

CHAPTER IX

The State of Germany Until the Invasion of the Barbarians, in the Time of the Emperor Decius

Extent of Germany; Climate; Origin of the Germans

The government and religion of Persia have deserved some notice from their connection with the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. We shall occasionally mention the Scythian, or Sarmatian tribes, which, with their arms and horses, their flocks and herds, their wives and families, wandered over the immense plains which spread themselves from the Caspian Sea to the Vistula, from the confines, of Persia to those of Germany. But the warlike Germans, who first resisted, then invaded, and at length overturned, the western monarchy of Rome, will occupy a much more important place in this history, and possess a stronger, and—if we may use the expression—more domestic claim to our attention and regard. The most civilized nations of modern Europe issued from the woods of Germany, and in the rude institutions of those barbarians we may still distinguish the original principles of our present laws and manners. In their primitive state of simplicity and independence the Germans were surveyed by the discerning eye, and delineated by the masterly pencil of Tacitus, the first historian who applied the science of philosophy to the study of facts. The expressive conciseness of his descriptions has deserved to exercise the diligence of innumerable antiquarians, and to excite the genius and penetration of the philosophic historians of our own times. The subject, however various and important, has already been so frequently, so ably, and so successfully discussed, that it is now grown familiar to the reader, and difficult to the writer. We shall therefore content ourselves with observing, and indeed with repeating, some of the most important circumstances of climate, manners, and institutions, which rendered the wild barbarians of Germany such formidable enemies to the Roman power.

Ancient Germany, excluding from its independent limits the province westward of the Rhine, which had submitted to the Roman yoke, extended itself over a third part of Europe. Almost the whole of modern Germany, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Livonia, Prussia, and the greater part of Poland, were peopled by the various tribes of one great nation, whose complexion, manners and language denoted a common origin, and preserved a striking resemblance. On the west, the Rhine divided ancient Germany from the Gallic provinces. On the south, the Danube divided it from the Illyrian province. A ridge of hills, rising from the Danube (called the Carpathian Mountains), covered Germany on the side of Dacia or Hungary. The eastern frontier was faintly marked by the mutual fears of the Germans and the Sarmatians, and was often confounded by the mixture of warring and confederating tribes of the two nations. In the remote darkness of the north, the ancients imperfectly descried a frozen ocean that lay beyond the Baltic Sea, and beyond the Peninsula, or islands¹ of Scandinavia.

Some ingenious writers² have suspected that Europe was much colder formerly than it is at present; and the most ancient descriptions of the climate of Germany tend exceedingly to confirm their theory. The general complaints of intense frost, and eternal winter, are perhaps little to be regarded, since we have no method of reducing to the accurate standard of the thermometer the feelings or the expressions

¹ The modern philosophers of Sweden seem agreed that the waters of the Baltic gradually sink in a regular proportion, which they have ventured to estimate at half an inch every year. Twenty centuries ago, the flat country of Scandinavia must have been covered by the sea; while the high lands rose above the waters, as so many islands of various forms and dimensions. Such indeed is the notion given us by Mela, Pliny, and Tacitus, of the vast countries round the Baltic. See in the *Bibliothèque Raisonnée*, tom. xl. and xlvi., a large abstract of Dalin's History of Sweden, composed in the Swedish language.

² In particular, Hume, the Abbé du Bos, and M. Pelloutier, *Hist. des Celtes*, tom. 1.

of an orator, born in the happier regions of Greece or Asia. But I shall select two remarkable circumstances of a less equivocal nature.

1. The great rivers that covered the Roman provinces, the Rhine and the Danube, were frequently frozen over, and capable of supporting the most enormous weights. The barbarians, who often chose that severe season for their inroads, transported, without apprehension or danger, their numerous armies, their cavalry, and their heavy wagons, over a vast and solid bridge of ice.³ Modern ages have not presented an instance of a like phenomenon.
2. The reindeer, that useful animal, from whom the savage of the North derives the best comforts of his dreary life, is of a constitution that supports, and even requires, the most intense cold. He is found on the rock of Spitzberg, within ten degrees of the Pole; he seems to delight in the snows of Lapland and Siberia; but at present he cannot subsist, much less multiply, in any country to the south of the Baltic.—Buffon Histoire Naturelle, tom. xii. pp. 79, 116.

In the time of Caesar, the reindeer, as well as the elk and the wild bull, was the native of the Hercynian forest, which then overshadowed a great part of Germany and Poland.⁴ The modern improvements sufficiently explain the causes of the diminution of the cold. These immense woods have been gradually cleared, which intercepted from the earth the rays of the sun.⁵ The morasses have been drained, and, as the soil became more cultivated, the air became more temperate. Canada, at this day, is an exact picture of ancient Germany. Although situated in the same parallel with the finest provinces of France and England, that country experiences the most rigorous cold. The reindeer are very numerous, the ground is covered with deep and lasting snow, and the great river of St. Lawrence is regularly frozen, in a season when the waters of the Seine and the Thames are usually free from ice. (Charlevoix Histoire du Canada)

It is difficult to ascertain, and easy to exaggerate, the influence of the climate of ancient Germany over the minds and bodies of the natives. Many writers have supposed without any adequate proof, that the rigorous cold of the North was favorable to long life and generative vigor, that the women were more fruitful, and the human species more prolific, than in warmer or more temperate climates.⁶ We may assert, with greater confidence, that the keen air of Germany formed the large and masculine limbs of the natives, who were, in general, of a more lofty stature than the people of the South.⁷ It also gave them a kind of strength better adapted to violent exertions than to patient labor, and inspired them with constitutional bravery, which is the result of nerves and spirits. The severity of a winter campaign, that chilled the courage of the Roman troops, was scarcely felt by these hardy children of the North,⁸ who in their turn were unable to resist the summer heats, and dissolved away in languor and sickness under the beams of an Italian sun.⁹

³ Diodorus Siculus, l. v. p. 340. Edit. Wessel. Herodian, l. vi. p. 221. Jornandes, o. 55. On the banks of the Danube, the wine, when brought to table, was frequently frozen into great lumps, *frusta vini*. Ovid. Epist. ex Porito, l. iv. 7, 9, 10. Virgil Georgic. l. iii. 355. A soldier and a philosopher who had experienced the intense cold of Thrace confirm the fact. Xenophon, Anabasis l. vii. p. 560. Edit. Hutchinson.

⁴ Caesar de Bell. Gallic. vi. 23, etc. The most inquisitive of the Germans were ignorant of its utmost limits, although some of them had traveled in it more than 60 days' journey.

⁵ Cluverius (Germania Antiqua, l. ni. a 47) investigates the small and scattered remains of the Hercynian wood.

⁶ Olaus Rudbeck asserts that the Swedish women often bear 10 or 12 children, and not uncommonly 20 or 30; but the authority of Rudbeck is much to be suspected.

⁷ Latin text omitted.

⁸ Plutarch. in Mario. The Cimbri, by way of amusement, often slid down mountains of snow on their broad shields.

⁹ The Romans made war in all climates, and by their excellent discipline were in a great measure preserved in health and vigor. It may be remarked that man is the only animal that can live and multiply in every country from the equator to the

There is not anywhere upon the globe a large tract of country that we have discovered destitute of inhabitants, or whose first population can be fixed with any degree of historical certainty. And yet, as the most philosophic minds can seldom refrain from investigating the infancy of great nations, our curiosity consumes itself in toilsome and disappointed efforts. When Tacitus considered the purity of the German blood, and the forbidding aspect of the country, he called those barbarians *Indigence*, or natives of the soil. We may allow with safety, and perhaps with truth, that ancient Germany was not originally peopled by any foreign colonies already formed into a political society;¹⁰ but that the name and nation received their existence from the gradual union of some wandering savages of the Hercynian woods. To assert those savages to have been the spontaneous production of the earth which they inhabited would be a rash inference, condemned by religion and unwarranted by reason.

Such rational doubt is but ill suited with the genius of popular vanity. According to Olaus Rudbeck, a professor of the University of Upsal,¹¹ whatever is celebrated either in history or fable this zealous patriot ascribes to his country. From Sweden (which formed so considerable a part of ancient Germany) the Greeks themselves derived their alphabetical characters, astronomy, and religion. Of that delightful region (for such it appeared to the eyes of a native) the Atlantis of Plato, the country of the Hyperboreans, the gardens of the Hesperides, the Fortunate Islands, and even the Elysian Fields, were all but faint and imperfect transcripts. A clime so profusely favored by Nature could not long remain desert after the flood. The learned Rudbeck allows the family of Noah a few years to multiply from eight to about twenty thousand persons. He then disperses them into small colonies, to replenish the earth, and to propagate the human species. The German or Swedish detachment (which marched, if I am not mistaken, under the command of Askenaz, the son of Gomer, the son of Japhet) distinguished itself by a more than common diligence in the prosecution of this great work. The northern hive cast its swarms over the greatest part of Europe, Africa, and Asia; and (to use the author's metaphor) the blood circulated from the extremities to the heart.

The Germans' Ignorance of Letters, Art, and Agriculture

But all this well-labored system of German antiquities is annihilated by a single fact, too well attested to admit of any doubt, and of too decisive a nature to leave room for any reply. The Germans, in the age of Tacitus, were unacquainted with the use of letters;¹² and the use of letters is the principal circumstance that distinguishes a civilized people from a herd of savages incapable of knowledge or reflection. Without that artificial help, the human memory soon dissipates or corrupts the ideas entrusted to her charge; and the nobler faculties of the mind, no longer supplied with models or with materials, gradually forget their powers; the judgment becomes feeble and lethargic, the imagination languid or irregular. Fully to apprehend this important truth, let us attempt, in an improved society, to calculate the immense distance between the man of learning and the illiterate peasant. The former, by reading and reflection, multiplies his own experience, and lives in distant ages and remote countries;

poles. The hog seems to approach the nearest to our species in that privilege.

¹⁰ Tacit. German. e. 3. The emigration of the Gauls followed the course of the Danube, and discharged itself on Greece and Asia. Tacitus could discover only one inconsiderable tribe that retained any traces of a Gallic origin.

¹¹ His work, entitled *Atlantica*, is uncommonly scarce. Bayle has given two most curious extracts from it. *Republique des Lettres Janvier et Fevrier*, 1685.

¹² Tacit. Germ. ii. 19. (Latin text omitted.) We may rest contented with this decisive authority, without entering into the obscure disputes concerning the antiquity of the Runic characters. The learned Celsius, a Swede, scholar, and philosopher, was of opinion that they were nothing more than the Roman letters, with the curves changed into straight lines for the ease of engraving. See Peiloutier, *Histoire des Celtes*, 1. ii. c. 11. *Dictionnaire Diplomatique*, tom. 1. p. 223. We may add that the oldest Runic inscriptions are supposed to be of the 3rd century, and the most ancient writer who mentions the Runic characters is Venantius Fortunatus (*Carm.* vS. 18), who lived toward the end of the 6th century.

while the latter, rooted to a single spot and confined to a few years of existence, surpasses but very little his fellow-laborer the ox in the exercise of his mental faculties. The same, and even a greater, difference will be found between nations than between individuals. We may safely pronounce that without some species of writing no people has ever preserved the faithful annals of their history, ever made any considerable progress in the abstract sciences, or ever possessed, in any tolerable degree of perfection, the useful and agreeable arts of life.

Of these arts, the ancient Germans were wretchedly destitute. They passed their lives in a state of ignorance and poverty, which it has pleased some declaimers to dignify with the label of 'virtuous simplicity.' Modern Germany is said to contain about 2,300 walled towns.¹³ In a much wider extent of country, the geographer Ptolemy could discover no more than 90 places which he decorates with the name of cities;¹⁴ though, according to our ideas, they would but ill deserve that splendid title. We can only suppose them to have been rude fortifications, constructed in the center of the woods, and designed to secure the women, children, and cattle, while the warriors of the tribe marched out to repel a sudden invasion.¹⁵ But Tacitus asserts, as a well-known fact, that the Germans, in his time, had *no* cities (Tacit. Germ. 15); and that they affected to despise the works of Roman industry, as places of confinement rather than of security.¹⁶ Their edifices were not even contiguous, or formed into regular villas.¹⁷ Each barbarian fixed his independent dwelling on the spot to which a plain, a wood, or a stream of fresh water had induced him to give the preference. Stone, brick, or tiles were never employed in these slight habitations.¹⁸ They were indeed no more than low huts of a circular figure, built of rough timber, thatched with straw, and pierced at the top to leave a free passage for the smoke. In the most inclement winter, the hardy German was satisfied with a scanty garment made of the skin of some animal. The nations who dwelt toward the North clothed themselves in furs; the women manufactured for their own use a coarse kind of linen. (Tacit. Germ. 17) The game of various sorts, with which the forests of Germany were plentifully stocked, supplied its inhabitants with food and exercise. (Tacit. Germ. 5) Their monstrous herds of cattle, less remarkable indeed for their beauty than for their utility (Caesar de Bell. Gall. vi. 21), formed the principal object of their wealth. A small quantity of corn was the only produce exacted from the earth. The use of orchards or artificial meadows was unknown to the Germans. Nor can we expect any improvements in agriculture from a people whose property experienced a general change by a new division of the arable lands annually, and who, in that strange operation, avoided disputes by letting most of their territory lie waste without tillage. (Tacit. Germ. 26; Caesar, vi. 22)

Gold, silver, and iron were extremely scarce in Germany. Its barbarous inhabitants lacked both skill and patience to investigate those rich veins of silver which have so liberally rewarded the attention of the princes of Brunswick and Saxony. Sweden, which now supplies Europe with iron, was equally ignorant of its own riches; and the appearance of the arms of the Germans furnished a sufficient proof how little iron they were able to bestow on what they must have deemed the noblest use of that metal. The various transactions of peace and war had introduced some Roman coins (chiefly silver) among the neighbors of the Rhine and Danube. But the more distant tribes were absolutely unacquainted with the use of money, carried on their confined traffic by the exchange of commodities, and prized their rude

¹³ Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains, tom. iii. p. 228. The author of that very curious work is, if I am not misinformed, a German by birth.

¹⁴ The Alexandria Geographer is often criticized by the accurate Cluverius. Vol. 1-12

¹⁵ See Caesar, and Whitaker's History of Manchester, vol. i.

¹⁶ When the Germans commanded the Ubii of Cologne to cast off the Roman yoke, and with their new freedom to resume their ancient manners, they insisted on the immediate demolition of the walls of the colony. Tacit. Hist. iv. 64.

¹⁷ The straggling villages of Silesia are several miles in length. Cluver. 1. 1. c. 13.

¹⁸ One hundred and forty years after Tacitus, a few more regular structures were erected near the Rhine and Danube. Herodian, 1. vii. p. 234.

earthen vessels as of equal value with the silver vases, the presents of Rome to their princes and ambassadors. (Tacit. Germ. 6) To a mind capable of reflection, such leading facts convey more instruction than a tedious detail of subordinate circumstances. The value of money has been settled by general consent to express our wants and property, as letters were invented to express our ideas. Both of these institutions have contributed to multiply the objects they were designed to represent by giving a more active energy to the powers and passions of human nature. The use of gold and silver is in a great measure factitious; but it would be impossible to enumerate the important and various services which agriculture, and all the arts, have received from iron, when tempered and fashioned by the operation of fire and the dexterous hand of man. Money, in a word, is the most universal incitement, iron the most powerful instrument, of human industry; and it is very difficult to conceive by what means a people, neither actuated by the one, nor seconded by the other, could emerge from the grossest barbarism.¹⁹

Their Indolence and Taste for Strong Liquors

If we contemplate a savage nation in any part of the globe, a supine indolence and a carelessness of futurity will be found to constitute their general character. In a civilized state, every faculty of man is expanded and exercised; and the great chain of mutual dependence connects and embraces the several members of society. The most numerous portion of it is employed in constant and useful labor. The select few, placed by fortune above that necessity, can, however, fill up their time by the pursuits of interest or glory, by the improvement of their estate or of their understanding, by the duties, the pleasures, and even the follies of social life. The Germans were not possessed of these varied resources. The care of the house and family, the management of the land and cattle, were delegated to the old and the infirm, to women and slaves. The lazy warrior, destitute of every art that might employ his leisure hours, consumed his days and nights in an animal gratification of sleep and food. And yet, by a wonderful diversity of Nature (according to the remark of a writer who had pierced into its darkest recesses), the same barbarians are by turns the most indolent and the most restless of mankind. They delight in sloth yet detest tranquillity. (Tacit. Germ. 15) The languid soul, oppressed with its own weight, anxiously required some new and powerful sensation; and war and danger were the only amusements adequate to its fierce temper. The sound that summoned the German to arms was grateful to his ear. It roused him from his uncomfortable lethargy, gave him an active pursuit, and, by strong exercise of the body, and violent emotions of the mind, restored him to a more lively sense of his existence. In the dull intervals of peace, these barbarians were very addicted to intense hunting and excessive drinking. The hunting inflamed their passions, the drinking extinguished their reason. Both relieved them from the pain of thinking. They gloried in passing whole days and nights at table; and the blood of friends and relations often stained their numerous and drunken assemblies. (Tacit. Germ. 22, 23) Their debts of honor (for in that light they have transmitted to us those of play) they discharged with the most romantic fidelity. The desperate gamester, who had staked his person and liberty on a last throw of the dice, patiently submitted to the decision of fortune, and suffered himself to be bound, chastised, and sold into remote slavery by his weaker but more lucky antagonist.²⁰

Strong beer, liquor extracted with very little art from wheat or barley, and corrupted (as it is strongly expressed by Tacitus) into a certain semblance of wine, was sufficient for the gross purposes

¹⁹ It is said that the Mexicans and Peruvians, without the use of either money or iron, had made a very great progress in the arts. Those arts, and the monuments they produced, have been strangely magnified. *Recherches sur les Americains*, tom. ii. p. 15

²⁰ Tacit. Germ. 24. The Germans might borrow the *arts* of play from the Romans, but the *passion* is wonderfully inherent in the human species.

of German debauchery. But those who had tasted the rich wines of Italy, and afterward of Gaul, sighed for that more delicious species of intoxication. They attempted not, however (as has since been executed with so much success), to naturalize the vine on the banks of the Rhine and Danube; nor did they endeavor to procure by industry the materials of an advantageous commerce. To solicit by labor what might be taken by force was esteemed unworthy of the German spirit. (Tacit. Germ. 14) The intemperate thirst of strong liquors often urged the barbarians to invade the provinces on which art or nature had bestowed those much-envied presents. The Tuscan who betrayed his country to the Celtic nations, attracted them into Italy by the prospect of the rich fruits and delicious wines, the productions of a happier climate. (Plutarch. in Camillo; T. liv. v. 33) And in the same manner the German auxiliaries, invited into France during the civil wars of the sixteenth century, were allured by the promise of plenteous quarters in the provinces of Champagne and Burgundy. (Dubos. Hist. de la Monar. Franc. i. p. 193) Drunkenness, the most illiberal, but not the most dangerous, of our vices, was sometimes capable, in a less civilized state of mankind, of occasioning a battle, a war, or a revolution.

Population, Freedom, Assemblies of the People, Authority of the Princes and Magistrates

The climate of ancient Germany has been mollified, and the soil fertilized, by the labor of ten centuries from the time of Charlemagne. The same extent of ground that at present maintains, in ease and plenty, a million of husbandmen and artificers, was unable to supply a hundred thousand lazy warriors with the simple necessaries of life.²¹ The Germans abandoned their immense forests to the exercise of hunting, employed in pasturage the most considerable part of their lands, bestowed on the small remainder a rude and careless cultivation, and then accused the scantiness and sterility of a country that refused to maintain the multitude of its inhabitants. When the return of famine severely admonished them of the importance of the arts, the national distress was sometimes alleviated by the emigration of a third, perhaps, or a fourth parts of their youth.²² The possession and the enjoyment of property are the pledges that bind a civilized people to an improved country. But the Germans, who carried with them what they valued most, their arms, cattle, and women, cheerfully abandoned the vast silence of their woods for the unbounded hopes of plunder and conquest. The innumerable swarms that issued, or seemed to issue, from the great storehouse of nations, were multiplied by the fears of the vanquished, and by the credulity of succeeding ages. And from facts thus exaggerated, an opinion was gradually established, and has been supported by writers of distinguished reputation, that, in the age of Caesar and Tacitus, the inhabitants of the North were far more numerous than they are in our days.²³ A more serious inquiry into the causes of population seems to have convinced modern philosophers of the falsehood, and indeed the impossibility, of the supposition. To the names of Mariana arid of Machiavel,²⁴ we can oppose the equal names of Robertson and Hume. (Robertson's Charles V., Hume's Political Essays)

A warlike nation like the Germans, without cities, letters, arts, or money, found some compensation for this savage state in the enjoyment of liberty. Their poverty secured their freedom, since our desires and our possessions are the strongest fetters of despotism. Says Tacitus:

²¹ The Helvetian nation, which issued from the country called Switzerland, contained, of every age and sex, 368,000 persons (Cesar de Bell Gall. i. 29). At present, the number of people in the Pays de Vaud (a small district on the banks of the Leman Lake, much more distinguished for politeness than for industry) amounts to 112,591. See an excellent tract of M. Muret, in the Memoires de la Societ  de Bern.

²² Paul Diaconus, a. 1, 2, 3. Machiavel, Davila, and the rest of Paul's followers, represent these emigrations too much as regular and concerted measures.

²³ Sir William Temple and Montesquieu have indulged, on this subject, the usual liveliness of their fancy.

²⁴ Machiavel Hist di Firenze, I. i. Mariana Hist Hispan. 1. v. c. 1

Among the Suiones riches are held in honor. They are therefore subject to an absolute monarch, who, instead of entrusting his people with the free use of arms, as is practiced in the rest of Germany, commits them to the safe custody not of a citizen, or even of a freedman, but of a slave. The neighbors of the Suiones, the Sitones, are sunk even below servitude; they obey a woman.²⁵

In the mention of these exceptions, the great historian sufficiently acknowledges the general theory of government. We are only at a loss to conceive by what means riches and despotism could penetrate into a remote corner of the North and extinguish the generous flame that blazed with such fierceness on the frontier of the Roman provinces. Or how the ancestors of those Danes and Norwegians, so distinguished in latter ages by their unconquered spirit, could thus tamely resign the great character of German liberty.²⁶ Some tribes, however, on the coast of the Baltic, acknowledged the authority of kings, though without relinquishing the rights of men (Tacit. Germ. c. 43). But in the far greater part of Germany, the form of government was a democracy, tempered indeed, and controlled, not so much by general and positive laws, as by the occasional ascendant of birth or valor, of eloquence or superstition. (Tacit. Germ. c. 11, 12, 13, etc)

Civil governments, in their first institutions, are voluntary associations for mutual defense. To obtain the desired end, it is absolutely necessary that individuals should think themselves obliged to submit their private opinion and actions to the judgment of the greater number of his associates. The German tribes were contented with this crude but liberal outline of political society. As soon as a youth, born of free parents, had attained the age of manhood, he was introduced into the general council of his countrymen, solemnly invested with a shield and spear, and adopted as an equal and worthy member of the military commonwealth. The assembly of the warriors of the tribe was convened at stated seasons, or on sudden emergencies. The trial of public offences, the election of magistrates, and the great business of peace and war were determined by its independent voice. Sometimes, indeed, these important questions were previously considered, and prepared in a more select council of the principal chieftains.²⁷ The magistrates might deliberate and persuade, the people only could resolve and execute; and the resolutions of the Germans were for the most part hasty and violent. Barbarians accustomed to place their freedom in gratifying the present passion, and their courage in overlooking all future consequences, turned away with indignant contempt from the remonstrance of justice and policy, and it was the practice to signify, by a hollow murmur, their dislike of such timid counsels. But whenever a more popular orator proposed to vindicate the lowest citizen from either foreign or domestic injury, whenever he called upon his fellow-countrymen to assert the national honor. Or, they would chase after some enterprise full of danger and glory, a loud clashing of shields and spears expressing the eager applause of the assembly. For the Germans always met in arms, and it was constantly to be dreaded, lest an irregular multitude, inflamed with faction and strong liquors, should use their weapons to enforce, as well as declare, their furious resolves. We may recollect how often the diets of Poland have been polluted with blood, and the more numerous party has been compelled to yield to the more violent and seditious.²⁸

²⁵ Tacit. German. 44, 45. Frenshemius (who dedicated his supplement to Livy, to Christina of Sweden) thinks proper to be very angry with the Roman who expressed so very little reverence for Northern queens.

²⁶ May we not suspect that superstition was the parent of despotism? The descendants of Odin (whose race was not extinct till the year 1060) are said to have reigned in Sweden more than a thousand years. The temple of Upsal was the ancient seat of religion and empire. In the year 1153 I find a singular law, prohibiting the use and profession of arms to any except the king's guards. Is it not probable that it was colored by the pretence of reviving an old institution? Dallin's History of Sweden in the Bibliothèque Raisonnée. xl. xlv.

²⁷ Latin text omitted.

²⁸ Even in our ancient parliament, the barons often carried a question, not so much by the number of votes, as by that of their armed followers.

A general of the tribe was elected on occasions of danger; and, if the danger was pressing and extensive, several tribes concurred in the choice of the same general. The bravest warrior was named to lead his countrymen into the field, by his example rather than by his commands. But this power, however limited, was still despicable. It expired with the war, and in time of peace the German tribes acknowledged no supreme chief. (Caesar de Bell. Gall. vi. 23) Princes were, however, appointed in the general assembly, to administer justice, or rather to compose differences,²⁹ in their respective districts. When choosing magistrates, birth and merit were given equal weight.³⁰ To each was assigned, by the public, a guard, and a council of a hundred persons. The first of the princes appears to have enjoyed a pre-eminence of rank and honor that sometimes tempted the Romans to compliment him with the regal title. (Cluver Germ. Ant. 1. i. c. 38)

The comparative view of the powers of the magistrates, in two remarkable instances, is alone sufficient to represent the whole system of German manners. The disposal of the landed property within their district was absolutely vested in their hands, and they distributed it every year according to a new division. (Caesar, vi. 22; Tacit. Germ. 26) At the same time they were not authorized to punish with death, to imprison, or even to strike, a private citizen. (Tacit. Germ. 7) A people thus jealous of their persons, and careless of their possessions, must have been totally destitute of industry and the arts, but animated with a high sense of honor and independence.

Voluntary Engagements

The Germans respected only those duties that they imposed on themselves. The most obscure soldier resisted with disdain the authority of the magistrates.

The noblest youths blushed not to be numbered among the faithful companions of some renowned chief, to whom they devoted their arms and service. A noble emulation prevailed among the companions to obtain the first place in the esteem of their chief; among the chiefs, to acquire the greatest number of valiant companions. To be ever surrounded by a band of select youths, was the pride and strength of the chiefs, their ornament in peace, their defense in war. The glory of such distinguished heroes diffused itself beyond the narrow limits of their own tribe. Presents and embassies solicited their friendship, and the fame of their arms often insured victory to the party that they espoused. In the hour of danger it was shameful for the chief to be surpassed in valor by his companions; shameful for the companions not to equal the valor of their chief. To survive his fall in battle was indelible infamy. To protect his person, and to adorn his glory with the trophies of their own exploits, were the most sacred of their duties. The chiefs combated for victory, the companions for the chief. The noblest warriors, whenever their native country was sunk in the laziness of peace, maintained their numerous bands in some distant scene of action, to exercise their restless spirit, and to acquire renown by voluntary dangers. Gifts worthy of soldiers, the warlike steed, the bloody and ever victorious lance, were the rewards that the companions claimed from the liberality of their chief. The rude plenty of his hospitable board was the only pay that he could bestow or they would accept. War, rapine, and the free-will offerings of his friends, supplied the materials of this munificence. (Tacit. Germ. 13, 14.)

This institution, however it might accidentally weaken the several republics, invigorated the general character of the Germans, and even ripened among them all the virtues of which barbarians are susceptible; the faith and valor, the hospitality and the courtesy, so conspicuous long afterward in the ages of chivalry. The honorable gifts, bestowed by the chief on his brave companions, have been supposed, by an ingenious writer, to contain the first rudiments of the fiefs, distributed, after the conquest of the Roman provinces, by the barbarian lords among their vassals, with a similar duty of

²⁹ Latin text omitted.

³⁰ Latin text omitted.

homage and military service.³¹ These conditions are, however, very repugnant to the maxims of the ancient Germans, who delighted in mutual presents; but without imposing, or accepting, the weight of obligations.³²

In the days of chivalry (or more properly, of romance), all the men were brave, and all the women were chaste. Notwithstanding, the latter of these virtues is acquired and preserved with much more difficulty than the former. This was ascribed, almost without exception, to the wives of the ancient Germans. Polygamy was not practiced, except among the princes, and among them only for the sake of multiplying their alliances. Divorces were prohibited by manners rather than by laws. Adulteries were punished as rare and unforgivable crimes; nor did example and fashion justify seduction.³³ We may easily discover that Tacitus indulges an honest pleasure in the contrast of barbarian virtue with the dissolute conduct of the Roman ladies; yet there are some striking circumstances that give an air of truth, or at least of probability, to the conjugal faith and chastity of the Germans.

Although the progress of civilization has undoubtedly contributed to assuage the fiercer passions of human nature, it seems to have been less favorable to the virtue of chastity, whose most dangerous enemy is the softness of the mind. The refinements of life corrupt while they polish the interchange between the sexes. The elegance of dress, motion, and manners, gives a luster to beauty, and inflames the senses through the imagination. Luxurious entertainment, midnight dances, and licentious spectacles present at once temptation and opportunity to female frailty.³⁴ Poverty, solitude, and the painful cares of a domestic life secured the unpolished wives of the barbarians from such dangers. The German huts, open, on every side, to the eye of indiscretion or jealousy, were a better safeguard of conjugal fidelity than the walls, bolts, and eunuchs of a Persian harem. To this reason, another may be added of a more honorable nature. The Germans treated their women with esteem and confidence, consulted them on every occasion of importance, and fondly believed that in their breasts resided sanctity and wisdom more than human. Some of these interpreters of fate, such as Velleda, in the Batavian war, governed, in the name of the deity, the fiercest nations of Germany. (Tacit. Hist. iv. 61, 65) The rest of the women, without being adored as goddesses, were respected as the free and equal companions of soldiers; associated even by the marriage ceremony to a life of toil, of danger, and of glory.³⁵ In their great invasions, the camps of the barbarians were filled with a multitude of women, who remained firm and undaunted amid the sound of arms, the various forms of destruction, and the honorable wounds of their sons and husbands.³⁶ Fainting armies of Germans have more than once been driven back upon the enemy, by the generous despair of the women, who dreaded death much less than servitude. If the day was irrecoverably lost, they well knew how to deliver themselves and their children, with their own hands, from an insulting victor.³⁷ Heroines of such a cast may claim our admiration; but they were most assuredly neither lovely, nor very susceptible of love. While they affected to emulate the stern virtues of man, they must have resigned that attractive softness in which principally consists a woman's charm. Conscious pride taught the German females to suppress every tender emotion that stood in competition with honor, and the first honor of the sex has ever been that of

³¹ Esprit des Loix, 1. xxx. c. 5. The brilliant imagination of Montesquieu is corrected, however, by the dry cold reason of the Abbé de Mably. Observations sur l'Histoire de France, tom. i. p. 356.

³² Latin text omitted.

³³ The adulteress was whipped through the village. Neither wealth nor beauty could inspire compassion, or procure her a second husband. Germ, a 18, 18.

³⁴ Ovid considers the theatre as the best adapted to collect the beauties of Rome, and to melt them into tenderness and sensuality.

³⁵ The marriage present was a yoke of oxen, horses, and arms. Germ. c.18. Tacitus is somewhat too flowery on the subject.

³⁶ The change of *exigere* (to demand) into *exugere* (???) is a most excellent correction.

³⁷ Tacit. Germ. c. 7. Plutarch in Mario. Before the wives of the Teutones destroyed themselves and their children, they had offered to surrender on condition that they should be received as the slaves of the vestal virgins.

chastity. The sentiments and conduct of these high-spirited matrons, may, at once, be considered as a cause, as an effect, and as a proof of the general character of the nation. Female courage, however it may be raised by fanaticism or confirmed by habit, can be only a faint and imperfect imitation of the manly valor that distinguishes the age or country in which it may be found.

Religion; Its Effect in Peace and War

The religious system of the Germans—if the wild opinions of savages can deserve that name—was dictated by their wants, fears, and ignorance.³⁸ They adored the great visible objects and agents of nature: the Sun and Moon, and Fire and the Earth; together with those imaginary deities who were supposed to preside over the most important occupations of human life. They were persuaded that, by some ridiculous arts of divination, they could discover the will of the superior beings, and that human sacrifices were the most precious and acceptable offering to their altars. Some applause has been hastily bestowed on the sublime notion, entertained by that people, of the Deity, whom they neither confined within the walls of a temple, nor represented, by any human figure. But when we recollect that the Germans were unskilled in architecture, and totally unacquainted with the art of sculpture, we shall readily assign the true reason of a scruple which arose not so much from a superiority of reason, as from a want of ingenuity. The only temples in Germany were dark and ancient groves, consecrated by the reverence of succeeding generations. Their secret gloom, the imagined residence of an invisible power, by presenting no distinct object of fear or worship, impressed the mind with a still deeper sense of religious horror.³⁹ The priests, crude and illiterate as they were, had been taught by experience the use of every artifice that could preserve and fortify impressions so well suited to their own interest.

The same ignorance, which renders barbarians incapable of conceiving or embracing the useful restraints of laws, exposes them naked and unarmed to the blind terrors of superstition. The German priests, improving this favorable temper of their countrymen, had assumed a jurisdiction, even in temporal concerns, which the magistrate could not venture to exercise. The haughty warrior patiently submitted to the lash of correction, when it was inflicted, not by any human power, but by the immediate order of the god of war. (Tacit. Germania, c. 7) The defects of civil policy were sometimes supplied by the interposition of ecclesiastical authority. The latter was constantly exerted to maintain silence and decency in the popular assemblies; and was sometimes extended to a more enlarged concern for the national welfare. A solemn procession was occasionally celebrated in the present countries of Mecklenburgh and Pomerania. The unknown symbol of the Earth, covered with a thick veil, was placed on a carriage drawn by cows. In this manner the goddess, whose common residence was in the isle of Rugen, visited several adjacent tribes of her worshippers. During her progress the sound of war was hushed, quarrels were suspended, arms laid aside, and the restless Germans had an opportunity of tasting the blessings of peace and harmony. (Tacit. Germania, c. 40) The truce of God, so often and so ineffectually proclaimed by the clergy of the eleventh century, was an obvious imitation of this ancient custom. (Robertson's Hist. of Char. V. vol. i. note 10)

But the influence of religion was far more powerful to inflame than to moderate the fierce passions of the Germans. Interest and fanaticism often prompted its ministers to sanctify the most daring and the most unjust enterprises, by the approval of Heaven, and full assurances of success. The consecrated

³⁸ Tacitus has employed a few lines, and Cluverius 124 pages, on this obscure subject. The former discovers in Germany the gods of Greece and Rome. The latter is positive that, under the emblems of the sun, the moon, and the fire, his pious ancestors worshipped the Trinity in unity.

³⁹ The sacred wood, described with such sublime horror by Lucan, was in the neighborhood of Marseilles but there were many of the same kind in Germany.

standards, long revered in the groves of superstition, were placed in the front of the battle⁴⁰ The hostile army was devoted with dire execrations to the gods of war and thunder. (Tacit. Annal. xiii. 57) In the faith of soldiers (and such were the Germans) cowardice is the most unpardonable of sins. A brave man was the worthy favorite of their martial deities; the wretch who had lost his shield was alike banished from the religious and the civil assemblies of his countrymen. Some tribes of the north seem to have embraced the doctrine of transmigration,⁴¹ others imagined a gross paradise of immortal drunkenness.⁴² All agreed that a life spent in arms, and a glorious death in battle, were the best preparations for a happy futurity either in this world or the next.

The Bards

The immortality so vainly promised by the priests was in some degree conferred by the bards. That singular order of men has most deservedly attracted the notice of all who have attempted to investigate the antiquities of the Celts, Scandinavians, and Germans. Their genius and character, as well as the reverence paid to that important office have been sufficiently illustrated. But we cannot so easily express, or even conceive, the enthusiasm of arms and glory, which they kindled in the breast of their audience. Among a polished people, a taste for poetry is rather an amusement of the fancy than a passion of the soul. And yet, when in calm retirement we peruse the combats described by Homer or Tasso, we are insensibly seduced by the fiction, and feel a momentary glow of warrior spirit. But how faint, how cold is the sensation which a peaceful mind can receive from solitary study! It was in the hour of battle, or in the feast of victory, that the bards celebrated the glory of heroes of ancient days, the ancestors of those warlike chieftains who listened with transport to their artless but animated strains. The view of arms and of danger heightened the effect of the military song. The passions that it tended to excite, the desire of fame, and the contempt of death were the habitual sentiments of a German mind.⁴³

Such was the situation, and such were the manners, of the ancient Germans. Their climate, their want of learning, of arts, and of laws, their notions of honor, of gallantry, and of religion, their sense of freedom, impatience of peace, and thirst of enterprise, all contributed to form a people of military heroes. And yet we find that, during more than 250 years that elapsed from the defeat of Varus to the reign of Decius, these formidable barbarians made few considerable attempts, and not any material impression, on the luxurious and enslaved provinces of the empire. Their progress was checked by their want of arms and discipline, and the intestine divisions of ancient Germany diverted their fury.

Causes That Stopped the Germans' Progress

It has been observed, with ingenuity, and not without truth, that the command of iron soon gives a nation the command of gold. But the rude tribes of Germany, alike destitute of both those valuable metals, were reduced slowly to acquire, by their unassisted strength, the possession of the one as well as the other. The face of a German army displayed their poverty of iron. Swords, and the longer kind of

⁴⁰ Tacit. Germ. c. 1. These standards were only the heads of wild beasts.

⁴¹ Caesar, Diodorus, and Lucan seem to ascribe this doctrine to the Gauls, but M. Pelloutier (*Histoire des Celtes*, 1. lli. c. 18) labors to reduce their expressions to a more orthodox sense.

⁴² Concerning this gross but alluring doctrine of the Edda, see Fable xx, in the curious version of that book, published by M. Mallet, in his *Introduction to the History of Denmark*.

⁴³ Tacit. Germ. e. 3. Diodor. Sicul. l. v. Strabo, l. iv. p. 197. The classical reader may remember the rank of Demodocus in the Phaeacian court, and the ardor infused by Tyrtus into the fainting Spartans. Yet there is little probability that the Greeks and the Germans were the same people. Much learned trifling might be spared if our antiquarians would condescend to reflect that similar manners will naturally be produced by similar situations.

lances, they could seldom use. Their *frameae* (as they called them in their own language) were long spears headed with a sharp but narrow iron point, and which, as occasion required, they either darted from a distance or pushed in close onset. With this spear, and with a shield, their cavalry was contented. A multitude of darts, scattered⁴⁴ with incredible force, were an additional resource of the infantry. Their military dress, when they wore any, were nothing more than a loose mantle. A variety of colors were the only ornament of their wooden or osier shields. Few of the chiefs were protected by breastplates, and fewer by helmets. The horses of Germany were neither beautiful, swift, nor practiced in the skilful evolutions of Roman training. Yet several of the nations obtained renown by their cavalry. In general, however, the principal strength of the Germans consisted in their infantry,⁴⁵ which was drawn up in several deep columns, according to the distinction of tribes and families. Impatient of fatigue or delay, these half-armed warriors rushed to battle with dissonant shouts and disordered ranks. Sometimes, by the effort of native valor, prevailed over the constrained and more artificial bravery of the Roman mercenaries. But as the barbarians poured forth their whole souls on the first onset, they knew not how to rally or to retire. A repulse was a sure defeat; and a defeat was most commonly total destruction. Consider the complete armor of the Roman soldiers, their discipline, exercises, evolutions, fortified camps, and military engines. It appears a just matter of surprise how the naked and unassisted valor of the barbarians could dare to encounter in the field the strength of the legions and various troops of auxiliaries that seconded their operations. The contest was too unequal, till the introduction of luxury had enervated the vigor and a spirit of disobedience and sedition had relaxed the discipline of the Roman armies. The introduction of barbarian auxiliaries into those armies was a measure attended with very obvious dangers, as it might gradually instruct the Germans in the arts of war and of policy. Although they were admitted in small numbers and with the strictest precaution, the example of Civilis was proper to convince the Romans that the danger was not imaginary, and that their precautions were not always sufficient.⁴⁶ During the civil wars that followed Nero's death, that artful and intrepid Batavian, whom his enemies condescended to compare with Hannibal and Sertorius (Tacit. Hist. iv. 13)—like them, he had lost an eye—formed a great design of freedom and ambition. Eight Batavian cohorts, renowned in the wars of Britain and Italy, came together under his flag. He introduced an army of Germans into Gaul, prevailed on the powerful cities of Treves and Langres to embrace his cause, defeated the legions, destroyed their fortified camps, and employed against the Romans the military knowledge which he had acquired in their service. When at length, after an obstinate struggle, he yielded to the power of the empire, Civilis secured himself and his country by an honorable treaty. The Batavians still continued to occupy the islands of the Rhine,⁴⁷ the allies not the servants of the Roman monarchy.

Dissension

The strength of ancient Germany appears formidable when we consider the effects that might have been produced by its united effort. The wide extent of country might very possibly contain a million warriors, all of whom of age to bear arms of a temper to use them. But this fierce multitude, incapable of executing any plan of national greatness, was agitated by various and often hostile intentions. Germany was divided into more than 40 independent states. Even in each state the union of the several

⁴⁴ Tacit. Germ. c. 6. Either that historian used a vague expression, or he meant that they were thrown at random.

⁴⁵ It was their principal distinction from the Sarmatians, who generally fought on horseback.

⁴⁶ The relation of this enterprise occupies a great part of the fourth and fifth books of the History of Tacitus, and is more remarkable for its eloquence than clarity. Sir Henry Saville has observed several inaccuracies.

⁴⁷ It was contained between the two branches of the old Rhine, as they subsisted before art and nature changed the face of the country. Cluver. Germ. Antiq. I iii. c. 30, 37

tribes was extremely loose and precarious. The barbarians were easily provoked; they knew not how to forgive an injury, much less an insult; their resentments were bloody and implacable. The casual disputes that so frequently happened in their tumultuous parties of hunting or drinking were sufficient to inflame the minds of whole nations; the private feud of any considerable chieftains diffused itself among their followers and allies. To chastise the insolent, or to plunder the defenseless, were alike causes of war. The most formidable states of Germany affected to encompass their territories with a wide frontier of solitude and devastation. The awful distance preserved by their neighbors, attested the terror of their arms, and in some measure defended them from the danger of unexpected incursions. (Caesar de Bell. Gall. 1. vi. 23)

Dissension Fomented By Rome

Writes Tacitus:

The Bructeri were totally exterminated by the neighboring tribes,⁴⁸ provoked by their insolence, allured by the hopes of spoil, and perhaps inspired by the tutelary deities of the empire. More than 60,000 barbarians were destroyed in our sight, for our entertainment, and not by Roman arms. May the nations, enemies of Rome, ever preserve this enmity to each other! We have now attained the utmost verge of prosperity,⁴⁹ and have nothing left to demand of Fortune, except the discord of these barbarians.⁵⁰

These sentiments, less worthy of the humanity than of the patriotism of Tacitus, express the invariable maxims of the policy of his countrymen. They deemed it a much safer expedient to divide than to combat the barbarians, from whose defeat they could derive neither honor nor advantage. The money and negotiations of Rome insinuated themselves into the heart of Germany. Every art of seduction was used with dignity, to conciliate those nations whom their proximity to the Rhine or Danube might render the most useful friends, as well as the most troublesome enemies. Chiefs of renown and power were flattered by the most trifling presents, which they received either as marks of distinction or as the instruments of luxury. In civil dissension, the weaker faction endeavored to strengthen its interest by entering into secret connections with the governors of the frontier provinces. Every quarrel among the Germans was fomented by the intrigues of Rome; and every plan of union and public good was defeated by the stronger bias of private jealousy and interest.⁵¹

Union Against Marcus Antoninus

The general conspiracy which terrified the Romans under the reign of Marcus Antoninus comprehended almost all the nations of Germany, and even Sarmatia, from the mouth of the Rhine to that of the Danube.⁵² It is impossible for us to determine whether this hasty confederation was formed by necessity, reason, or by passion. But we may rest assured that the barbarians were neither allured by the indolence, nor provoked by the ambition, of the Roman monarch. This dangerous invasion required

⁴⁸ They are mentioned, however, in the 4th and 5th centuries as a tribe of Pranks by Nazarius, Ammianus, Claudian, etc., Cluver. Germ. Antiq. iii. C. 13.

⁴⁹ *Urgentibus* is the common reading, but good sense, Lipsius, and some MSS declare for *Vergentibus*.

⁵⁰ Tacit. Germania, c. 33. The pious Abbé de la Bleterie is very angry with Tacitus, talks of the devil who was a murderer from the beginning, etc., etc.

⁵¹ Many traces of this policy may be discovered in Tacitus and Dion; many more may be inferred from the principles of human nature.

⁵² Hist. August. p. 31. Ammian. Marcellin. 1. xxxi. c. 5. Aurel. Victor. The emperor Marcus was reduced to selling the rich furniture of the palace, and to enlist slaves and robbers.

all the firmness and vigilance of Marcus. He fixed generals of ability in the several stations of attack, and assumed in person the conduct of the most important province on the Upper Danube. After a long and doubtful conflict the spirit of the barbarians was subdued. The Quadi and the Marcomanni,⁵³ who had taken the lead in the war, were the most severely punished in its catastrophe. They were commanded to retire five miles⁵⁴ from their own banks of the Danube, and to deliver up the flower of the youth, who were immediately sent into Britain, a remote island, where they might be secure as hostages, and useful as soldiers. (Dion, 1. lxxi. and lxxii) On the frequent rebellions of the Quadi and Marcomanni, the irritated emperor resolved to reduce their country to a province. His designs were disappointed by death. This formidable league, however, the only one that appears in the two first centuries of the Imperial history, was entirely dissipated, without leaving any traces behind in Germany.

The German Tribes; Numbers

In the course of this introductory chapter, we have confined ourselves to the general outlines of the manners of Germany, without attempting to describe or to distinguish the various tribes that filled that great country in the time of Caesar, Tacitus, or Ptolemy. As the ancient, or as new tribes successively present themselves in the series of this history, we shall concisely mention their origin, situation, and particular character. Modern nations are fixed and permanent societies, connected among themselves by laws and government, bound to their native soil by arts and agriculture. The German tribes were voluntary and fluctuating associations of soldiers, almost of savages. The same territory often changed its inhabitants in the tide of conquest and emigration. The same communities, uniting in a plan of defense or invasion, bestowed a new title on their new confederacy. The dissolution of an ancient confederacy restored to the independent tribes their peculiar but long-forgotten name. A victorious state often communicated its own name to a vanquished people. Sometimes crowds of volunteers flocked from all parts to the standard of a favorite leader. His camp became their country, and some circumstance of the enterprise soon gave a common denomination to the mixed multitude. The distinctions of the ferocious invaders were perpetually varied by them, and confounded by the astonished subjects of the Roman Empire.⁵⁵

Wars, and the administration of public affairs, are the principal subjects of history; but the number of persons interested in these busy scenes is very different, according to the different condition of mankind. In great monarchies, millions of obedient subjects pursue their useful occupations in peace and obscurity. The attention of the Writer, as well as of the Reader, is solely confined to a court, a capital, a regular army, and the districts that happen to be the occasional scene of military operations. But a state of freedom and barbarism, the season of civil commotion, or the situation of petty republics, raises almost every member of the community into action, and consequently into notice. The irregular divisions, and the restless motions, of the people of Germany, dazzle our imagination, and seem to multiply their numbers.⁵⁶ The profuse enumeration of kings and warriors, of armies and nations, inclines us to forget that the same objects are continually repeated under a variety of titles. The most splendid of these have been frequently lavished on the most worthless objects.

⁵³ The Marcomanni, a colony, who, from the banks of the Rhine, occupied Bohemia and Moravia, had once erected a great and formidable monarchy under their king Maroboduus, Strabo, 1. vii. Veil. Pat. ii. 105. Tacit. Annal. II. 63.

⁵⁴ Wotton (Hist. of Rome, p. 166) increases the prohibition to ten times the distance. His reasoning is specious, but not conclusive. Five miles were sufficient for a fortified barrier.

⁵⁵ See an excellent dissertation on the origin and migrations of nations, in the *Mom. de l'Acad. des Inscript.*, tom. xviii. pp. 48—71. It is seldom that the antiquarian and the philosopher are so happily blended.

⁵⁶ Should we suspect that Athens contained only 21,000 citizens and Sparta no more than 39,000? See Hume and Wallace on the number of mankind in ancient and modern times.

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