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Feature article introducing the following book

“Scotland. An Unwon Cause”. Paul H Scott, 1997, Canongate Books.

SCOTLAND:- A NATION’S IDENTITY

“Scotland is not a lost cause. It is an unwon cause.” (John Steinbeck)

Commencing a series of highlights and articles from an anthology and commentary through Scotland’s development as a nation.

Scottish national consciousness exists because Scotland was an independent country for centuries, and has had degrees of autonomy since. The two are interdependent. Firstly, early nationhood was gained through political power. The later sense of nationality gives need for political leadership again.

The earliest recorded statement attributed to an inhabitant of the place which we know as Scotland, occurs in the work of a Roman historian. This was in the Agricola of Tacitus, written about AD 97.

Agricola who was the father-in-law of Tacitus, was the Governor of Roman Britain from 78 - 84. ...He made a determined attempt to extend Roman control to the north of the Tweed. In 84 he defeated the Caledonians near Mt Graupius, north of the Tay. Tacitus tells us that the caledonian leader was Calgacus. “A man of outstanding valour and nobility” and he gives us the “substance of what he is reported to have said” in a speech to his troops before the battle. His words curiously anticipate Bruce’s Bannockburn speech as reported by Barbour, and echoed by Burns, and the Declaration of Arbroath.

“They Create a Desolation and Call it Peace”

Calgacus.

“When I consider the motives we have for fighting and the critical position we are in, I have a strong feeling that

the united front you are showing today will mean the dawn of liberty for the whole of Britain. You have mustered

to a man, and all of you are free. There are no lands behind us, and even on the sea we are menaced by the Roman

Fleet. The clash of battle - the hero’s glory has now actually become the safest refuge for a coward. Battles against Rome have been lost and won before, but hope was never abandoned, since we were always here in reserve.

We, the choicest flower of Britain’s manhood, were hidden away in her most secret places. Out of sight of subject shores, we kept even our eyes free from the defilement of tyranny. We, the most distant dwellers upon earth, the last of the free, have been shielded till today by our remoteness and by the obscurity in which it has shrouded our name. Now, the farthest bounds of Britain lie open to our enemies.

What men know nothing about, they always assume to be a valuable prize. But there are no more nations beyond us ; nothing is there but waves and rocks , and the Romans - more deadly still than these- for in them is an arrogance for which there is no submission, or good behaviour that can escape.

Pillagers of the world, they have exhausted the land by their indiscriminate plunder, and now they



ransack the sea.

A rich enemy excites their

cupidity; a

poor one, their lust for power.

East and west have failed to

satisfy them . They are the only

people on

earth to whom covetousness both riches and poverty are equally tempting. To robbery, butchery and rapine

they

give the lying name of 'Government'. They create a desolation and call it peace.

A 19th century steel engraving of Calgacus delivering his speech to his Caledonians before the battle against the Romans at Mons Graupius

Nature has ordained that every man should love his children and his other relatives above all else. These are now

being torn from us by conscription to slave in other lands. Our wives and sisters, even if they are not being raped by enemy soldiers are seduced by men who are supposed to be our friends and guests. Our goods and money are consumed by taxation; our land is stripped of its harvest to fill their granaries, our hands and limbs are crippled by building roads through forests and swamps under lash of our oppressors. Creatures born to be slaves are sold once for all, and what is more, get their keep from their owners. We Britons are sold into slavery anew every day; we have to pay the purchase price ourselves and feed our masters into the bargain. In a private household, the latest arrival is made the butt, even to his fellow slaves, so, in this establishment where all mankind have long been slaves, it is we, the cheap new acquisitions, who are marked out for destruction. For we have no fertile lands, no mines, no ports which we might be spared to work in. Our courage too, and our martial spirit are against us . Masters do not like such qualities in their subjects. Even our remoteness and isolation, while they give us protection are bound to make the Romans wonder what mischief we are up to . Since you cannot hope for mercy, therefore, take courage before it is too late to strive for what you hold most dear, whether it be life or honour We who have never been forced to feel the yoke, shall be fighting to preserve our freedom, and not, like them, merely to avenge past injuries. Let us then show , at the very first clash of arms what manner of men, Caledonia has kept in reserve.

Do you imagine that the Romans' bravery in war matches their dissoluteness in peace ? No! It is our quarrels and disunion that have given them fame. The reputation of the Roman Army is built upon the faults of its enemies. Look at it. A motley conglomeration of nations , that will be shattered by defeat as surely as it is now held together by success. Or can you seriously think that those Gauls and Germans , and to our bitter shame, many Britons too - are bound to Rome by genuine loyalty and affection ? They may be lending their life-blood now to the foreign tyrant, but they were enemies of Rome for more years than they have been her slaves. Terror and intimidation are poor bonds of attachment: once break them, and where fear ends hatred will begin. All that can spur men on to victory is on our side. The enemy has no wives to fire their courage, no parents ready to taunt them if they run away. Most of them have no fatherland they can remember or belong to other than Rome. See them, a scanty band, scared and bewildered, staring blankly at the unfamiliar sky, sea and forests around them. The gods have given them, like so many prisoners bound hand and foot, into our hands. Be not afraid of the outward show that means nothing, the glitter of gold and silver, that neither avert or inflict a wound. Even in the ranks of our enemies we shall find willing hands to help us. The Britons will recognise our cause as their own; the Gauls will remember their lost liberty; the rest of the Germans will desert them as surely as the Usipi did recently. And beyond this army that you see there is nothing to be frightened of - only forts without garrisons, colonies of greybeards, towns sick and distracted between rebel subjects and tyrant masters. Which will you choose - to follow your leader into battle , or submit to taxation, labour in the mines, and all the tribulations of slavery? Whether you are to endure these forever or take` quick vengeance, this field must decide. On, then, into action; and as you go, think of those that went before you and of those that come after." (CALGACUS, leader of the Caledonians).

THE SOCIAL SOLUTION...

“ The following winter was spent

on schemes of social betterment .

Agricola had to deal with people

living in

isolation and ignorance, and

therefore prone to fight; and his

object was to accustom them to a

life of peace and quiet by the provision of amenities. He therefore gave private encouragement and official

The Romans failed to hold Caledonia for any length of time, but they gradually incorporate the territory into the southern region.

The method of incorporation adopted by Tacitus is familiar to us today as if it were a modern political tactic. It was employed again, this time by the English centuries later to quell the rebellious Highlanders.

assistance to the building of temples, public squares, and good houses. He praised the energetic and scolded the the slack; and competition for honour proved as effective as compulsion. Furthermore, he educated the sons of the chiefs in the liberal arts, and expressed a preference for British ability as compared with the trained skills of the Gauls. The result was that instead of loathing the latin language they became eager to speak it effectively In the same way, our national dress came ito favour and the toga was everywhere to be seen. And so the population was gradually led into the demoralising temptations of arcades, baths, and sumptuous banquets. The unsuspecting Britons spoke of such novelties as 'Civilization', when in fact they were only a feature of their enslavement.

Tacitus, *The Agricola and the Germania*.