

LEGEND LAND

VOLUME THREE

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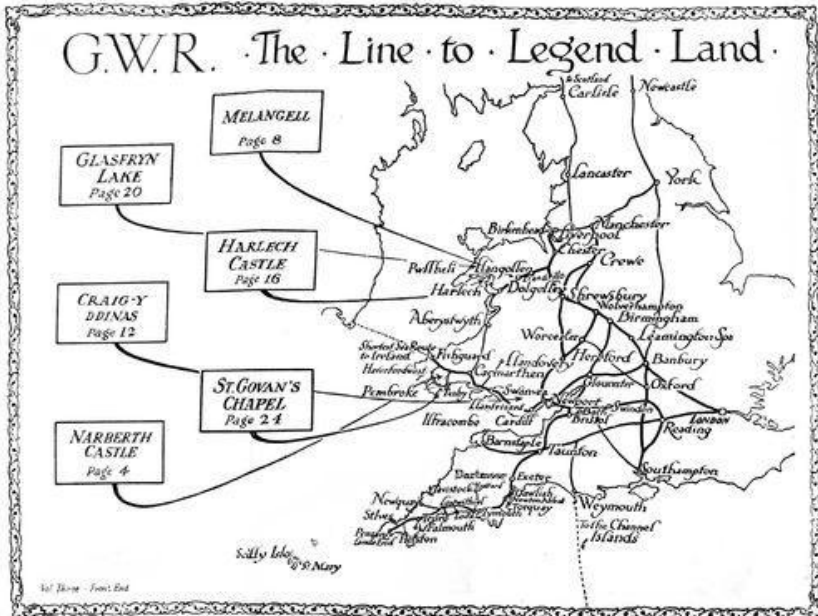
THE STORY OF "JOHN DORY."

LEGEND LAND



Being a further collection of some of the Old Tales told in those
Western Parts of Britain served by the Great Western Railway

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FOREWORD

This third volume of Legend Land tells some more of the old stories of those peoples, kindred in origin, the Welsh and the Cornish. They are mostly the old tales that have survived—who shall say how many generations?

If you look into them, with the eyes of imagination, you will see behind them the simplest romances of a very simple people; a people that explained some uncomprehended thing with some comprehensible story, or who would invest the memories of their great men and women with records of wonderful achievement often formerly attributed to some yet earlier hero.

But that is a student's occupation. Many weighty tomes have been written upon the origins of folk-lore.

For us it is sufficient to be glad that the old legends have survived. Let us enjoy them without speculation as to their beginnings, remembering only that they had a beginning, most of them in an age so long ago that history cannot place it.

These romances are perhaps the most "genuine antiques" that our country can offer, and they come from the corners of our land where romance still lingers and where, to the country folk, rocks and lakes, streams and great hills, are matters of history—not geology.

And we, who travel to these distant parts of Britain, can better enjoy their charms if we go there knowing something of the stories that have clung about them for many centuries, and if

we leave our critical business method of mind behind us locked
in our office desks.

That is why these old tales are again retold by

LYONESSE.



A PRINCE WHO WOULD HANG A MOUSE

In the very border line of “The Little England Beyond Wales,” as South Pembrokeshire is known, a land of many splendid old castles into which the sea bites deep at Milford Haven, stands Narberth Castle, famous for many things, among them that its owner once tried to hang a mouse.

It is a queer old story of magic and sorcery, and as the tale goes, far, far back in history, Prince Manawyddan lived at Narberth Castle with his stepson Pryderi and Cigfa his wife. One day a great darkness fell upon the land, and when it had passed Pryderi and all the retainers had vanished. Narberth was left unpeopled save for the Prince and Cigfa.

So these two fell to work to cultivate the land themselves. They worked hard and when harvest time came they were rewarded by the sight of many fields of waving corn. But, when they began to reap, Manawyddan and his daughter-in-law found to their consternation that the grain had been eaten from every ear of corn and that all they reaped was straw. The Prince suspected sorcery, and resolved to watch that night in an adjoining field which had not yet been robbed.

Towards midnight he heard a weird rustling sound, and, gazing from his place of concealment, he saw a horde of field mice roaming over his crops, nibbling away at the ears of wheat. Manawyddan sprang forward and captured one of the marauders, and the others scampered away.

For safety he placed the captured mouse in a glove and then returned to Narberth Castle determined to hang the thief. He erected a little gallows, and was fashioning a noose of string in order to carry out the execution on the castle slopes, when there came along a scholar who enquired what the Prince was doing.

Manawyddan told him, and the scholar protested, saying that it was unseemly for a prince to act a hangman's part. "Come, I will give you a pound to ransom the thief," he added, but

Manawyddan refused. So the scholar passed on and presently a priest approached. He too enquired as to the Prince's task and also tried to dissuade him from it, offering five pounds as a ransom. But the Prince was adamant.

Then as he was about to release the mouse from his glove and string it up, a bishop came by. Like the other two strangers he began to argue with Manawyddan and offered ten, then twenty pounds to have the mouse set free. But the Prince's suspicions were now aroused. "No," said he, "the thief shall hang." Then the bishop fell into a great rage and stamped his foot in anger, and as he did so his mitre fell off disclosing the fact that he was no bishop but a noted sorcerer of the neighbourhood.

"Name your price," he said at last, "the mouse shall not hang, for she is my wife."

So Manawyddan drove a bargain. He demanded the return of his stepson; that all spells should be removed from his land and never replaced; and that no vengeance should be wreaked upon him. To this the enchanter agreed, and the Prince untied his glove and out ran, not a mouse but a beautiful lady who went away with her rescuer.

That night the stepson and all the retainers returned, the cornfields grew rich and ripe, and ever since Narberth and the lands round about have been amazingly fertile.

You may prove the truth of this latter to-day if you visit this pleasant and prosperous land, with its mild climate and abundant crops. There is a station at Narberth, but Tenby, that picturesque and attractive little town on the coast of

Carmarthen Bay, is perhaps your best centre for the district. The coast to the westward is wild and rocky, while inland is a glorious country, scattered more thickly than any part of our islands with the remains of noble medieval castles.

Tenby itself is one of the most delightful seaside towns in the country. It has extensive sands between its rocks and the sea's edge. The place has ample accommodation for visitors of all kinds, and the praises of Tenby's reputation for sunshine at all seasons of the year have been sung by writers for many years past.



Narberth Castle.



ST. MELANGELL AND HER “LAMBS.”

Up in the Montgomeryshire mountains, three or four miles from the shores of Lake Vyrnwy, is the little village of Melangell, named after a saint who for fifteen years, so the story goes, lived a lonely life in the midst of the wild hills, sleeping on the bare rock, rather than marry the man her father had designed for her.

St. Melangell was the daughter of a Welsh chieftain, and when she ran away, to avoid the undesirable bridegroom, she hid herself in a remote but lonely spot at the head of the Tanant. Every effort to make her return to her father's home failed and she continued to live her secluded life, choosing the birds and the animals for friends.

After some fifteen years of this solitary existence, they say, Brochwel, Prince of Powis, was hare hunting up in the hills and ran his quarry into a dense thicket. He entered in pursuit and soon found himself face to face with a woman of marvellous beauty beneath whose robes the frightened hare had taken refuge.

This strange woman raised her hands in supplication, and begged the Prince and his party to depart and spare the life of the animal that had come to her for succour. It was one of her friends, she said. The Prince, much impressed by this incident, halted, unable at first to understand what was happening, but his attendant huntsman, ignoring the gentle plea and anxious only to be on with the chase, raised his horn to his lips to rally the hounds.

Then a strange thing happened. No sound issued from the horn, nor could he remove it from his mouth to which it remained stuck fast.

In terror, the man fell upon his knees, and tried to beg forgiveness, but he could not articulate. Then Prince Brochwel, realizing at once that he was in the presence of a very holy woman, stepped forward and asked her pardon, promising that the hare should receive no hurt from him. The holy woman

smiled and the huntsman regained his speech, his horn dropping to the ground.

The Prince then asked Melangell what he could do to serve her. Melangell asked for a grant of a small piece of land to serve as a sanctuary. The Prince immediately gave her far more than she asked and besought her to found upon it a convent.

So the good woman proceeded to carry out his wishes and lived the rest of her holy life in a cell, which you may see to-day at the east end of Melangell Church. And upon the cornice of the oak screen of the church you will find carved many scenes from her life story.

St. Melangell ever retained her love for wild animals and is considered to have taken hares, which she called her "lambs," under her particular protection. They say that even now, if you call upon St. Melangell to aid a hare pursued by hounds, the animal will escape; consequently, the holy woman is not greatly beloved of huntsmen.

Her lonely hill-side bed, upon which she slept for fifteen years, still survives near the church. It is a recess in the rock now overgrown with bushes, but is there for all the world to see, to prove conclusively—if you require proof—the truth of this charming legend of the solitary lady of the hills.

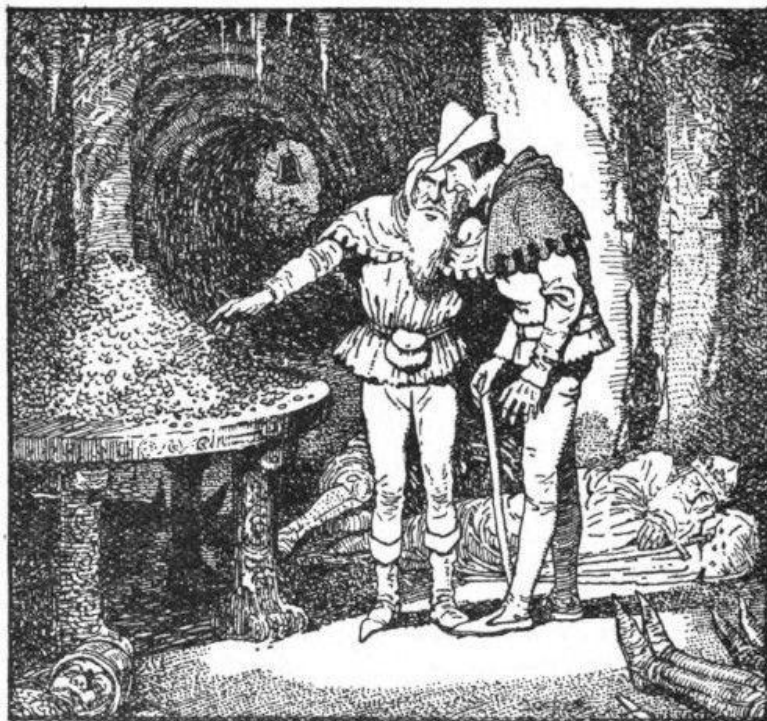
Melangell and the lovely country of hill and stream, and glittering waterfalls, thickly wooded little valleys, and bare upstanding mountains, that stretches all about it, is best reached from Llandrillo Station on the picturesque line that runs from Corwen to Bala by the valley of the Dee. This is a fine

sporting country, where the red grouse flourishes and where the streams and lakes hold trout in abundance. "The Welsh Highlands" it is aptly called.

The Berwyn Mountains, that here divide Merioneth and Montgomeryshire, rise to over 2,000 feet in Moel Ferna near Corwen, from which station there is a motor car service in summer to Bettws-y-Coed, a place, perhaps, more famed than any in Wales for the beauty of its surroundings.



Lake Vyrnwy.



WHERE KING ARTHUR SLEEPS.

The old stories tell that King Arthur and his gallant knights are not dead; they are only sleeping and will awake with renewed vigour, should ever they be needed to fight the enemies of their beloved land. And their resting place is within the great upstanding limestone rock of Craig-y-Ddinas in South Wales.

There is a tale told of a Welshman from Llantrisant who was accosted on London Bridge, of all places, by a strange little man with a grey beard, who asked where he had cut the hazel staff he carried. The Welshman replied: "In my own country not far from my home."

"Where that staff was cut," the grey beard said, "is gold beyond counting and I can show you how to get it." So the Welshman invited his queer acquaintance to accompany him to his home, and shortly afterwards the two set out for Craig-y-Ddinas, which is a few miles away in the Vale of Neath.

They came to an entrance of a cave close by where the hazel staff had been cut, and the stranger bade the Welshman enter. Within the entrance was a silver bell hanging from the roof, beyond which a passage led to a great cavernous hall where, around a massive oak table, were a number of warriors, fast asleep, but still clad in their armour and with their weapons by their sides. One of these ancient warriors, with a long silver beard, wore a crown upon his head. This was the great King Arthur himself, the stranger said.

But what most attracted the eye of the Welshman was a mighty stack of gold piled high in the centre of the table, upon which the light from the flickering flames of a fire in one corner of the underground chamber glinted pleasantly.

"Now help yourself," said the stranger, "but in carrying out your gold, do not ring the bell or you will awaken the knights. If you should chance to ring it be ready to answer immediately for they will ask: 'Is it day?' and you must reply: 'Sleep on, it is

still night.' Then all may be well." With this the mysterious stranger disappeared.

The Welshman did as he had been instructed, although in his hurry to escape with the treasure he did cause the bell to chime. But his answer satisfied the awakened warriors who instantly returned to their age-old slumbers.

For many years this Welshman lived in luxury and ease upon his stolen treasure, but at last it was exhausted, and he determined to go back again to the cave and seek some more. This time his greed tempted him to carry away more gold than he could easily lift. He staggered panting with his heavy burden to the entrance, and then again he blundered against the silver bell which gave out its warning notes.

The ancient warriors awakened. "Is it day?" they cried, but the Welshman was so breathless with his exertion that he could not reply. Then the knights rose from their chairs and fell upon him, beating him cruelly before they ejected him roughly from their cavern, and closed and locked the door behind him.

The greedy fellow lived for many years after this adventure but he never recovered from his trouncing and he died a cripple and a pauper in the town where he had lived in such opulence, and although he tried many times to find the treasure chamber again he could never do so. And so it is supposed that King Arthur and his knights still sleep on in Craig-y-Ddinas, awaiting the call to further action which may some day come.

Llantrisant, where the hero—or should it not be villain?—of this strange old story lived, is a charming little town straggling

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