

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

BERIC THE BRITON : A
STORY OF THE ROMAN
INVASION

George Henty

**Beric the Briton : a Story
of the Roman Invasion**

«Public Domain»

Henty G.

Beric the Briton : a Story of the Roman Invasion / G. Henty —
«Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER I: A HOSTAGE	5
CHAPTER II: CITY AND FOREST	14
CHAPTER III: A WOLF HUNT	23
CHAPTER IV: AN INFURIATED PEOPLE	32
CHAPTER V: THE SACK OF CAMALODUNUM	41
CHAPTER VI: FIRST SUCCESSES	50
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	53

G. A. Henty

Beric the Briton : a Story of the Roman Invasion

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 Icenii 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 peristylum, 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 peristylum 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 peristylum; this was called the fauces. Above the chambers round the atrium was a second story, approached by a staircase from the peristylum; 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 Belgae, 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 Sarcî 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 Sarcî 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 naught. 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 proprætor 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 yourself 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 proprætor, 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 balked. 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 Icenii. 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 suppliant 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 statue 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 cubicle, 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 cubicle, "I will be with you in a moment; it is but a minute since we were awoken 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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.