

The First Britons

In vain the Briton offers his furs. The wily trader has noticed that he possesses something of much greater value than the skin of a wild animal. By the side of the British woman you observe two knuckle-shaped slabs of tin. Now tin is the most precious metal of the ancient world. The art of tempering iron is as yet unknown, and swords and spears are made of a mixture of copper and tin--that is, of bronze. Tin is a very rare metal, and the ancients seek it and prize it, just as we seek and prize gold at the present day.

The trader's eyes gleam as he makes the discovery that tin is common in Britain. Visions of untold wealth flash before him. He has lighted upon a Klondike that will give him wealth beyond his wildest dreams. He strikes a bargain with the Briton, and goes to and fro along the coast hawking his wares for the precious metal. Again and again he visits the land, and every time he grows richer and richer. At length his secret is discovered. Other traders follow in his wake, and, in time, an important trade springs up between Britain and Southern Europe. Thus, by means of those mineral treasures which have made Britain what she is, the motherland of our empire becomes known to the civilized world.

Now let us suppose that some three hundred years have passed by, and that we again visit the island in the company of a trader. We see before us the white cliffs gleaming in the sunlight, and soon our ship runs ashore on a strip of sand. Looking inland, we observe a vast green forest; the tall tree-tops are waving in the sea-breeze. We plunge into the dark shades of this forest, and follow a narrow track that winds hither and thither through the dense undergrowth. The captain of our ship is well known to the Britons, so he makes his way fearlessly to the nearest "town," and we go with him.

We are armed, for in the thickets and in the caves of the rocky hillocks lurk the gray wolf, the fierce boar, the black bear, and the wild cat. Now and then a startled deer gazes at us for a moment and bounds away into safety. We pass by a stream in which herons are fishing and beavers are building.