

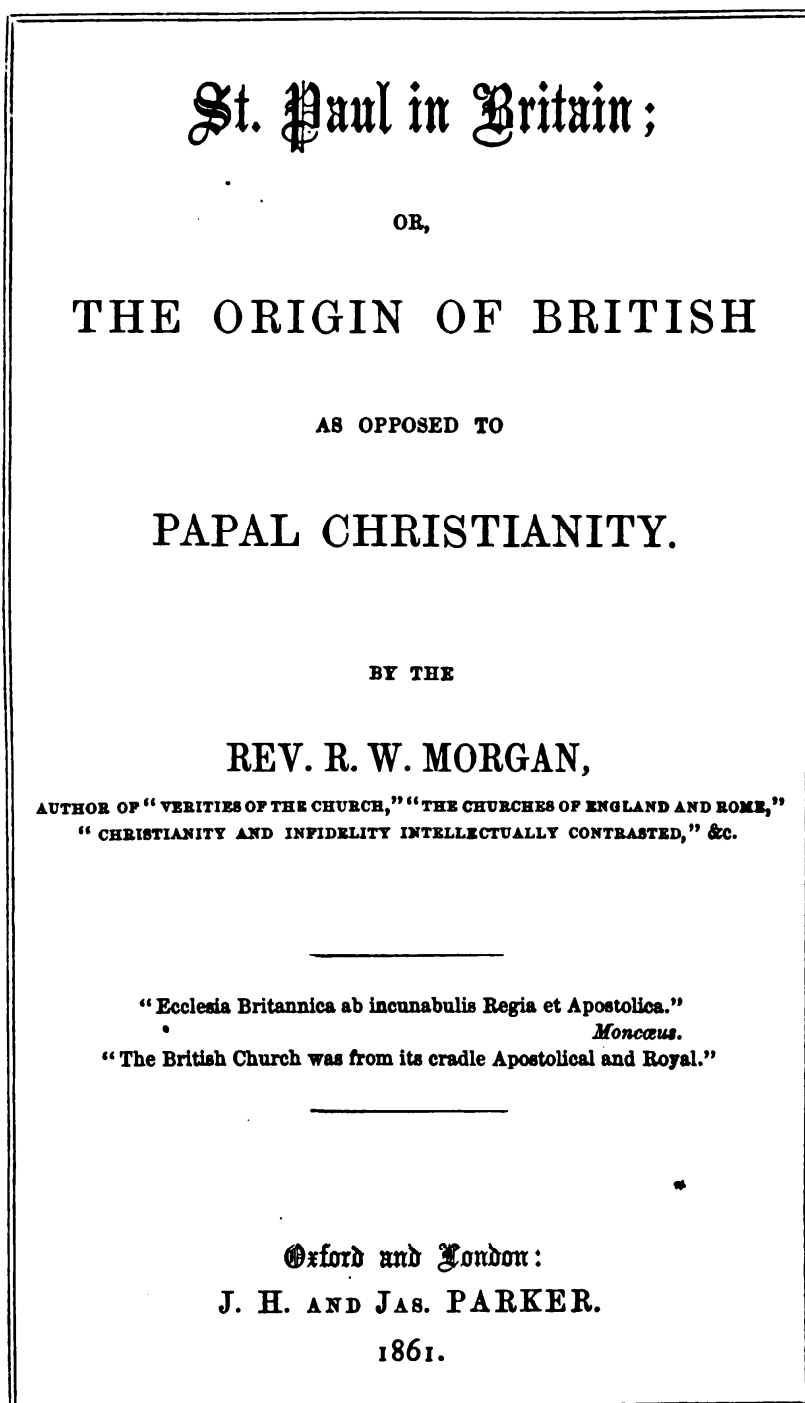
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Julius Caesar's invasions – R W Morgan (1861)



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CHAPTER III.

HISTORIC POSITIONS OF BRITAIN AND THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA.

JULIUS CÆSAR, in justification of his invasion of Britain, alleges the Britons to have been the aggressors, British levies taking the field against him in every Gallic campaign. Those singular collections of cardinal events known as the "Triads of the Isle of Britain," corroborate the statement. Prior to Cæsar's campaigns in Northern Gaul, a British army of 50,000 men, termed in these Triads the "second silver host," under the command of the two nephews of Cassibelaunus, or Caswallon, invaded Aquitania, routed the Roman proconsul, Lucius Valerius Præconinus, at Tolosa, and compelled Lucius Manilius, the consul, to fly with the loss of all his commissariat. On receiving intelligence of these reverses, Cæsar turned his arms against the Veneti, (Vendeans,) who carried on a flourishing commerce with Britain, and whose navy supplied the transport for these auxiliaries. As long as the Venetian fleet, which from Cæsar's description of it would do no discredit to our present state of nautical architecture, remained mistress of the narrow seas, invasion was impracticable. Upon its destruction, Cæsar ad-

vanced by slow marches to Portius Iccius, (Witsand,) near Calais, and on the 5th of August, B.C. 55, the Roman fleet crossed the Channel in two divisions. This first campaign lasted fifty-five days, during which Cæsar failed to advance beyond seven miles from the spot of disembarkation, lost one battle, and had his camp attempted by the victorious enemy, a thing unprecedented in his continental career^a.

The second expedition embarked in above a thousand ships, and carrying the army which afterwards completed the conquest of the world on the fields of Pharsalia and Munda, set sail from Witsand May 10, B.C. 54. The campaign lasted till September 10, when peace was concluded at Gwerddlan, (Verulam, or St. Albans,) the furthest point (70 miles) from the coast Cæsar had been able to attain. The conditions are not particularized in either the Triads or Commentaries. Hostages and a tribute are mentioned by Cæsar, but it is certain from numerous passages in the Augustan authors that no Briton of eminence left the island a hostage or prisoner. On the conclusion of the treaty, Cæsar moved from Verulam to London, where he was entertained at the Bryn Gwyn (white mount^b) by Cassibelaunus,

^a Dion Cassius states that Cæsar's original intention was to carry the war into the interior, but finding his forces inadequate to cope with the British in the field, he abruptly determined to close the campaign. (Lib. xxxix. p. 115, ed. 1606, fol.)

^b The old belief that part of the Tower of London was built by

the British pendràgon, or military dictator, with a magnificence which appears to have found great favour in the eyes of the ancient Bards, who record it with great exactness. Leaving not a Roman soldier behind, Cæsar disembarked his forces at Rutupium, at ten at night, and arrived at Witsand by daybreak the next morning, September 26, B.C. 54.

The tests of the success or non-success of a campaign are its effects. The effects of the second Julian invasion demonstrate that both at Rome and

Julius Cæsar is known to every one; and the White Tower was pointed out as the part. "The White Tower" appears a version of the original British name *Bryn Gwyn*, but whether Cæsar was lodged therein, or laid its foundation-stone, or was never at all entertained in London, there seems to us to be so much good sense in the sentiments put by Shakespeare on this point in the mouth of the young King Edward V., that we make no apology for transcribing them:—

Prince Edward. Did Julius Cæsar build the Tower, my lord?

Gloucester. He did, my gracious liege, begin that place;
Which since succeeding ages have re-edified.

Pr. Ed. Is it upon record, or else reported
Successively from age to age he built it?

Glo. Upon record, my gracious lord.

Pr. Ed. But say, my lord, it were not registered;
Methinks the truth should live from age to age,
As 'twere entailed to all posterity,
Even to the general all-ending day.

Glo. So wise, so young!

I say, without characters, fame lives long."

King Richard III., act iii. sc. 1.

in Gaul it was considered a more serious failure than the first. The line quoted by Lucan,—

“*Territa quæsitis ostendit terga Britannis*”^c—

as a common sarcasm in the mouths of the Pompeian party against Cæsar, may be thrown aside as the invidious exaggeration of the defeat on the Darent, and the loss of his sword to Nennius, the brother of Caswallon; but it is undeniable that the invasion cost Cæsar for a time the loss of all his continental acquisitions. Before he could dispose of his troops in winter quarters, the Treviri, Eburones, Senones, and Sicambri rose in arms, and the work of Gallic conquest had to be re-enacted.

To estimate aright the military abilities of Caswallon, and the resources of the British people at this period of the first collision of our island with the continent, it should be borne in mind that they were engaged against perhaps the ablest general of antiquity, heading an army to which, either before or after the invasion, France, Spain, Western Germany, Africa, Egypt, Asia, and finally Rome itself succumbed; the conquerors, in fact, of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and the real founders of the imperial dynasty of the Cæsars. Contrasted with the success of the Norman invasion, effected by a comparatively

^c Aulus Gellius wrote an account of Cæsar’s invasion of Britain. He commemorates a British cry which seems to have produced a very lively impression on the Roman mind,—“*Horribilis ille Britannorum clamor, Tori pen i Caisar,*” (‘Off with Cæsar’s head.’)

rude race and king, the double repulsion of the Julian expedition by the ancient Britons has never received due weight or consideration. It yet remains unparalleled in British history.

[ENDS]