

DONNE WILLIAM BODHAM

OLD ROADS AND NEW
ROADS

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William Bodham Donne

Old Roads and New Roads

PREFACE

Gentle Reader,

If you look to move through this little volume in a direct line, after the present fashion of Railway Travelling, you will be signally disappointed. Nothing can well be more circuitous than the route proposed to you, nor more eccentric than your present guide. This book aspires to the precision of neither Patterson nor Bradshaw. Let men “bloody with spurring, fiery hot with speed,” consult those oracles of swiftness and rectitude of way: we do not belong to their manor. We desire to beguile, by a sort of serpentine irregularity, the occasional tedium of rapid movement. We move to our journey’s end by sundry old-fashioned circuitous routes. Grudge not, while you are whirled along a New Road, to loiter mentally upon certain Old Roads, and to consider as you linger along them the ways and means of transit which contented our ancestors. Although their coaches were slow, and their pack-saddles hard as those of the Yanguesan carriers of La Mancha, yet they reached their inns in time, and bequeathed to you and me – Gentle Reader – if we have the grace to use them, many pithy and profitable records of their wayfaring. The battle is not always to the strong, nor the race to the swift: neither is the most rapid always the pleasantest journey. Horace accompanied Mæcenas on very urgent business, yet he loitered on the way, and confesses his slackness without shame —

“Hoc iter ignavi divisimus, altius ac nos
Præcinctis unum: minus est gravis Appia tardis.”

It was, he says, more comfortable to take his time. Is our business more pressing than his was? It can hardly be, seeing that he wended with a company whose errand was to prevent the two masters of the world from coming to blows. In comparison with such a mission, who will put the buying of a cargo of cotton, or arriving an hour before a public meeting begins, or catching a pic-nic party just in the nick of time? St. Bernard rode from sunrise to sunset along the Lake Lemman without once putting his mule out of a walk; so much delectation the holy man felt in beholding the beauty of the water and the mountains, and in “chewing the cud of his own sweet or bitter fancies.” And good Michel Seigneur de Montaigne took a week for his journey from Nice to Pisa, although his horse was one of the smartest trotters in Gascony, merely for the pleasure he felt in following the by-lanes. And did not Richard Hooker receive from Bishop Jewell his blessing and his walking-staff, and yet with such poor means of speed he thought not of the weary miles between Exeter and Oxford, but trudged merrily with a thankful heart for the good oak prop, and the better blessing? Much less content with his journey was Richard when he rode to London on a hard-paced nag, that he might be in time to preach his first sermon at St. Paul’s. And was not this, the hastier of his journeys, the most unlucky in his life, seeing that it brought him acquainted with that foul shrew, Joan, his wife, who made his after-days as bitter to him, patient and godly though he were, as wormwood and coloquintida? Are not these goodly examples, Christian and Heathen? Let the Train rush along, you and I will travel at our own pace.

Neither shall you, if you will be ruled by your present guide, saunter along the roads of Britain alone, or on known and extant ways only. Are there not roads which never paid toll, roads in the waste, roads travelled only in vision, roads once traversed by the feet of myriads, yet now overgrown by the forest, or buried deeply in the marsh? Shall we not for awhile be surveyors of these forgotten highways, and pause beside the tombs of the kings, or consuls, or Incas, who first levelled them?

The world has moved westward with the daily motion of the earth. Yet, in the far East lie the most ancient highways – whose pavements once echoed with the hurrying feet of Nimrod’s outposts or the trampling of Agamemnon’s rear-guard. It were well to mark how that ancient chivalry sped along their causeways.

Nor, on our devious route, shall baiting-places be wanting. Drunken Barnaby stayed not oftener to prove the ale than we will do: —

“Ægre jam relictò rure
Securem Aldermanni—bury
Primo petii, qua exosa
Sentina, Holburni rosa
Me excepit, ordine tali
Appuli Gryphem Veteris Bailey:
Ubi experrectum lecto
Tres Ciconias indies specto,
Quo victurus, donec æstas
Rure curas tollet mæstas:
Ego etiam et Sodales
Nunc *Galerum Cardinalis*
Visitantes, vi Minervæ
Bibimus ad *Cornua Cervi*.”

Our inns may not always be found at the roadside; and we may possibly ever and anon seem to have missed the track altogether. Yet we will come into the main line in the end, and, I trust, part with kindly feelings, when the time has come for saying

SISTE VIATOR

OLD ROADS AND NEW ROADS

We have histories of all kinds in abundance, – and yet no good History of Roads. “Wines ancient and modern,” “Porcelain,” “Crochet work,” “Prisons,” “Dress,” “Drugs,” and “Canary birds,” have all and each found a chronicler more or less able; and the most stately and imposing volume we remember ever to have turned over was a history of “Button-making:” you saw at once, by the measured complacency of the style, that the author regarded his buttons as so many imperial medals. But of roads, except Bergier’s volumes on the Roman Ways, and a few learned yet rather repulsive treatises in Latin and German, we have absolutely no readable history. How has it come to pass that in works upon civilization, so many in number, so few in worth, there are no chapters devoted to the great arteries of commerce and communication? The subject of roads does not appear even on that long list of books which the good Quintus Fixlein *intended* to write. Of Railways indeed, both British and foreign, there are a few interesting memorials; but Railways are one branch only of a subject which dates at least from the building of Damascus, earliest of recorded cities.

Perhaps the very antiquity of roads, and the wide arc of generations comprised in the subject, have deterred competent persons from attempting it; yet therefore is it only the more strange that incompetent persons have not essayed “this great argument,” since they generally rush in, where their betters fear to tread. A history of roads is, in great measure indeed, a history of civilization itself. For highways and great cities not merely presuppose the existence of each other, but are also the issues and exponents of two leading impulses in the nature of man. Actuated by the one – the centripetal instinct – the shepherd races of Asia founded their great capitals on the banks of the Euphrates and the Ganges: impelled by the other – the centrifugal instinct – they passed forth from their cradle in the Armenian Highlands, westward as far as the Atlantic, and eastward as far as the Pacific. We have indeed indications of roads earlier than we have accounts of cities. For ages before Arcadian Evander came as a “squatter” to Mount Palatine, was there not the great road of the Hyperboreans from Ausonia to Delphi, by which, with each revolving year, the most blameless of mankind conveyed to the Dorian Sun-god their offerings? And as soon as Theseus – the organizer of men, as his name imports – had slain the wolves and bears and the biped ruffians of the Corinthian Isthmus, did he not set up a direction-post, informing the wayfarer that “this side was Peleponnesus, and that side was Ionia”? Centuries of thought and toil indeed intervened between the path across the plain or down the mountain-gorge and the Regina Viarum, the Appian Road; and centuries between the rude stone-heap which marked out to the thirsting wayfarer the well in the desert, and the stately column which told the traveller, “This is the road to Byzantium.”

In the land of “Geryon’s sons,” the paths which scaled the sierras were attributed to the toils of Hercules. In Bœotia, at a most remote era, there was a broad carriage-road from Thebes to Phocis, and at one of its intersections by a second highway the homicide of Laius opened the “long process” of woes, which for three generations enshrouded, as with “the gloom of earthquake and eclipse,” the royal house of Labdacus. We have some doubts about the nature, or indeed the existence, of the road along which the ass Borak conveyed Mahommed to the seventh heaven: but we have no grounds for questioning the fact of the great causeway, which Milton saw in his vision, leading from Pandemonium to this earth, for have not Sin and Death been travelling upon it unceasingly for now six thousand years?

From that region beyond the moon, where, according to Ariosto – and Milton also vouches for the fact, – all things lost on earth are to be found, could we evoke a Carthaginian ledger, we would gladly purchase it at the cost of one or two Fathers of the Church. It would inform us of many things very pleasant and profitable to be known. Among others it would probably give some inkling of the stages and inns upon the great road which led from the eastern flank of Mount Atlas to Berenice, on the Red Sea. This road was in ill odour with the Egyptians, who, like all close boroughs, dreaded the

approach of strangers and innovations. And the Carthaginian caravans came much too near the gold-mines of the Pharaohs to be at all pleasant to those potentates: it was

– “much I wis
To the annoyance of King Amasis.”

But it is bootless to pine after knowledge irretrievably buried in oblivion. Otherwise we might fairly have wished to have stood beside King Nebuchadnezzar when he so unadvisedly uttered that proud vaunt which ended in his being condemned to a long course of vegetable diet. For doubtless he gazed upon at least four main roads which entered the walls of Babylon from four opposite quarters:

“From Arachosia, from Candaor east,
And Margiana, to the Hyrcanian cliffs
Of Caucasus, and dark Iberian dales:
From Atropatia and the neighbouring plains
Of Adiabene, Media, and the south
Of Susiana, to Balsara’s havens.”

We pass over as a mad imperial whim Caligula’s road from Baiae to Puteoli, partly because it was a costly and useless waste of money and labour, and partly because that emperor had an awkward trick of flinging to the fishes all persons who did not admire his road. It was a bad imitation of a bad model – the road with which Xerxes bridled the “indignant Hellespont.” Both the Hellespontine and the Baian road perished in the lifetime of their founders; while the Simplon still attests the more sublime and practical genius of Napoleon. We should have also greatly liked to watch the Cimbri and Ambrones at their work of piling up those gigantic earth-mounds in Britain and in Gaul, which, under the appellation of Devil’s-dykes, are still visible and, as monuments of patient labour and toil, second only to the construction of the Pyramids.

The physiognomy of races is reflected in their public works. The warm climate of Egypt was not the only cause for the long paven corridors which ran underground from temple to temple, and conducted the Deputies of the Nomes to their sacerdotal meeting in the great Labyrinth. It was some advantage, indeed, to travel in the shade in a land where the summer heats were intense, and refreshing rains of rare occurrence; but it was a still greater recommendation to these covered ways that they enabled the priests to assemble without displaying upon the broad highway of the Nile the times and numbers of their synods. The pyramidal temples of Benares communicated by vaulted paths with the Ganges, as the chamber of Cheops communicated with the Nile. The capital of Assyria was similarly furnished with covered roads, which enabled the priests of Bel to communicate with one another, and with the royal palace, in a city three days’ journey in length and three in breadth. Civilization and barbarism, indeed, in this respect met each another, and the caves of the Troglodyte Æthiopians on the western shore of the Red Sea were connected by numerous vaulted passages cut in the solid limestone, along which the droves of cattle passed securely in the rainy season to their winter stalls from the meadows of the Nile and the Astaboras.

Of the civil history of Carthage we know unfortunately but little. The colonists of Tyre and Sidon are to the ages a dumb nation. All we know of them is through the accounts of their bitter foes, the Greeks of Sicily and the Romans. It is much the same as if the only records of Manchester and Birmingham were to be transmitted to posterity by the speeches of Mr. George Frederic Young. Yet we know that the Carthaginians alone, among the nations of antiquity, made long voyages, – perchance even doubled the Cape three thousand years before Vasco de Gama broke the silence of the southern seas; and we are certain also that their caravan traffic with Central Africa and the coasts

of the Red Sea passed along defined and permeable roads, with abiding land-marks of hostelry, well, and column. And we know more than this. The Romans, who jealously denied to other nations all the praise for arts or arms which they could withhold, yet accorded to the Carthaginians the invention of that solid intessellation of granite-blocks which is beheld still upon the fragments of the Appian Road. The highways which conveyed to the warehouses of Carthage the ivory, gold-dust, slaves, and aromatic gums of Central Libya ran through miles of well-ordered gardens and by hundreds of villas; and it was the ruthless destruction of these country-seats of the merchant-princes of Byrsa, which forced upon them the first and the second peace with Rome.

The Grecian roads, like the modern European highways, represented the free genius of the people: they were often sinuous in their course, and, respecting the boundaries of property, wound around the hills rather than disturb the ancient landmarks. Up to a certain point the character of the Grecian Republics was marked rather by rapid progression than by permanence. Their roads were of a less massive construction than the Roman, consisting for the most part of oblong blocks, and were not very artificially constructed, except in the neighbourhood of the great emporia of traffic, Corinth, and Athens, and Syracuse. Sparta possessed two principal military highways, one in the direction of Argolis, and another in that of Mycene; but the roads in the interior of Laconia were little better than drift-ways for the conveyance of agricultural produce from the field to the garner, or from the farm-yard to the markets of the capital and the sea-ports.

The Romans were emphatically the road-makers of the ancient world. An ingenious but somewhat fanciful writer of the present day has compared the literature of Rome to its great Viæ. One idea, he remarks, possessed its poets, orators, and historians – the supremacy of the City on the Seven Hills; and Lucan, Virgil, Livy, and Tacitus, various as were their idiosyncrasies, still present a formal monotony, which is not found to the same degree in any other literature. This censure is, perhaps, as regards the literature of the Roman people, rather overstated; but it applies literally to their roads, aqueducts, and tunnels. The State was the be-all and the end-all of social life: the wishes, the prejudices, the conveniences of private persons never entered into account with the planners and finishers of the Appian Way, or the Aqueduct of Alcantara. The vineyard of Naboth would have been taken from him by a single *senatûs consultum*, without the scruples of Ahab and without the crime of Jezebel. The Roman roads were originally constructed, like our own, of gravel and beaten stone; the surface was slightly arched, and the Macadamite principle was well understood by the contractors for the earliest of the Sabine highways, the Via Salaria¹. But after the Romans had borrowed from Carthage the art of intessellation, their roads were formed of polygonal blocks of immense thickness, having the interstices at the angles well filled with flints, and in some instances, as at Pompeii, with wedges of iron and granite; so that they resembled on a plane the vertical face of a Cyclopean or polygonal wall. Upon the roads themselves were imposed the stately and sonorous epithets of Consular and Prætorian; and had the records of the western Republic perished as completely as those of its commercial rival, the Appian Road would have handed down to the remotest ages one of the names of the pertinacious censor of the Claudian house. To the Commonwealth, perpetually engaged in distant wars on its frontiers, it was of the utmost importance to possess the most rapid means of communicating with its provinces, and of conveying troops and ammunition. To the Empire it was no less essential to correspond easily with its vast circle of dependencies. The very life of the citizens, who, long before the age of Augustus, had ceased to be a corn-producing people, was sometimes dependent upon the facility of transit, and the rich plains of Lombardy and Gaul poured in their stores of wheat and millet, and of salted pork and beef, when the harvest of Egypt failed through an imperfect inundation of the Nile. But the convenience of travellers was as much consulted as the

¹ The appellation of this, the earliest Roman road, affords another instructive example of the connection between the necessary wants of man and civilization. Salt, among the first needs of the city of Romulus, produced the path from the Salt-works; and the convenience of the Salt-work Road led ultimately to the construction of the Appian, Flaminian, and Æmilian.

necessity of the subjects of Rome. A foot-pavement on each side was secured by a low wall against the intrusion or collision of wheel carriages. Stones to mount horses (for stirrups were unknown)² were placed at certain distances for the behoof of equestrians; and the miles were marked upon blocks of granite or peperino, the useful invention of the popular tribune Caius Gracchus. Trees and fences by the sides were cut to admit air, and ditches, like ours, carried off the rain and residuary water from the surface. The office of *Curator Viarum*, or Road Surveyor, was bestowed upon the most illustrious members of the Senate, and the Board of Health in our days may feel some satisfaction in knowing that Pliny the Younger once held the office of Commissioner of Sewers on the Æmilian Road. Nay, the ancients deemed no office tending to public health and utility beneath them; and after his victory at Mantinea, Epaminondas was appointed Chairman of the Board of Scavengers at Thebes.

We close this part of our subject, which must not expand into an archaeological dissertation, with the following extract from the most eloquent and learned of the English historians who have treated of Rome.

“All these cities were connected with one another and with the capital by the public highways, which, issuing from the Forum of Rome, traversed Italy, pervaded the provinces, and were terminated only by the frontiers of the empire. If we carefully trace the distance from the wall of Antoninus to Rome, and from thence to Jerusalem, it will be found that the great chain of communication, from the north-west to the south-east point of the empire, was drawn out to the length of four thousand and eighty Roman miles. The public roads were accurately divided by milestones, and ran in a direct line from one city to another, with very little respect for the obstacles either of nature or of private property. Mountains were perforated, and bold arches thrown over the broadest and most rapid streams. The middle part of the road was raised into a terrace, which commanded the adjacent country, consisted of several strata of sand, gravel, and cement, and was paved with large stones, or, in some places near the capital, with granite. Such was the solid construction of the Roman highways, whose firmness has not entirely yielded to the effect of fifteen centuries. They united the subjects of the most distant provinces by an easy and familiar intercourse; but their primary object had been to facilitate the marches of the legions; nor was any country considered as completely subdued till it had been rendered in all its parts pervious to the arms and authority of the conqueror. The advantage of receiving the earliest intelligence, and of conveying their orders with celerity, induced the emperors to establish throughout their extensive dominions the regular institution of posts. Houses were everywhere erected at the distance only of five or six miles; each of these was constantly provided with forty horses, and by the help of these relays it was easy to travel a hundred miles on a day along the Roman roads.”

Wherever the Romans conquered they inhabited, and introduced into all their provinces, from Syene, “where the shadow both way falls,” to the *ultima Thule* of the Scottish border, the germs of Latin civilization. To this imperial people England and France owe their first roads; for the drift-ways along the dykes of the Celts scarcely deserve the name. The most careless observer must have remarked the strong resemblance between the right lines and colossal structure of the Roman Viæ and the modern Railroad. We have indeed arrived at a very similar epoch of civilization to that of the Cæsarian era, but with adjuncts derived from a purer religion, and from more generous and expanded views of commerce and the interdependence of nations, than were vouchsafed by Providence to the ancient world.

² The first introduction of stirrups was probably not earlier than the end of the sixth century, a. d. See Beckmann’s ‘History of Inventions and Discoveries,’ Eng. Trans., 1817, vol. ii. pp. 255–270.

Roads being so essential a feature of all political communities, it might have been expected that if no other feature of Roman cultivation had survived the wreck of the Empire, the great arteries of intercourse would at least have been retained. But the works of man's hand are the exponent of his ideas; and the ideas of the Teutonic and Celtic races who divided among themselves the patrimony of the Cæsars were essentially different from those entertained and embodied by Greece and Rome. The State ceased to be an organic and self-attracting body. The individual rather than the corporate existence of man became the prevalent conception of the Church and of legislators; and nations sought rather to isolate themselves from one another, than to coalesce and correspond. Moreover, the life of antiquity was eminently municipal. The city was the germ of each body politic, and the connection of roads with cities is obvious. But our Teutonic ancestors abhorred civic life. They generally shunned the towns, even when accident had placed them in the very centre of their shires or marks, and when the proximity of great rivers or the convenience of walls and markets seemed to hold out every inducement to take possession of the vacant enclosures. The castle and the cathedral became the nucleus of the Teutonic cities. Hamlets crept around the precincts of the sacred and the outworks of the secular building: but it was long before the Lord Abbot or the Lord Chatelain regarded with any feelings but disdain, the burgher who exercised his trade or exposed his wares in the narrow lanes of the town which abutted on his domains, and enriched his manorial exchequer.

In many cases indeed the Roman cities were allowed to decay: the forest resumed its rights: the feudal castle was constructed from the ruins of the Proconsul's palace and the Basilica, or if these edifices were too massive for demolition, they were left standing in the waste – the Mammoths and Saurians of a bygone civilization. The great Viæ were for leagues overgrown with herbage, or concealed by wood and morass; and for the direct arms of transit which bound Rome and York together as by the cord of a bow, were substituted the devious and inconvenient highways, which led the traveller by circuitous routes from one province to another. The contrast indeed between the 'Old Road and the New' is represented in Schiller's fine image – rendered even finer in Coleridge's translation: —

“Straight forward goes
The lightning's path, and straight the fearful path
Of the cannon ball. Direct it flies, and rapid,
Shattering that it may reach, and shattering what it reaches.
My son! the road the human being travels,
That on which blessing comes and goes, doth follow
The river's course, the valley's playful windings,
Curves round the corn-field and the hill of vines,
Honouring the holy bounds of property:
And thus secure, though late, leads to its end.”

It was long however before much security was found on the new roads. In the dark ages the days described by Deborah the prophetess had returned. “The highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through bye-ways: the villages were deserted. Then was war in the gates, and noise of the archers in the places of drawing water.” Danger and delay were often the companions of the traveller. Occasionally a vigorous ruler, like Alfred, succeeded in restoring security to the wayfarer, and proved his success (so said the legend) by hanging up, in defiance of the plunderer, golden armlets on crosses by the roadside. But these intervals of safety were few and far between, and the traveller journeyed, like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, “in fear and dread,”

“Because he knew a fearful fiend
Did close behind him tread.”

The man-at-arms in the days of Border-war was a more formidable obstacle to progress than a wilderness of spectres. In the reign of Edward the Confessor the great highway of Watling Street was beset by violent men. If you travelled in the eastern counties, the chances were that you were snapped up by a retainer of Earl Godwin, and if in the district now traversed by the Great Northern Railway, Earl Morcar would in all likelihood arrest your journey, and without so much as asking leave clap a collar round your neck, with his initials and yours scratched rudely upon it, signifying to all men, by those presents, that in future your duty was to tend his swine or rive his blocks. Outlaws, dwelling in the forests or in the deep morass which girded the road, pounced upon the traveller on the causeway, eased him of his luggage if he carried any, and if there was no further occasion for his services, they either let him down easily into the next quagmire, or if they were, for those days, gentlemanly thieves, left him standing, as Justice Shallow has it, like a “forked radish,” to enjoy the summer’s heat or the winter’s cold. The cross and escallop shell of the pilgrim were no protection: “Cucullus non fecit monachum” in the eyes of these minions of the road; or rather, perhaps, the hood gave a new zest to the wrongs done to its wearer by these “uncircumcised Philistines.” Convents, the abodes of men professing at least to be peaceful, were obliged to keep in pay William of Deloraine to mate with Jock of Thirlstane: and ancient citizens were fain to put by their grave habiliments, and “wield old partisans in hands as old.” There is extant an agreement made between Leofstan, Abbot of St. Albans, and certain barons, by which the Abbot agrees to hire, and the barons to let, certain men-at-arms for the security of the Abbey, and for scouring the forests. Savage capital punishments – impalement, mutilation, hanging alive in chains – were inflicted on the marauders, who duly acknowledged these attentions by yet more atrocious severities upon the wayfarers who had the ill luck to be caught by them.

The insecurity of the old roads necessarily affected the manners of the time. He should have been a hardy traveller who would venture himself “single and sole,” when he might journey in company. The same cause which leads to the formation of the caravans of Africa and Asia, led to the collection of such goodly companies of pilgrims as wended their way from the Tabard in Southwark to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury; and the pursuit of travelling under difficulties produced for all posterity the most delightful of the poems of the great father of English verse.

Travelling in companies, in times when it was next to impossible to be on “visiting terms with one’s neighbours,” tended greatly to the improvement of social intercourse, and to the erection of roomy and comfortable inns for the wayfarers. It took Dan Chaucer only a few hours to be on the best footing with the nine and twenty guests at the Tabard.

“Befelle that, in that season³ on a day,
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay,
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To Canterbury with devout corage,
At night was come into that hostelrie
Wel nine and twentie in a compaignie
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felawship; and pilgrimes were they alle,

³ It is acknowledged on all hands that no people talk so much about weather as the English. It is also true that no literature contains so many descriptions of the sensations dependent on the seasons. A French or Italian poet generally goes to Arcadia to fetch images proper for “a fine day.” We, on the contrary, paint from the life. Chaucer luxuriates, in his opening lines of the ‘Canterbury Tales,’ on the blessings and virtues of “April shoures.” Our modern novelists are always very diffuse meteorologists. In lands where the seasons are unhappily uniform, the natives are debarred from this unfailing topic of conversation. Hajji Baba, in Mr. Morier’s pleasant tale, is amazed at being told at Ispahan, by the surgeon of the English Embassy, that “it was a fine day.” On the banks of the South American rivers, mosquitoes afford a useful substitute for meteorological remarks. – “How did you sleep last night?” “Sleep! not a wink. I was hitting at the mosquitoes all night, and am, you see, bitten like a roach notwithstanding.”

That toward Canterbury wolden ride.
The chambres and the stables weren wide,
And wel we weren esed attè beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was gone to reste
So hadde I spoken with hem everich on,
That I was of hir felawship anon.”

But the tenants of the waste and the woodland were not the only lords of the highway. The Norman baron drew little profit from the natural produce of his ample domains. In his way he was a staunch protectionist; but he left agriculture very much to take care of itself, and looked to his tolls, his bridges, and above all to his highways, for a more rapid return of the capital he had invested in accoutring men-at-arms, squires, and archers. We know, from ‘Ivanhoe,’ how it fared with Saxons, Pilgrims, and Jews, whose business led them near the castles of Front de Bœuf or Philip de Malvoisin: and we are certain that the Lady of Branksome kept, an expensive establishment, who were expected to bring grist to the mill of the lord or lady of the demesne, by turning out in all weathers and at all hours, whenever a herd of beeves or a company of pilgrims were descried by the watchers from Branksome Towers. For it must have taken no small quantity of beef and hides to furnish the Branksome retainers in dinners and shoe- and saddle-leather; since —

“Nine and twenty knights of fame
Hung their shields in Branksome Hall:
Nine and twenty squires of name
Brought them their steeds to bower from stall:
Nine and twenty yeomen tall
Waited duteous on them all:
They were all knights of mettle true,
Kinsmen to the bold Buccleugh.”

When the traveller carried money in his purse, or the merchant had store of Sheffield whittles or Woodstock gloves in his pack, the lowest dungeon in the castle of the Bigods was his doom; and he was a lucky man who came out again from those crypts which now so much delight our archaeological associations, with a tithe of his possessions, or with his proper allowance of eyes, hands, and ears.

Even on the Roman roads, with their good accommodation of pavement, milestones, and towns, journeys were for the most part performed on foot or horseback. For before steel springs were invented, it was by no means pleasant to ride all day in a jolting cart – and the most gorgeous of the Roman *carrucæ*, or coaches, was no better. Pompous and splendid indeed – to pass for a moment from Norman and Saxon barbarism – must have been the aspect of the Queen of Roads within a few leagues of the capital of the world; splendid and pompous as it was to the actual beholder, it is perhaps seen to best advantage in the following description by Milton —

“Thence to the gates cast round thine eye, and see
What conflux issuing forth, or entering in;
Prætors, proconsuls to their provinces
Hasting or on return, in robes of state,
Lictors and rods, the ensigns of their power,
Legions and cohorts, turms of horse and wings;
Or embassies from regions far remote,
In various habits, on the Appian road,
Or on the Æmilian.”

As a pendant to this breathing picture of an Old Road at the gate of the “vertex omnium civitatum,” we subjoin a note from Gibbon: —

“The *carrucae* or coaches of the Romans were often of solid silver, curiously carved and engraved, and the trappings of the mules or horses were embossed with gold. This magnificence continued from the reign of Nero to that of Honorius: and the Appian Road was covered with the splendid equipages of the nobles who came out to meet St. Melania, when she returned to Rome, six years before the Gothic siege. Yet pomp is well exchanged for convenience; and a plain modern coach, that is hung upon springs, is much preferable to the silver and gold *carts* of antiquity, which rolled on the axle-tree, and were exposed, for the most part, to the inclemency of the weather.”⁴

The Anglo-Saxon generally travelled on horseback. The Jews were restricted to the ignobler mule. The former indeed had a species of carriage; and horse-litters, probably for the use of royal or noble ladies and invalids, are mentioned by Matthew Paris and William of Malmesbury. Wheel-carriages appear to have multiplied after the return of the Crusaders from Palestine — partly, it may be inferred, because increased wealth had inspired a taste for novel luxuries, and partly because the champions of the Cross had imbibed in the Holy War some of the prejudices of the infidels, and had grown chary of exposing to vulgar gaze their dames and daughters on horseback.⁵

The speed of travelling depends upon the nature and facilities of the means of transit. Herodotus mentions a remarkable example of speed in a Hemerodromus, or running-post, named Phidippides, who in two days ran from Athens to Sparta, a distance of nearly 152 English miles, to hasten the Laconian contingent, when the Persians were landing on the beach of Marathon. Couriers of this order, trained to speed and endurance from their infancy, conveyed to Montezuma the tidings of the disembarkation of Cortes; and so imperfect were the means of communication at that era in Europe, that the Spaniards noted it as a proof of high refinement in the Aztecs to employ relays of running postmen, from all quarters of their empire to the city on the Great Lake. The speed of a Roman traveller was probably the greatest possible before the invention of carriage-springs and railways. We have some data on this head. The mighty Julius was a rapid traveller. He continually mentions his *summa diligentia* in his journal of the Gaulish Wars. The length of journeys which he accomplished within a given time, appears even to us at this day, and might well therefore appear to his contemporaries, truly astonishing. A distance of one hundred miles was no extraordinary day's journey for him. When he did not march with his army on foot, — as he often seems to have done, in order to set his soldiers an example, and also to express that sympathy with them which gained him their hearts so entirely — he mostly travelled in a *rheda*. This was a four-wheeled carriage, a sort of curricule, and adapted to the carriage of about half a ton of luggage. His personal baggage was probably considerable, for he was a man of most elegant habits, and sedulously attentive to his personal appearance. The tessellated flooring of his tent formed part of his *impedimenta*, and, like Napoleon, he expected to find amid the distractions of war many of the comforts and conveniences of his palace at Rome. He reached the Sierra Morena in twenty-three days from the date of his leaving Rome; and he went the whole way by land. The distance round the head of the Gulf of Genoa and through the passes of the Pyrenees is 850 leagues; and although the Carthaginians had once been

⁴ The historian might have added to this description of Roman carriages an allusion to the sumptuousness of Roman harness. Apuleius informs us that “necklaces of gold and silver thread embroidered with pearls encircled the necks of the horses; that the headbands glittered with gems; and the saddles, traces, and reins were cased in bright ribbons.”

⁵ Not always, on horseback: for while the knight, as his Latin designation *eques* implied, was always mounted on a charger, his lady sometimes rode beside him on an ass: — “A loyely ladie rode him faire beside, Upon a lowly asse, more white than snow; Yet she much whiter; but the same did hide Under a vele, that wimpled was full low; And over all a black stole did she throw: As one that inly mourned so was she sad, And heaveie sate upon her palfrey slow.”

masters of Spanish Navarre, the roads were far from regular or good. The same distance would now be accomplished in twelve days by a general and his mounted staff. From the usual rapidity with which the great Proconsul travelled, Cowley, in his Essay on 'Procrastination,' extracts a moral, or, as his Puritan contemporaries would have phrased it, a "pious use." "Cæsar," he says, "the man of expedition above all others, was so far from this folly (procrastination), that whensoever in a journey he was to cross any river, he never went out of his way for a bridge, or a ford, or a ferry, but flung himself into it immediately, and swam over; and this is the course we ought to imitate, if we meet with any stops in our way to happiness." In the time of Theodosius, Cæsarius, a magistrate of high rank, went post from Antioch to Constantinople. He began his journey at night, was in Cappadocia, 165 miles from Antioch, the ensuing evening, and arrived at Constantinople the sixth day about noon. The whole distance was 725 Roman, or 665 English miles.

Gibbon describes bishops as among the most rapid of ancient travellers. The decease of a patriarch of Alexandria or Antioch caused the death of scores of post-horses, from the rate at which anxious divines hurried to Constantinople to solicit from the Emperor the vacant see. On the whole however, in respect of speed in travelling, the Greeks and Romans were but slow coaches; and these exceptional instances merely serve to prove the general slackness of their pace. A Roman nobleman indeed, with all the means and appliances which his wealth could purchase, and with the positive advantage of the best roads in the world, travelled generally with such a ponderous train, that the heavy-armed legions with their parks of artillery might well advance as rapidly as an Olybrius or Anicius of the Empire. "In their journeys into the country," says Ammianus, "the whole body of the household marches with their master. In the same manner as the cavalry and infantry, the heavy and the light armed troops, the advanced guard and the rear, are marshalled by the skill of their military leaders; so the domestic officers who bear the rod, as an ensign of authority, distribute and arrange the numerous train of slaves and attendants. The baggage and wardrobe move in the front; and are immediately followed by a multitude of cooks and inferior ministers, employed in the service of the kitchen and of the table. The main body is composed of a promiscuous crowd of slaves, increased by the accidental concourse of idle or dependent plebeians."

At an even earlier period, in the age of Nero, before luxury had made the gigantic strides which distinguished and disgraced the Byzantine Court, Seneca records three circumstances relative to the journeys of the Roman nobility. They were preceded by a troop of Numidian light horse who announced by a cloud of dust the approach of a great man. Their baggage-mules transported not only the precious vases, but even the fragile vessels of crystal and *murra*, which last probably meant the porcelain of China and Japan. The delicate faces of the young slaves were covered with a medicated crust or ointment, which secured them against the effects of the sun and frost. Rightly did the Romans name their baggage *impedimenta*. A funeral pace was the utmost that could be expected from travellers so particular about their accommodations as these luxurious senators. Of a much humbler character was the state observed by the monarchs who succeeded to portions of the empire of the Cæsars. The Merovingian kings, when they employed wheel carriages at all, rode in wains drawn by bullocks; the Bretwaldas of the Saxon kingdoms went to temple or church on high festivals in the same cumbrous fashion; and "slow oxen" dragged the standard of the Italian Republics into the battle-field.

With the disuse or breaking up of the great Roman Viæ in our island, the difficulty and delay of travelling increased, and more than thirteen centuries elapsed before it was again possible to journey with any tolerable speed. Wolsey indeed, it is well known, by the singular rapidity with which he conveyed royal letters to and from Brussels, galloped swiftly up the road of royal favour: and by his fast style of living at home afterwards galloped even more swiftly down again. Mordaunt, Earl of Peterborough, was noted for his incessant restlessness, and his rapid mode of passing from one land to another; but then he dispensed with all state and attendance, and rode like a post-boy from one end of Europe to another. As the readers of Pope, Swift, and their contemporaries are daily becoming

fewer in number, we venture to extract the Dean's pleasant burlesque on this eccentric nobleman's migratory habits.

“Mordanto fills the trump of fame,
The Christian worlds his deeds proclaim,
And prints are crowded with his name.

In journeys he outrides the post,
Sits up till midnight with his host,
Talks politics and gives the toast;

Knows every prince in Europe's face,
Flies like a squib from place to place,
And travels not, but runs a race.

From Paris gazette à-la-main,
This day arrived, without his train,
Mordanto in a week from Spain.

A messenger comes all a-reek,
Mordanto at Madrid to seek;
He left the town above a week.

Next day the post-boy winds his horn,
And rides through Dover in the morn;
Mordanto's landed from Leghorn.

Mordanto gallops on alone;
The roads are with his followers strown;
This breaks a girth and that a bone.

His body active as his mind,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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