



OXFORD JOURNALS  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS



---

British Druidism and the Roman War Policy

Author(s): W. F. Tamblyn

Source: *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Oct., 1909), pp. 21-36

Published by: [Oxford University Press](#) on behalf of the [American Historical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1835422>

Accessed: 08/12/2013 04:45

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Oxford University Press and American Historical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Historical Review*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## BRITISH DRUIDISM AND THE ROMAN WAR POLICY

IN spite of the recent revival among us of the Celtic, one is still inclined to doubt, with the vigorous writer in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1863, the claims of British Druidism to a place in sober history. Certain efforts to resuscitate the old faith have failed to catch the dull, cold ear of this scientific time. In most quarters where reason discriminates between truth and fancy, one who would start again the question of British Druidism might be met with a "Ne actum agas". Still, serious historians like Mommsen, Schiller, and Hübnér express a confident view that the Roman annexation of Britain was rendered necessary by a common religious system of insular and Continental Celts.<sup>1</sup> The tale of a British Druidism is thus invested with the guise not only of historical truth but of considerable historical significance. The Claudian invasion would appear to some extent as a kind of crusade. Paul, writing in Fleckeisen's *Jahrbücher*, 1892, declares without hesitation that "In the corporation of the Druids the Celtic nation though politically extremely divided had its centre and preserved a strong national consciousness." Mommsen<sup>2</sup> apparently pronounces the island of Anglesey to have been "the chief seat of the priestly system" of the whole Celtic race, and again, "the true focus of British national and religious resistance".<sup>3</sup> Jung styles Anglesey "a centre of the Celtic agitation".<sup>4</sup> Let us then examine once again the evidence of ancient writers and medieval story as to this British Druidism and its effect upon Roman war-policy.

<sup>1</sup> Duruy's travesty of the theory is interesting. See the English translation of his *Roman History*, IV. 420-423, 497-498. Mr. Bernard Henderson (*Nero*, pp. 199, 206 ff.) also develops with some imagination the view of the German historians. Does he, however, on p. 199, think that it was or was not advisable in 43 A.D. to conquer Britain? Professor Bury in his *History of the Roman Empire from 27 B. C. to 180 A. D.*, pp. 259, 400, agrees with the German theory, but is a little more cautious in its expression. Professor Schuckburgh, *Augustus*, p. 152, has no faith at least in the story that Augustus seriously intended to invade Britain; Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit*, I. 326, is on this point non-committal for the most part.

<sup>2</sup> *Provinces*, I. 188.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 193.

<sup>4</sup> *Romanische Landschaften*, p. 280. Cf. Lefevre, *Les Gaulois*, pp. 92 ff., for more of such ideas. Some of these writers are "men of imagination haunted by the idea of a Celtic race", as Dottin says, *L'Antiquité Celtique*, p. 357. In their terse accounts of the Claudian invasion Mr. Pelham and Mr. Furneaux pass over the religious issue in silence.

It is clear from a number of sources that in Gaul, at any rate, the Celts had in their progress towards civilization evolved a distinct learned aristocracy of bards, priests (*επισεις*), and philosopher-magicians called druids, "very wise ones";<sup>5</sup> who exercised considerable power among the people. The druids, or the leading element in this privileged class, were an organized hierarchy under an arch-druid.<sup>6</sup> They administered the sacred things in general of the Gauls, professed magic, and pretended to large metaphysical or cosmogonic knowledge orally preserved. This aristocracy of blood, culture, and sacred power united the Gallic tribes in a loose religious union. And as the religious beliefs of the Gauls seem to have differed little from the general Aryan polytheism,<sup>7</sup> the term Druidism must denote not so much a unique system of theology as the peculiar organization of a hierarchic caste that kept a secret magic-lore and conducted the religious side of Gallic life.<sup>8</sup>

This Gallic Druidism is well attested. But the light shed by ancient writers on a pan-Celtic, or a separate British Druidism, or on the religious motive of the Claudian invasion of 43 A. D., is faint enough. Nothing at all was said by the ancients or by any one before our day of Claudius as assailing Druidism in Britain.<sup>9</sup> Those ancient writers who described Britain as almost sundered from the rest of the world were painfully ignorant of the purpose now attributed by some historians to Claudius. If that emperor did aim at the final destruction of Druidism by invading its stronghold in Britain, he left his educated subjects singularly in the dark as to what he really intended or accomplished. For no ancient writer assigned to the Claudian expedition any other motive than that of aggrandizement and unreasoning desire of military fame. And if this silence be regarded as proving not the non-existence of the pan-Celtic Druidism as a system, but only that it had little or no political consequence, it need only be added that the vague indifference of the ancients to the political bearings of Druidism is not more striking than their silence regarding the bare existence of such a pan-Celtic system.

But we have two splendid testimonies, it may be argued, for the existence of British Druidism, if not for an organized pan-Celtic

<sup>5</sup> Holder, *Altkeltischer Sprachschatz*.

<sup>6</sup> Caesar, *B. G.*, VI. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, VI. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ausonius's "Stirpe druidarum" with the Hebrew Levites. Mommsen (IV. 226) lays stress on the hierarchic condition of Gaul. Cf. Dottin, *L'Antiquité Celtique*, p. 289, "the hierarchy of the Druids".

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Niebuhr's brief notice of the invasion, *Ancient Ethnography*, II. 322-323.

union and its greater menace to the Roman Empire. There is the word of Caesar,<sup>10</sup> and the reference in the thirtieth chapter of the fourteenth book of Tacitus's *Annals*.

Amidst a variety of pleasant tales that he heard in Gaul, Caesar gives us one all too brief scrap of story suggesting a British origin for druidic theology and ritual. He further gives us to understand that young Gauls wishing to become fully equipped druids commonly ("plerumque") went to Britain to study, let us say, at the headquarters or university of the order.

In this passing notice one thing is perfectly clear and certain. It is that Caesar does not speak from any actual observation of his own, but from hearsay or the narratives of previous writers. His account of the Hercynian unicorn is of the same kind, and more confidently set down.

Caesar had written from his own observation, "neque enim temere praeter mercatores illo adit quisquam."<sup>11</sup> He did not summon any druid graduates of a British university to corroborate or supplement the scanty information of traders about the unknown island.<sup>12</sup> Yet such druids, the best educated of the Gallic aristocracy, men of weight and prominence, would have been particularly well fitted to give a detailed account of Britain from an intimate personal acquaintance. Divitiacus, a druid, was on the Roman side! Caesar does not put forward in VI. 13, written or compiled along with the following chapters certainly not long after the British campaigns, any personal experience in support of his "disciplina in Britannia reperta atque inde in Galliam translata esse existimatur." He had been equally silent in describing Britain<sup>13</sup> as to its being the glorious high-seat of Druidism. It may be safely concluded, at least, that pan-Druidism, if it existed, did not influence Caesar's invasion of Britain.<sup>14</sup>

The story told to Caesar that Druidism originated in Britain and spread thence to Gaul should not be too seriously taken. The Britons had scarcely any intercourse with the mainland up to Caesar's time, and what they had was passive.<sup>15</sup> Even the Belgic or Brythonic Britons of the South and East were mostly in a savage condition. The Goidels and Silures of the West were still less

<sup>10</sup> *B. G.*, VI. 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, IV. 20.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, V. 12-14.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Edinburgh Review* (1863), p. 45. But one writer assures us that "Caesar had recognized the necessity of conquering in Britain." Cf. Hübner, *Römische Herrschaft in Westeuropa*, pp. 9, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Strabo, II. 5, 8, etc.

advanced.<sup>16</sup> Rhys, therefore, does not believe that Britons ever sent missionaries to Gaul.<sup>17</sup> And it is almost impossible to believe that young Gauls “commonly” or ever went to learn from rude tutors in the swamps and glens of Siluria.

Probably the Gallic druids themselves were responsible for Caesar’s “disciplina . . . existimatur”.<sup>18</sup> Like some other philosophies that of the druids, in order to surround it with greater sanctity, was given out by its professors to have come from beyond the seas. Ammianus observes<sup>19</sup> that part of the Gauls were said by the druids to have come from “extimis insulis”.<sup>20</sup> We may then connect the stories of racial and religious origins and regard them as equally baseless. Perhaps we may compare the “White Island” of the Brahmins which also some enthusiasts have identified with Britain. The British Isles were almost fabulous before Caesar’s time. Pelloutier<sup>21</sup> relates an ancient story from Procopius<sup>22</sup> that they were the Druidic Islands of the Blest. They were, then, naturally seized upon as the sacred source of druidic science; or it may easily be that Caesar or his informants before him, hearing the Gallic legend of the “extimis insulis” and some story of religious pilgrimage, confused with Britain such doubtful islands as those referred to by Strabo,<sup>23</sup> or any of the magic islands of the Atlantic (especially about Britain, the unknown world) to which the fancy of early romancers had clung.<sup>24</sup> The idea of a sacred island haunts the venerable pages of antiquity with a wonderful persistence.<sup>25</sup>

Besides Caesar, Tacitus is cited as authority for the existence of the druidic system in Britain. Referring to the attack of Paulinus

<sup>16</sup> *B. G.*, V. 14; and see Rhys, *Celtic Britain*, ch. 1., also Elton, *Origins*, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> *Celtic Britain*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Dottin, *L’Antiquité Celtique*, p. 280, says, “We must hold to the opinion reported by Caesar that the teaching of the Druids came from Britain.” On what grounds “must we”? Why this absolute “must”? Especially when Dottin says elsewhere, p. 262 (making little of Ammianus, XV. 9. 8, and Caesar, *B. G.*, VI. 14), that the doctrine of immortality “far from being the result of the meditations of the philosophers of Britain, is Indo-European”. Cf. also what he says on p. 275, quoted below, p. 35, note 93.

<sup>19</sup> XV. 9. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Owen, *The Kymry*, p. 8, thinks that “Atlantis” may be meant.

<sup>21</sup> *Histoire des Celtes*, II. 185 ff. Cf. Plutarch, *De Def. Orac.*, 18, cited on p. 28, below.

<sup>22</sup> *De Bell. Get.*, IV. 20.

<sup>23</sup> IV. 4. 6.

<sup>24</sup> As reported in Strabo, III. 5. 11; Dio, LXXXVI. 12; Mela, III. 6; etc. Ammianus, living later, when Britain was well known, did not venture to render his vague “extimis insulis” into “Britannia”.

<sup>25</sup> Plutarch, *De Def. Orac.*, 18; Tac., *Germ.*, 40; *id.*, *Ann.*, XIV. 30.

on Anglesey,<sup>26</sup> Tacitus describes the island not as the awful shrine of pan-Celtic or British Druidism, nor even as a local religious centre, but only as “vires rebellibus ministrantem”. In introducing the subject of Mona<sup>27</sup> Tacitus does not mention that it was a sacred island; but he does say that it was populous and a refuge for fugitives. This is a very mild characterization, for a rhetorician, of the Celtic Mecca, “the focus of the national and religious resistance”, as Mommsen says. But then follows a very interesting chapter,<sup>28</sup> the gospel as it were, of British Druidism, describing the demonstration of “Druids praying and cursing, and women running about dressed in funereal black, with torches in their hands and hair wildly flowing”. But the Romans easily quelled a “mob of fanatics and women”, cut down the sacred “groves”, and broke the altars defiled with human gore.

Here at least, then, if Tacitus wrote all of this and if his information was correct, we have positive proof of the existence of druids in Anglesey at the time of Nero. And in connection with this we should consider the old Irish word *drui* (sorcerer) and the Welsh *derwydd*, as proving perhaps that there were in ancient times druids among the savage, skin-clad Britons. There were, then, let us say, British druids. Were the druids general among the British tribes? We do not know. Did the name druid denote the same kind of person in both Britain and Gaul? The writer of *Ann.*, XIV. 30, may seem to identify his Anglesey *druidae* with the great druids of Gaul. Did Druidism, the theological science and institution of an “educated” hierarchic caste, Druidism as known to Roman writers, exist to any extent, however geographically limited, in Britain? Or were the British druids at best the counterpart in some respects of the Teutonic king-priests,<sup>29</sup> or the Gallic *οὐάταις* or *μάνταις* described by Strabo and Diodorus Siculus, rather than of the Gallic druids, who were in a sense regularly graduated theologians and organized beyond the limits of canton and tribe? May the British druids have been usually mere sorcerers or medicine-men, as far removed in dignity from the Gallic druids as the despised private augurs at Rome from the stately augural college recognized as a public institution?<sup>30</sup> In short, does the mere co-

<sup>26</sup> *Agric.*, 14.

<sup>27</sup> *Ann.*, XIV. 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, XIV. 30.

<sup>29</sup> Professor Rhys himself says (*Celtic Heathendom*, p. 231): “Druidism and Kingship went hand in hand” in Ireland. Dr. Fowler, in his edition of Adamnan’s *Vita S. Columbae*, p. 10, notes that the Irish *druidh* is equivalent to the Latin *magus*. Cf. foot-note 93, p. 35, below.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Edinburgh Review* for April, 1882, p. 404.

incidence that the word "druid" (wise man), used by both insular<sup>31</sup> and Continental Celts, and which was applied to the wise men or magi in both Britain and Gaul, prove that the magi of Britain and Gaul were of the same organization or alike organized or nearly identical in character? This is not proved, nor probable.

The question whether the *druidae* of Anglesey belonged to any religious organization, whether there was a British Druidism, receives no direct answer from the classical writers. But there are several considerations which point to a negative.

In the first place no ancient writer so much as hints at any priest-directed national religious movement among the Britons against Roman rule. In Gaul the Emperors Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius are reported as suppressing the druids. Tacitus tells how in 69 A. D. the call of the druids went forth to awaken in the Gallic Celts strange memories of the nation's glorious past and stir them to revolt.<sup>32</sup> But political and economic considerations, and not religious feeling, are assigned by Tacitus and Dio to the British revolt of 61, although, if the attack on Anglesey had been the violation of a national sanctuary, the bitterness thus aroused could not have been passed over in the *Agricola*, 15, where the causes of the British uprising are set forth. But Tacitus does not suggest that the disaffected Britons were "exasperated by Paulinus' attack on the most sacred seat of the national religion", or that "the old vehement Celtic faith burst forth for the last time."<sup>33</sup> He says only that the Britons (of Norfolk and Suffolk)<sup>34</sup> took courage "in the absence of the legate", who by going to so *distant* a place as Anglesey gave them a chance to plot behind his back. Not because of druidic ties binding Norfolk and Anglesey in sympathy, but because, on the contrary, those localities were so wide asunder, did the men of Norfolk, according to Tacitus, rise in rebellion.

Secondly, neither Tacitus nor any other ancient writer except Caesar<sup>35</sup> anywhere alludes to a British Druidism; nor are *druidae* of the Britons-in-general anywhere mentioned. In *Ann.*, XIV. 30, the *druidae* appear as part of the paraphernalia of the holy isle alone. The following are the ancient references to Druidism as being a Gallic institution:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> I do not know whether the insular use of the word preceded or followed the reading of Caesar and Pliny in Britain and Ireland. See pp. 35-36, below.

<sup>32</sup> *Hist.*, IV. 54.

<sup>33</sup> Mommsen, *Provinces*, I. 195.

<sup>34</sup> The rebellion of 61 was local, not broadly national.

<sup>35</sup> See above.

<sup>36</sup> Of course no one would contend that any one of the following passages helps much to disprove a British Druidism; but the combined effect is impressive, and Pliny, XXX. 4, may be noted in particular, along with Mela.

- Cicero: *De Divinatione*, I. 41: "In Gallia Druidae sunt."
- Strabo, IV. 4. 4, describes Druidism in Gaul at some length.
- Diodor. Sic., V. 31, gives an account of the Gallic druids.
- Mela, III. 2 and 18, gives an account of the Gallic druids. He has nothing to say in III. 6 of British druids.
- Lucan, bk. I., ll. 450 ff., refers to the druids of Gaul.
- Pliny, *H. N.*, XXIX. 12. 1: "Galliarum Druidae". *H. N.*, XXIV. 62. 1: "Druidae Gallorum". *H. N.*, XVI. 95. 1: "Galliarum admiratio . . . Druidae (ita suos appellant magos)", etc. *H. N.*, XXX. 4; "Tiberius sustulit Druidas Gallorum." Cf. the following paragraph in which Pliny refers to the excessive superstitions of the Britons comparing their practice of magic ("eam artem", i. e., *magicam*, "celebrat") to that of Persia, not Gaul.<sup>37</sup> The druids, in Pliny's opinion, are a peculiarly Gallic order of magicians. To no other magicians does Pliny give this name.
- Tacitus, *Hist.*, IV. 54, shows how the centre, at any rate, of Druidism and of druidic opposition to Rome was in Gaul. Cf. Plin., *H. N.*, XXX. 4, and Sueton., *Claud.*, 25. We never hear of a similar organized and organizing force in Britain.
- Sueton., *Claud.*, 25: "Druidarum religionem apud Gallos penitus aboleuit." If Claudius invaded Britain in order to crush the national spirit of the Gallic Celts by striking a death blow at the heart of the druidic system in Britain, Suetonius seems to have been unaware of such a policy. If it had been so, he would not have said "apud Gallos", merely.
- Ammianus, XV. 9: Account of the druids of Gaul.
- Origen, *Contra Cels.*, I. 16, mentions the "Druids of the Gauls".
- Id.*, *Philos.*, 2: "τοὺς παρὰ Κελτοῖς δρυΐδας". *Ibid.*, 25: "Δρυΐδαι οἱ ἐν Κελτοῖς", etc.
- Diog. Laert., Proem., 4:<sup>38</sup> "Among the Keltoi", i. e., Germans, etc., "and the Gauls the so-called Druids". Britons were of course not included among the "Keltoi" (cf. Strabo, IV. 4. 5, IV. 5. 1-3). Diogenes is mistaken as to the Germans, just as Caesar seems mistaken as to a British Druidism, and the evidence for a British and a German Druidism is almost equal.
- Dio Chrysos., *Or.*, 49: "Κελτοὶ δὲ οὗς ὀνομάζουσι Δρυΐδας"; another error as to a German Druidism.<sup>39</sup>
- Clem. Alexand., *Strom.*, I. 15, in a list of the magi of the different nations, enumerates "the Prophets of the Egyptians, the Chaldees of Assyria, the Druids of the Gauls, and the philosophers of the Keltoi". Nothing is said of the Britons.
- Victor, *Caes.*, IV. 2: "per Galliam Druidarum famosas superstitiones".
- Cyrril. Alex., *Adv. Julian.*, bk. IV., p. 133E: "Γαλατῶν οἱ δρυΐδαι".
- Comm. Lucan.* (Usener), p. 33: "Driadae gens Germaniae . . . Driadae philosophi Gallorum". Britain at any rate excluded!
- Suidas, s. v.: "δρυΐδαι παρὰ Γαλάταις φιλόσοφοι καὶ σεμιόδοι". The good lexicographer or his authorities would seem to have lived too early to be acquainted with Britain as the headquarters of Druidism.

<sup>37</sup> That Pliny here means to refer to Britain not Druidism but the practice of magic in general is made certain by "adeo ista toto mundo consensere". Pliny could not speak of all the world as possessed by a common Druidism!

<sup>38</sup> See also citation by Steph. Byz., s. v. Δρυΐδαι.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. also below: *Comm. Lucan.* (Usener).

Neither Pliny's encyclopedia nor the dictionary called of Suidas speaks of British druids or Druidism. Both view the druids and Druidism as distinctly Gallic.

To these passages which refer Druidism explicitly to Gaul, the following should be added, in which as describing the institutions of the Britons one would expect to find some notice of their Druidism, if it existed:

Caesar, *B. G.*, V. 12-14; Strabo, IV. 1-3; Diodor. Sic., V. 21-22; Mela, III. 6 (who clearly never dreamed of druids in Ireland, either, for its inhabitants, he says, were "virtutum ignari, pietatis admodum expertes"); Tac., *Agric.*, 10-12; Solinus, c. 22; Gildas, cc. 3-4. Solinus says of the Silures that they "deos percolunt".<sup>40</sup> Though inclined to exaggeration and fond of the marvellous, Solinus does not indicate that druids of any kind existed in Britain. Dio<sup>41</sup> apparently knows no *druidae*, even of Anglesey. In Plutarch's *De Def. Orac.*, c. 18, one Demetrius, a Cilician grammarian returned from Britain, tells of magic isles just west of Britain<sup>42</sup> and of his visit, at the emperor's command, to an island next to them, "in which a few people lived, all of whom the Britons regarded as sacred". This looks like Mona, but Demetrius or Plutarch knows nothing of druids there.

It is clear that Britain was not, in the opinion of Roman writers, the chief seat of Druidism. It is almost as certain that Druidism was not known at all except as existing in Gaul.<sup>43</sup> The story related by Caesar received no credit from later Roman writers when Britain had become better known.

In the third place, Tacitus, whose *Annals* tell of Anglesey druids, does not know the origin of the Britons. If he had known of a druidic system among them he could not have failed to connect them with their Gallic brethren. Some of the tribes he traces to Spain, some to Germany, and indeed those of the southeast (the Brythons) to Gaul.<sup>44</sup> But Professor Rhys says that "there is no evidence that druidism was ever the religion of any Brythonic people."<sup>45</sup> Caesar seems to hold the same view regarding the Brythonic Belgae of the Continent,<sup>46</sup> who plumed themselves on

<sup>40</sup> This tallies with Pliny, *H. N.*, XXX. 5. In both passages the British Druidism is conspicuously absent.

<sup>41</sup> LXII. 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*, c. 67.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Facciolati's definition of the word *Druidae*.

<sup>44</sup> *Agric.*, 11.

<sup>45</sup> *Celtic Britain*, p. 69; and cf. p. 67.

<sup>46</sup> *B. G.*, VI. 13, does not include here the Belgae "in omni Gallia". Cf. VI. 12, where the Haedui and the Sequani are called the leading states of Gaul;

their German origin and customs; and the Brythons of southeastern Britain were an offshoot from the Continental Belgae.<sup>47</sup> The very name "Britannia", which replaced the older "Albion", seems to designate the land occupied by the Belgic Brythons.<sup>48</sup> The most civilized of the Britons, therefore, those "proximi Gallis",<sup>49</sup> who resembled the Continental Belgae, though a little less advanced and in the interior of the island somewhat assimilated to the more barbarous Goidels,<sup>50</sup> approached in their manner of life and institutions, at the time of Caesar, nearer to the Germans than to the Gauls proper. So, the statement of Tacitus regarding the religion of the southeastern Britons, too general in any case<sup>51</sup> to be taken as referring to so striking a phenomenon of religion as Gallic Druidism, cannot intimate the presence of that system in Britain. Simply the common naturalistic religion of the old Celts and Teutons at large, or at most the similarity between the Brythonic British and the non-druidic Belgic or Gallic religion, is indicated.<sup>52</sup> As for a Silurian or Goidelic Druidism which Professor Rhys seems to maintain, Tacitus would not have proposed an Iberian origin for the Silures, if he had known of the druidic system among them or their next-door neighbors the Ordovices.<sup>53</sup> He cannot dream of Druidism among the northern Britons, when he affirms their German affinities.<sup>54</sup> Tacitus is apparently quite unaware of either a national or a sectional British druidic system, if he finds at least three unlike peoples in the island, and, at most, suggests that "it is credible" that the *southeastern* Britons are of Gallic, *i. e.*, Belgic, origin.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, the material and social condition of the Britons, in many respects so closely resembling that of the Teutons,<sup>56</sup> might the Belgae cannot be viewed as part of Gaul. See *B. G.*, I. 1, II. 3, 1, II. 4, VI. 24, and *cf.* I. 1. 6, I. 30. He says, I. 1. 2, that the institutions of Gaul proper and Belgica differ. *Cf.* Mommsen, *History*, IV. 277-278; Froude, *Caesar*, pp. 216, 296-297; Niebuhr, *Ancient Ethnography*, II. 308.

<sup>47</sup> *B. G.*, V. 12.2; 21.1.

<sup>48</sup> See Furneaux, *Tac. Agric.*, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> *Agric.*, 11.

<sup>50</sup> *B. G.*, V. 14.

<sup>51</sup> *Agric.*, 11, "eorum sacra". And how could any one in 97 A. D. refer to Gallic Druidism as present-day *sacra*? It was extinct, as a religious system.

<sup>52</sup> See Rhys, p. 67. In 97 A. D. Gaul was as non-druidic as Belgica had been in Caesar's time; yet if Tacitus had known that Druidism ever existed in Britain he could hardly have failed to notice it as a Gallic phenomenon of that country.

<sup>53</sup> Mr. Furneaux does not admit Druidism among the Goidels of Ireland and Caledonia. *Agric.*, p. 33, n. 4. One writer excludes it from one place, another from another.

<sup>54</sup> *Agric.*, 11, "adseverant".

<sup>55</sup> More exactly he might say "Belgic". But in Tacitus's day Gauls proper and Belgae were already fused, Druidism and other former points of difference being mainly obliterated.

<sup>56</sup> Herod., III. 14; Mela, III. 51; Caes., V. 14; Solin., 22; etc.

forbid us to believe not only that the more civilized Gauls should derive their religious system from Britain, but that the Britons, especially the savage Goidels, should have made the doubtful progress to a hierarchy of quasi-theologians.

Gaidoz has argued, it is true, that the more primitive conditions of Goidelic life would constitute rather the reason why a pre-Celtic Druidism should have been in western Britain better preserved. But if, as he, Reinach, and Professor Rhys think, Druidism was the common aboriginal religion from the Baltic to Gibraltar, why should it have persisted only in a part of Gaul,<sup>57</sup> or at least have caught Roman attention only there? There it did arouse their wonder in a special way, as I have shown, though Roman writers were not very particular or discriminating in matters of barbaric religion. Dottin very reasonably rejects the pre-Celtic theory,<sup>58</sup> maintaining that the popular Gallic, rather than the Druidic, religion, was largely a survival from anterior beliefs.<sup>59</sup> And whatever Gaidoz may say about a pre-Celtic Druidism, Tacitus was clearly unaware of such a thing in the pre-Celtic Silures whom he was ready to trace to an Iberian origin. Caesar's story of British origins and of a British university is thoroughly discredited not only by his own personal observations and actions, and by the general evidence of ancient writers, but also by the remoteness and savagery of old Wales.

It would seem, then, that the druids of ancient Britain, if the single mention of Anglesey *druidae*, and the Irish and Welsh words *drui* and *derwydd* prove that they existed at all, were not members of an intertribal "educated" hierarchic caste, but king-priests, or isolated men of parts, strolling bards, or simple medicine-men—any who might possess superior intelligence or cunning, and likewise the power of beguiling themselves and others by a rude eloquence. Apparently the simple sorcerer druid ("wise one") of the old Celts, if such there was, whether he was pre-Celtic or Celtic, had stood still among the Celts who had migrated to Britain,<sup>60</sup> except perhaps in refinements of diabolical magic or cruel ritual; had disappeared, perhaps under Teutonic influence, among the Belgae who remained in Continental Belgica; but had advanced to a peculiar dignity and

<sup>57</sup> Plus a part of Britain, say Rhys and Gaidoz. T. Rice Holmes (*Ancient Britain*, London, 1907, pp. 290-291), who thinks, without showing evidence, that the Brythons had druids, implies that if they had *not*, then neither had the Goidels, who were much mixed with the Brythons, and here he seems to divine truly.

<sup>58</sup> *L'Antiquité Celtique*, p. 295.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Bertrand, *La Religion des Gaulois*, pp. 21 ff.

<sup>60</sup> Whether he went with them or was there before them. Cf. the Celts of northern Italy and Spain among whom the Romans never noticed Druidism.

intertribal caste organization in Gaul proper. The term "druid" has a technical significance as applied in Gaul, but apparently not so in Britain. Gaul had Druidism, Britain may have had her druids, as Indian tribes have had their medicine-men.

In the above paragraph it has been to some extent assumed that the mention in the *Annals* of *druidae* in Anglesey has some bearing upon the general question of British druids. But when we consider the silence of Tacitus and the other writers regarding British druids, we are led to suspect that the *druidae* of *Ann.*, XIV. 30, are out of all relation to the actual British world, being the peculiar denizens of a half unreal, sacred island. Nowhere else does Tacitus show any acquaintance with a British term "druid". The description of the Anglesey *druidae* in *Ann.*, XIV. 30, is abruptly isolated from the rest of the narrative. Even if the passage is historically accurate, it does not say anything of British druids.

To estimate the historical value of *Ann.*, XIV. 30, we should compare not only *Ann.*, XIV. 29, and *Agric.*, 14, 15, and 18, where no reference is made to the sacred character of Anglesey, but also Dio's account<sup>61</sup> of the expedition of Paulinus. Dio seems to know nothing of the druids and altars. He tells how the revolt of the Britons took place while "Paulinus the governor was on an expedition to a certain island Mona, situated close to Britain." This is cruelly prosaic. And yet Dio was not the man to miss a chance for lively writing, provided it were at all compatible with what he deemed to be historical accuracy. Moreover, Dio seems to have used for the reign of Nero the same sources as Tacitus, if not Tacitus himself.<sup>62</sup> But by this time the nearer islands of the Atlantic had evidently ceased to be fair game except for the most careless falsifiers and miracle-mongers. "Mona long covered with a mist—Mona, once hid from those who search the main".<sup>63</sup> But Anglesey had now emerged from the shadow of fable. Its people or priests could not in the third century, however it might be in the first or in the sixth and following, be painted at all conscientiously in the same magic light which transfigures in old story the Cassiterides, Thule, and other islands sacred to superstition.

But apart from the suspicious isolation of *Ann.*, XIV. 30, its own inner character,<sup>64</sup> the strong flavor of rhetoric, the suddenness with which the druids are introduced and then dropped, and the reminiscent quality of certain features<sup>65</sup> tell against its historical

<sup>61</sup> LXII. 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> Haupt, in *Philologus* (1885), pp. 145, 150, 161.

<sup>63</sup> Collins, *Ode to Liberty*.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Mahaffy's editorial note to Duruy, IV. 498.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Furneaux, *ad. loc.*

value. In the "women dressed in funereal black, looking like the Furies", there is a damning echo of Strabo's account of the Iberian Cassiterides.<sup>66</sup> The "black" or "sable garb of woe" seems to be heterodox so far as Druidism might be concerned,<sup>67</sup> but the writer follows Strabo not wisely but too well.<sup>68</sup> The sentence "nam cruore", etc., is a bald paraphrase from a passage in Diodor. Sic., V. 31. We seem to be reminded also of Lucan, bk. III., ll. 429 ff. May then the writer of this chapter, understanding that Anglesey was a sort of sacred island,<sup>69</sup> have put together passages of the old romancers, with an additional touch in the druids and their ways derived from Diodorus and Lucan, and from a hazy identification with the magician caste of Gaul, to draw his picture of a mock-supernatural, druidic scene?

One might be tempted to believe that Tacitus is not responsible for all of this chapter. Perhaps the *druidae* are too suddenly introduced: we have no hint in the preceding chapter 29 or anywhere else of the sacred character of Anglesey. Especially the trite phrase "Praesidium impositum" savors of the interpolator. It is out of joint with what follows, and is not altogether reconcilable with *Agric.*, 18. 4, "a cuius possessione revocatum Paulinum". Pfitzner's reference on this point to *Ann.*, XIV. 35, does not seem quite relevant.<sup>70</sup> The British insurrection could hardly permit Paulinus to leave men in Anglesey.<sup>71</sup> Also the passage in Jordanis<sup>72</sup> cited by Mr. Furneaux may seem to cast a shadow upon the genuineness of *Ann.*, XIV. 30: Jordanis quotes Tacitus not for "Memma's" being a sacred isle, but "metallis plurimis copiosam".<sup>73</sup> However, as Tacitus is not very accurate in military details, and as he shows generally a *penchant* towards detail-painting in vivid colors,<sup>74</sup> it is far from safe, in spite of misgivings, to assume interpolation.

<sup>66</sup> "μεγάχχλανοι . . . ποιναις".

<sup>67</sup> Pliny, XVI. 95.

<sup>68</sup> For confusion of the fictitious Cassiterides with the British Isles, see *Edinburgh Review* (1882), p. 400. Cf. Jord., *De Rebus Get.*, II., and Strabo "Κατὰ τὸ βρετανικὸν πῶς κλίμα ἰδρῦμενα". There was a notion of sorcery about the Cassiterides.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Tac., *Germ.*, 40. See also the citation from Plutarch's *De Def. Orac.*, and *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*, p. 28 above.

<sup>70</sup> Bernard Henderson, *Nero*, p. 207, explains the difficulty in a way more ingenious than convincing.

<sup>71</sup> Duruy revels in the imaginary holiness of Mona, but omits instinctively this garrison detail.

<sup>72</sup> *De Reb. Get.*, II.

<sup>73</sup> This phrase suggests again the Cassiterides, and it is possible that Tacitus himself might have had the Cassiterides and Mona confused.

<sup>74</sup> Peter, *Litteraturgeschichte*, II. 317, n. 3, quoting Ranke.

But shall we now on the strength of this suspicious passage, which, even if free from error, proves only that there was a sort of *druidae* in ancient Anglesey, and on the strength of the Gallic legend told to Caesar, for which he himself as well as later writers showed small concern, and in spite of the general testimony which indicates Druidism to have been a peculiarity of Gaul, believe nevertheless that there was a British order of druids, that it was united with the Gallic druids in a pan-Celtic system, that the Gallic druids were a mere branch of a "grand lodge" in Britain, and that this pan-Celtic religion determined the Roman invasion and annexation of the island? With the writer in the *Edinburgh Review*<sup>75</sup> and with M. Reinach<sup>76</sup> we may discard the political significance of Druidism and with it the theory put forward by some admirers of Roman imperialism to justify the blunder of half-imbecile Claudius in locking up 60,000 soldiers in Britain.

A pan-Celtic Druidism is very difficult to imagine. The testimony of antiquity, which knew neither a Celtic nation nor a Celtic religion, is against an hypothesis that would place the high-seat of Druidism in Britain. The Roman writers show no knowledge even of the British king or sorcerer druids, if such were.<sup>77</sup> The isolation of Britain is a commonplace of the ancient writers, and has been fully set forth by Freeman in his essay *Alter Orbis*. The Gallic soldiers of Aulus Plautius mutinied when ordered to Britain, not because they were going against brother Celts or co-religionists, but because they were to be banished, as it were, off the earth.<sup>78</sup> Not everyone, therefore, will accept the theory that there existed two thousand years ago a national feeling and a national religion holding Britain and Gaul so closely together as to render the conquest of the Continental Celts insecure<sup>79</sup> without the subjugation of Britain.

But, some will say, a parallel, independent British Druidism, which Professor Rhys claims rather wistfully for certain restricted parts of Britain, or at least the existence at one time of some sort of druids in the Celtic islands, may seem to be established by the voice of tradition if not of ancient literature. Professor O'Curry,

<sup>75</sup> October, 1900, p. 439.

<sup>76</sup> *Revue Celtique*, XIII. 194.

<sup>77</sup> Dottin, *L'Antiquité Celtique*, p. 270, "We have no ancient information on the Druidism of Britain." Yet Dottin is one of the believers, in a mild way.

<sup>78</sup> Dio, LX. 19.

<sup>79</sup> Indeed Gaul was well in hand by 43 A. D. For the condition of northern Gaul before that, see Jung, *Romanische Landschaften*, p. 200; Strabo, IV. 1. 2. and IV. 4. 2, cited by Arnold in his *Later Roman Commonwealth*, p. 491; and Tacitus, *Ann.*, XI. 18, "dites et inbelles".

AM. HIST. REV., VOL. XV.—3.

however, says that "our traditions of the Scottish and Irish druids are evidently derived from a time when Christianity had long been established." One early document, no less a paper than the *Confessio* of St. Patrick himself, though narrating his conversion of Ireland, particularly in chapter 18, has nothing to say of either druids or magi. The crazy legends of Celtic Britain, whose historical worthlessness is recognized by Dottin,<sup>80</sup> furnish too flimsy a basis for history. Dr. Joyce<sup>81</sup> agrees with Professor O'Curry. No Erse manuscript is earlier than about 1100 A. D., while the Latin hagiology is not explicit as to any contact between missionaries and druids: the magi spoken of were not necessarily even called druids.<sup>82</sup> The *Life* of St. Columba, for example, tells of a magus called Broichan and of other magi, but not of any druids, though Dr. Fowler takes it for granted in his edition that every time "magus" is written in the text, it means "druid". It is needless to add that the "tradition" connecting Stonehenge with Druidism is the successor of an earlier, wholly different tradition.<sup>83</sup> No ancient or early medieval writer connects the stone circles with Druidism.

"Nennius", describing himself as a Briton,<sup>84</sup> knows no druids. In his enthusiastic account of the conversion of Ireland, there is no mention of them. What do those who rely on Celtic tradition make of Geoffrey of Monmouth? A Welshman of the twelfth century, who knew not the druids! Geoffrey can tell, however, of one king-sorcerer, good old King Bladud.<sup>85</sup> Layamon and Robert of Gloucester repeated the story, like all else, after Geoffrey. But not one of the three was aware of the simple fact that Bladud was a druid! Geoffrey, Layamon, and Robert of Gloucester show us the Britons thanking their gods for victory,<sup>86</sup> and Geoffrey says that when Christianity came in under Lucius, the "flamens" and "arch-flamens" became bishops and arch-bishops.<sup>87</sup> But where were the druids turning monks, as Bertrand and others imagine? Geoffrey, Layamon, and the rest were all interested in religious matters and in things Celtic, but they are shamefully, shamelessly ignorant of Druidism and druids. The magi whom Vortigern con-

<sup>80</sup> *L'Antiquité Celtique*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>81</sup> *Social History of Ireland*, I. 219.

<sup>82</sup> See the citation from Whitley Stokes, page 35, note 93.

<sup>83</sup> See Geoffrey of Monmouth, VIII. 10 ff. and XI. 4; Layamon, *Brut*, II. 17156 ff.; Robert of Gloucester, II. 3109 ff.

<sup>84</sup> He claims also to use not only Latin chronicles, but the traditions of ancestors, and British and Scottish histories (ch. 1.). Gildas and Bede say nothing of druids.

<sup>85</sup> II. 10.

<sup>86</sup> *Historia Britonum*, IV. 8; *Brut*, II. 8071 ff.; *Chronicle*, 1208.

<sup>87</sup> IV. 19.

sults are not introduced as survivors or heirs of that glorious band which modern fancy has enthroned in ancient British oak groves; Layamon calls them "witien, world-wise monne, the wisdom cuthen"<sup>88</sup> or men who "cuthen of tho crafte the wuneth i than lufte" (astrologers).<sup>89</sup> Robert says simply "enchantors".<sup>90</sup> The astrologers of King Arthur<sup>91</sup> become in Layamon's more pious narrative tolerably Christianized:

Canunes ther weoren,  
the cuth weoren widen.  
ther wes moni god clarc,  
the wel cuthe a leore.  
Muchel heo ferden mid than crafte,  
to lokien in than leofte,  
to lokien i than steorren,  
nehhe and feorren.  
The craft is ihate  
Astronomie.

Robert leaves them out for some reason. Hunt as we may, we find no druids in these Celtic pages. The "voice of tradition" is a very modern voice.<sup>92</sup>

It would appear, in fact, that in the Dark Ages, or rather later, certain Welsh and Irish "doctors" and fablers developed views of their sorcerers or medicine-men<sup>93</sup> based on "a little learning" in

<sup>88</sup> *Brut*, ll. 15495 ff.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 15750.

<sup>90</sup> L. 2711.

<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey, *Hist. Brit.*, IX. 12.

<sup>92</sup> Dating in England from Richard of Cirencester? I find nothing said of druids by William of Malmesbury nor by Henry of Huntingdon. Henry says (bk. I.) that nobody knows how the stones came to be set up at Stonehenge nor why. He gives a somewhat detailed account of Ireland; is certain that the Scots came from Spain to Ireland. Forester editorially (p. 19, note 2) laments Henry's ignorance, *e. g.*, of the fact that "Paulinus reduced Mona and exterminated the Druids."

<sup>93</sup> See the distinctions drawn by Joyce (I. 239): Irish druids merely wizards and learned men, not priests like those of Gaul; they did not practice human sacrifice. *Cf.* p. 25, note 29, above. Dottin (p. 275) says: "It is improbable that the (Gallic) druids of Caesar's time were like their Irish confrères [I object to this word] only sorcerers and wonder-workers." On page 286 he says that in Ireland there was no hierarchy; contrast with this the Gallic hierarchy (p. 289). Whitley Stokes (*Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, p. clix): "There is nothing to show that in Ireland the druids constituted a hierarchy or a separate caste, as they are said to have done in Gaul and Britain. They seem simply to have been one species of the wizards, sorcerers or enchanters variously named in Irish *druí*, *maithmain*, *tinchilídi*, and in the Latin of the Book of Armagh *scivi*, *magi*," etc. In his edition of Adamnan's *Columba*, Dr. Fowler doubts (p. xx) that the druids of Ireland were "a distinct order". As for Wales, Professor Rhys says: "There is no proof of any formal connection between the Druidic priesthood and the bardic system as it appears in Wales in the 12th Century." *The Welsh People*, p. 255.

Caesar and Pliny and generally in the Latin literature on Gallic Druidism; possibly they were pushed on by a natural confusion of the home druids—if that *was* originally the insular sorcerers' name—with the great Gallic hierarchy; given an inch, as it seemed, by Caesar and more doubtfully by Pliny, they took a mile. As the scene of the Arthurian legends was sometimes shifted in French romance from Britain to Brittany, so very probably Druidism has been gradually transplanted from ancient Gaul to ancient Britain. We may compare also the Welsh and Irish traditions of Iberian origins based on Roman geography and on such speculations as those of Tacitus on the Silures.<sup>94</sup> Just as Christ, the saints, Achilles, and other heroes of classical antiquity mingle in the fantastic Irish sagas with the native kinglings, so it is probable that Celtic learning and fancy co-operating made Druidism their own. This is no isolated phenomenon in the realm of semi-barbaric literature.

We find, then, no sure proof from any quarter<sup>95</sup> that Druidism in the proper sense of the word or even druids ever existed in Britain. There is much reason to believe the contrary. Until there appears some real evidence that a druidic hierarchy or caste and a druidic speculative philosophy or magic did prevail in Britain, and that the Romans knew of it, one may neglect, like Mr. Pelham and Mr. Furneaux, a defense of the Claudian policy based on an improbable supposition.

W. F. TAMBLYN.

<sup>94</sup> *Quarterly Review*, April, 1885, p. 441. See page 35, n. 92, above; also Geoffrey of Monmouth; Layamon, ll. 6207 ff.; Robert of Gloucester, l. 1001.

<sup>95</sup> Brehon law proves nothing. The triple organization of the Irish learned class cannot be shown to antedate the sixth century, the age of Latin learning.