

York, in the seventh century, encased the venerable chapel in lead and it remained whole for seven hundred years after St. Patrick's death, when it was destroyed by fire.

Thus the Christian legend runs, and the books of the divines. If you seek further confirmation of it,—well, there is the hill to begin with,—“Weary-all Hill,” where Joseph and his friends landed weary and worn on a December afternoon. You will not find the thorn-tree which sprung there from his staff, but you will find a flat, white stone lying on the hill-slope, in commemoration of that miraculous growth which flourished here till the Cromwellian wars, and was then cut down by a fanatic soldier who had no love for “popish relics.” This vandal warrior made a bad business of his wood-cutting, for a chip of the bark flew into his eye and so blinded him that he made a false stroke with his axe and cut off one of his legs. The brave knave, however, succeeded in destroying one trunk of the two which had grown from a single root. The second tree was destroyed by an imitator of his zeal about the middle of the eighteenth century. But two hundred years or more before that slips had been taken from it and from its companion and planted in the gardens about Glastonbury, where several descendant trees are now extant, and may be seen flowering at Christmas-time. Glastonbury and the shrewd merchants of Bristol were wont to push a thrifty trade in the holy blossoms of Joseph's tree, in the days when the folk were more superstitious than now—if ever such days were!

If Joseph did not build the little church of withe and wattle, the legend anticipates but a small stretch of time, for all the old writers, and the modern ones, agree that in British, or early Roman times, within about one hundred years from the death of Christ, a church was built at Glastonbury, and, under the name of *Vetusta Ecclesia*, it was venerated as the first Christian church in Britain. It became a holy place, the object of pilgrimages from afar; saints and kings were buried near its altar; the most splendid and powerful monastery of Britain grew up around it, and about the island-valley where it stood,

there gathered with the march of years a wealth of lore and legend greater in interest and mystery than any other spot Britain ever knew. To this place King Arthur, “deeply smitten thro’ the helm,” passed from Camelot, in the dusky barge, whose decks

“... were dense with stately forms, Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream,” to heal him of his grievous wound. From the peak of the capricious Tor you gaze upon

“... the island-valley of Avilion: Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, Nor ever wind blows, loudly; but it lies Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard-lawns, And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea.”

Here is King Arthur's country, and the heart of it. Camelot, the capital town and fortress of the West Welsh, was only fifteen miles away as an arrow flies. The present little town of Glastonbury, which sprawls at the foot of the weird cone-hill, was in Arthur's time the site of the most venerated religious house in Britain, and, for its sacred savor, the king sought its shelter for his death-place.

Here is the heart of King Arthur's country—Avalon, the place of apple orchards; the Avalonia of the Romans, the *Ynyswitrin* of the Britons, the *Glaestingaburh* of the Saxons; and the Glastonbury of to-day. It is still a place of apple orchards. There are more of them than in King Arthur's time, for the land has been drained, the sea walled out, and the wide plain covered with fair farms. The town itself is not interesting; it long ago lost whatever ambition it may have had to become a Mecca. It plundered all there was of the glorious architecture of the ancient days. What the great wrecker, Henry, left, Glastonbury built cottages and shops withal, and made roads out of altar-pieces and Norman architecture. Half a century ago the population was buying Glastonbury abbey at a shilling a cart-load, and to-day you can travel half the way to Wells on a road supported by the sculp-

tured stones which were removed wholesale by the stalwart hinds of Somerset, who know little, and care less, about the few “papistical remains” which still cumber the ground. On the other hand, the country-folk round about among the hills and in the plains commanded by the steep mysterious Tor atone for their lack of archaeological fervor by their fondness for the Arthurian legend, which they treasure in a simple way, guarding it steadfastly enough, even sternly, from the curious strangers who come here seeking folklore.

The Arthurian legends were in the care of the Welsh bards until the time of Henry II, when they seem to have passed over to the charge of the monks of Glastonbury, and in a fashion which links some notable events in England's history. Becket had been killed at Canterbury. King Henry, eager to divert the popular excitement, set forth to invade Ireland. He crossed his kingdom and reached the coast of Pembroke, where he tarried a little until his forces were ready to embark on their adventure. He was entertained at Kilgarren castle, a stronghold built by Roger de Montgomery, who led the van of the Normans at Hastings. The ruins of Kilgarren still stand on the banks of the river Tieve. In the great banquetting hall of the castle there was held a stately ceremonial enriched by all the rude splendor that a medieval baron could bring for the diversion of his king. The host and his liegemen, the king and his nobles and warriors, the imposing figures of the Welsh bards, who were held in the esteem of their countrymen not less than the prophets of old were by the Hebrews, made a striking company. The scene was enlivened by the blaze of torches, the glare of hospital fires, by glistening armor and shining plate. There was high revelry for the entertainment of the king. After the banquet the bards approached the dais where his majesty sat, and they sang to him of the doughty deeds of the great King Arthur. They told how Arthur had ranged his Red Cross knights against the faithless Modred; how, in spite of his stupendous valor, he fell covered with wounds; how Merlin's magic brought an elfin

queen who threw a mystic mantle over the king and bore him far away to an embowered isle, where she placed him in an enchanted bed and sprinkled his wounds with dew from Arabian flowers; they told how the king revived and was healed of his grievous wound, and how, in a fair and fragrant clime, he continued to reign in the prime of immortal manhood, and would some day come again to Britain to resume his throne. This and much more they sang till the chief of the bards, a dignified and stately man, whose deep-set, brilliant eyes, long white hair and flowing silvery beard, combined to give him the appearance of a seer, stepped forth, saluted King Henry, and began a sort of prologue to his song.

His mission was one of grave import, he said; and as he told his tale, striking his harp and chanting his rude rhymes, the king moved forward on his throne, intent on what he heard; the nobles listened in astonished silence, and the bardic group, amazed to hear its revered chief deny the hoary legend of their faith, stood awed before the melodious revelation.

“I come,” the bardic chief declared, “to rouse King Henry, and deny the strange fantastic legend of Arthur's fate. King Arthur is dead, in very truth; he does not live to come again.” It was the license of the poet that kept alive the story that Arthur lived and would return some day; it impressed the thoughtless and the ignorant with the traditions of a great name; and for the wise it also had a meaning. But through the centuries the bardic chiefs had known the truth and passed it with secret vows to their successors. Thus had the white-haired sage received the secret, and now had come the time foretold of yore when he should break it to the King of England, and through the king pronounce it to the world.

And then he sang how Arthur had been overborne, and had not passed to some fair realm, there to rest immortal, and from thence return to England and his crown

“But when he fell, with winged speed, His champions, on a milk-white steed, From the battle's hurricane Bore him to Joseph's towered fane In the fair isle of Avalon.”

He was buried secretly in a three-fathom grave. None knew the spot save the bardic chiefs, who kept the mystery through all the centuries of war and desecration, when Roman, Saxon, Dane, and Norman swept across the land. But now a new era had dawned upon Britain, and King Henry could win the distinction of rescuing from oblivion the grave of the hero king. Near Joseph's chapel, on the Apple Isle, and 'twixt two pyramids of mossy stone, should Henry's liegemen dig. “Promise this, O King,” exclaimed the bard, “and thine arms shall conquer in the imminent war!”

King Henry, mightily bestirred with the bard's narrative, and eager to increase the luster of his name, promised that after his Irish wars he would seek the sepulcher where in King Arthur's bones lay secretly inurned. He crossed St. George's channel, conquered the recreant isle, and returned to England. Events of greater issue prevented him from fulfilling his promise to seek the sepulcher of Arthur, but he told his nephew, Henry de Soliaco, abbot of Glastonbury, what the bard had revealed. For some reason de Soliaco delayed his search until two years after his uncle's death. Then, in 1191, Richard I being on the throne, the abbot caused the excavations to be made. The instructions of the old Welsh bard were faithfully followed. Between two richly sculptured pyramids which stood outside the church near its western end, the monks of Soliaco dug. At a depth of six feet they came upon a flat stone inlaid with a leaden cross which bore upon its inner surface, next the stone, this inscription, rudely carved in Latin: “Here lies buried, in the island of Avalonia, the renowned King Arthur.” The excavations were carried ten feet deeper when another stone was found bearing Arthur's name, and under this a huge sarcophagus of hollowed oak. The sarcophagus was opened: it showed two divisions, one containing the bones of a man of immense stature. His leg-bone set upright on the ground reached to

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