Beric; but at any rate it will be well to see how our brethren are prepared. They may have no boats, and may urgently need help."

"I quite agree with you, and I think it would be as well for you to go. You could offer to bring all their women and children to our islands here, and then we would send down a strong force to help them. We should begin to contest strongly the Roman advance from the very first."

Accordingly Aska started up the Ouse in one of the large boats with twelve men to pole it along, and three days afterwards returned with the news that there were some two thousand men with twice that many women and children scattered among the upper swamps.

"They have only a few small boats," he said, "and are in sore straits for provisions. They drove at first a good many cattle in with them, but most of these were lost in the morasses, and as there have been bodies of horse moving about near Huntingdon, they have not been able to venture out as we have done to drive in more."

"Have they any chief with them?" Beric asked.

"None of any importance. All the men are fugitives from the battle, who were joined on their way north by the women of the villages. They are broken up into groups, and have no leader to form any general plan. I spoke to the principal men among them, and told them that we had strongly fortified several places here, had built a fleet of boats, and were prepared for warfare; they will all gladly accept you as their leader. They urgently prayed that we would send our boats down for the women and children, and I promised them that you would do so, and would also send down some provisions for the fighting men."

The next morning the twenty large boats, each carrying thirty men and a supply of meat and grain, started up the river, Beric himself going with them, and taking Boduoc as his lieutenant. Aska remained in command at the river fort, where the force was maintained at its full strength, the boat party being drawn entirely from the two islands. Four miles below Huntingdon they landed at a spot where the greater part of the Iceni there were gathered. Fires were at once lighted, and a portion of the meat cooked, for the fugitives were weak with hunger. As soon as this was satisfied, orders were issued for half the women and children to be brought in.

These were crowded into the boats, which, in charge of four men in each, then dropped down the stream, Beric having given orders that the boats were to return as soon as the women were landed on the island. He spent the next two days in traversing the swamps in a coracle, ascertaining where there was firm ground, and where the morasses were impassable. He learned all the particulars he could gather about the exact position of the Roman camp, and the spot where the boats were being constructed--the Iceni were already familiar with several paths leading out of the morasses in that

neighbourhood--and then drew out a plan for an attack upon the Romans.

He had brought with him half the Sarci who had retired with him from the battle. These he would himself command. A force of four hundred men, led by Boduoc, were to travel by different paths through the swamp; they were then to unite and to march round the Roman camp, and attack it suddenly on three sides at once.

The camp was in the form of a horseshoe, and its ends resting on the river, and it was here that the boats were being built. Beric himself with his own hundred men and fifty others were to embark in four boats. As soon as they were fairly beyond the swamp, they were to land on the Huntingdon side, and to tow their boats along until within two or three hundred yards of the Roman camp, when they were to await the sound of Boduoc's horn. Boduoc's instructions were that he was to attack the camp fiercely on all sides. The Roman sentries were known to be so vigilant that there was but slight prospect of his entering the camp by surprise, or of his being able to scale the palisades at the top of the bank of earth. The attack, however, was to be made as if in earnest, and was to be maintained until Beric's horn gave the signal for them to draw off, when they were to break up into parties as before, and to retire into the heart of the swamp by the paths by which they had left it.

The most absolute silence was to be observed until the challenge of the Roman sentries showed that they were discovered, when they were to raise their war shouts to the utmost so as to alarm and confuse the enemy.

The night was a dark one and a strong wind was blowing, so that Beric's party reached their station unheard by the sentries on the walls of the camp. It was an hour before they heard a distant shout, followed instantly by the winding of a horn, and the loud war cry of the Iceni. At the same moment the trumpets in the Roman intrenchments sounded, and immediately a tumult of confused shouting arose around and within the camp. Beric remained quiet for five minutes till the roar of battle was at its highest, and he knew that the attention of the Romans would be entirely occupied with the attack. Then the boats were again towed along until opposite the centre of the horseshoe; the men took their places in them again and poled them across the river.

The fifty men who accompanied the Sarci carried bundles of rushes dipped in pitch, and in each boat were burning brands which had been covered with raw hides to prevent the light being seen. They were nearly across the river when some sentries there, whose attention had hitherto been directed entirely to the walls, suddenly shouted an alarm. As soon as the boats touched the shore, Beric and his men leapt out, passed through the half built boats and the piles of timber collected beside them, and formed up to repel an attack. At the same moment the others lighted their bundles of rushes at the brands, and jumping ashore set fire to the boats and wood piles. Astonished at this outburst of flame within their camp, while engaged in defending the walls from the desperate attacks of the Iceni, the Romans hesitated, and then some of them came running down to meet the unexpected attack.

But the Sarci had already pressed quickly on, followed by some of the torch bearers, and were in the midst of the Roman tents before the legionaries gathered in sufficient force to meet them. The torches were applied to the tents, and fanned by the breeze, the flames spread rapidly from one to another. Beric blew the signal for retreat, and his men in a solid body, with their spears outward, fell back. The Romans, as they arrived at the spot, rushed furiously upon them; but discipline was this time on the side of the Sarci, who beat off all attacks till they reached the river bank. Then in good order they took their places in the boats, Beric with a small body covering the movement till the last; then they made a rush to the boats; the men, standing with their poles ready, instantly pushed the craft into the stream, and in two minutes they were safe on the other side.

The boats and piles of timber were already blazing fiercely, while the Roman camp, in the centre of the intrenchment, was in a mass of flames, lighting up the helmets and armour of the soldiers ranged along the wall, and engaged in repelling the attacks of the Iceni. As soon as the Sarci were across, they leapt ashore and towed the boat along by the bank. A few arrows fell among them, but as soon as they had pushed off from the shore most of the Romans had run back to aid in the defence of the walls. Beric's horn now gave the signal that the work was done, and in a short time the shouts of the Iceni began to subside, the din of the battle grew fainter, and in a few minutes all was quiet round the Roman camp.

There was great rejoicing when the parties of the Iceni met again in the swamp. They had struck a blow that would greatly inconvenience the Romans for some time, would retard their attack, and show them that the spirit of the Britons was still high. The loss of the Iceni had been very small, only some five or six of Beric's party had fallen, and twenty or thirty of the assailants of the wall; they believed that the Romans had suffered much more, for they could be seen above their defences by the light of the flames behind them, while the Iceni were in darkness. Thus the darts and javelins of the defenders had been cast almost at random, while they themselves had been conspicuous marks for the missiles of the assailants.

In Beric's eyes the most important point of the encounter was that it had given confidence to the fugitives, had taught them the advantage of fighting with a plan, and of acting methodically and in order. There was a consultation next morning. Beric pointed out to the leaders that although it was necessary sometimes with an important object in view to take the offensive, they must as a rule stand on the defensive, and depend upon the depth of their morasses and their knowledge of the paths across them to baffle the attempts of the Romans to penetrate.

"I should recommend," he said, "that you break up into parties of fifteens and twenties, and scatter widely over the Fen country, and yet be near enough to each other to hear the sound of the horn. Each party must learn every foot of the ground and water in the neighbourhood round them. In that way you will be able to assemble when you hear the signal announcing the coming of the Romans, you will know the paths by which you can attack or retreat, and the spots where you can make your way across, but where the Romans cannot follow you. Each party must earn its sustenance by fishing and fowling; and in making up your parties, there should be two or

three men in each accustomed to this work. Each party must provide itself with coracles; I will send up a boat load of hides. Beyond that you must search for cattle and swine in the woods, when by sending spies on shore you find there are no parties of Romans about.

"The parties nearest to Huntingdon should be always vigilant, and day and night keep men at the edge of the swamp to watch the doings of the Romans, and should send notice to me every day or two as to what the enemy are doing, and when they are likely to advance. Should they come suddenly, remember that it is of no use to try to oppose their passage down the river. Their boats will be far stronger than ours, and we should but throw away our lives by fighting them there. They may go right down to the sea if they please, but directly they land or attempt to thrust their boats up the channels through the swamp, then every foot must be contested. They must be shot down from the bushes, enticed into swamps, and overwhelmed with missiles. Let each man make himself a powerful bow and a great sheath of arrows pointed with flints or flakes of stone, which must be fetched from the dry land, although even without these they will fly straight enough if shot from the bushes at a few yards' distance.

"Let the men practice with these, and remember that they must aim at the legs of the Romans. It is useless to shoot at either shields or armour. Besides, let each man make himself a spear, strong, heavy, and fully eighteen feet long, with the point hardened in the fire, and rely upon these rather than upon your swords to check their progress. Whenever you find broad paths of firm ground across the swamps, cut down trees and bushes to form stout barriers.

"Make friends with the Fenmen. Be liberal to them with gifts, and do not attempt to plant parties near them, for this would disturb their wildfowl and lead to jealousy and quarrels. However well you may learn the swamps, they know them better, and were they hostile might lead the Romans into our midst. In some parts you may not find dry land on which to build huts; in that case choose spots where the trees are stout, lash saplings between these and build your huts upon them so as to be three or four feet above the wet soil. Some of my people who know the swamps by the eastern rivers tell me that this is the best way to avoid the fen fevers."

Having seen that everything was arranged, Beric and his party returned to their camp. For some time the reports from the upper river stated that the Romans were doing little beyond sending out strong parties to cut timber. Then came the news that a whole legion had arrived, and that small forts containing some two hundred men each were being erected, three or four miles apart, on both sides of the Fen.

"That shows that all resistance must have ceased elsewhere," Aska said, "or they would never be able to spare so great a force as a legion and a half against us. I suppose that these forts are being built to prevent our obtaining cattle, and that they hope to starve us out. They will hardly succeed in that, for the rivers and channels swarm with fish, and now that winter is coming on they will abound with wildfowl."

"I am afraid of the winter," Beric said, "for then they will be able to traverse the swamps, where now they would sink over their

heads."

"Unless the frosts are very severe, Beric, the ground will not harden much, for every foot is covered with trees and bushes. As to grain we can do without it, but we shall be able to fetch some at least down from the north. Indeed, it would need ten legions to form a line along both sides of the Fen country right down to the sea and to pen us in completely."

By this time the Iceni had become familiar with the channels through the swamps for long distances from their fastness, and had even established a trade with the people lying to the northwest of the Fen country. They learnt that the Romans boasted they had well nigh annihilated the Trinobantes and Iceni; but that towards the other tribes that had taken part in the great rising they had shown more leniency, though some of their principal towns had been destroyed and the inhabitants put to the sword.

A month later a fleet of boats laden with Roman soldiers started from Huntingdon and proceeded down the Ouse. Dead silence reigned round them, and although they proceeded nearly to the sea they saw no signs of a foe, and so turning they rowed back to Huntingdon. But in their absence the Iceni had not been idle. The spies from the swamps had discovered when the expedition was preparing to start, and had found too that a strong body of troops was to march along the edges of the swamps in order to cut off the Iceni should they endeavour to make their escape.

The alarm had been sounded from post to post, and in accordance with the orders of Beric the whole of the fighting men at once began to move south, some in boats, some in their little coracles, which were able to thread their way through the network of channels. The night after the Romans started, the whole of the fighting force of the Britons was gathered in the southern swamps, and two hours before daybreak issued out. Some five hundred, led by Aska, followed the western bank of the river towards Huntingdon, which had for the time been converted into a Roman city, inhabited by the artisans who had constructed the boats and the settlers who supplied the army; it had been garrisoned by five hundred legionaries, of whom three hundred had gone away in the boats.

The main body advanced against the Roman camp on the opposite bank, in which, as their spies had learnt, three hundred men had been left as a garrison. By Beric's orders a great number of ladders had been constructed. As upon the previous occasion the camp was surrounded before they advanced against it, and when the first shout of a sentry showed that they were discovered Beric's horn gave the signal, and with a mighty shout the Britons rushed on from all sides. Dashing down the ditch, and climbing the steep bank behind it the Iceni planted their ladders against the palisade, and swarming over it poured into the camp before the Romans had time to gather to oppose them. Beric had led his own band of two hundred trained men against the point where the wall of the camp touched the river, and as soon as they were over formed them up and led them in a compact body against the Romans.

In spite of the suddenness of the attack, the discipline of the legionaries was unshaken, and as soon as their officers found that the walls were already lost they formed their men in a solid body

to resist the attack. Before Beric with his band reached the spot the Romans were already engaged in a fierce struggle with the Britons, who poured volleys of darts and arrows among them, and desperately strove, sword in hand, to break their solid formation. This they were unable to do, until Beric's band six deep with their hedge of spears before them came up, and with a loud shout threw themselves upon the Romans. The weight and impetus of the charge was irresistible. The Roman cohort was broken, and a deadly hand to hand struggle commenced. But here the numbers and the greatly superior height and strength of the Britons were decisive, and before many minutes had passed the last Roman had been cut down, the scene of the battle being lighted up by the flames of Huntingdon.

A shout of triumph from the Britons announced that all resistance had ceased. Beric at once blew his horn, and, as had been previously arranged, four hundred of the island men immediately started under Boduoc to oppose the garrison at the nearest fort, should they meet these hastening to the assistance of their comrades. Then a systematic search for plunder commenced. One of the storehouses was emptied of its contents and fired, and by its light the arms and armour of the Roman soldiers were collected, the huts and tents rifled of everything of value, the storehouses emptied of their stores of grain and provisions, and of the tools that had been used for the building of boats. Everything that could be of use to the defenders was taken, and fire was then applied to the buildings and tents. Morning broke before this was accomplished, and laden down with spoil the Iceni returned to their swamps, Boduoc's and Aska's parties rejoining them there.

The former had met the Romans hurrying from the nearest fort to aid the garrison of the camp. Beric's orders had been that Boduoc was if possible to avoid a fight, as in the open the discipline of the Romans would probably prevail over British valour. The Iceni, therefore, set up a great shouting in front and in the rear of the Romans, shooting their missiles among them, and being unable in the dark to perceive the number of their assailants, and fearful that they had fallen into an ambush, the Romans fell back to their fort. Aska's party had also returned laden with plunder, and as soon as the whole were united a division of this was made. The provisions, clothing, and arms were divided equally among the men, while the stores of rope, metal, canvas, and other articles that would be useful to the community were set aside to be taken to the island. Thither also the shields, armour, and helmets of the Roman soldiers were to be conveyed, to be broken up and melted into spear and arrow heads.

As the Roman boats returned two days later from their useless passage down the river, they were astonished and enraged by outbursts of mocking laughter from the tangle of bushes fringing the river. Not a foe was to be seen, but for miles these sounds of derisive laughter assailed them from both sides of the stream. The veterans ground their teeth with rage, and would have rowed towards the banks had not their officers, believing that it was the intention of the Britons to induce them to land, and then to lead them into an ambush, ordered them to keep on their way. On passing beyond the region of the swamp a cry of dismay burst from the crowded boats, as it was perceived that the town of Huntingdon had entirely disappeared. As they neared the camp, however, the sight of numerous sentries on the walls relieved them of part of their anxiety; but

upon landing they learnt the whole truth, that the five hundred Roman soldiers in the camp and at Huntingdon had fallen to a man, and that the whole of the stores collected had been carried away or destroyed.

The news had been sent rapidly along the chain of forts on either side of the swamp, and fifty men from each had been despatched to repair and reoccupy the camp, which was now held by a thousand men, who had already begun to repair the palisades that had been fired by the Britons.

This disaster at once depressed and infuriated the Roman soldiers, while it showed to the general commanding them that the task he had been appointed to perform was vastly more serious than he had expected. Already, as he had traversed mile after mile of the silent river, he had been impressed with the enormous difficulty there would be in penetrating the pathless morasses, extending as he knew in some places thirty or forty miles in width. The proof now afforded of the numbers, determination, and courage of the men lurking there still further impressed him with the gravity of the undertaking. Messengers were at once sent off to Suetonius, who was at Camalodunum, which he was occupied in rebuilding, to inform him of the reverse, and to ask for orders, and the general with five hundred men immediately set out for the camp of Godman.

Suetonius at once proceeded to examine for himself the extent of the Fen country, riding with a body of horsemen along the eastern boundary as far as the sea, and then, returning to the camp, followed up the western margin until he again reached the sea. He saw at once that the whole of the Roman army in Britain would be insufficient to guard so extensive a line, and that it would be hopeless to endeavour to starve out men who could at all times make raids over the country around them. The first step to be taken must be to endeavour to circumscribe their limits. Orders were at once sent to the British tribes in south and midlands to send all their available men, and as these arrived they were set to work to clear away by axe and fire the trees and bush on the eastern side of the river Ouse.

As soon as the intentions of the Romans were understood, the British camp at the junction of the rivers was abandoned, as with so large a force of workmen the Romans could have made wide roads up to it, and although it might have resisted for some time, it must eventually fall, while the Romans, by sending their flotilla of boats down, could cut off the retreat of the garrison. For two months thirty thousand workmen laboured under the eyes of strong parties of Roman soldiers, and the work of denuding the swamps east of the Ouse was accomplished.

Winter had now set in, but the season was a wet one, and although the Romans made repeated attempts to fire the brushwood from the south and west, they failed to do so. Severe frost accompanied by heavy snow set in late, and as soon as the ground was hard enough the Romans entered the swamps near Huntingdon, and began their advance northwards. The Britons were expecting them, and the whole of their fighting force had gathered to oppose them. Beric and Aska set them to work as soon as the Roman army crossed the river and marched north, and as the Romans advanced slowly and carefully through the tangled bushes, they heard a strange confused noise

far ahead of them, and after marching for two miles came upon a channel, where the ice had been broken into fragments.

They at once set to work to cut down bushes and form them into faggots to fill up the gaps, but as they approached the channel with these they were assailed by volleys of arrows from the bushes on the opposite side. The light armed troops were brought up, and the work of damming the channel at a dozen points, was covered by a shower of javelins and arrows. The Britons, however, had during the past month made shields of strong wicker work of Roman pattern, but long enough to cover them from the eyes down to the ankles, and the wicker work was protected by a double coating of ox hide. Boys collected the javelins as fast as they were thrown, and handed them to the men. As soon as the road across the channel was completed the Romans poured over, believing that now they should scatter their invisible foes; but they were mistaken, for the Britons with levelled spears, their bodies covered with their bucklers, burst down upon them as they crossed, while a storm of darts and javelins poured in from behind the fighting line.

Again and again they were driven back, until after suffering great loss they made good their footing at several points, when, at the sound of a horn, resistance at once ceased, and the Britons disappeared as if by magic. Advancing cautiously the Romans found that the ice in all the channels had been broken up, and they were soon involved in a perfect network of sluggish streams. Across these the Britons had felled trees to form bridges for their retreat, and these they dragged after them as soon as they crossed. Every one of these streams was desperately defended, and as the line of swamp grew wider the Roman front became more and more scattered.

Late in the afternoon a sudden and furious attack was made upon them from the rear, Beric having taken a strong force round their flank. Numbers of the Romans were killed before they could assemble to make head against the attack, and as soon as they did so their assailants as usual drew off. After a long day's fighting the Romans had gained scarce a mile from the point where resistance had commenced, and this at a cost of over three hundred men. Suetonius himself had commanded the attack, and when the troops halted for the night at the edge of an unusually wide channel, he felt that the task he had undertaken was beyond his powers. He summoned the commanders of the two legions to the hut that had been hastily raised for him.

"What think you?" he asked. "This is a warfare even more terrible than that we waged with the Goths in their forests. This Beric, who is their leader, has indeed profited by the lessons he learned at Camalodunum. No Roman general could have handled his men better. He is full of resources, and we did not reckon upon his breaking up the ice upon all these channels. If we have had so much trouble in forcing our way where the swamps are but two miles across, and that with a frost to help us, the task will be a terrible one when we get into the heart of the morasses, where they are twenty miles wide. Yet we cannot leave them untouched. There would never be peace and quiet as long as these bands, under so enterprising a leader, remained unsubdued. Can you think of any other plan by which we may advance with less loss?"

The two officers were silent. "The resistance may weaken," one said

after a long pause. "We have learnt from the natives that they have not in all much above three thousand fighting men, and they must have lost as heavily as we have."

Suetonius shook his head. "I marked as we advanced," he said, "that there was not one British corpse to four Romans. We shoot at random, while they from their bushes can see us, and even when they charge us our archers can aid but little, seeing that the fighting takes place among the bushes. However, we will press on for a time. The natives behind us must clear the ground as fast as we advance, and every foot gained is gained for good."

Three times during the night the British attacked the Romans, once by passing up the river in their coracles and landing behind them, once by marching out into the country round their left flank, and once by pouring out through cross channels in their boats and landing in front. All night, too, their shouts kept the Romans awake in expectation of attack.

For four days the fighting continued, and the Romans, at the cost of over a thousand men, won their way eight miles farther. By the end of that time they were utterly exhausted with toil and want of sleep; the swamps each day became wider, and the channels larger and deeper. Then the Roman leaders agreed that no more could be done. Twelve miles had been won and cleared, but this was the mere tongue of the Fenland, and to add to their difficulties that day the weather had suddenly changed, and in the evening rain set in. It was therefore determined to retreat while the ground was yet hard, and having lighted their fires, and left a party to keep these burning and to deceive the British, the Romans drew off and marched away, bearing to the left so as to get out on to the plain, and to leave the ground, encumbered with the sharp stumps of the bushes and its network of channels, behind them as soon as possible.

CHAPTER X: BETRAYED

The Britons soon discovered that the Romans had retreated, but made no movement in pursuit. They knew that the legionaries once in open ground were more than their match, and they were well content with the success they had gained. They had lost in all but four hundred men, while they were certain that the Romans had suffered much more heavily, and that there was but little chance of the attack being renewed in the same manner, for if their progress was so slow when they had frost to aid them, what chance would they have when there was scarce a foot of land that could bear their weight? The winter passed, indeed, without any further movement. The Britons suffered to some extent from the damps; but as the whole country was undrained, and for the most part covered with forest, they were accustomed to a damp laden atmosphere, and so supported the fogs of the Fens far better than they would otherwise have done.

In the spring, grain, which had been carefully preserved for the purpose, was sown in many places where the land was above the level of the swamps. A number of large boats had been built during the winter, as Beric and Aska were convinced that the next attack would be made by water, having learned from the country people to

the west that a vast number of flat bottomed boats had been built by the Romans.

Early in the spring fighting again began. A great flotilla of boats descended from Huntingdon, and turning off the side channels entered the swamp. But the Britons were prepared. They were now well provided with tools, and numbers of trees had been felled across the channels, completely blocking the passage. As soon as the boats left the main river, they were assailed with a storm of javelins from the bushes, and the Romans, when they attempted to land, found their movements impeded by the deep swamp in which they often sank up to the waist, while their foes in their swamp pattens traversed them easily, and inflicted heavy losses upon them, driving them back into their boats again. At the points where the channels were obstructed desperate struggles took place. The Romans, from their boats, in vain endeavoured, under the storm of missiles from their invisible foes, to remove the obstacles, and as soon as they landed to attempt to do so they were attacked with such fury that they were forced to fall back.

Several times they found their way of retreat blocked by boats that had come down through side channels, and had to fight their way back with great loss and difficulty. After maintaining the struggle for four days, and suffering a loss even greater than that they had incurred in their first attack, the Romans again drew off and ascended the river. The Fenmen had joined the Iceni in repelling the attack. The portion of the swamp they inhabited was not far away, and they felt that they too were threatened by the Roman advance. They had therefore rejoined the Iceni, although for some time they had kept themselves aloof from them, owing to quarrels that had arisen because, as they asserted, some of the Iceni had entered their district and carried off the birds from their traps. Beric had done all in his power to allay this feeling, recompensing them for the losses they declared they had suffered, and bestowing many presents upon them. He and Aska often talked the matter over, and agreed that their greatest danger was from the Fenmen.

"They view us as intruders in their country," Aska said, "and doubtless consider that in time we shall become their masters. Should they turn against us they could lead the Romans direct to our islands, and if these were lost all would be lost."

"If you fear that, Aska," Boduoc, who was present, said, "we had better kill the little wretches at once."

"No, no Boduoc," Beric said. "We have nothing against them at present, and we should be undeserving of the protection of the gods were we to act towards them as the Romans act towards us. Moreover, such an attempt would only bring about what we fear. Some of them, knowing their way as they do through the marshes, would be sure to make their escape, and these would bring the Romans down upon us. Even did we slay all this tribe here, the Fenmen in the north would seek to avenge their kinsmen, and would invite the Romans to their aid. No, we must speak the Fenmen fair, avoid all cause of quarrel, do all we can to win their goodwill, and show them that they have nothing to fear from us. Still, we must always be on guard against treachery. Night and day a watch must be set at the mouths of all

the channels by which they might penetrate in this direction."

Another month passed. The Romans still remained in their forts round the Fens. The natives had now been brought round to the western side, and under the protection of strong bodies of soldiers were occupied in clearing the swamp on that side. They made but little progress, however, for the Britons made frequent eruptions among them, and the depth of the morasses in this direction rendered it well nigh impossible for them to advance, and progress could only be made by binding the bush into bundles and forming roads as they went on. From their kinsmen in the northwest, Beric learned that a new propraetor had arrived to replace Suetonius, for it was reported that the wholesale severity of the latter was greatly disapproved of in Rome, so that his successor had come out with orders to pursue a milder policy, and to desist from the work of extirpation that Suetonius was carrying on. It was known that at any rate the newcomer had issued a proclamation, saying that Rome wished neither to destroy nor enslave the people of Britain, and that all fugitives were invited to return to their homes, adding a promise that no molestation should be offered to them, and that an amnesty was granted to all for their share in the late troubles.

"What do you think, Aska?" Beric asked when they heard the news.

"It may be true or it may not," Aska said. "For myself, after the treatment of Boadicea, and the seizure of all her husband's property, I have no faith in Roman promises. However, all this is but a rumour. It will be time enough to consider it when they send in a flag of truce and offer us terms of surrender. Besides, supposing the proclamation has been rightly reported, the amnesty is promised only for the past troubles. The new general must have heard of the heavy losses we inflicted on the Romans as soon as he landed, and had he meant his proclamation to apply to us he would have said so. However, I sincerely trust that it is true, even if we are not included, and are to be hunted down like wild beasts. Rome cannot wish to conquer a desert, and you have told me she generally treats the natives of conquered provinces well after all resistance has ceased. It may well be that the Romans disapprove of the harshness of Suetonius, although the rising was not due to him so much as to the villain Decianus. Still he was harsh in the extreme, and his massacre of the Druids enlisted every Briton against him. Other measures may now be tried; the ground must be cultivated, or it is useless to Rome. There are at present many tribes still unsubdued, and were men like Suetonius and Decianus to continue to scourge the land by their cruelties, they might provoke another rising as formidable as ours, and bring fresh disaster upon Rome. But whether the amnesty applies to us or not, I shall be glad to hear that Suetonius has left. We know that three days ago at any rate he was at their camp opposite Huntingdon, and he may well wish to strike a blow before he leaves, in order that he may return with the credit of having crushed out the last resistance."

Two nights later, an hour before daybreak, a man covered with wounds, breathless and exhausted, made his way up to the intrenchment on the principal island.

"To arms!" he shouted. "The Romans are upon us!" One of the sentries ran with the news to Beric's hut. Springing from his couch Beric sounded his horn, and the band, who were at all times kept to the

strength of four hundred, rushed to the line of defences.

"What is it? What is your news?" Beric asked the messenger.

"It is treachery, Beric. With two comrades I was on watch at the point where the principal channel hence runs into the river. Suddenly we thought we heard the sound of oars on the river above us. We could not be sure. It was a faint confused sound, and we stood at the edge of the bank listening, when suddenly from behind us sprang out a dozen men, and before we had time to draw a sword we were cut down. They hewed at us till they thought us dead, and for a time I knew nothing more. When I came to myself I saw a procession of Roman boats turning in at the channel. For a time I was too faint to move; but at last I crawled down a yard or two to the water and had a drink. Then my strength gradually returned and I struggled to my feet.

"To proceed by land through the marshes at night was impossible, but I found my coracle, which we had hidden under the bushes, and poled up the channel after the Romans, who were now some distance ahead. The danger gave me strength, and I gained upon them. When I could hear their oars ahead I turned off by a cross channel so as to strike another leading direct hither. What was my horror when I reached it to see another flotilla of Roman boats passing along. Then I guessed that not only we but the watchers at all the other channels must have been surprised and killed by the treacherous Fenmen. I followed the boats till I reached a spot where I knew there was a track through the marshes to the island.

"For hours I struggled on, often losing the path in the darkness and falling into swamps, where I was nearly overwhelmed; but at last I approached the island. The Romans were already near. I tried each avenue by which our boats approached, but all were held by them. But at last I made my way through by one of the deepest marshes, where at any other time I would not have set foot, even in broad daylight, and so have arrived in time to warn you."

"You have done well. Your warning comes not, I fear, in time to save us, but it will enable us at least to die like men, with arms in our hands."

Parties of men were at once sent down to hold the intrenchments erected to cover the approaches. Some of those who knew the swamps best were sent out singly, but they found the Romans everywhere. They had formed a complete circle round the island, all the channels being occupied by the boats, while parties had been landed upon planks thrown across the soft ground between the channels to prevent any from passing on foot.

"They will not attack until broad daylight," Aska said, when all the men who had been sent out had returned with a similar tale. "They must fight under the disadvantage of not knowing the ground, and would fear that in the darkness some of us would slip away."

Contrary to expectation the next day passed without any movement by the Romans, and Beric and Aska agreed that most likely the greater portion of the boats had gone back to bring up more troops.

"They will not risk another defeat," Aska said, "and they must be

sure that, hemmed in as we are, we shall fight to the last."

The practicability of throwing the whole force against the Romans at one point, and of so forcing their way through was discussed; but in that case the women and children, over a thousand in number, must be left behind, and the idea was therefore abandoned. Another day of suspense passed. During the evening loud shouts were heard in the swamp, and the Britons had no doubt that the boats had returned with reinforcements. There were three points where boats could come up to the shore of the island. Aska, Boduoc, and another chief, each with a hundred men, took their posts in the intrenchments there, while Beric, with a hundred of the Sarci, remained in the great intrenchment on the summit, in readiness to bear down upon any point where aid was required. Soon after daybreak next morning the battle began, the Romans advancing in their flat bottomed boats and springing on shore. In spite of a hail of missiles they advanced against the intrenchments; but these were strongly built in imitation of the Roman works, having a steep bank of earth surmounted by a solid palisade breast high, and constructed of massive timber.

For some hours the conflict raged, fifty of the defenders at each intrenchment thrusting down with their long spears the assailants as they strove to scale the bank, while the other fifty rained arrows and javelins upon them; and whenever they succeeded in getting up to the palisade through the circle of the spears, threw down their bows and opposed them sword in hand. Again and again the Romans were repulsed with great slaughter, the cries of exultation from the women who lined the upper intrenchment rose loud and shrill.

Beric divided his force into three bodies. The first was to move down instantly if they saw the defenders of the lower intrenchment hard pressed; the others were to hold their position until summoned by Beric to move down and join in the fray. He himself paced round and round the intrenchment, occupied less with the three desperate fights going on below than with the edge of the bushes between those points. He knew that the morasses were so deep that even an active and unarmed man could scarce make his way through them and that only by springing from bush to bush. But he feared that the Romans might form paths by throwing down faggots, and so gain the island at some undefended point.

Until noon he saw nothing to justify his anxiety; everything seemed still in the swamp. But he knew that this silence was deceptive, and the canopy of marsh loving trees completely hid the bushes and undergrowth from his sight. It was just noon when a Roman trumpet sounded, and at once at six different points a line of Roman soldiers issued from the bushes. Beric raised his horn to his lips and blew the signal for retreat. At its sound the defenders of the three lower intrenchments instantly left their posts and dashed at full speed up the hill, gaining it long before the Romans, who, as they issued out, formed up in order to repel any attack that might be made upon them.

"So they have made paths across the swamp," Aska said bitterly, as he joined Beric. "They would never have made their way in by fair fighting."

"Well," Beric said, "there is one more struggle, and a stout one,

and then we go to join our friends who have gone before us in the Happy Island in the far west. We need not be ashamed to meet them. They will welcome us as men who have struggled to the last for liberty against the oppressor, and who have nobly upheld the honour of the Iceni. We shall meet with a great welcome."

Not until the Romans had landed the whole of the force they had brought up, which Beric estimated as exceeding two thousand men, did they advance to the attack, pressing forward against all points of the intrenchment. The Iceni were too few for the proper defence of so long a circuit of intrenchments, but the women and boys took their places beside them armed with hatchets, clubs, and knives. The struggle was for a long time uncertain, so desperately did the defenders fight; and it was not until suffering the loss of a third of their number, from the missiles and weapons of the British, that the Romans at last broke through the intrenchment. Even then the British fought to the last. None thought of asking for quarter, but each died contented if he could kill but one Roman. The women flung themselves on the spears of the assailants, preferring death infinitely to falling into the hands of the Romans; and soon the only survivors of the Britons were a group of some thirty men gathered on a little knoll in the centre of the camp.

Beric had successfully defended the chief entrance to the camp until the Romans burst in at other places, and then, blowing his horn, he had tried to rally his men in the centre for a final stand. Aska had already fallen, pierced by a Roman javelin; but Boduoc and a small body of the Sarci had rallied round Beric, and had for a time beaten off the assaults of the Romans. But soon they were reduced to half their number, and were on the point of being overwhelmed by the crowds surrounding them, when a Roman trumpet sounded and their assailants fell back. An officer made his way towards them and addressed Beric.

"Suetonius bids me say that he honours bravery, and that your lives will be spared if you lay down your arms."

"Tell Suetonius that we scorn his mercy," Beric said, "and will die as we have lived, free men."

The Roman bade his men stand to their weapons, and not move until his return. It was a few minutes before he came back again. Behind him were a number of soldiers, who had laid aside their arms and provided themselves with billets of wood and long poles. Before Beric could understand what was intended, he and his companions were struck to the ground by the discharge of the wooden missiles or knocked down by the poles. Then the Romans threw themselves upon them and bound them hand and foot, the camp was plundered, fire applied to the huts, and the palisades beaten down. Then the captives were carried down to the boats, and the Romans rowed away through the marshes. They had little to congratulate themselves upon. They had captured the leader of the Iceni, had destroyed his stronghold and slain four hundred of his followers, but it had cost them double that number of men, and a large portion of the remainder bore wounds more or less severe.

Boduoc and the other prisoners were furious at their capture. The Britons had no fear whatever of death, but capture was regarded as a disgrace; and that they alone should have been preserved when their

comrades had all been killed and the women and children massacred, was to them a terrible misfortune. They considered that they had been captured by an unworthy ruse, for had they known what was intended they would have slain each other, or stabbed themselves, rather than become captives.

Beric's feelings were more mixed. Although he would have preferred death to captivity, his ideas had been much modified by his residence among the Romans, and he saw nothing disgraceful in what he could not avoid. He would never have surrendered; would never have voluntarily accepted life; but as he had been taken captive against his will and in fair fight, he saw no disgrace in it. He wondered why he and his companions had been spared. It might be that they were to be put to death publicly, as a warning to their countrymen; but he thought it more likely that Suetonius had preserved them to carry them back to Rome as a proof that he had, before giving up the command, crushed out the last resistance of the Britons to Roman rule. As the captives had been distributed among the boats, he had no opportunity of speaking to his companions until, about midnight, the flotilla arrived at Godmancastra. Then they were laid on the ground together, a guard of six men taking post beside them. Boduoc at once broke out in a torrent of execrations against the Romans.

"They had a right to kill us," he said, "but they had no right to dishonour us. We had a right to die with the others. We fought them fairly, and refused to surrender. It is a shameful tyranny thus to disgrace us by making us captives. I would not have refused death to my most hated foe; but they shall not exult over us long. If they will not give me a weapon with which to put an end to my life, I will starve myself."

There was an exclamation of fierce assent from the other captives.

"They have not meant to dishonour us, Boduoc, but to do us honour," Beric said. "The Romans do not view these things in the same light that we do. It is because, in their opinion, we are brave men, whom it was an honour to them to subdue, that they have thus taken us. You see they slew all others, even the women and children. We were captured not from pity, not because they wished to inflict disgrace upon us, but simply as trophies of their own valour; just as they would take a standard. We may deem ourselves aggrieved because we have not, like the rest, died fighting to the last, and so departed for the Happy Island; but it is the will of the gods that we should not make the journey for a time. It is really an honour to us that they have deemed us worthy of the trouble of capture, instead of slaying us. Like you, I would rather a thousand times have died; but since the gods have decreed it otherwise, it is for us to show that not even captivity can break our spirit, but that we are able to bear ourselves as brave men who, having done all that men could do against vastly superior force, still preserve their own esteem, and give way neither to unmanly repinings nor to a sullen struggle against fate.

"Nothing would please the Romans better than for us to act like wild beasts caught in a snare, gnashing our teeth vainly when we can no longer strike, and either sulkily protesting against our lot, or seeking to escape the pains of death or servitude by flying from life. Let us preserve a front haughty and unabashed. We have

inflicted heavy defeats upon Rome, and are proud of it. Let them see that the chains on our bodies have not bound our spirit, and that, though captives, we still hold ourselves as free men, fearless of what they can do to us. In such a way we shall win at least their respect, and they will say these are men whom we are proud of having overcome."

"By the sacred oak, Beric, you speak rightly," Boduoc exclaimed. "Such was the bearing of Caractacus, as I have heard, when he fell into their hands, and no one can say that Caractacus was dishonoured. No man can control his fate; but, as you say, we may show that we are above fate. What say you, my friends, has Beric spoken well?"

A murmur of hearty assent came from the other captives, and then the Roman sergeant of the guard, uneasy at this animated colloquy among the captives, gruffly ordered silence.

Beric translated the order. "Best sleep, if we can," he added. "We shall be stronger tomorrow."

Few, however, slept, for all were suffering from wounds more or less severe. The following morning their bonds were unloosed, and their wounds carefully attended to by a leech. Then water and food were offered to them, and of these, following Beric's example, they partook heartily. An hour later they were placed in the centre of a strong guard, and then fell in with the troops who were formed up to escort Suetonius to Camalodunum.

"What are they going to do to us, think you?" Boduoc asked Beric.

"They are either going to put us to death publicly at Camalodunum, as a warning against resistance, or they are going to take us to Rome. I think the latter. Had Suetonius been going to remain here, he might be taking us to public execution; but as he has, as we have heard, been ordered home, he would not, I think, have troubled himself to have made us prisoners simply that his successor might benefit by the example of our execution. It is far more likely, I think, that he will carry us to Rome in order to show us as proofs that he has, before leaving Britain, succeeded in crushing out all resistance here."

"And what will they do with us at Rome?"

"That I know not, Boduoc; possibly they will put us to death there, but that is not their usual custom. Suetonius has gained no triumph. A terrible disaster has fallen upon the Romans during his command here; and though he may have avenged their defeat, he certainly does not return home in triumph. After a triumph the chief of the captives is always put to death, sacrificed to their gods. But as this will be no triumph, we shall, I should say, be treated as ordinary prisoners of war. Some of these are sold as slaves; some are employed on public works. Of some they make gladiators--men who fight and kill each other in the arena for the amusement of the people of Rome, who gather to see these struggles just as we do when two warriors who have quarrelled decide their differences by combat."

"The choice does not appear a pleasing one," Boduoc said, "to be a private or public slave, or to be killed for the amusement of the

Romans."

"Well, the latter is the shortest way out of it, anyhow, and the one I should choose; but it must be terrible to have to fight with a man with whom one has had no quarrel," Beric said.

"Well, I don't know, Beric. If he is a captive like yourself, he must be just as tired of life as you are. So, if he kills you he is doing you a service; if you kill him, you have greatly obliged him. So, looking at it in that way, it does not much matter which way it goes; for if you do him this service one day, someone else may do you a like good turn the next."

"I had not looked at it in that way, Boduoc," Beric said, laughing. "Well, there is one thing, I do not suppose the choice will be given us. At any rate I shall be glad to see Rome. I have always wished to do so, though I never thought that it would be as a captive. Still, it will be something even in this evil that has befallen us to see so great a city with all its wonders. Camalodunum was but as a little hamlet beside it."

On the evening of the second day after leaving Godmancastra they arrived at Camalodunum, which in the year that had passed since its destruction, had already been partially rebuilt and settled by Gaulish traders from the mainland, Roman officials with their families and attendants, officers engaged in the civil service and the army, friends and associates of the procurator, who had been sent out to succeed Catus Decianus, priests and servants of the temples. Suetonius had already sent to inform the new propraetor, Petronius Turpillianus, of the success which he had gained, and a crowd assembled as the procession was seen approaching, while all eyes were directed upon the little party of British captives who followed the chariot of Suetonius.

Many of the newcomers had as yet scarcely seen a native, so complete had been the destruction of the Trinobantes, and they looked with surprise and admiration at these men, towering a full head above their guards, and carrying themselves, in spite of their bonds, with an air of fearless dignity. Most of all they were surprised when they learned that the youth--for Beric was as yet but eighteen --who walked at their head was the noted chief, who had during the past year inflicted such heavy losses upon the troops of Rome, and who had now only been captured by treachery. As yet he lacked some inches of the height of his companions, but he bade fair in another two or three years to rival the tallest among them in strength and vigour. The procession halted before the building which had been erected from the ruins of the old city as a residence for the propraetor. Petronius, surrounded by a number of officials, came out to meet Suetonius.

"I congratulate you on your success, Suetonius," he said. "It will make my task all the easier in carrying out my orders to deal mildly with the people."

"And it will make my return to Rome all the more pleasant, Petronius, and I thank you again for having permitted me to continue in command of my troops until I had revenged the losses we have suffered at the hands of these barbarians. It is, of course, for you to decide upon the fate of Beric and his companions; assuredly they deserve

death, but I should like to take them with me as captives to Rome."

"I should prefer your doing so, Suetonius. I could hardly pardon men who have so withstood us, but, upon the other hand, I should grieve to commence my rule by an act of severity; besides, I hope through them to persuade the others--for, as you told me in your letter, it is but a fraction of these outlaws that you have subdued --to lay down their arms. It is well, indeed, that you have taken their chief, and that he, as I hear, has partly been brought up among us and speaks our language."

"Yes, he lived here for some five years as a hostage for his tribe. He was under the charge of Caius Muro, who returned to Rome after our defeat of the Britons. I made inquiries about him, when I learned that he was chief of the insurgents, and heard that he was tractable and studious when among us, and that Caius thought very highly of his intelligence."

"They are noble looking men," Petronius said, surveying the group of captives; "it is an honour to conquer such men. I will speak with their chief presently."

"I shall make no longer delay," Suetonius said. "Ships have been lying at the port in readiness for my departure for the last two weeks, and I would fain sail tomorrow or next day. Glad I shall be to leave this island, where I have had nothing but fighting and hardships since I landed."

"And you have done well," Petronius said courteously. "It was but half conquered when you landed, it is wholly subdued now. It is for me only to gather the fruit of your victories."

"Never was there such an obstinate race," Suetonius replied angrily. "Look at those men, they bear themselves as if they were conquerors instead of conquered."

"They are good for something better than to be killed, Suetonius; if we could mate all our Roman women with these fair giants, what a race we should raise!"

"You would admire them less if you saw them pouring down on you shouting like demons," Suetonius said sullenly.

"Perhaps so, Suetonius; but I will endeavour to utilize their strength in our service, and not to call it into the field against us. Now, let us enter the house. Varo," he said to one of his officers, "take charge of the captives until Suetonius sails. Guard them strongly, but treat them well. Place them in the house, where they will not be stared at by the crowd. If their chief will give you his word that they will not attempt to escape, their bonds can be removed; if not, they must remain bound."

Varo at once called a centurion of the legion in garrison at Camalodunum, and bade him bring up his company. These on their arrival surrounded the captives and marched with them to a guardhouse near. When they entered Varo said to Beric:

"The orders of the propraetor are, that you shall all be released from your bonds if you will give your oath that you will not try

to escape."

Beric turned to the others and asked if they were willing to give the promise. "In no case could we escape," he said, "you may be sure we shall be guarded too strictly for that. It were better that we should remain bound by our own promise than by fetters." As they all consented, Beric, in their name, took an oath that they would not attempt to escape, so that the ropes that bound their arms were at once taken off, and in a short time a meal was sent to them from the house of Petronius.

Soon after they had finished an officer came in and requested Beric to accompany him to the propraetor.

"I will bring two of my followers with me," Beric said. "I would not say aught to the Roman governor that my tribesmen should not hear."

The officer assented, and Beric with Boduoc and another subchief followed him to the house of the propraetor. Petronius was seated with Suetonius at his side, while a number of officers and officials stood behind him.

"How is it, Beric," he asked, "that, as I hear, you, who speak our language and have lived for years amongst us, come to be a leader of those who have warred against us?"

"It is, perhaps, because I studied Roman books, and learned how you value freedom and independence," Beric replied, "and how you revolt against tyranny. Had Rome been conquered by a more powerful nation, every Roman would have risen in arms had one tenth of the tyranny been practised against them which Catus Decianus exercised against us. We have been treated worse than the beasts of the field; our lives, our properties, and the honour of our women were sacrificed at his will. Death was a thousand times better than such treatment. I read that Rome has elsewhere been a worthy conqueror, respecting the religion of the tribes it subdued, and treating them leniently and well. Had we been so treated we should have been, if not contented, patient under our lot, but being men we rose against the infamous treatment to which we were subject; and although we have been conquered and well nigh exterminated, there are Britons still remaining, and if such be the treatment to which they are subjected it is not till the last Briton is exterminated that you will rule this island."

A murmur of surprise at the boldness with which the young captive spoke ran round the circle.

"Have you inquired since you arrived," Beric went on, "of the infamous deeds of Decianus? How he seized, without the shadow of excuse, the property of Boadicea? and how, when she came here for justice for herself and her insulted daughters, he ordered her to be scourged? Should we, a free born people, submit to such an indignity to our queen? I knew from the first that our enterprise was hopeless, and that without order or discipline we must in the end be conquered; but it was better a thousand times to die than to live subject to treatment worse than that which you give to your slaves."

"I believe that there is justice in your complaints, Beric," Petronius said calmly, "and it is to lessen these grievances that Rome has sent me hither. Vengeance has been fully taken for your rebellion, it is time that the sword was laid aside. I have already issued a proclamation granting an amnesty to all who then rose against us. Your case was different, you have still continued in arms and have resisted our power, but I trust that with your capture this will end. You and your companions will go to Rome with Suetonius; but there are many of your followers still in arms, with these I would treat, not as a conqueror with the conquered, but as a soldier with brave foes. If they will lay down their arms they shall share the amnesty, and be free to return every man to his own land, to dwell there and cultivate it free from all penalty or interruption. Their surrender would benefit not only themselves but all the Britons. So long as they stand in arms and defy our power we must rule the land with the sword, but when they surrender there will be peace throughout the island, and I trust that the Britons in time will come to look upon us as friends."

"If Rome had so acted before," Beric said, "no troubles would have arisen, and she might now be ruling over a contented people instead of over a desert."

"There are still many of your tribesmen in the Fens?"

"There is an army," Beric replied. "You have taken one stronghold, and that by surprise, but the lesson will not be lost upon them. There will be no traitors to guide your next expedition; by this time the last Fenman in the southern swamps will have been killed. There will be a heavy vengeance taken by my countrymen."

"I would fain put a stop to it all," Petronius said. "Upon what terms, think you, would your countrymen surrender?"

"They will not surrender at all," Beric said; "there is not a man there but will die rather than yield. But if you will solemnly take oath that those who leave the Fens and return to their villages shall live unmolested, save that they shall--when their homes are rebuilt and their herds again grazing around them--pay a tribute such as they are able to bear, they will, I believe, gladly leave the Fens and return to their villages, and the fugitives who have fled north will also come back again."

"I am ready to take such an oath at the altar," Petronius said. "I have come to bring peace to the land. I am ready to do all in my power to bring it about; but how are they to know what I have done?"

"I would say, Petronius, let us, your captives, be present when you take the oath. Release four of my band; choose those most sorely wounded, and who are the least able to support the journey to Rome. I will send them with my bracelet to the Fens. I will tell them what you have said, and they will testify to having seen you swear before your gods; and I will send my last injunctions to them to return again to their land, to send for the fugitives to return from the north, and to say from me that they will return as free men, not as slaves, and that there is no dishonour in accepting such terms as you offer."

"I will do as you say," the Roman agreed. "Suetonius, you can spare

four of your captives, especially as there are assuredly some among them who could ill support the fatigues of the journey. Return now to your friends, Beric; tomorrow morning you shall meet me at the temple, and there I will take an oath of peace with Britain."

CHAPTER XI: A PRISONER

On leaving the propraetor Beric further informed his comrades of the offer that Petronius had made.

"And you think he will keep his oath?" Boduoc asked.

"I am sure of it," Beric said; "he has been sent out by Rome to undo the mischief Suetonius and Decianus have caused. His face is an honest one, and a Roman would not lie to his gods any more than we would."

"But you ought to have made terms with them, Beric," Boduoc said. "You ought to have made a condition that you should be allowed to stay. It matters not for us, but you are the chief of all the Iceni who are left."

"In the first place, Boduoc, I was not in a position to make terms, seeing that I am a captive and at their mercy; and in the next place, I would not if I could. Think you that the tribesmen would then accept my counsels to leave the Fens and return to their homes? They would say that I had purchased my life and freedom from the Romans, and had agreed to betray them into their hands."

"No one would venture to say that of you, Beric."

"You may think not, Boduoc; but if not now, in the future it would be said that, as before I was brought up among the Romans, so now I had gone back to them. No, even if they offered to all of us our liberty, I would say, let those go who will, but I remain a captive. Had the message come to us when I was free in the Fens I would have accepted it, for I knew that, although we might struggle long, we should be finally overpowered. Moreover, the marsh fevers were as deadly as Roman swords, and though for a year we have supported them, we should in time, perhaps this year when the summer heats come, have lost our strength and have melted away. Thus, had I believed that the Romans were sincere in their wish for peace, and that they desired to see the land tilled, I would have accepted their terms, because we were in arms and free, and could still have resisted; but as a captive, and conquered, I scorn to accept mercy from Rome."

By this time they had arrived at the house where the other captives were guarded, and Beric repeated the terms that Petronius had offered.

"They will not benefit us," he said. "We are the captives of Suetonius, and being taken with arms in our hands warring against Rome, we must pay the penalty; but, for the sake of our brethren, I rejoice. Our land may yet be peopled again by the Iceni, and we shall have the consolation that, whatever may befall us, it

is partly our valour that has won such terms from Rome. There are still fifteen hundred fighting men in the swamps, and twice as many women and children. There may be many more lurking in the Fens to the north, for great numbers, especially from our northern districts, must have taken refuge with the Brigantes. Thus, then, there will, when all have returned, be a goodly number, and it is our defence of the Fenlands that has won their freedom for them. We may be captives and slaves, but we are not dishonoured. For months we have held Suetonius at bay, and two Romans have fallen for every Briton; and even at last it was by treachery we were captured.

"None of us have begged our lives of Rome. We fought to the last, and showed front when we were but twenty against two thousand. It was not our fault that we did not die on the field, and we can hold our heads as high now when we are captives as we did when we were free men. We know not what may be our fate at Rome, but whatever it be, it will be a consolation to us to know that our people again wander in the old woods; that our women are spinning by their hearthstones; that the Iceni are again a tribe; and that it is we who have won this for them."

An enthusiastic assent greeted Beric's words.

"Now," he said, "we must choose the four who shall carry the message. I said those most sorely wounded, but since four are to go they can care little who are chosen. Most of us have lost those we love, but there are some whose wives may have been elsewhere when the attack was made. Let these stay, and let those who have no ties save that of country go to Rome."

Only two men were found whose families had not been on the island when it was attacked. These and the two most seriously wounded were at once chosen as the messengers. The next morning the whole of the captives were escorted to the temple, which was but a small building in comparison with the great edifice that had been destroyed at the capture of Camalodunum. Here Petronius and all the principal officers and officials were assembled. Sacrifice was offered, and then Petronius, laying his hand on the altar, declared a solemn peace with the Britons, and swore that, so long as they remained peaceable subjects of Rome, no man should interfere with them, but all should be free to settle in their villages, to till their land, and to tend their herds free from any molestation whatever. Beric translated the words of the oath to the Britons. Petronius then bade the four men who had been chosen stand forward, and told them to carry his message to their countrymen.

"Enough blood has been shed on both sides," he said. "It is time for peace. You have proved yourselves worthy and valiant enemies; let us now lay aside the sword and live together in friendship. I sent orders last night for the legions to leave their forts by the Fenland and to return hither, so that the way is now open to your own land. We can settle the terms of the tribute hereafter, but it shall not be onerous."

After leaving the temple Beric gave his messages to the men, and they at once started under an escort for the camp, the officer in charge of them being ordered to provide them with a boat, in which they were to proceed alone to their countrymen.

That evening Petronius sent for Beric, and received him alone. "I am sorry," he said, "that I cannot restore you and your companions to your tribe, but in this I am powerless, as Suetonius has captured you, and to him you belong. I have begged him, as a personal favour, to hand you over to me, but he has refused, and placed as we are I can do no more. I have, however, written to friends in Rome concerning you, and have said that you have done all in your power to bring about a pacification of the land, and have begged them to represent to Nero and the senate that if a report reach this island that you have been put to death, it will undo the work of pacification, and perhaps light up a fresh flame of war."

There had, indeed, been an angry dispute between Suetonius and his successor. The former, although well pleased to return to Rome, was jealous of Petronius, and was angry at seeing that he was determined to govern Britain upon principles the very reverse of those he himself had adopted. Moreover, he regarded the possession of the captives as important, and deemed that their appearance in his train, as proofs that before leaving he had completely stamped out the insurrection, would create a favourable impression, and would go far to restore him to popular opinion. This was, as he had heard from friends in Rome, strongly adverse to him, in consequence of the serious disasters and heavy losses which had befallen the Roman arms during his propraetorship, and he had therefore refused with some heat to grant the request of Petronius.

The next morning the captives were mustered, and were marched down to the river and placed on board a ship. There were six vessels lying in readiness, as Suetonius was accompanied not only by his own household, but by several officers and officials attached to him personally, and by two hundred soldiers whose time of service had expired, and who were to form his escort to Rome. To Beric, from his residence in Camalodunum, large ships were no novelty, but the Britons with him were struck with astonishment at craft so vastly exceeding anything that they had before seen.

"Could we sail in these ships to Rome?" Boduoc asked.

"You could do so, but it would be a very long and stormy voyage passing through the straits between two mountains which the Romans call the Pillars of Hercules. Our voyage will be but a short one. If the wind is favourable we shall reach the coast of Gaul in two days, and thence we shall travel on foot."

Fortunately the weather was fine, and on the third day after setting sail they reached one of the northern ports of Gaul. When it was known that Suetonius was on board, he was received with much pomp, and was lodged in the house of the Roman magistrate. As he had no desire to impress the inhabitants of the place, the captives were left unbound and marched through the streets under a guard of the Roman spearmen. Gaul had long been completely subdued, but the inhabitants looked at the captives with pitying eyes. When these reached the house in which they were to be confined, the natives brought them presents of food, bribing the Roman guards to allow them to deliver them.

As the language of the two peoples was almost identical, the Gauls had no difficulty in making themselves understood by the captives, and asked many questions relating to the state of affairs in Britain.

They had heard of the chief, Beric, who had for a year successfully opposed the forces of Rome, and great was their surprise when they found that the youngest of the party was the noted leader. Two days later they started on their long march.

Inured as the Britons were to fatigue, the daily journeys were nothing to them. They found the country flourishing. Villages occurred at frequent intervals, and they passed through several large towns with temples, handsome villas, and other Roman erections similar to those that they had sacked at the capture of Camalodunum.

"The people here do not seem to suffer under the Roman rule at any rate," Boduoc remarked; "they appear to have adopted the Roman dress and tongue, but for all that they are slaves."

"Not slaves, Boduoc, though they cannot be said to be free; however, they have become so accustomed to the Roman dominion that doubtless they have ceased to fret under it; they are, indeed, to all intents and purposes Roman. They furnish large bodies of troops to the Roman armies, and rise to positions of command and importance among them. In time, no doubt, unless misfortunes fall upon Rome, they will become as one people, and such no doubt in the far distance will be the case with Britain. We shall adopt many of the Roman customs, and retain many of our own. There is one advantage, you see, in Roman dominion--there are no more tribal wars, no more massacres and slaughters, each man possesses his land in peace and quiet."

"But what do they do with themselves?" Boduoc asked, puzzled. "In such a country as this there can be few wild beasts. If men can neither fight nor hunt, how are they to employ their time? They must become a nation of women."

"It would seem so to us, Boduoc, for we have had nothing else to employ our thoughts; but when we look at what the Romans have done, how great an empire they have formed, how wonderful are their arts, how good their laws, and what learning and wisdom they have stored up, one sees that there are other things to live for; and you see, though the Romans have learned all these things, they can still fight. If they once turn so much to the arts of peace as to forget the virtues of war, their empire will fall to pieces more rapidly than it has been built up."

Boduoc shook his head, "These things are well enough for you, Beric, who have lived among the Romans and learned many of their ways. Give me a life in which a man is a man; when we can live in the open air, hunt the wolf and the bear, meet our enemies face to face, die as men should, and go to the Happy Island without bothering our brains about such things as the arts and luxuries that the Romans put such value on. A bed on the fallen leaves under an oak tree, with the stars shining through the leaves, is better than the finest chamber in Rome covered with paintings."

"Well, Boduoc," Beric said good temperedly, "we are much more likely to sleep under the stars in Rome than in a grand apartment covered with paintings; but though the one may be very nice, as you say, in summer, I could very well put up with the other when the snow lies deep and the north wind is howling."

They did not, as Beric had hoped, cross the tremendous mountains, over which, as he had read in Polybius, Hannibal had led his troops against Rome. Hannibal had been his hero. His dauntless bravery, his wonderful resources, his cheerfulness under hardships, and the manner in which, cut off for years from all assistance from home, he had yet supported the struggle and held Rome at bay, had filled him with the greatest admiration, and unconsciously he had made the great Carthaginian his model. He was therefore much disappointed when he heard from the conversation of his guards that they were to traverse Gaul to Massilia, and thence take ship to Rome.

The Roman guards were fond of talking to their young captive. Their thoughts were all of Rome, from which they had been so long absent, and Beric was eager to learn every detail about the imperial city; the days' marches therefore passed pleasantly. At night they were still guarded, but they were otherwise allowed much liberty, and when they stopped for two or three days at a place they were free to wander about as they chose, their great stature, fair hair, and blue eyes exciting more and more surprise as they went farther south, where the natives were much shorter and swarthier than those of northern Gaul.

One of the young officers with Suetonius had taken a great fancy to Beric, and frequently invited him to spend the evening with him at their halting places. When they approached Massilia he said, "I have some relations in the city, and I will obtain leave for you to stay with me at their house while we remain in the town, which may be for some little time, as we must wait for shipping. My uncle is a magistrate, and a very learned man. He is engaged in writing a book upon the religions of the world, and he seldom remains long at any post. He has very powerful friends in Rome, and so is able to get transferred from one post to another. He has been in almost every province of the empire in order to learn from the people themselves their religions and beliefs. I stayed with him for a month here two years since on my way to Britain, and he was talking of getting himself transferred there, after he had been among the Gauls for a year or two; but his wife was averse to the idea, protesting that she had been dragged nearly all over the world by him, and was determined not to go to its furthest boundaries. But I should think that after the events of the last year he has given up that idea. I know it will give him the greatest possible pleasure to converse with one who can tell him all about the religions and customs of the Britons in his own language."

Massilia was by far the largest city that the Britons had entered, and they were greatly surprised at its magnitude, and at the varieties of people who crowded its streets. Even Boduoc, who professed a profound indifference for everything Roman, was stupefied when he saw a negro walking in the train of a Roman lady of rank.

"Is it a human being, think you," he murmured in Beric's ear, "or a wild creature they have tamed? He has not hair, but his head is covered with wool like a black sheep."

"He is a man," Beric replied. "Across the sea to the south there are brown men many shades darker than the people here, and beyond these like lands inhabited by black men. Look at him showing his teeth and the whites of his eyes. He is as much surprised at our appearance, Boduoc, as we are at his. We shall see many like him

in Rome, for Pollio tells me that they are held in high estimation as slaves, being good tempered and obedient."

"He is hideous, Beric; look at his thick lips. But the creature looks good tempered. I wonder that any woman could have such an one about the house. Can they talk?"

"Oh, yes, they talk. They are men just the same as we are, except for their colour."

"But what makes them so black, Beric?"

"That is unknown; but it is supposed that the heat of the sun, for the country they inhabit is terribly hot, has in time darkened them. You see, as we have gone south, the people have got darker and darker."

"But are they born that colour, Beric?"

"Certainly they are."

"If a wife of mine bore me a child of that colour," Boduoc said, "I would strangle it. And think you that it is the heat of the sun that has curled up their hair so tightly?"

"That I cannot say--they are all like that."

"Well, they are horrible," Boduoc said positively. "I did not think that the earth contained such monsters."

Soon after the captives were lodged in a prison, Pollio came to see Beric, and told him that he had obtained permission for him to lodge at his uncle's house, he himself being guarantee for his safe custody there; accordingly they at once started together.

The house was a large one; for, as Pollio had told Beric by the way, his uncle was a man of great wealth, and it was a matter of constant complaint on the part of his wife that he did not settle down in Rome. Passing straight through the atrium, where he was respectfully greeted by the servants and slaves, Pollio passed into the tablinum, where his uncle was sitting writing.

"This is the guest I told you I should bring, uncle," he said. "He is a great chief, young as he looks, and has given us a world of trouble. He speaks Latin perfectly, and you will be able to learn from him all about the Britons without troubling yourself and my aunt to make a journey to his country."

Norbanus was an elderly man, short in figure, with a keen but kindly face. He greeted Beric cordially.

"Welcome, young chief," he said. "I will try to make your stay here comfortable, and I shall be glad indeed to learn from you about your people, of whom, unfortunately, I have had no opportunity hitherto of learning anything, save that when I journeyed up last year to the northwest of Gaul, I found a people calling themselves by the same name as you. They told me that they were a kindred race, and that your religion was similar to theirs."

"That may well be," Beric said. "We are Gauls, though it is long since we left that country and settled in Britain. It may well be that in some of the wars in the south of the island a tribe, finding themselves overpowered, may have crossed to Gaul, with which country we were always in communication until it was conquered by you. We certainly did not come thence, for all our traditions say that the Iceni came by ship from a land lying due east from us, and that we were an offshoot of the Belgae, whose country lay to the northwest of Gaul."

"The people I speak of," the magistrate said, "have vast temples constructed of huge stones placed in circles, which appear to me to have, like the great pyramids of Egypt, an astronomical signification, for I found that the stones round the sacrificial altars were so placed that the sun at its rising threw its rays upon the stone only upon the longest day of summer."

"It is so with our great temples," Beric said; "and upon that day sacrifices are offered. What the signification of the stones and their arrangements is I cannot say. These mysteries are known only to the Druids, and they are strictly preserved from the knowledge of those outside the priestly rank."

"Spare him for today, uncle," Pollio said laughing. "We are like, I hear, to be a fortnight here before we sail; so you will have abundant time to learn everything that Beric can tell you. I will take him up now, with your permission, and introduce him to my aunt and cousins."

"You will find them in the garden, Pollio. Supper will be served in half an hour. Tomorrow, Beric, we will, after breakfast, renew this conversation that my feather brained young nephew has cut so short."

"My Aunt Lesbia will be greatly surprised when she sees you," Pollio laughed as they issued out into the garden. "I did not see her until after I had spoken to my uncle, and I horrified her by telling her that the noted British chief Beric, who had defeated our best troops several times with terrible slaughter, was coming here to remain under my charge until we sail for Rome. She was shocked, considering that you must be a monster of ferocity; and even my pretty cousins were terrified at the prospect. I had half a mind to get you to attire yourself in Roman fashion, but I thought that you would not consent. However, we shall surprise them sufficiently as it is."

Lesbia was seated with her two daughters on couches placed under the shade of some trees. Two or three slave girls stood behind them with fans. A dalmatian bore hound lay on the ground in front of them. Another slave girl was singing, accompanying herself on an instrument resembling a small harp, while a negro stood near in readiness to start upon errands, or to fetch anything that his mistress might for the moment fancy. Lesbia half rose from her reclining position when she saw Pollio approaching, accompanied by a tall figure with hair of a golden colour clustering closely round his head. The Britons generally wore their hair flowing over their shoulders; but the Iceni had found such inconvenience from this in making their way through the close thickets of the swamps, that many of them--Beric among the number--had cut their hair

close to the head. With him it was but a recurrence to a former usage, as while living among the Romans his hair had been cut short in their fashion. The two girls, who were fifteen and sixteen years old, uttered an exclamation of surprise as Beric came near, and Lesbia exclaimed angrily:

"You have been jesting with us, Pollio. You told me that you were going to bring Beric the fierce British chief here, and this young giant is but a beardless lad."

Pollio burst into a fit of laughter, which was increased at the expression of astonishment in Lesbia's face when Beric said, in excellent Latin,--"Pollio has not deceived you, lady. My name is Beric, I was the chief of the Britons, and my followers gave some trouble even to Suetonius."

"But you are not the Beric whom we have heard of as leading the insurgent Britons?"

"There is no other chief of my name," Beric said. "Therefore, if you heard aught of good or evil concerning Beric the Briton, it must relate to me."

"This is Beric, aunt," Pollio said, "and you must not judge him by his looks. I was with Suetonius in his battles against him, and I can tell you that we held him in high respect, as we had good cause for doing, considering that in all it cost the lives of some twelve hundred legionaries before we could overcome him, and we took him by treachery rather than force."

"But how is it that he speaks our language?" Lesbia asked.

"I was a hostage for five years among the Romans," Beric said, "and any knowledge I may have of the art of war was learned from the pages of Caesar, Polybius, and other Roman writers. The Romans taught me how to fight them."

"And now," Pollio broke in, "I must introduce you in proper form. This is my Aunt Lesbia, as you see; these are my cousins Aemilia and Ennia. Do you know, girls, that these Britons, big and strong as they are, are ruled by their women. These take part in their councils, and are queens and chieftainesses, and when it is necessary they will fight as bravely as the men. They are held by them in far higher respect than with us, and I cannot say that they do not deserve it, for they think of other things than attiring themselves and spending their time in visits and pleasure."

"You are not complimentary, Pollio," Aemilia said; "and as to attire, the young Romans think as much of it as we do, and that without the same excuse, for we are cut off from public life, and have none save home pursuits. If you treat us as you say the Britons treat their women, I doubt not that we should show ourselves as worthy of it."

"Now I ask you fairly, Aemilia, can you fancy yourself encouraging the legionaries in the heat of battle, and seizing spear and shield and rushing down into the thick of the fight as I have seen the British women do?"

"No, I cannot imagine that," Aemilia said laughing. "I could not bear the weight of a shield and spear, much less use them in battle. But if the British women are as much bigger and stronger than I am, as Beric is bigger and stronger than you are, I can imagine their fighting. I wondered how the Britons could withstand our troops, but now that I see one of them there is no difficulty in comprehending it, and yet you do not look fierce, Beric."

"I do not think that I am fierce," Beric said smiling; "but even the most peaceful animal will try and defend itself when it is attacked."

"Have you seen Norbanus?" Lesbia asked.

"He has seen him," Pollio replied; "and if it had not been for me he would be with him still, for my uncle wished to engage him at once in a discourse upon the religion and customs of his people; I carried Beric away almost forcibly."

Lesbia sighed impatiently. The interest of her husband in these matters was to her a perpetual source of annoyance. It was owing to this that she so frequently travelled from one province to another, instead of enjoying herself at the court in Rome. But although in all other matters Norbanus gave way to her wishes, in this he was immovable, and she was forced to pass her life in what she considered exile. She ceased to take any further interest in the conversation, but reclined languidly on her couch, while Pollio gave his cousins a description of his life in Britain, and Beric answered their numerous questions as to his people. Their conversation was interrupted by a slave announcing that supper was ready, and Lesbia was relieved at finding that Beric thoroughly understood Roman fashions, and comported himself at table as any other guest would have done. The girls sat down at the meal, although this was contrary to usual custom; but Norbanus insisted that his family should take their meals with him, save upon occasions of a set banquet.

"It seems wonderful," Ennia said to her sister later on, "that we should have been dining with the fierce chief of whom we have heard so much, and that he should be as courteous and pleasant and well mannered as any young Roman."

"A good deal more pleasant than most of them," Aemilia said, "for he puts on no airs, and is just like a merry, good tempered lad, while if a young Roman had done but a tithe of the deeds he has he would be insufferable. We must get Pollio to take us tomorrow to see the other Britons. They must be giants indeed, when Beric, who says he is but little more than eighteen years, could take Pollio under his arm and walk away with him."

In the morning, accordingly, Pollio started with his two cousins to the prison, while Beric sat down for a long talk with Norbanus in his study. Beric soon saw that the Roman viewed all the matters on which he spoke from the standpoint of a philosopher without prejudices.

After listening to all that Beric could tell him about the religion of the Britons, he said, "It is remarkable that all people appear to think that they have private deities of their own, who interest themselves specially on their behalf, and aid them to fight their battles. I have found no exception to this rule, and the more

primitive the people the more obstinate is this belief. In Rome at present the learned no longer believe in Jupiter and Mars and the rest of the deities, though they still attend the state ceremonies at the temples, holding that a state religion is necessary. The lower class still believe, but then they cannot be said to reason. In Greece scepticism is universal among the upper class, and the same may now be said of Egypt. Our Roman belief is the more unaccountable since we have simply borrowed the religion of the Greeks, the gods and their attributes being the same, with only a change of name; and yet we fancy that these Greek gods are the special patrons of Rome.

"Your religion seems to me the most reasonable of any I have studied, and approaches more nearly than any other to the highest speculations of the Greek philosophers. You believe in one God, who is invisible and impersonal, who pervades all nature; but having formed so lofty an idea of him, you belittle him by making him a special god of your own country, while if he pervades all nature he must surely be universal. The Jews, too, believe in a single God, and in this respect they resemble you in their religion, which is far more reasonable than that of nations who worship a multiplicity of deities; but they too consider that their God confines His attention simply to them, and rules over only the little tract they call their own--a province about a hundred miles long, by thirty or forty wide. From them another religion has sprung. This has made many converts, even in Rome, but has made no way whatever among the learned, seeing that it is more strange and extravagant than any other. It has, however, the advantage that the new God is, they believe, universal, and has an equal interest in all people. I have naturally studied the tenets of this new sect, and they are singularly lofty and pure. They teach among other things that all men are equal in the sight of God--a doctrine which naturally gains for them the approval of slaves and the lower people, but, upon the other hand, brings them into disfavour with those in power.

"They are a peaceful sect, and would harm no one; but as they preach that fighting is wrong, I fear that they will before long come into collision with the state, for, were their doctrines to spread, there would soon be a lack of soldiers. To me it appears that their views are impracticable on this subject. In other respects they would make good citizens, since their religion prescribes respect to the authorities and fair dealing in all respects with other men. They are, too, distinguished by charity and kindness towards each other. One peculiarity of this new religion is, that although springing up in Judaea, it has made less progress among the Jews than elsewhere, for these people, who are of all others the most obstinate and intolerant, accused the Founder of the religion, one Christus, before the Roman courts, and He was put to death, in my opinion most unjustly, seeing that there was no crime whatever alleged against Him, save that He perverted the religion of the Jews, which was in no way a concern of ours, as we are tolerant of the religions of all people."

"But Suetonius attacked our sacred island and slew the priests on the altars," Beric objected.

"That is quite true," Norbanus said, "but his had nothing whatever to do with the religion, but was simply because the priests stirred up insurrection against us. We have temples in Rome to the deities

of almost every nation we have subdued, and have suffered without objection the preachers of this new doctrine to make converts. The persecutions that have already begun against the sect are not because they believe in this Christus, but because they refuse to perform the duties incumbent upon all Roman citizens. Two of my slaves belong to the sect. They know well that I care not to what religion they belong, and indeed, for my part, I should be glad to see all my slaves join them, for the moral teaching is high, and these slaves would not steal from me, however good the opportunity. That is more than I can say of the others. Doubtless, had I been fixed in Rome, the fact that they belonged to these people would have been kept a secret, but in the provinces no one troubles his head about such matters. These are, to my mind, matters of private opinion, and they have leave from me to go on their meeting days to the place where they assemble, for even here there are enough of them to form a gathering.

"So long as this is done quietly it is an offence to no one. The matter was discussed the other day among us, for orders against Christians came from Rome; but when the thing was spoken of I said that, as I believed members of the sect were chiefly slaves, who were not called upon to perform military duties, I could not deem that the order applied to them, and that as these were harmless people, and their religion taught them to discharge their duty in all matters save that of carrying arms, I could not see why they should be interfered with. Moreover, did we move in the matter, and did these people remain obstinate in their Faith, we might all of us lose some valuable slaves. After that no more was said of the matter. Now tell me about your institution of the bards, of which I have heard. These men seem not only to be the depositors of your traditions and the reciters of the deeds of your forefathers, but to hold something of a sacred position intermediate between the Druids and the people."

For some hours Beric and his host conversed on these subjects, Beric learning more than he taught, and wondering much at the wide knowledge possessed by Norbanus. It was not until dinner was announced that the Roman rose.

"I thank you much, Beric, for what you have told me, and I marvel at the interest that you, who have for the last two years been leading men to battle, evince in these matters. After five minutes of such talk my nephew Pollio would begin to weary."

"I was fond of learning when I was in the household of Caius Muro, but my time was chiefly occupied by the study of military works and in military exercises; still I found time to read all the manuscripts in Muro's library. But I think I learned more from the talk of Cneius Nepo, his secretary, who was my instructor, than from the books, for he had travelled much with Muro, and had studied Greek literature."

Pollio had returned some time before with his cousins.

"I would have come in before to carry you away," he whispered to Beric as they proceeded to the dinner table, "but it would have put out my uncle terribly, and as I knew you would have to go through it all I thought it as well that you should finish with it at once."

"I am glad you did not," Beric replied. "It has been a great pleasure to me to listen to your uncle's conversation, from which I have learned a good deal."

Pollio glanced up to see if Beric was joking. Seeing that he spoke in perfect good faith, he said:

"Truly, Beric, you Britons are strange fellows. I would rather go through another day's fighting in your swamps than have to listen to uncle for a whole morning."

As they sat down he went on:

"The girls are delighted with your Britons, Beric. They declare they are not only the biggest but the handsomest men they ever saw, and I believe that if your lieutenant Boduoc had asked either of them to return with him and share his hut in the swamps they would have jumped at the offer."

The girls both laughed.

"But they are wonderful, Beric," Aemilia said. "When you told us that you were not yet full grown I thought you were jesting, but I see now that truly these men are bigger even than you are. I wish I had such golden hair as most of them have, and such a white skin. Golden hair is fashionable in Rome, you know, but it is scarce, except in a few whose mothers were Gauls who have married with Romans."

"It is the nature of man to admire the opposite to himself," Norbanus said. "You admire the Britons because they are fair, while to them, doubtless, Roman women would appear beautiful because their hair and their eyes are dark."

"But Beric has not said so, father," Aemilia said laughing.

"I am not accustomed to pay compliments," Beric said with a smile, "but assuredly your father is right. I have been accustomed for the last two years to see British maidens only. These are fair and tall, some of them well nigh as tall as I, and as they live a life of active exercise, they are healthy and strong."

"That they are," Pollio broke in. "I would as soon meet a soldier of the Goths as one of these maidens Beric speaks of, when her blood is up. I have seen our soldiers shrink from their attack, when, with flashing eyes and hair streaming behind them, they rush down upon us, armed with only stones and billets of wood that they had snatched up. What they may be in their gentler moments I know not, and I should hesitate to pay my court to one, for, if she liked it not, she would make small difficulty in throwing me outside the door of her hut."

"You are too quick, Pollio," Aemilia said. "Beric was about to compare us with them."

"The comparison is difficult," Beric said; "but you must not imagine our women as being always in the mood in which Pollio has seen them. They were fighting, not for their lives, but in order to be killed rather than fall into the hands of your soldiers.

Ordinarily they are gentle and kind. They seemed to Pollio to be giantesses, but they bear the same proportion to our height as you do to the height of the Roman men."

"I meant not to say aught against them," Pollio broke in hastily. "I meant but to show my cousins how impossible it was for you to make any comparison between our women and yours. All who know them speak well of the British women, and admire their devotion to their husbands and children, their virtue, and bravery. You might as well compare a Libyan lioness with a Persian cat as the British women with these little cousins of mine."

"But the Persian cat has, doubtless, its lovable qualities," Beric said smiling. "It is softer and gentler and better mannered than the lioness, though, perhaps, the lion might not think so. But truly your Roman ladies are beyond comparison with ours. Ours live a life of usefulness, discharging their duties as mistress of the household, intent upon domestic cares, and yet interested as ourselves in all public affairs, and taking a share in their decision. Your ladies live a life of luxury. They are shielded from all trouble. They are like delicate plants by the side of strong saplings. No rough air has blown upon them. They are dainty with adornments gathered from the whole world, and nature and art have combined alike to make them beautiful."

"All of which means, Aemilia," Pollio laughed, "that, in Beric's opinion, you are pretty to look at, but good for nothing else."

"I meant not that," Beric said eagerly, "only that the things you are good for are not the things which British women are good for. You have no occasion to be good housewives, because you have slaves who order everything for you. But you excel in many things of which a British woman never so much as heard. There is the same difference that there is between a cultured Roman and one of my tribesmen."

"Human nature is the same everywhere," Norbanus said, "fair or dark, great or small. It is modified by climate, by education, by custom, and by civilization, but at bottom it is identical. And now, Pollio, I think you had better take Beric down to the port, the sight of the trade and shipping will be new to him."

CHAPTER XII: A SCHOOL FOR GLADIATORS

As the vessels carrying Suetonius, his suite, and captives sailed up the Tiber it was met by a galley bearing the orders of the senate that Suetonius was not to traverse the streets with an armed suite and captives in his train, but was to land as a private person; that the soldiers were to march to the barracks on the Capitoline, where they would receive their arrears of pay and be disbanded; and that the captives were to be handed over to a centurion, who with his company would be at the landing place to receive them. Pollio took the news to Beric, who was on board the same ship, the rest of the captives being with the soldiers in the vessel which followed.

"I am rejoiced, indeed," he said, "for although I knew that the general would not receive a triumph, I feared that if he made

a public entry it was possible there might be a public outcry for your life, which would, by our custom, have been forfeited had there been a triumph. I doubt not that the hand of Petronius is in this; his messengers would have arrived here weeks ago, and it may be that letters despatched as much as a month after we left have preceded us. Doubtless he would have stated that his clemency had had the desired effect, and that all trouble was at an end; he may probably have added that this was partly due to your influence, and warned them that were you put to death it would have a deplorable effect among your people and might cause a renewal of trouble. Suetonius is furious, for he has hoped much from the effect his entry with captives in his train would have produced. He has powerful enemies here; scarce a noble family but has lost a connection during the troubles in Britain, and Suetonius is of course blamed for it. You and I know that, although he has borne himself harshly towards the Britons, the rising was due to Catus rather than to him, but as Catus is a creature of Nero the blame falls upon Suetonius."

"It was the deeds of Catus that caused the explosion," Beric said; "but it would have come sooner or later. It was the long grinding tyranny that had well nigh maddened us, that drove Caractacus first to take up arms, that raised the western tribes, and made all feel that the Roman yoke was intolerable. The news of the massacre of the Druids and the overthrow of our altars converted the sullen discontent into a burning desire for revenge, and the insult to Boadicea was the signal rather than the cause of the rising. It is to the rule of Suetonius that it is due that hundreds of thousands of Britons, Romans, and their allies have perished."

"The fault of Suetonius," Pollio said, "was that he was too much of a soldier. He thought of military glory, and left all other matters, save the leading of his troops, in the hands of his civilians. Petronius is a general, but he has distinguished himself more in civil matters. Two generals have been sent out with him, to lead the troops if necessary, but he has been chosen as an administrator."

"They should have sent him out ten years ago," Beric said, "and there then would have been no occasion for generals."

They were now approaching Rome, and Beric's attention was entirely occupied by the magnificent scene before him, and with the sight of the temples and palaces rising thickly upon the seven hills. Massilia had surprised him by its size and splendour, but beside Rome it was only a village. "Rome would do well," he said to Pollio, "to bring the chiefs of every conquered country hither; the sight would do more than twenty legions to convince them of the madness of any efforts to shake off the Roman yoke."

"I will see you tomorrow," Pollio said as they neared the landing place. "I shall see many of my friends today, and get them to interest themselves in your behalf. I will find out for you where Caius Muro is at present; doubtless he too will do what he can for you, seeing that you lived so long in his charge;" for Beric had not mentioned to his friend aught of the manner in which he had saved Muro's daughter at the sack of Camalodunum.

As soon as the centurion came on board Pollio recommended Beric to his care, saying that he was the chief of the party of British

captives, and that during the journey he had formed a close friendship with him.

"I shall not be in charge of him long," the centurion said. "I have but to hand him over to the governor of the prison, but I will tell him what you have said to me. He must now go on board the other ship and join his companions, for my orders are that they are not to be landed until after dark." Pollio nodded to Beric; this was another proof that it was determined the populace should not be excited in favour of Suetonius by the passage of the captives through the streets.

Beric rejoined his companions. "Well, Boduoc, what think you of Rome?"

"I have been thinking how mad our enterprise was, Beric. You told me about the greatness of Rome and from the first predicted failure, but I thought this was because you had been infected by your Roman training; I see now that you were right. Well, and what do you think is going to be done with us?"

"It is evident there is going to be no public display of us, Boduoc. Suetonius is at present in disgrace, and we shall be either sent into the school for gladiators, or set to work at some of the palaces Nero is building."

"They may do what they like," Boduoc said, "but I will not fight for their amusement. They may train me if they like and send me into the arena, but if they do I will not lift sword, but will bid my opponent slay me at once."

There was a murmur of assent from some of the others; but another who said, "Well, I would rather die fighting anyway than work as a slave at Roman palaces," found a response from several.

The next day they were marched up to Nero's palace.

Surprised as they might be by the splendour of the streets they traversed, and by the grandeur and magnificence of the palace, they betrayed no sign whatever of their feelings, but marched through the vast halls with their wealth of marble and adornments with calm and unmoved faces. At last they reached the audience hall, where the emperor was seated with a throng of courtiers behind him.

Nero was five-and-twenty, but looked older, for his dissolute habits had already left their marks upon his features. He had an air of good temper, and a rough frankness of manner that rendered him popular among the mass of the people, whom he courted by every means in his power, distributing with lavish hand the wealth he gained by confiscation and spoliation of the rich. The Britons bowed deeply before him and then stood upright and fearless.

"By Hercules," the emperor said to the councillor standing next to him, "but these are grand men! No wonder Suetonius has had such trouble in subduing them. And this young man is their chief? Truly, as Petronius said in his letter, he is but a lad. You speak our language too?" he went on, addressing Beric.

"I was brought up as a hostage among the Romans," he replied, "and

was instructed in their language and literature."

"Then you should have known better than to rise against us, young chief."

"Two years ago I was but a boy, Caesar," Beric replied, "scarce deemed old enough to fight, much less to give an opinion in the presence of my elders. I was well aware that the struggle must end in our defeat; but when the chiefs of my nation decided for war, I had nought to do but to go with them."

"But how is it, then, that you came to command so many, and became in time the leader of so large a band?"

"It was because I had studied your military books, and knew that only by an irregular warfare could we hope to prolong our existence. It was no longer an insurrection; we were simply fugitives trying to sell our lives dearly. If Suetonius had offered us terms we would gladly have laid down our arms, but as he simply strove to destroy us we had, like animals brought to bay, to fight for our own lives. The moment Petronius offered to allow my people to return to their homes and pay tribute to Rome I advised them to submit."

"So Petronius tells me, and he has said much to excuse your conduct.

"I would I could enlist this band as my bodyguard," Nero said in a low voice, turning to his councillor, "but the praetorian guards are jealous of their privileges, and none save a Roman can be enrolled in their ranks."

"It would be dangerous, Caesar; the praetorians are well affected to your majesty, and in these days when there are so many ambitious generals at the head of armies it would be unwise to anger them."

"Then we will send them to the schools to be trained. Send this lad with the four best of the others to Scopus, and divide the rest among three other schools. The Romans have never seen such men as these in the arena. We must not spoil it by matching them at present with men whose skill more than makes up for their want of strength. Two years in the schools will make marvels of them. The lad will want more than that before he gains his full bulk and strength, but he will some day turn out such a gladiator as Rome has never seen; and if after a time we can find no champion to withstand him, we can match him against the lions. I will myself give Scopus orders concerning him."

So saying he waved his hand. The guards closed round the captives and they were led away.

"What is it all about, Beric?" Boduoc asked.

"We are to go to the school for gladiators," Beric said; "but as the emperor considers that you will all need two years' training at the exercises before you will be fit to appear in the ring, we shall have time to think matters over. Much may happen before that. Nero may be liked by the mass of the people, but he is hated and feared, as I hear, by the upper classes. He may be assassinated or overthrown before that."

"I don't see that it will make much difference to us," Boduoc grumbled.

"I don't know that it would. At any rate we have time before us. We shall be well taken care of, well fed, and have plenty of exercise. Before now the gladiators have shaken Rome to its centre. What has happened once may happen again."

A

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