

Chapter IX: State Of Germany Until The Barbarians.--Part I.

The State Of Germany Till The Invasion Of The Barbarians In The Time Of The Emperor Decius.

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, [1001] 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, a 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, [1002] the first of historians who applied the science of philosophy to the study of facts. The expressive conciseness of his descriptions has served 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, of manners, and of institutions, which rendered the wild barbarians of Germany such formidable enemies to the Roman power.

[Footnote 1001: The Scythians, even according to the ancients, are not Sarmatians. It may be doubted whether Gibbon intended to confound them.--M. ----The Greeks, after having divided the world into Greeks and barbarians. divided the barbarians into four great classes, the Celts, the Scythians, the Indians, and the Ethiopians. They called Celts all the inhabitants of Gaul. Scythia extended from the Baltic Sea to the Lake Aral: the people enclosed in the angle to the north-east, between Celtica and Scythia, were called Celto-Scythians, and the Sarmatians were placed in the southern part of that angle. But these names of Celts, of Scythians, of Celto-Scythians, and Sarmatians, were invented, says Schlozer, by the profound cosmographical ignorance of the Greeks, and have no real ground; they are purely geographical divisions, without any relation to the true affiliation of the different races. Thus all the inhabitants of Gaul are called Celts by most of the ancient writers; yet Gaul contained three totally distinct nations, the Belgae, the Aquitani, and the Gauls, properly so called. *Hi omnes lingua institutis, legibusque inter se differunt.* Caesar. Com. c. i. It is thus the Turks call all Europeans Franks. Schlozer, *Allgemeine Nordische Geschichte*, p. 289. 1771. Bayer (*de Origine et priscis Sedibus Scytharum*, in *Opusc.*

p. 64) says, Primus eorum, de quibus constat, Ephorus, in quarto historiarum libro, orbem terrarum inter Scythas, Indos, Aethiopas et Celtas divisit. Fragmentum ejus loci Cosmas Indicopleustes in topographia Christiana, f. 148, conservavit. Video igitur Ephorum, cum locorum positus per certa capita distribuere et explicare constitueret, insigniorum nomina gentium vastioribus spatiis adhibuisse, nulla mala fraude et successu infelici. Nam Ephoro quoquomodo dicta pro exploratis habebant Graeci plerique et Romani: ita gliscebatur error posteritate. Igitur tot tamque diversae stirpis gentes non modo intra communem quandam regionem definitae, unum omnes Scytharum nomen his auctoribus subierunt, sed etiam ab illa regionis adpellatione in eandem nationem sunt conflatae. Sic Cimmericorum res cum Scythicis, Scytharum cum Sarmaticis, Russicis, Hunnicis, Tataricis commiscentur.--G.]

[Footnote 1002: The Germania of Tacitus has been a fruitful source of hypothesis to the ingenuity of modern writers, who have endeavored to account for the form of the work and the views of the author. According to Luden, (Geschichte des T. V. i. 432, and note,) it contains the unfinished and disarranged for a larger work. An anonymous writer, supposed by Luden to be M. Becker, conceives that it was intended as an episode in his larger history. According to M. Guizot, "Tacite a peint les Germains comme Montaigne et Rousseau les sauvages, dans un acces d'humeur contre sa patrie: son livre est une satire des moeurs Romaines, l'eloquente boutade d'un patriote philosophe qui veut voir la vertu la, ou il ne rencontre pas la mollesse honteuse et la depravation savante d'une vieille societe." Hist. de la Civilisation Moderne, i. 258.--M.]

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. [1] 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, ancient Germany was divided by the Rhine from the Gallic, and on the south, by the Danube, from the Illyrian, provinces of the empire. A ridge of hills, rising from the Danube, and 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 islands [1001] of Scandinavia.

[Footnote 1: Germany was not of such vast extent. It is from Caesar, and more particularly from Ptolemy, (says Gatterer,) that we can know what was the state of ancient Germany before the wars with the Romans had changed the positions of the tribes. Germany, as changed by these wars, has been described by Strabo, Pliny, and Tacitus. Germany, properly so called, was bounded on the west by the Rhine, on the east by the Vistula, on the north by the southern point of Norway, by Sweden, and Esthonia. On the south, the Maine and the mountains to the north of

Bohemia formed the limits. Before the time of Caesar, the country between the Maine and the Danube was partly occupied by the Helvetians and other Gauls, partly by the Hercynian forest but, from the time of Caesar to the great migration, these boundaries were advanced as far as the Danube, or, what is the same thing, to the Suabian Alps, although the Hercynian forest still occupied, from north to south, a space of nine days' journey on both banks of the Danube. "Gatterer, Versuch einer all-gemeinen Welt-Geschichte," p. 424, edit. de 1792. This vast country was far from being inhabited by a single nation divided into different tribes of the same origin. We may reckon three principal races, very distinct in their language, their origin, and their customs. 1. To the east, the Slaves or Vandals. 2. To the west, the Cimmerians or Cimbri. 3. Between the Slaves and Cimbrians, the Germans, properly so called, the Suevi of Tacitus. The South was inhabited, before Julius Caesar, by nations of Gaulish origin, afterwards by the Suevi.--G. On the position of these nations, the German antiquaries differ. I. The Slaves, or Sclavonians, or Wendish tribes, according to Schlozer, were originally settled in parts of Germany unknown to the Romans, Mecklenburgh, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Upper Saxony; and Lusatia. According to Gatterer, they remained to the east of the Theiss, the Niemen, and the Vistula, till the third century. The Slaves, according to Procopius and Jornandes, formed three great divisions. 1. The Venedi or Vandals, who took the latter name, (the Wenden,) having expelled the Vandals, properly so called, (a Suevian race, the conquerors of Africa,) from the country between the Memel and the Vistula. 2. The Antes, who inhabited between the Dneister and the Dnieper. 3. The Sclavonians, properly so

called, in the north of Dacia. During the great migration, these races advanced into Germany as far as the Saal and the Elbe. The Sclavonian language is the stem from which have issued the Russian, the Polish, the Bohemian, and the dialects of Lusatia, of some parts of the duchy of Luneburgh, of Carniola, Carinthia, and Styria, &c.; those of Croatia, Bosnia, and Bulgaria. Schlozer, *Nordische Geschichte*, p. 323, 335. II. The Cimbric race. Adelung calls by this name all who were not Suevi. This race had passed the Rhine, before the time of Caesar, occupied Belgium, and are the Belgae of Caesar and Pliny. The Cimbrians also occupied the Isle of Jutland. The Cymri of Wales and of Britain are of this race. Many tribes on the right bank of the Rhine, the Guthini in Jutland, the Usipeti in Westphalia, the Sigambri in the duchy of Berg, were German Cimbrians. III. The Suevi, known in very early times by the Romans, for they are mentioned by L. Corn. Sisenna, who lived 123 years before Christ, (Nonius v. Lancea.) This race, the real Germans, extended to the Vistula, and from the Baltic to the Hercynian forest. The name of Suevi was sometimes confined to a single tribe, as by Caesar to the Catti. The name of the Suevi has been preserved in Suabia. These three were the principal races which inhabited Germany; they moved from east to west, and are the parent stem of the modern natives. But northern Europe, according to Schlozer, was not peopled by them alone; other races, of different origin, and speaking different languages, have inhabited and left descendants in these countries. The German tribes called themselves, from very remote times, by the generic name of Teutons, (Teuten, Deutschen,) which Tacitus derives from that of one of their gods, Tuisco. It appears more probable that it means merely men,

people. Many savage nations have given themselves no other name. Thus the Laplanders call themselves Almag, people; the Samoiedes Nilletz, Nissetsch, men, &c. As to the name of Germans, (Germani,) Caesar found it in use in Gaul, and adopted it as a word already known to the Romans. Many of the learned (from a passage of Tacitus, de Mor Germ. c. 2) have supposed that it was only applied to the Teutons after Caesar's time; but Adelung has triumphantly refuted this opinion. The name of Germans is found in the Fasti Capitolini. See Gruter, Iscrip. 2899, in which the consul Marcellus, in the year of Rome 531, is said to have defeated the Gauls, the Insubrians, and the Germans, commanded by Virdomar. See Adelung, Aelt. Geschichte der Deutsch, p. 102.--Compressed from G.]

[Footnote 1001: 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 Bibliotheque Raisonnee, tom. xl. and xlv. a large abstract of Dalin's History of Sweden, composed in the Swedish language. * Note: Modern geologists have rejected this theory of the depression of the Baltic, as inconsistent with recent observation. The considerable changes which have taken place on its shores, Mr. Lyell, from actual observation now decidedly attributes to the regular and uniform elevation of the land.--Lyell's Geology, b. ii. c. 17--M.]

Some ingenious writers [2] 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, 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 which 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. [4] In the time of Caesar the reindeer, as well as the elk and the wild bull, was a native of the Hercynian forest, which then overshadowed a great part of Germany and Poland. [5] 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. [6] The morasses have been drained, and, in proportion as the soil has been cultivated, the air has become 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. [7]

[Footnote 2: In particular, Mr. Hume, the Abbe du Bos, and M. Pelloutier. *Hist. des Celtes*, tom. i.]

[Footnote 3: Diodorus Siculus, l. v. p. 340, edit. Wessel. Herodian, l. vi. p. 221. Jornandes, c. 55. On the banks of the Danube, the wine, when brought to table, was frequently frozen into great lumps, *frusta vini*. Ovid. *Epist. ex Ponto*, l. iv. 7, 9, 10. Virgil. *Georgic*. l. iii. 355. The fact is confirmed by a soldier and a philosopher, who had experienced the intense cold of Thrace. See Xenophon, *Anabasis*, l. vii. p. 560, edit. Hutchinson. Note: The Danube is constantly frozen over. At Pesth the bridge is usually taken up, and the traffic and communication between the two banks carried on over the ice. The Rhine is likewise in many parts passable at least two years out of five. Winter campaigns are so unusual, in modern warfare, that I recollect but one instance of an army crossing either river on the ice. In the thirty years' war, (1635,) Jan van Werth, an Imperialist partisan, crossed the Rhine from

Heidelberg on the ice with 5000 men, and surprised Spiers. Pichegru's memorable campaign, (1794-5,) when the freezing of the Meuse and Waal opened Holland to his conquests, and his cavalry and artillery attacked the ships frozen in, on the Zuyder Zee, was in a winter of unprecedented severity.--M. 1845.]

[Footnote 4: Buffon, Histoire Naturelle, tom. xii. p. 79, 116.]

[Footnote 5: Caesar de Bell. Gallic. vi. 23, &c. The most inquisitive of the Germans were ignorant of its utmost limits, although some of them had travelled in it more than sixty days' journey. * Note: The passage of Caesar, "parvis renonum tegumentis utuntur," is obscure, observes Luden, (Geschichte des Teutschen Volkes,) and insufficient to prove the reindeer to have existed in Germany. It is supported however, by a fragment of Sallust. Germani intectum rhenonibus corpus tegunt.--M. It has been suggested to me that Caesar (as old Gesner supposed) meant the reindeer in the following description. Est bos cervi figura cujus a media fronte inter aures unum cornu existit, excelsius magisque directum (divaricatum, qu?) his quae nobis nota sunt cornibus. At ejus summo, sicut palmae, rami quam late diffunduntur. Bell. vi.--M. 1845.]

[Footnote 6: Cluverius (Germania Antiqua, l. iii. c. 47) investigates the small and scattered remains of the Hercynian wood.]

[Footnote 7: 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, and most have allowed, though, as it should seem, 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. [8] 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, [9] 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, [10] 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. [11]

[Footnote 8: Olaus Rudbeck asserts that the Swedish women often bear ten or twelve children, and not uncommonly twenty or thirty; but the authority of Rudbeck is much to be suspected.]

[Footnote 9: *In hos artus, in haec corpora, quae miramur, excrescunt. Tacit Germania, 3, 20. Cluver. l. i. c. 14.*]

[Footnote 10: Plutarch. in Mario. The Cimbri, by way of amusement, often did down mountains of snow on their broad shields.]

[Footnote 11: 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 which can live and multiply in every country from the equator to the poles. The hog seems to approach the nearest to our species in that privilege.]