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***ANNALS
OF A FORTRESS***

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CHAPTER I.

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THE FIRST RETREAT.

Many winters, as we are told by the old men of the district, have passed since human beings first settled in the land of Ohet, a somewhat extensive valley of varying breadth, traversed by a winding stream running southward till it flows into a great river.

The sides of the valley present a series of hills of moderate height, descending by gentle slopes where it widens, and more abruptly where it narrows. On the steeper hill-sides grey crags jut out, and the ground is strewn with fragments of rock. Ascending the stream for some three hours' walk from the point where it joins the great river, we find on the right another stream separating into several small branches in a more elevated valley. In summer, some of these branches dry up, others form pools, whose banks are covered with reeds and water-lilies. The inhabitants of the vale dread this valley, which they believe to be haunted by evil spirits. It is dangerous to wander there, because of the number of bogs covered over with leaves and decaying branches in which the unwary sink. The forest in this valley is so dense, the plants and bushes are so thickly interlaced with the trunks and branches of dead trees, that the rays of the sun hardly penetrate through it, and only illuminate pools of water covered with a mantle of green. A kind of promontory divides the two water-courses at this point (Frontispiece—[Fig. 1](#));—the river running from the north-

west, and the smaller stream from the north-north-east. This elevated part of the country is covered with thick woods, and the inhabitants of the valley seldom go there except to hunt the wild ox, the boar, the wolf, and the deer. Beyond, the country seems a wilderness; and strangers who occasionally visit the inhabitants of the vale to exchange amber, copper, gold, salt, and coarse woollen or hempen fabrics for skins of beasts, never come except by the way where flows the great river. The occupants live in families, in the open spaces amid the woods and on the banks of the rivers, inhabiting conical huts, made with stakes set in the ground, joined at the top, and covered with branches, earth, and rushes. The father of the family occupies one of these huts with his wife and children, and as his sons grow up, they build another cabin and take a companion.

The products of the chase and fishing, with the wild roots which they dry and crush between stones, are their only means of subsistence; they do not till the soil, nor have they any flocks or herds. Our informants add that they never had to fight men like themselves, and that if any disputes arise between the families, they call together the oldest chiefs of the other families to arbitrate between them. Those who are unwilling to submit to their judgment are banished from the valley, together with their families; they descend the shores of the great river, and are no more heard of.

When these old men are further asked whether there were other human beings before them settled in the valley, they answer that there were; but that they were small men—dwarfs—who ate earth, and had no bows and arrows to kill the wild beasts, nor hooks to catch fish, nor canoes to cross

the river; that at the approach of the present inhabitants, these dwarfs disappeared, and took refuge underground, whence they came out sometimes in the night to do mischief—to cut the fastenings of boats, or sink the boats themselves—to cause children at the breast to die, or to break the bows, or warn the animals of the forest of an intended chase, so that they might get out of the way.

For some time a report has been current—brought by strangers who have found their way along the river into the valley—that an alien race of great stature and strength, with fair hair, and mounted on horses, have already overspread the neighbouring countries, driving away their inhabitants, or killing those who do not fly at their approach; speaking an unknown tongue, and undertaking nothing without first deliberating in great numbers, and consulting the elders and women, sparing none but children, and employing these in labours of all kinds. This news has spread great consternation in the valley; the chiefs of the families meet together, and determine to watch by turns at the mouth of the river; young men posted at regular intervals are to give warning, by loud cries, of the arrival of the fair-haired people, so that all the inhabitants of the valley may be quickly warned, and take refuge with their families in the woods situated on the promontory which divides the river from the smaller stream at their confluence; lastly, each is to furnish himself with provisions such as will be sufficient for a hunting expedition of several days; and then they will consult as to what course shall be adopted.

Meantime, the elders of the people take counsel. They decide that at the first cry of alarm, and while the invaders

are entering the valley by one of the banks, all the inhabitants of that side shall cross in the boats to the opposite side shore, in order to unite with those who inhabit that side, and that all together they shall hasten to bring their cargoes to the point where the valley divides, so as to moor the boats below the promontory on the left bank above the mouth of the stream; that the women, children, and old men shall take refuge on the promontory, so that the able-bodied, thus separated from the fair-haired men by the river and the rivulet, will be able to deliberate whether they should use their bows or fly to the forest above. Some days after, just when the sun is beginning to decline, the valley resounds with the cry of alarm, a hundred times repeated, announcing that the fair-haired people are advancing and entering the valley on the western side.

Immediately the whole country—silent but a few minutes before—begins to be filled with a continued hum; most of the inhabitants of the right hasten in their boats to the left bank; but some, either through negligence, or because they have been away from their dwellings, cannot follow the advice of the elders.

In the meantime, the invaders advance with caution: first, a detachment mounted on horses are seen riding round the woods, assembling in the openings, and appearing to deliberate before going further. A body of them have captured some unhappy loiterers among the inhabitants of the valley, who, fastened with cords, are driven onwards by their captors, and closely interrogated, but they do not understand what is said to them.

In a little while, at every visible point in the direction of the river, the valley appears dotted with men on foot and on horseback, and with chariots; and every now and then shouts arise. The sun sinks upon the horizon, but the shouting continues to be heard, and the columns of smoke ascend from all sides; night comes, the valley appears lit up with fires, and silence gradually supervenes.

Assembled at the foot of the promontory, along the banks of the two streams, the men of the land of Ohet have concealed their boats among the bulrushes; they have sent up the women, the children, and the aged to the plateau; they dare not light any fires, lest they should attract the attention of the invaders. The night is spent in fruitless deliberation; some bold young hunters propose to take advantage of the sleep of the fair-haired people to cross the river and fall upon them as they would upon wild beasts, and to kill them all with their stone hatchets; but the chiefs of the families consider that they are too few in number for the execution of any such design; they urge that this body of invaders is perhaps followed by others, that they have horses and can easily escape, that they appear to be tall and strong; and, moreover, that they do not appear to have killed the inhabitants they met with, as the strangers had reported.

At break of day the valley echoes with unusual sounds, such as the inhabitants of the land of Ohet had never heard before. It is not the shouting of men, nor the songs of women, nor the bellowing of wild bulls. These noises spread terror among the fugitives. They all abandon the boats and climb the promontory; there, in the woods, they can see

through the trees what is taking place in the valley: They soon perceive a numerous body of men on the opposite side, not far from the river. Some canoes which had been forgotten are being guided up the stream by the invaders. They go through the rushes, unfasten the boats, and draw them up with loud cries on the shore opposite the promontory. These cries are answered from other quarters, and the whole body rush to the shore. But at this juncture the chiefs seem to interfere; they parley for some time, and appear to threaten those who are impatient to get into the boats, often pointing to the plateau above. The main body retire again from the shore, and a dozen men only get into two boats, which make for the opposite bank at the foot of the promontory. With them are two of the inhabitants of the land of Ohet, tied by the neck with leathern thongs. They land together, put the captives before them, and ascend to the plateau. The twelve fair-haired men are armed with sticks, terminated by a long, bright, metal point. Some hold bows in their hands, with the arrows in place. They are dressed in short tunics of ornamented stuffs, their arms bare, and their legs up to the knee bound round with leathern thongs, to which are fastened covered sandals. About their loins is a belt of skin, to which is suspended a bag, also of skin, with the hair of the animal preserved, two knives—one long, the other very short—and a hatchet, the blade of which is of bronze; their necks and wrists are adorned with strings of large glass beads, or with circlets of metal. Many have their hair fastened on the top of their heads, with large pins of bone or bronze; others have their hair divided into long tresses. Their beards have been

carefully removed, while their moustaches reach down to their breasts. Their aspect is terrible, for they are tall; their light blue eyes, inclosed by black lines, sparkle like diamonds beneath bushy brows dyed of a brilliant red.

Approaching to within fifty paces of the brow of the promontory, where the ground is somewhat clear, they stop, and one of the captives speaks thus: "The fair-haired people have captured several of us; they have done us no harm; they have not burned our huts, nor killed the women and children. They wish to live in peace with us always, on the same ground. They will not hinder us from hunting or fishing, or from remaining with our wives and children. They say that the land is good, and can support a much greater number of inhabitants than it does now. They bring an abundance of things useful to man. They teach youths to ride, and to use arms against evil men. They say in fine that we have nothing to fear, and that you may return to your dwellings.

"I am told all this by one of their people who speaks as we do, and who once lived in our valley, from which he was banished. They also say that if you will not return to your homes and live in peace with them, they will kill us all like wild beasts, for they are both numerous and strong. They will await your answer here until the sun reaches the middle of its daily course. This is all we have to say."

Several of the elders of the valley then came out of the wood and advanced towards the captives; but the party of fair-haired men made signs to them to come no farther, and fitted their arrows to the strings of their bows. The captive who had already spoken, again addressed them: "Do not

come any nearer; deliberate among yourselves, and give an answer quickly. This is all we have to say."

The old men thereupon assembled, and having cut some branches of trees on which they seated themselves, one of them spoke thus: "These fair-haired people with painted faces are more numerous than we; they have murderous weapons, and horses, and are brave; we are not able to drive them out of the valley; if they desire to live with us in peace, as they say they do, why not consider them as friends? Is it to their advantage to kill us? No. They possess many things which we have not, and are provided with what they need. Have you not observed the flocks and herds, the loaded waggons, and the women and children that accompany them? They are not empty-handed robbers. Let us accept the conditions they offer us."

One of the hunters, among the bravest in the valley, then rose and spoke in his turn: "Why do these people with painted faces come into our valley? It is to take possession of it and drive us away. They are strangers to us, and we have never done them any harm. Why do they not remain where they were born? Will there be fish enough in the river and enough wild animals in the forest to feed them and us? They will take all and leave us nothing. Fighting against them is impossible, it is true—but we can fly. There are other valleys and other rivers not far off. Let us take our wives and children with us; I know the woods as far as three days' journey. Let us leave our huts and our boats, and go and settle far away from these strangers." After the utterance of these contrary opinions a hundred voices were raised; some

supporting the advice of the old man, others that of the hunter.

A few young men even wished to fall upon the little troop of strangers and massacre them.

Some of the most venerated of the inhabitants of the Val d'Ohet tried more than once to impose silence and make themselves heard, but the tumult continuing to increase, the assembly was broken up into groups, and the women began to cry out and lament and the children to weep. Meanwhile the little party of fair-haired men had begun to cut some bushes and briars and to make a rampart with them.

Not long afterwards twelve boats crossed the river, and sixty of the strangers came and joined the first twelve. These were bearing twelve oval shields of wicker-work covered with skin. They set up these shields by means of stakes driven in the ground, and placed themselves behind them; only their heads painted red and blue and their sparkling eyes remained visible. They were laughing together loudly.

Midday was at hand, and confusion continued to prevail among the fugitives. Then were heard again those strange sounds which had so much alarmed the unhappy inhabitants of Ohet at dawn; and the shore opposite to the promontory was covered with a multitude of fair-haired men in several detachments, all armed. They began to cross the river, and to seat themselves in a line on the shore beneath the plateau. Then the captive who had already spoken advanced alone toward the forest, and when he was within hearing, said: "My friends, my brethren, you are going to be

attacked: and we are to be killed before your eyes. Have pity on yourselves—have pity on us; come down to the fair-haired men; they will do you no sort of harm; they have respected your houses and the women that have fallen into their hands. Do not hope to defend yourselves, for they will kill you with their keen weapons!" At this last appeal the fugitives became silent, and one of the inhabitants of the valley, who had remained since the morning without speaking a word, rose up. He was a short, robust man, of dark complexion and crisp hair; he was well known as a skilful carpenter, and the best boats were his handy work. "There is no more time for discussion," said he. "Let those who wish to stay in the valley come out from the wood, and let the rest hide themselves as quickly as possible in the forest. They will be able to fly with their families; for the strangers do not know how many we are. As for myself, I remain where I was born." A great number assembled round the carpenter with acclamations, accompanied by their wives and children; and all together without a moment's delay showed themselves to the troop of strangers. "We will return to our dwellings," was all the carpenter said to the captive interpreter, and then they advanced towards the little camp.

Many had bows and stone hatchets. "Throw down your arms," said the captive; "throw down your arms, you have no need of them." The invaders who had taken up their position on the shore, dividing into two bodies, were rapidly climbing the sides of the promontory, to the right and left; so that in a few minutes the carpenter and his companions were surrounded by an innumerable crowd, which

penetrating the mass of the fugitives, separated them into small parties and took possession of the few weapons which had been retained by some of their number.

The strangers laughed, skipped, and leaned their brows on the breasts of the inhabitants of the valley in token of good will. Thus some hundreds of the natives went down towards the river surrounded by their new guests. They were compelled to get into the boats, and they went back to their houses, which had been completely pillaged. Many of the huts remained vacant, and the new-comers took possession of them, without troubling themselves much respecting the inhabitants and what had become of them.



CHAPTER II.

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THE OPPIDUM.

Two centuries later, the land of Ohet had assumed a new aspect, and its name was changed. It was then called the Valley of Avon.

Beautiful fields, affording pasture to flocks and herds, carpeted the slopes of the bordering hill; while in the vale below ripened harvests of barley and rye. The uplands were still covered with forest, and on all sides wooden houses peeped out from the meadows, with their inclosures of palisades painted in lively colours.

The marshes of the rivulet were drained, and at the summit of the promontory was to be seen cutting the sky the talus of an *Oppidum* which commanded the valley and the two streams. Its origin was as follows:—

Not long after the invasion of the fair-haired people, the inhabitants of the valley who had fled into the woods had reappeared, accompanied by a great multitude of men of the same race, and at dawn had fallen with great violence and loud cries upon the strangers.

The latter, not expecting an attack, defended themselves as best they could; but the younger and more active among them assembled on the promontory, where they waited until night. Then they descended noiselessly, crossed the stream, and fell in their turn upon the men of the ancient race, who thought to repossess themselves of the valley. The greater number were asleep; many had dispersed in search of food

and plunder. The young fair-haired men massacred a vast number of them, making no distinction between the old inhabitants who had remained in their homes and those who presented themselves as enemies; the women and children alone were spared.

After a council of the elders, and after having consulted the women, it was decided that in order to prevent fresh surprises, and to protect the inhabitants of the valley, they should form a vast camp on the promontory, where in case of alarm the people of the valley of Avon could take refuge with their families, their flocks and herds, provisions and arms, defy every attack, and resume the offensive at the opportune moment.

The summit of the promontory was therefore cleared; every able-bodied man was required to give one day's work in four till the camp was finished; and those of the old inhabitants who had escaped the massacre, as well as the children and women, had to labour without ceasing at the circumvallations. The women prepared food for the workmen, and the children carried earth in baskets or brought branches of trees which were mingled with the earth.

Following exactly the verge of the plateau, the chiefs of the eight tribes settled in the valley marked out the boundary of the camp, its entrances, its defences, the retreat of the elders, the place for the cattle, that of the huts for the families, and lastly the site proper for the erection of the Némède—the sacred inclosure—the sanctuary of Belen and the dwellings of the Druids.

First, with the aid of strong levers of wood hardened by fire, the stones which obtruded above the level of the plateau were forced out and arranged on the perimeter described; then upon this layer, behind which was heaped coarse gravel mixed with earth, were placed trunks of trees, crosswise, four feet apart. The width of the base was twenty feet. The interval between the trunks was filled with stones, earth, and branches. Then another layer of stones mingled with earth, then three rows of trunks of trees, laid this time lengthwise, bound together with strong bands of green withy, always with gravel between. On this a third layer of stones, more trunks of trees across, overlapping the others, and a topping of gravel, of turf and soil, forming the rampart walk.

Stakes were placed upright, five feet apart, and firmly driven three feet down into the rampart on the outer edge, serving to fix, by means of osier bands, wattled hurdles five feet six inches high, so as to form a continuous parapet pierced with loop-holes.

The rampart rose to a height of five feet. The inclosure completed, the Druids marked out the area allotted to the eight tribes. To each of them was given a circular space of two hundred feet in diameter; the huts were disposed in two rings around the perimeter; in the middle was the paddock for the animals and the hut of the chief.

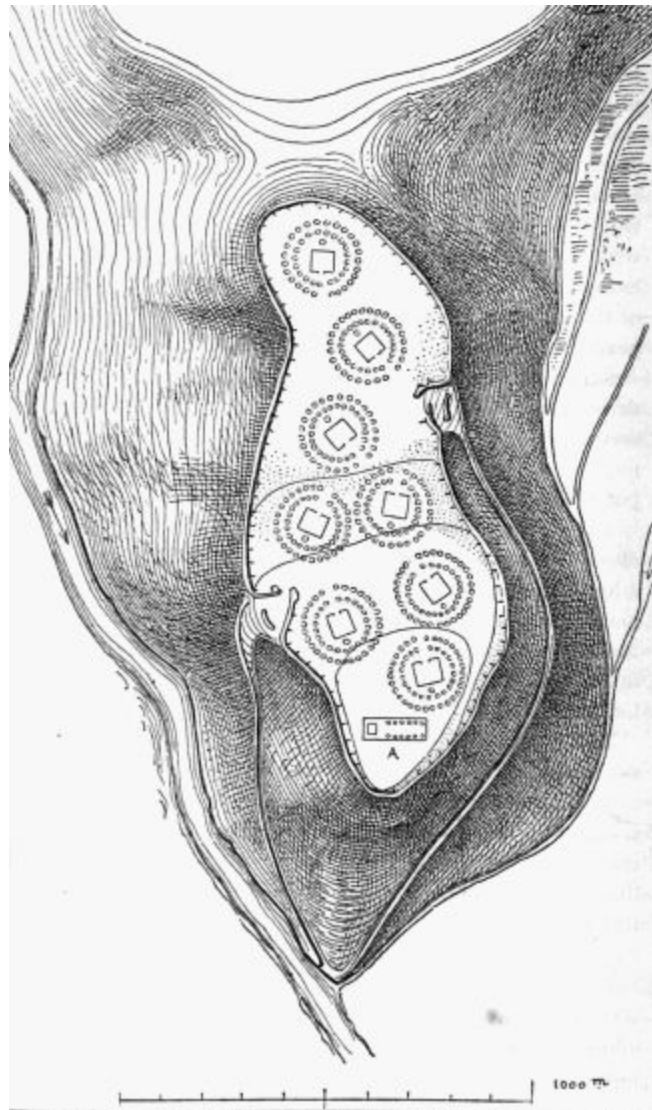


FIG. 2.—THE OPPIDUM.

The general view of the camp is given in [Fig. 2](#), with the rampart, the two entrances, the sunk approaches, defended on the other side by a mound raised with the earth excavated to form these approaches, and the eight circles allotted to the tribes; at A, the Némède and the dwelling of the Druids and Druidesses, surrounded by the sacred inclosure. Wells were sunk in each of the circles of the tribes, and in the inclosure of the Némède.

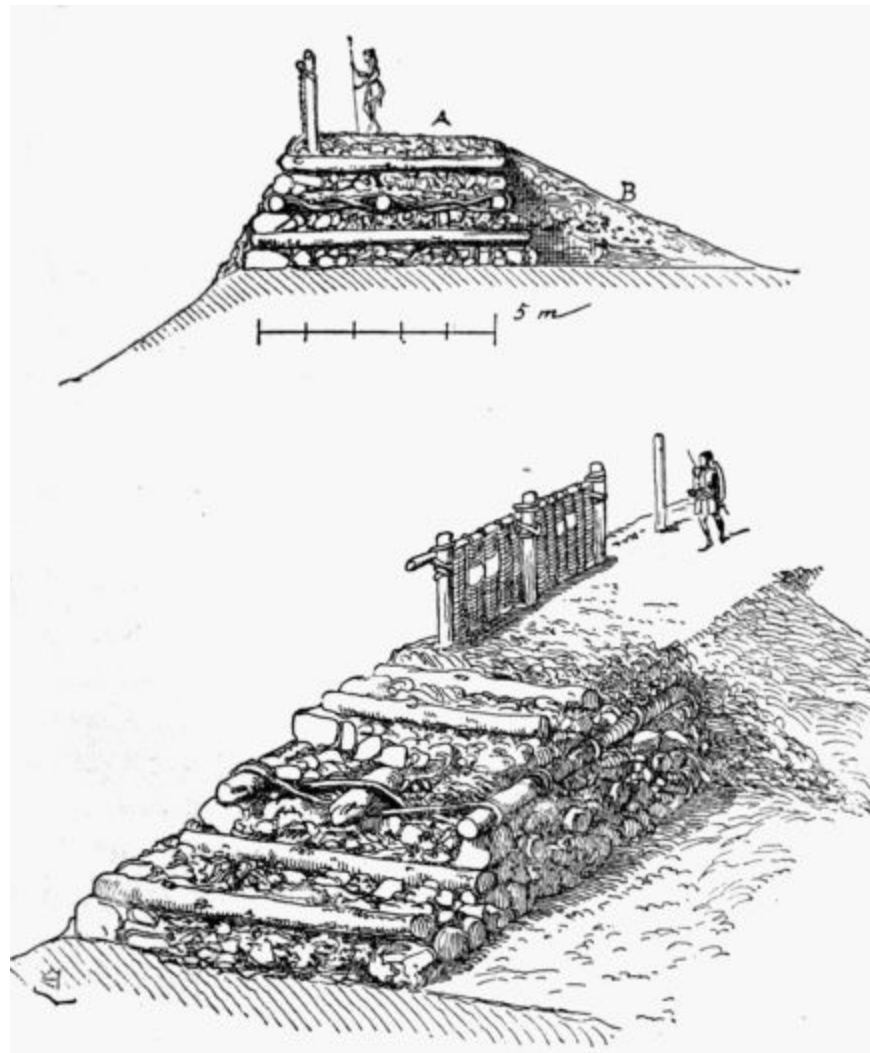


FIG. 3.

[Fig. 3](#) gives the section of the rampart with its terrace-walk, A, for the defenders, and, at intervals, the inclines, B, affording an easy means for ascending to the terrace-walk. The entrances were masked by a mound forming an advanced work, and leaving two ways out along the ramparts. [Fig. 4](#) shows how these entrances were disposed. The two extremities of the rampart were strengthened by a wider embankment, H, affording space for a numerous assemblage of defenders. Here is shown the screen thrown

up outside the cutting, and at K the sunken road with its mound, L.

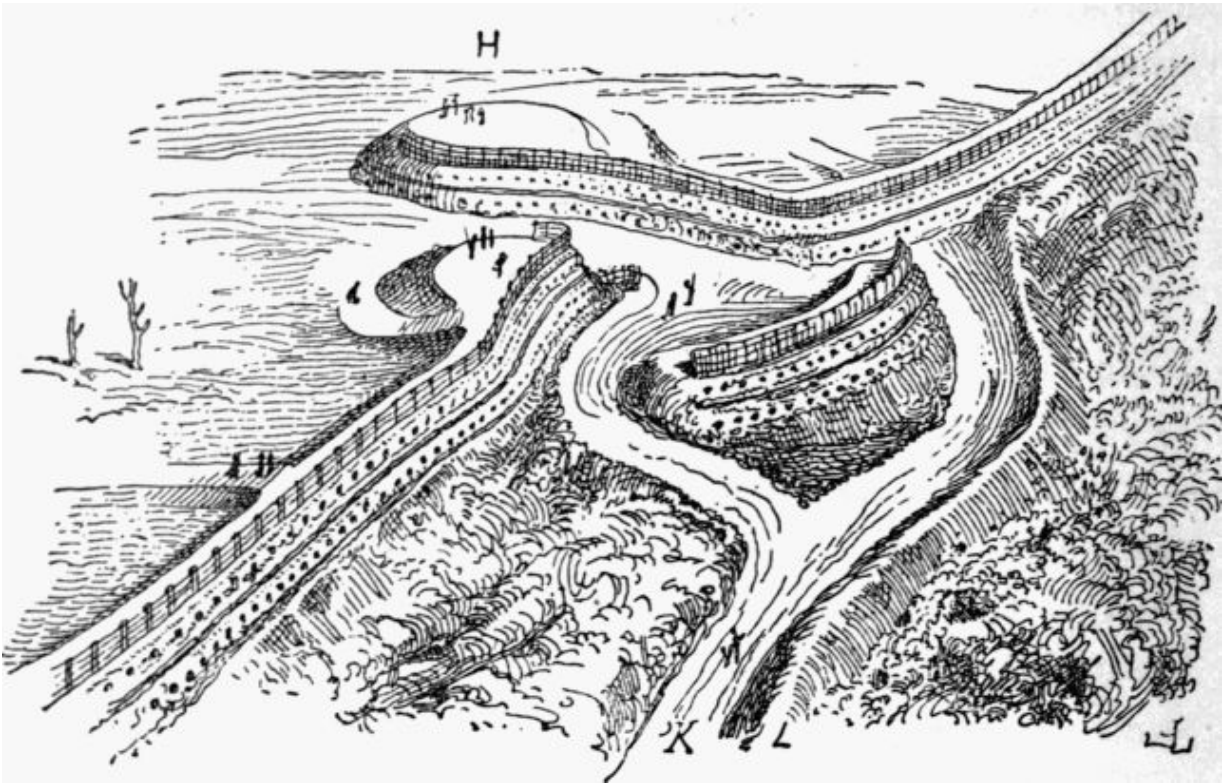


FIG. 4.

[Fig. 5](#) represents the Némède, with its inclosure and the dwellings of the Druids.

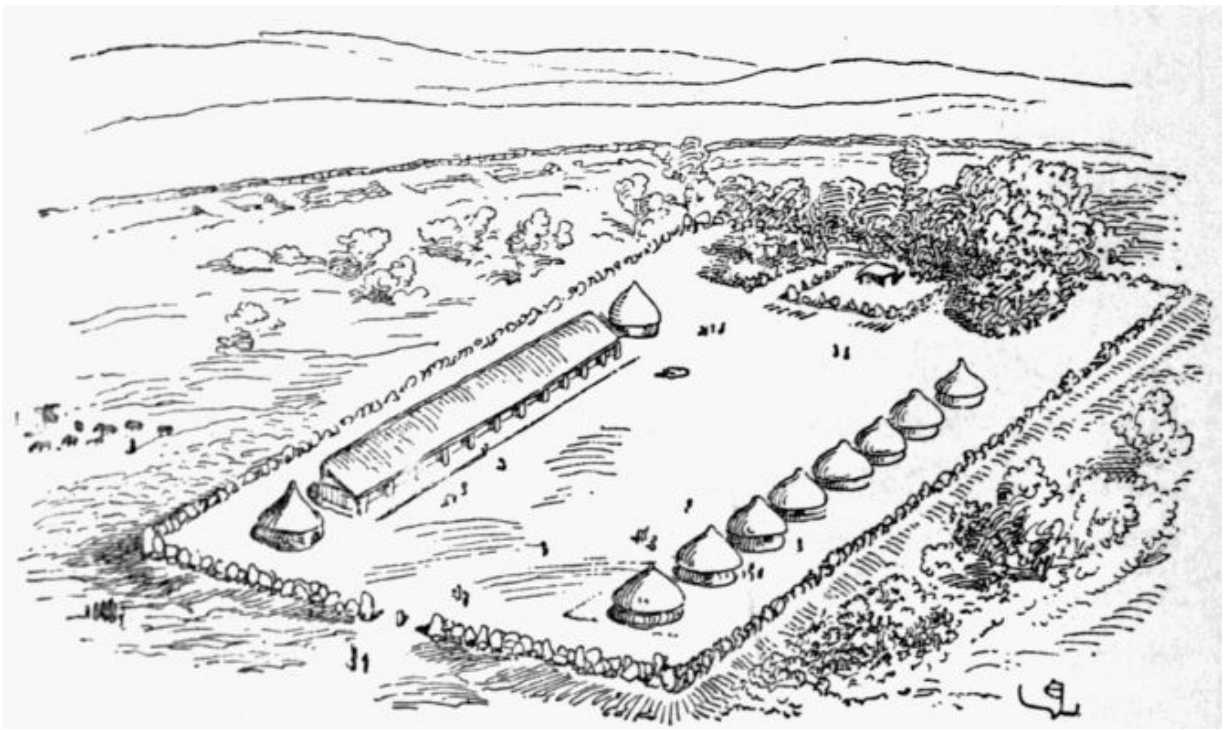


FIG. 5.

The camp finished—except the habitations of the tribes, whose site was only marked by circles of stones—a certain number of young men were put to live there, who replaced each other every day. Arriving there at sunset, they remained in the camp until the beginning of the next night. Those of the former inhabitants of the valley who still lived were forbidden to enter the camp on pain of death.

The tribes prospered, enriching themselves with the produce of the earth and with their cattle. Some, having discovered copper ore in the neighbourhood, manufactured arms and utensils. There were also potters who wrought skilfully in clay. At certain periods of the year, merchants brought to the valley stuffs, salt, spices, and even wine in leathern bottles. They took in exchange articles of bronze, skins, cheese, and corn.

The tribes, not having had any fresh attacks to resist during a lengthened period, left off guarding the camp, which was rarely visited except on occasion of certain solemnities and of assemblies convoked by the Druids. The latter lived by themselves, surrounded by their college, within the vast inclosure which they cultivated, and where their sheep and cattle grazed. The ramparts, whose timber work had decayed, had sunk, and presented only a slight elevation. They were overgrown with vegetation in several places. But in the peaceful state in which the tribes were living, no one thought of repairing these defences.

The inhabitants of the valley had been frequently embroiled with the neighbouring tribes, and had often come to blows with them; but peace was soon restored, for none of these groups of tribes cherished the intention of subjugating its neighbours and seizing their territory.

Nevertheless repose was irksome to them, and their youths would often quit the valley in quest of adventures, and to see the world.

About 389 B.C., a great number of men, attracted by the seductive eloquence of a Brenn—a chief elected by certain tribes to command distant expeditions—had quitted their hearths in the hope of amassing wealthy spoils in the southern lands beyond the mountains. Two years having passed away, a small number made their appearance again in the valley; they brought with them gold and costly fabrics, and marvellous were the tales they told of the countries they had traversed, and in which they had been incessantly fighting.

They had seen cities environed by strong stone walls, and filled with magnificent public buildings and sumptuous mansions—richly fertile regions, where the vine and luscious fruits of every kind were cultivated.

Among other results of adventure, it was observed that those who returned from these distant expeditions had lost the habit of peaceful industry; and although more than half their comrades had perished by the way, their dreams were still of battles, and plunder, and adventures. They were idle, insolent, and irascible, and even aspired to a kind of lordship over the peaceable families that lived by industry. The latter had at first joyfully welcomed the unhopd-for return of these warriors; and had listened with admiration to the stories of their prowess and adventures recited around the family hearth; but their imperious bearing, their idleness and boasting, were beginning to become intolerable. Every day saw new quarrels arise, which generally ended in blood. The wives of these heroes were still more insolent than the warriors themselves, and presumed to treat their dependents as slaves, such as were those of the ladies in the countries so gloriously traversed by their husbands.

Things being in this state, the tribes of the valley had been summoned to a meeting in the old camp, according to custom, to deliberate on their common interests, and to endeavour to put an end to feuds. The men always repaired to these assemblies armed; the women used to come bringing food and drink; for these meetings were usually terminated by festivities lasting the whole night.

On the morning of the day appointed, the sound of trumpets re-echoed through the valley, and from every

quarter the inhabitants might be seen flocking towards the hill. A wooden bridge had long since been built over the river near the mouth of the rivulet. When the chiefs of the tribes, accompanied by the mass of the people, presented themselves at the bridge, they found it occupied by the warriors, whose ranks had been increased by a large number of young men of the valley, and even other warriors, strangers to the tribes.

"It is at the camp and not here that the people meet," said one of the chiefs; "let us pass over." "You shall not pass," replied one of the warriors, "without listening to the conditions we propose." "We have neither conditions to submit to nor conditions to impose," rejoined the first; "the men of this country are free, and the land is theirs, in the valley and on the mountain; let us pass on!" "It will be by force then," replied the warrior, half unsheathing his sword.

A long-continued cry of indignation followed this defiance, and arms began to glitter in the sun among the crowd like flashes of lightning. The chiefs, however, imposed silence, and held the crowd in check. Then advancing in concert to the entrance of the bridge, one of them spoke thus:—"What do you want? Do you not belong to our tribes? Have you not flocks, and wives, and children born in the valley? What conditions do you aim to impose upon us—us who are your equals? Speak! What can you ask for more than you already possess? What wrongs have been done you? Why bring with you men who are strangers to the country, whom we do not know, and who have no claim to an interest among us?" "Answer him, answer him, Sigild," said all the warriors with one voice. Sigild advanced. He was

a handsome young man, a native of the valley, tall and slight, with a mild look, and a beard just appearing; his breast covered with a small bronze cuirass which glittered in the sun: his white arms were bare, and adorned with bracelets of gold. He disdained a helmet, and his blond hair, fastened at the top of his head with a long golden pin, fell down over his back; *chases*^[1] wrought in bright colours covered his legs; his waist was girt with a kind of scarf, which was gracefully thrown back over the shoulder and left arm. A narrow buckler and a sword hung at his side. He smiled, made a sign with his hand as if requesting silence, and said:—"Friends and brethren, we are all free—all of the same blood; we ought to remain united to conquer those who desire to plunder or to enslave us. Consider, however, that you have among you the élite of the warriors who have conquered powerful nations, and have spread the renown of the Gallic name beyond the mountains. Many have died in battle; but do not those who have returned to you after so many trials, bringing, with them a rich booty and having acquired skill in arms, deserve some consideration from you? Inured to war and always ready to shed their blood, are they not more fitted to defend your hearths than men who have done nothing but tend cattle and till the soil? They do not, however, ask you to keep them in idleness, or to consider them as chiefs or masters; their only wish is to defend you. They know to what extent you are encompassed by rapacious and envious men, who, jealous of the prosperity of your valley, are cherishing the most sinister designs against you. They know this because they have seen many peoples of whose existence you do not

dream, though they are close to your borders. Lulled by a prolonged security, you are not in a condition to resist a serious attack. Now these warriors—your relations, your brothers, your friends, of the same blood as yourselves—have been considering with painful anxiety this state of repose in which you are living. They have, therefore, formed the intention—they, as men of war, to occupy the camp, to fortify it effectually, to make it a reliable place of refuge in case of invasion, and to defend themselves in it to the death. Is there any wrong in this? As to these warriors, whom you regard as strangers, they are brethren in arms who have fought side by side with us beyond the mountains, but who no longer finding their abodes on returning to their valleys devastated by marauders, ask an asylum with us. Besides, if they do not belong to your tribes, are they not Gauls like ourselves?

"We have wished to say this to you here, and not in the place of rendezvous itself, in the fear lest our intentions should be misunderstood amid so great a concourse. If our proposals, conceived with a view to the common interest, appear to you just, and if you still persist in holding the assembly on the height above, we will go before you to the camp, and will remain there when you return to your habitations.

"As for us, devoting ourselves to those new functions which we are competent to discharge, we will make of this camp a stronghold impregnable to any enemy that might dare to attack us." A long murmur followed this discourse and the chiefs of the tribes looked wistfully at each other.

The most venerable of them, advancing in his turn replied thus: "Sigild, your words are fair; but the act to which you and your companions are committing yourselves at this moment is insulting, and aims a blow at the liberty of the inhabitants of the valley. You parade before us imaginary dangers, with a view to remaining on that height under the pretext of defending our families, but really in order to separate yourselves from us and act according to your good pleasure. Tell us who will support you and take care of your cattle while you are remaining on the height under arms, waiting for an enemy who perhaps will never make his appearance? Sole masters of the bridge and the two streams, you will be able, if you choose, to debar the inhabitants of the valley from hunting in the woods that extend behind the camp, and from fishing in the waters of the upper stream which furnish the best supply. We shall thus be at your discretion. If the assembly thinks it desirable to strengthen the fortifications of the camp, every inhabitant of the valley will take his share in the work—yourselves with the rest. If it shall be necessary to defend the inclosure, all who are in a condition to bear arms must engage in the defence; for all are equally interested in protecting their families, in repelling an enemy, and not exposing themselves to insult. Come, then, with us to the camp; we will deliberate on all that concerns the interests of the tribes, and you will only have to submit, like ourselves, to the result of our deliberation. As to the new-comers, if they ask for an asylum, you know that it will not be refused them; but they must fulfil the conditions imposed upon

foreigners wishing to live among us. Moreover, we shall have to consult the Ovates."

Thrusting back Sigild, who was preparing to give an answer, the first warrior, who had spoken so insolently, advanced to the edge of the bridge in front of the chiefs of the tribes, and putting aside their arms, he said, "No one shall pass; all this parleying is useless; go back to your houses; we will hold the camp."

At these words a thousand voices arose, and in spite of the endeavours of the chiefs to restrain them, the crowd of the men of the valley rushed forward like a torrent. Swords were drawn on both sides, and the clash of arms was mingled with the cries of the two parties. The imprecations of the women dispersed along the shore, and who were urging the men towards the bridge, were heard above the clamour of the multitude. The party that was endeavouring to obstruct the passages recoiled for the moment, with a view to concentrate themselves on the narrowest point; and, as the warriors had crowded together on the bridge to hear what was being said on both sides, and many had even mounted on the wooden parapets, this movement from front to rear threw confusion into the closely-packed mass, and several fell into the river.

At sight of this a shout, followed by an immense burst of laughter, issued from the groups assembled on the shore; and the defenders of the bridge, and those who were advancing to meet them, having no conception of the cause of this laughter, stopped and looked behind them on either side.

But the warriors who had fallen from the bridge into the water, embarrassed by their clothes and shackled by their armour, although able to swim, were being swept down by the current, with a rapidity increased by the swollen state of the river. They were all but engulfed in the rapid torrent. Two boats were fastened to the bank on the valley side; in a moment some of the spectators pushed off in them, and rowing with might and main, and with the help of poles, had soon rescued the half-drowned warriors and brought them to the shore.

Three had lost consciousness; every assistance was afforded them, and the women especially lavished upon them the most assiduous attention.

The result of this episode was the intermingling of the parties; the defenders of the bridge had advanced on the shore as far as the middle of the passage, and were surrounding the handsome Sigild, who, with a smile upon his lips, was answering all the questions addressed to him by reassuring words. He might be seen slightly shrugging his shoulders and shaking his head in graceful fashion. An armed struggle was no longer possible, and the war-cry had been exchanged for laughter. A more compact group, however, consisting of members of the two parties, were keeping up a lively discussion along one of the parapets of the bridge, when one of the inhabitants of the valley, to whom the attention of those surrounding him seemed to be directed, mounted the hand-rail with agility, and, fastening his buckler to his shoulder, plunged into the river.

He soon re-appeared, and swimming with vigour and address, gained a footing on the bank at the base of the promontory.

The hurraing on the opposite shore recommenced; in an instant the two boats were filled by men of the valley, and others crossed swimming, partly aided by the boats, which soon reached the other side. Some vessels towed across conveyed considerable numbers—so many, indeed, that the holders of the bridge saw themselves placed between two hostile bodies, should they persist in their resolution. The laughter was kept up on both sides, and was communicated even to the warriors posted on the passage. The knot of defenders became less and less dense, and if they did not retreat *en masse*—which would have called forth a fresh burst of hilarity—they were gradually retiring. Soon the platform of the bridge was deserted by all but the surly instigator of the strife, whose insolent words had almost occasioned a sanguinary struggle. He indeed was not laughing; when he saw himself abandoned he threw his sword into the river, and making himself a passage through the crowd, he bent his steps towards the valley. The handsome Sigild, surrounded by the greater part of the warriors, was on his way upwards towards the camp, and the whole multitude was following him.

Footnote

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[1] *Chases*—a kind of trousers divided down the legs and fastened with bandelets.
