

# **LEGEND LAND**

VOLUME FOUR

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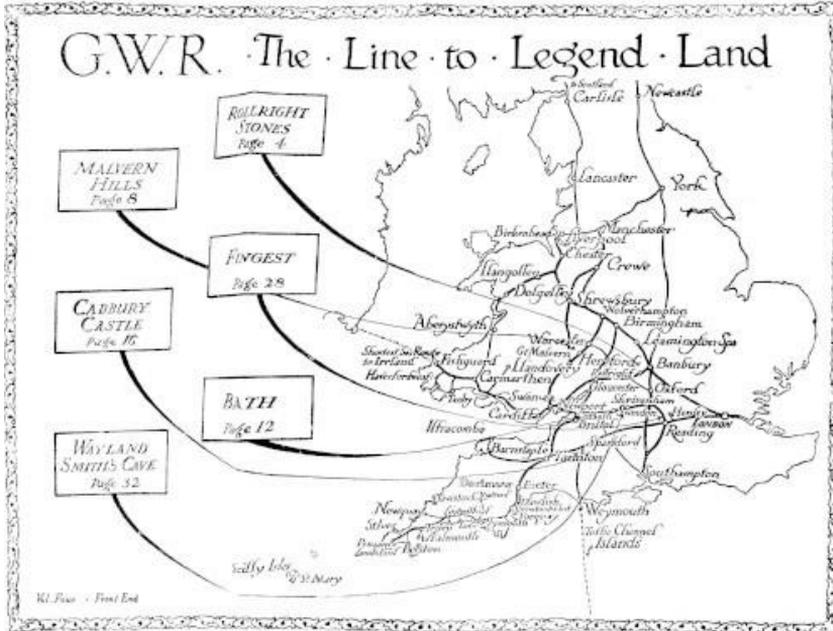
A SONG OF THE XIII CENTURY.

# LEGEND LAND



Being a further collection of some of the Old Tales told in those  
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## FOREWORD

Volume Four brings Legend Land nearer to the great centres of modern life. It comprises some of the old stories told of districts within easy reach of such busy cities as London, Birmingham and Bristol.

In it you will find historic and pre-historic romance mingled. Some of its tales are as old as any in our land, tales born of the very ancient belief that saw in "Druid" stones a human origin. Other stories are romances of much later date, of events almost within the memory of our great-grandparents' great-grandparents.

Here you will find two legends that come from Shakespeare's land, legends that must have been well known to that great lover and teller of old tales. And in the legend of Herne the Hunter you will recognise a story which Shakespeare himself told in "The Merry Wives of Windsor." And it was probably an old tale when he repeated it.

In "King Arthur's Camelot" you meet with a very old legend of that great hero of British historical romance; and in the story of "Wayland Smith" you get an echo of the lore of the old Pagan gods which invading Anglo-Saxon tribes brought to England soon after the Romans left it.

Manners and customs change; the old creeds die as the new ones arise, yet—and it is very wonderful to realize it—some of the old stories have survived every phase of the passing

centuries' intolerance of the past, and are told to-day in a form not so very different from that in which they were first narrated by our semi-savage ancestors, over their camp fires in the heart of primeval English forests.

But civilization is "improving" away romance very rapidly. And it is worth while to hang on fast to the last remaining shreds of those other days when life, though ruder, had more time for simple dreams of wonderful things.

LYONESSE



## **THE WHISPERING KNIGHTS.**

High up on an outlying spur of the Cotswold hills, where Warwickshire and Oxfordshire meet, there is a sort of miniature Stonehenge, known as the Rollright Stones; and the Story they tell about them is that they were once a king and his courtiers who, by evil spells, were changed suddenly into Stone.

The Rollrights are scattered about the hill top, seven hundred feet above sea-level, a mile or so from the quiet village of Little Compton. And this is the old Story of how they came there.

Ever so long ago there came marching over the hills a king and his army bent upon the conquest of England. As they neared the summit of the hill the king was met by a witch who told him that he had nearly achieved his desire. She spoke in rhyme, and her words are remembered in the neighbourhood even now.

“If Long Compton you can see,  
King of England you shall be,”

she said. The king rushed forward, but, owing to treachery on the part of some of his men, his view of Long Compton, which lies in the valley below, was impeded.

Then the witch turned to him with a croaking laugh, and muttered:

“As Long Compton you can’t see  
King of England you shan’t be.  
Rise up stick, and stand still stone,  
For King of England you shall be none.  
You and your men hoar stones shall be  
And I myself an elder tree.”

The unfortunate king, although within a few paces of a spot from which he might have viewed Long Compton and so become ruler of this realm, was unable to move a step further. His joints became stiff, his energy left him, and in a few minutes he had turned into stone. And there you may see him

to-day as “the King Stone,” a grey weathered monolith standing stark in a field, but in a place from which Long Compton is invisible.

But his treacherous supporters who had hindered him from success did not escape. The old story tells that there were five knights who led the company. Seeing their leader’s strange fate, they tried to escape. But the same doom overtook them. A few hundred yards from the “King Stone” is a group of five large upright slabs. These are the “Whispering Knights,” turned to stone in the very act of conspiring against their king.

Nearer to the silent king is a circle of stones, once his faithless soldiers, and all about grow elder trees, said to be descendants of that witch who was herself transformed into an elder after her magic spell had worked upon the king and his men. They tell you that if you stick a knife into these elders you will sometimes draw blood.

The Rollright Stones form a weird relic of some long forgotten time. Men have written of their strange appearance throughout many centuries. Bede called them the second wonder of the kingdom. Whether the legend of their formation be true or not, it must have been some very important event that caused them to be erected.

You may best reach them from Rollright station on the line between Banbury and Chipping Norton, and if you dare venture up to visit them on a moonlight night, they say you may find the fairies at their revels, dancing all about.

This is a peaceful English country of hill and vale, fine country estates—Compton Winyates with its matchless Tudor mansion is near at hand—and little churches, rich in architecture, that will repay a visit. Here you are on the outskirts of Shakespeare's land, real generous England, full of history, that has not changed so very much since the spacious days of Elizabeth—the England that the English tourist all too seldom sees.



*The King Stone.*



## **THE SHADOW CURSE OF THE RAGGEDSTONE.**

Near the middle of England, where the Malvern Hills rise abruptly to a height of nearly 1,400 feet above the sea, is the double-peaked rugged Raggedstone hill about which several strange old legends centre. A restless spirit is said to haunt the

bleaker portions of the summit, but a stranger legend is that of the Shadow Curse, called down upon this hill by a monk of Little Malvern in the olden time.

Little Malvern lies in the plain at the foot of these hills, and at the Benedictine monastery there, as the old story tells, there was once a rebellious brother. His offences against the monastic discipline were so serious that the Prior decreed, as his punishment, that he should crawl on hands and knees every day and in all weather, for a certain period, from the monastery to the top of the Raggedstone and back again.

The wretched monk had to obey, and day after day, week after week, he performed his penance. But the pain and degradation of his task embittered him, and they say that before his punishment was completed he died upon the hill of exhaustion and humiliation. Others say that he sold his soul to the devil in order to be free of his hated task, but anyhow before he disappeared from human ken, he put a bitter curse upon the hill that had caused him so much suffering.

He cursed with death or misfortune whomsoever the shadow of the hill should fall upon, having in mind that in those days of sparsely populated land the people who would suffer most would be the Prior and his brethren in the monastery beneath.

Now the shadow of the Raggedstone is very seldom seen. Only at rare times when the sun is shining between the twin peaks does it appear, and those who have seen it describe it as a weird cloud, black and columnar in shape, which rises up between the two summits and moves slowly across the valley.

Many stories were told, in times past, of the misfortunes that happened to those upon whom this uncanny shadow fell; and it is recorded that Cardinal Wolsey was once caught by this weird cloud, and to that the old folk attributed the misfortune that came to the proud man when at the height of his power.

Wolsey in his early days was a tutor to the Nanfan family whose house was at Birts Morton Court, a couple of miles from the foot of Raggedstone. The young tutor fell asleep in the orchard one day, and awoke suddenly, shivering, to find the strange unearthly shadow moving across the trees.

Much of Little Malvern Priory, the home of that miserable monk of long ago, remains to-day. Its domestic buildings are almost intact, with amazing good fortune having escaped the common fate of such edifices. There are, too, the old monkish fish ponds, now lily spangled in spring time, and an old preaching cross. The parish church is part of the old priory church and contains a finely carved rood screen and some most interesting stained glass.

Great Malvern, some three miles away, clinging as it were to the side of the great Worcestershire Beacon, is a place with world-wide fame. It, too, has its great priory church, and all the attractions and conveniences of a favourite inland resort.

But the chiefest charm of the Malverns—there are seven of them—is their hills. These form a glorious range, of varying barren and wooded mountainous country, flung as it were as a far outpost beyond Severn of the wild Welsh mountains many miles to the westward.

The view from these Malvern Hills is, perhaps, unequalled. They say nobody knows exactly how much of England and Wales can be seen from them. Fifteen counties are certain, and in that range is included the Wrekin, the Mendips, and the Welsh mountains as far as Plinlimmon.

On the fine upstanding Herefordshire Beacon is, perhaps, the best specimen of an ancient British camp that we have. Tradition says that here Caractacus defended himself from the Romans.

It was “on a May morning on Malverene Hilles” that Piers Plowman had that vision of which Langland wrote five hundred and more years ago.

Few centres in our country offer such varied scope to the holiday-maker as the Malverns, where nature and history vie with one another in the matter of attractions.

The fresh upland air is tonic and health-giving. That weird dark shadow of the Raggedstone can never have fallen here, or, if it have, its mystical power has become impotent by reason of the many beauties of the place.



*The Malvern Hills.*



## **HOW BATH WAS DISCOVERED.**

Some people may tell you that the Romans discovered Bath, but the old story gives the honour to a British Prince, Bladud, who is, variously, said to have been the father of King Lear, and the eldest son of King Lud. Like these two illustrious monarchs, Bladud came in time to be king of Britain. But that was after he had passed through a very sad experience.

Prince Bladud, as was becoming the eldest son of a king, spent many years in Athens studying the liberal arts and sciences. But, alas! while in Greece he became a leper, and on his return to Britain he had to be shut away from his fellow-men, for fear that he should infect them with the dreaded disease.

The Prince bore his confinement patiently for a time, but at last it became unendurable, and he escaped in disguise, and went out into the world to forget his royal birth and to earn his living as best he could. His wanderings brought him to the hamlet of Swainswick, a few miles from where Bath now stands, and there he found the only occupation given to one afflicted as he was, that of a swineherd.

Here for some time he carried on his lowly duties, content to be a free man, no matter how humble his station in life. And they say that early one winter's morning when he was out in the neighbouring woods with his pigs, the animals suddenly became restive. Before he could stop them a large part of the herd had taken panic and rushed furiously down a hill-side into a swamp, at the foot where they began to wallow in the mud.

Bladud pursued them, wondering that pigs should seek to roll in cold muddy water on a winter's day. But when he reached them, he found, to his surprise, that the water and slime in which they rolled was hot, and that steam arose from the marsh. This explained the problem to the Prince, though he marvelled greatly at the existence of such springs.

But there was another surprise in store for him. He noticed that those pigs that habitually went to the hot swamp were in

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