

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

There is not any where upon the globe a large tract of country, which 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 was disposed to pronounce 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; [12] 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.

[Footnote 12: Facit. Germ. c. 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. * Note: The Gothini, who must not be confounded with the Gothi, a Suevian tribe. In the time of Caesar many other tribes of Gaulish origin dwelt along the course of the Danube, who could not long resist the attacks of the Suevi. The Helvetians, who dwelt on the borders of the Black Forest, between the Maine and the

Danube, had been expelled long before the time of Caesar. He mentions also the Volci Tectosagi, who came from Languedoc and settled round the Black Forest. The Boii, who had penetrated into that forest, and also have left traces of their name in Bohemia, were subdued in the first century by the Marcomanni. The Boii settled in Noricum, were mingled afterwards with the Lombards, and received the name of Boio Aarii (Bavaria) or Boiovarii: var, in some German dialects, appearing to mean remains, descendants. Compare Malte B-m, Geography, vol. i. p. 410, edit 1832--M.]

Such rational doubt is but ill suited with the genius of popular vanity. Among the nations who have adopted the Mosaic history of the world, the ark of Noah has been of the same use, as was formerly to the Greeks and Romans the siege of Troy. On a narrow basis of acknowledged truth, an immense but rude superstructure of fable has been erected; and the wild Irishman, [13] as well as the wild Tartar, [14] could point out the individual son of Japhet, from whose loins his ancestors were lineally descended. The last century abounded with antiquarians of profound learning and easy faith, who, by the dim light of legends and traditions, of conjectures and etymologies, conducted the great grandchildren of Noah from the Tower of Babel to the extremities of the globe. Of these judicious critics, one of the most entertaining was Olaus Rudbeck, professor in the university of Upsal. [15] 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,

their astronomy, and their 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.

[Footnote 13: According to Dr. Keating, (History of Ireland, p. 13, 14,) the giant Portholanus, who was the son of Seara, the son of Esra, the son of Sru, the son of Framant, the son of Fathaclan, the son of Magog, the son of Japhet, the son of Noah, landed on the coast of Munster the 14th day of May, in the year of the world one thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight. Though he succeeded in his great enterprise, the loose behavior of his wife rendered his domestic life very unhappy, and provoked him to such a degree, that he killed--her favorite greyhound. This, as the learned historian very properly observes, was the first instance of female falsehood and infidelity ever known in Ireland.]

[Footnote 14: Genealogical History of the Tartars, by Abulghazi Bahadur Khan.]

[Footnote 15: His work, entitled Atlantica, is uncommonly scarce. Bayle has given two most curious extracts from it. *Republique des Lettres Janvier et Fevrier*, 1685.]

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; [16] 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 intrusted 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; whilst 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; and 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.

[Footnote 16: Tacit. Germ. ii. 19. *Literarum secreta viri pariter ac foeminae ignorant.* 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, a scholar, and a 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 Pelloutier, *Histoire des Celtes*, l. ii. c. 11.

Dictionnaire Diplomatique, tom. i. p. 223. We may add, that the oldest Runic inscriptions are supposed to be of the third century, and the most ancient writer who mentions the Runic characters is Venantius Fortunatus, (*Carm.* vii. 18,) who lived towards the end of the sixth century. *Barbara fraxineis pingatur Runa tabellis.* * Note: The obscure subject of the Runic characters has exercised the industry and ingenuity of the modern scholars of the north. There are three distinct theories; one, maintained by Schlozer, (*Nordische Geschichte*, p. 481, &c.,) who considers their sixteen letters to be a corruption of the Roman alphabet, post-Christian in their date, and Schlozer would attribute their introduction into the north to the Alemanni. The second, that of Frederick Schlegel, (*Vorlesungen uber alte und neue Literatur*,) supposes that these characters were left on the coasts of the Mediterranean and

Northern Seas by the Phoenicians, preserved by the priestly castes, and employed for purposes of magic. Their common origin from the Phoenician would account for their similarity to the Roman letters. The last, to which we incline, claims much higher and more venerable antiquity for the Runic, and supposes them to have been the original characters of the Indo-Teutonic tribes, brought from the East, and preserved among the different races of that stock. See Ueber Deutsche Runen von W. C. Grimm, 1821. A Memoir by Dr. Legis. Fundgruben des alten Nordens. Foreign Quarterly Review vol. ix. p. 438.--M.]

Of these arts, the ancient Germans were wretchedly destitute. [1601] They passed their lives in a state of ignorance and poverty, which it has pleased some declaimers to dignify with the appellation of virtuous simplicity. Modern Germany is said to contain about two thousand three hundred walled towns. [17] In a much wider extent of country, the geographer Ptolemy could discover no more than ninety places which he decorates with the name of cities; [18] 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 centre of the woods, and designed to secure the women, children, and cattle, whilst the warriors of the tribe marched out to repel a sudden invasion. [19] But Tacitus asserts, as a well-known fact, that the Germans, in his time, had no cities; [20] and that they affected to despise the works of Roman industry, as places of confinement rather than of security. [21] Their edifices were not even contiguous, or formed into regular villas; [22] 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. Neither stone, nor brick, nor tiles, were employed in these slight habitations. [23] 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 towards the North clothed themselves in furs; and the women manufactured for their own use a coarse kind of linen. [24] The game of various sorts, with which the forests of Germany were plentifully stocked, supplied its inhabitants with food and exercise. [25] Their monstrous herds of cattle, less remarkable indeed for their beauty than for their utility, [26] 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 prosperity every year experienced a general change by a new division of the arable lands, and who, in that strange operation, avoided disputes, by suffering a great part of their territory to lie waste and without tillage. [27]

[Footnote 1601: Luden (the author of the *Geschichte des Teutschen Volkes*) has surpassed most writers in his patriotic enthusiasm for the virtues and noble manners of his ancestors. Even the cold of the climate, and the want of vines and fruit trees, as well as the barbarism of the inhabitants, are calumnies of the luxurious Italians. M. Guizot, on the other side, (in his *Histoire de la Civilisation*, vol. i. p. 272, &c.,)

has drawn a curious parallel between the Germans of Tacitus and the North American Indians.--M.]

[Footnote 17: 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. (De Pauw.)]

[Footnote 18: The Alexandrian Geographer is often criticized by the accurate Cluverius.]

[Footnote 19: See Caesar, and the learned Mr. Whitaker in his History of Manchester, vol. i.]

[Footnote 20: Tacit. Germ. 15.]

[Footnote 21: 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. "Postulamus a vobis, muros coloniae, munimenta servitii, detrahatis; etiam fera animalia, si clausa teneas, virtutis obliviscuntur." Tacit. Hist. iv. 64.]

[Footnote 22: The straggling villages of Silesia are several miles in length. See Cluver. 1. i. c. 13.]

[Footnote 23: One hundred and forty years after Tacitus, a few more

regular structures were erected near the Rhine and Danube. Herodian, 1. vii. p. 234.]

[Footnote 24: Tacit. Germ. 17.]

[Footnote 25: Tacit. Germ. 5.]

[Footnote 26: Caesar de Bell. Gall. vi. 21.]

[Footnote 27: Tacit. Germ. 26. Caesar, vi. 22.]

Gold, silver, and iron, were extremely scarce in Germany. Its barbarous inhabitants wanted 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 borderers 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 earthen vessels as of equal value with the silver vases, the presents of Rome to their princes and ambassadors. [28] 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 our property, as letters were invented to express our ideas; and both these institutions, by giving a more active energy to the powers and passions of human nature, have contributed to multiply the objects they were designed to represent. 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. [29]

[Footnote 28: Tacit. Germ. 6.]

[Footnote 29: 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. See *Recherches sur les Americains*, tom. ii. p. 153, &c]

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 the animal gratifications 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, they detest tranquility. [30] 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 immoderately addicted to deep gaming and excessive drinking; both of which, by different means, the one by inflaming their passions, the other by extinguishing their reason, alike 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. [31] 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.

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[Footnote 30: Tacit. Germ. 15.]

[Footnote 31: Tacit. Germ. 22, 23.]

[Footnote 32: Id. 24. The Germans might borrow the arts of play from the Romans, but the passion is wonderfully inherent in the human species.]

Strong beer, a 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 of German debauchery. But those who had tasted the rich wines of Italy, and afterwards 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 ravished by arms, was esteemed unworthy of the German spirit. [33] 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. [34] 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. [35] 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.

[Footnote 33: Tacit. Germ. 14.]

[Footnote 34: Plutarch. in Camillo. T. Liv. v. 33.]

[Footnote 35: Dubos. Hist. de la Monarchie Francoise, tom. i. p. 193.]

The climate of ancient Germany has been modified, and the soil fertilized, by the labor of ten centuries from the time of Charlemagne. The same extent of ground which 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. [36] 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 part of their youth. [37] The possession and the enjoyment of property are the pledges which bind a civilized people to an improved country. But the Germans, who carried with them what they most valued, their arms, their cattle, and their 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. [38] 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 and of Machiavel, [39] we can oppose the equal names of Robertson and Hume. [40]

[Footnote 36: The Helvetian nation, which issued from a country called Switzerland, contained, of every age and sex, 368,000 persons, (Caesar de Bell. Gal. i. 29.) At present, the number of people in the Pays de Vaud (a small district on the banks of the Lemane 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 Societe de Born.]

[Footnote 37: Paul Diaconus, c. 1, 2, 3. Machiavel, Davila, and the rest of Paul's followers, represent these emigrations too much as regular and concerted measures.]

[Footnote 38: Sir William Temple and Montesquieu have indulged, on this subject, the usual liveliness of their fancy.]

[Footnote 39: Machiavel, Hist. di Firenze, l. i. Mariana, Hist. Hispan. l. v. c. 1]

[Footnote 40: Robertson's Charles V. Hume's Political Essays. Note: It is a wise observation of Malthus, that these nations "were not populous in proportion to the land they occupied, but to the food they produced." They were prolific from their pure morals and constitutions, but their institutions were not calculated to produce food for those whom they brought into being.--M--1845.]

A warlike nation like the Germans, without either 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. "Among the Suiones (says Tacitus) riches are held in honor. They are therefore subject to an absolute monarch, who, instead of intrusting his people with the free use of arms, as is practised 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." [41] 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. [42] Some tribes, however, on the coast of the Baltic, acknowledged the authority of kings, though without relinquishing the rights of men, [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. [44]

[Footnote 41: Tacit. German. 44, 45. Freinshemius (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. Note: The Suiones and the Sitones are the ancient inhabitants of Scandinavia, their name may be traced in that of Sweden; they did not belong to the race of the Suevi, but that of the non-Suevi or Cimbri, whom the Suevi, in very remote times, drove back part to the west, part to the north; they were afterwards mingled with Suevian tribes, among others the Goths, who have traces of their name and power in the isle of Gothland.--G]

[Footnote 42: 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 above 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? See Dalin's History of Sweden in the Bibliotheque Raisonnee tom. xl. and xlv.]

[Footnote 43: Tacit. Germ. c. 43.]

[Footnote 44: Id. c. 11, 12, 13, & c.]

Civil governments, in their first institution, are voluntary associations for mutual defence. To obtain the desired end, it is absolutely necessary that each individual should conceive himself obliged to submit his private opinions and actions to the judgment of the greater number of his associates. The German tribes were contented with this rude 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. [45] 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 remonstrances 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 meanest citizen from either foreign or domestic injury, whenever he called upon his fellow-countrymen to assert the national honor, or to pursue some enterprise full of danger and glory, a loud clashing of shields and spears expressed 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 those arms to enforce, as well as to 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. [46]

[Footnote 45: Grotius changes an expression of Tacitus, *pertractantur* into *Protractantur*. The correction is equally just and ingenious.]

[Footnote 46: 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 invidious. It expired with the war, and in time of peace the German tribes acknowledged not any supreme chief. [47] Princes were, however, appointed, in the general assembly, to administer justice, or rather to compose differences, [48] in their respective districts. In the choice of these magistrates, as much regard was shown to birth as to merit. [49] To each was assigned, by the public, a guard, and a council of a hundred persons, and the first of the princes appears to have enjoyed a preeminence of rank and honor which sometimes tempted the Romans to compliment him with the regal title. [50]

[Footnote 47: Caesar de Bell. Gal. vi. 23.]

[Footnote 48: *Minuunt controversias*, is a very happy expression of Caesar's.]

[Footnote 49: *Reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt.*

Tacit Germ. 7]

[Footnote 50: 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. [51] At the same time they were not authorized to punish with death, to imprison, or even to strike a private citizen. [52] 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.

[Footnote 51: Caesar, vi. 22. Tacit Germ. 26.]

[Footnote 52: Tacit. Germ. 7.]