

The Romans in England

The old Morris bounced along roads where Roman soldiers had marched two thousand years before. As they traveled, Sir Nigel told the story. “Hadrian’s Wall was built by *Roman Emperor Hadrian* about one hundred years after Julius Caesar left England. It was *117 kilometers* long across the narrow neck of England, from the North Sea to the Irish Sea. The Romans built it because they were afraid that the people of the north might attack them.”

While Sir Nigel parked, Simon and Barklee hopped out and walked slowly towards the silent, ghostly remains of the crumbling wall. Grayish-green moss was growing on the stones and little sprigs of grass poked out of the cracks. Fog drifted silently along the remains of the ancient wall. They thought of the five hundred soldiers who once lived and worked right where they were standing.

Simon, wandering off alone, pictured himself as a Roman *centurion*. He wondered what life was like for the soldiers of that long-ago time. As he walked, he spied something shiny partly buried in the dirt and pried it out with his foot. It was an ancient coin, with a man’s head on one side, a building on the other. Carefully, he picked it up and brushed the dirt from its surface. He gazed at it in wonder.

“I bet this was lost by a Roman soldier,” Simon said to himself.

“It was. I lost it.”

Stunned, Simon whirled around. There, standing amid the fog and the ruins, was the image of a handsome, young Roman soldier. He had a kind face and spoke softly.

“I am - or was - Marcus Larium, a junior officer in a British legion assigned to defend this part of the wall.”

Simon stood absolutely still while the soldier explained that the coin had special meaning. He said Emperor Hadrian personally gave it to him in the days when the wall was new.

“Do you like to read?” Marcus Larium asked.

“Oh, I read all the time,” Simon replied, thinking it was an odd question.

“I was born and raised near this wall and I am standing exactly where my *ludus* was,” the soldier said. “We spoke the ancient language of Latin, and *ludus* is

that paper had not been invented then, so he wrote on tablets coated with wax. Later, he read from scrolls made of papyrus, which were made from Egyptian reeds.

“When I was eleven, I attended *grammaticus*, what you call middle school. I studied subjects like history, geography and astronomy and art. I liked reading about Greece, especially. Greek culture had a big influence on Roman life...even here in *Britannia*.”



Simon meets the ghost of Marcus Larium.

“You studied Greek when you were eleven?” Simon asked in disbelief.

“Quite so,” the soldier responded. “Most of my teachers were Greek slaves who spoke Latin. They were brought here as educators. The finest books were written by Greeks, so it was important to learn that language. Some of my friends even went to Greece to study. They became lawyers and politicians.”

Simon was enthralled.

“What is your favorite subject to study?” Marcus Larium asked.

“Music. I love opera and I want to sing from the great stages of the world. Do you like music?”

“I enjoy the sweet notes of the *lyre* and the flute,” the soldier replied. “Music soothes my warrior soul.”

“Is - I mean was - there anything you didn't like here?” said Simon.

“The cold,” Marcus Larium answered. “I nearly froze while standing winter watch on top of Hadrian's Wall. Even the woolen cloak and trousers I wore and my wood and leather shield were no protection against the blasts of icy winds.”

Simon shivered.

“Thank you for finding my coin. After looking for so many years, I am happy to have it returned. It has been a long and frustrating search, but Romans learned long ago not to get discouraged when something we tried to do was difficult. Our lives were often hard, but we were very strong and brave.”

New Words

Roman Emperor Hadrian - emperor of Rome from 117-138 AD, almost 2,000 years ago.

117 kilometers - metric measurement about the same as 73 miles. One mile is 1.60 kilometers.

centurion - an officer in the army of ancient Rome.

Britannia - what England was called by the Romans.

lyre - a small stringed instrument rather like a harp.



Simon thought about that. He looked down at his feet and remembered the failed rehearsal at the Royal Albert Hall. It had been very hard. He thought about the life of Marcus Larium and the soldiers of the wall. Their lives, too, were hard, but they did not give up. Suddenly, he was filled with confidence. He knew that his performance back in London would be spectacular. The spirit of Marcus Larium would stay with him.

“Hey, Simon!” Simon turned at the sudden sound of Barklee’s voice.

“C’m on down, Simon.” Barklee waved her paws and skipped around on flat rocks in a shallow dip in the ground. “We can take a bath.” She stood in the ruins of a bathhouse for soldiers.

Simon whirled and looked back toward the ludus. Marcus Larium had vanished.

The coin that had lain at Simon’s feet was gone, too. *Was he real?* Simon wondered. *Was it another daydream?* He shook his feathers, took a deep breath, then smiled. Whichever it was, he felt fine. He jumped down to meet Barklee.

Sir Nigel pointed to holes where bath water used to come in and go out. Next to the bathhouse, old broken bricks and stones formed a map on the ground. They could see where houses and shops once stood. The sheepdog knelt on the ground and pointed to the outlines to show how rooms might have been laid out.

“Roman engineers built excellent roads, too,” he told them. “They built them throughout all their empire so they could move large armies quickly. Many of England’s roads today are built where Roman roads once ran. Not far from here, you can still see the ruins of some of the ancient roadways.”

Simon thought quietly about the life of long ago. Marcus Larium had taught him something about bravery. He would not forget.