

## The Roll-Right Tones and their Folk-Lore

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# THE ROLLRIGHT STONES AND THEIR FOLK-LORE.

BY ARTHUR J. EVANS, M.A., F.S.A.

## PART I.

### ROWLDRICH IN ITS RELATION TO THE WYCHWOOD AND COTSWOLD GROUP OF MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS.

PERHAPS owing to their occurrence in a part of England where such remains are rare, the Rollright stones have from very early days attained a celebrity in England quite disproportionate to their actual dimensions, and have become household words while many more important megalithic piles have been almost forgotten. The Stone Circle, otherwise known as Rolldrich, is found already in the lists of the mediæval compilers of the "Marvels of Britain," and in one entry it even appears as the second wonder of the realm.<sup>1</sup> It is thus described by Camden:<sup>2</sup>

"Beneath Einsham, Evenlode a little river, arising likewise out of Cotteswold speedeth him into Isis: which riveret on the very border of the shire passeth by an ancient Monument standing not farre from his bank, to wit, certaine large stones placed in a round circle (the common people usually call them *Rolle-rich* stones, and dreameth that they were sometimes men by a wonderfull *Metamorphosis* turned into hard stones). The draught of them, such as it is, portrayed long since, heere I represent unto your view. For, without all form and shape they bee, unequall, and by long continuance of time much impaired.

<sup>1</sup> In a MS. in the library of Benet College, Cambridge, falsely ascribed to Bede, cited by Mr. Thomas Beesley in a paper on the Rollright Stones. *Transactions of the North Oxfordshire Archaeological Society*, vol. i. p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Philemon Holland's Translation, 1637, p. 374.

The highest of them all, which without the circle looketh into the earth, they use to call *the King*, because hee should have beene King of England (forsooth) if hee had once seene *Long Compton*, a little towne so called lying beneath and which a man if he goe some few paces forward may see: other five standing on the other side, touching as it were one another, they imagine to have been knights mounted on horsebacke and the rest the Army. But loe the foresaid portraiture. These would I verily thinke to have beene the Monument of some Victory and haply erected by Rollo the Dane who afterwards conquered Normandy."

The stones themselves are set on a bleak hill, which forms a branch of the Cotswold range, at a height of somewhat over 700 feet above sea-level, overlooking to the North-West the valley of the Warwickshire Stour and its tributary brooks. The road that runs between the circle and the "King-stone" is itself of great antiquity, and forms in this part of its course the boundary between the counties of Oxford and Warwick, the circle lying in Oxfordshire and the single stone beyond in Warwickshire.

The Rollright stones lie but a few miles outside the old boundary of Wychwood Forest. From the Perambulation of the Forest made in the 28th year of King Edward I.<sup>1</sup> (1300 A.D.) the manor of Podelicote—now marked by Padlicot Copse near the village of Sarsden—and Chadlington (within whose hundred the Rollright stones are situated) were both included in the limits of the Forest, which therefore extended a good deal further to the North than it does at the present day.<sup>2</sup> Westwards it extended to the manor of Tainton, then held by the Prior of Deerhurst. It is quite conceivable that this forest land had a wider exten-

<sup>1</sup> See Akerman, "A View of the Ancient Limits of the Forest of Wychwood" (*Archæologia*, 1858).

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

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sion to the North-West, and that it is to its sheltering wilds that this early monument survived intact for so many ages.

That if not actually covered with trees, the immediate neighbourhood of Rollright remained uncultivated to comparatively recent times is certain. Stukeley,<sup>1</sup> who explored the neighbourhood early in the last century, says: "The country hereabouts was originally an open barren heath. At present there are some inclosures which have been ploughed up." In another place<sup>2</sup> he describes "the Rowldrich," as he calls it, as lying on high ground upon an extended heath. This heath he elsewhere speaks of<sup>3</sup> as stretching in the Banbury direction and containing many barrows. We are therefore fully justified in including this district in the same "Wealden" district as the neighbouring forest. If it was not strictly speaking part of the "Weald" it was part of the "Wold." The origin of this great "Waste" district of Western Oxfordshire may in fact go back very far, and be traced to the boundary arrangement of uncivilized tribes, with which it was a common practice to surround their territory, for purposes of security, with a waste tract. Such, to take a celebrated instance from Celtic antiquity, was the "Boian Waste," and in this case the existence of an ancient British boundary embankment known as "Grimes Dyke," threading the central part of the district in question, and of old a landmark of the forest region, squares well with this conclusion. It is possible that this dyke once marked the boundary of the free Dobuni and of those subject to the Cattyeuchlani or Catuellani, who from the evidence of coins seem under their great Prince, Cunobeline, to have extended their territory West of the Chilterns, and to have occupied the Oxford district, subjugating a part

<sup>1</sup> *Abury* (London, 1743), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

of the Dobuni.<sup>1</sup> This event would have taken place in the first decades of the Christian era; and if this theory of the creation of the Oxfordshire "Waste" in what was before the centre of a tribal area holds good, the megalithic remains of the district which involve the presence of a considerable population must be referred to an earlier date.

The whole region is emphatically a border district. The former confines of the Forest on the West reach over the Gloucestershire boundary. The frontier character of the Wold on which Rollright lies has been already noticed; and near Addlestrop, a few miles to the South-West, an old Shire-stone or Merestone marks the meeting place of the boundaries of the four shires of Gloucester, Worcester, Oxford, and Warwick. The road which, by the monument itself, marks the boundary between Oxfordshire and Warwickshire is, as we shall see, in its origin an old British trackway of great antiquity, and it has been suggested<sup>2</sup> that at an earlier period this trackway marked the confines of the Dobuni and the Cornavii, whose territory extended at least into the Avon valley.

That the former extension of the forest of Wychwood accounts for the survival of almost all the other megalithic remains of the same class existing within the Oxfordshire limits appears to be certain. On the Western confines of the Forest stood till lately Frethelestone, perhaps originally Frithwald's Stone (Frithwaldes Stân), broken up only a generation since to make a newly-formed<sup>3</sup> road, the ebb of the forest boundary on this side having left it exposed.

<sup>1</sup> Dion Cassius, lib. lx. s. 20, says that Aulus Plautius in 43 A.D. subjugated a part of the Boduni who were under the Catuellani. The line of division between the area where coins of the presumably Dobunian Prince Boduoc occur and that in which coins of Cunobeline are found must be drawn through the old limits of Wychwood. See Sir J. Evans, *Coins of the Ancient Britons*, Supplement (Map of localities where Ancient British inscribed coins have been found).

<sup>2</sup> Beesley, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Akerman, *op. cit.*, p. 7, note.

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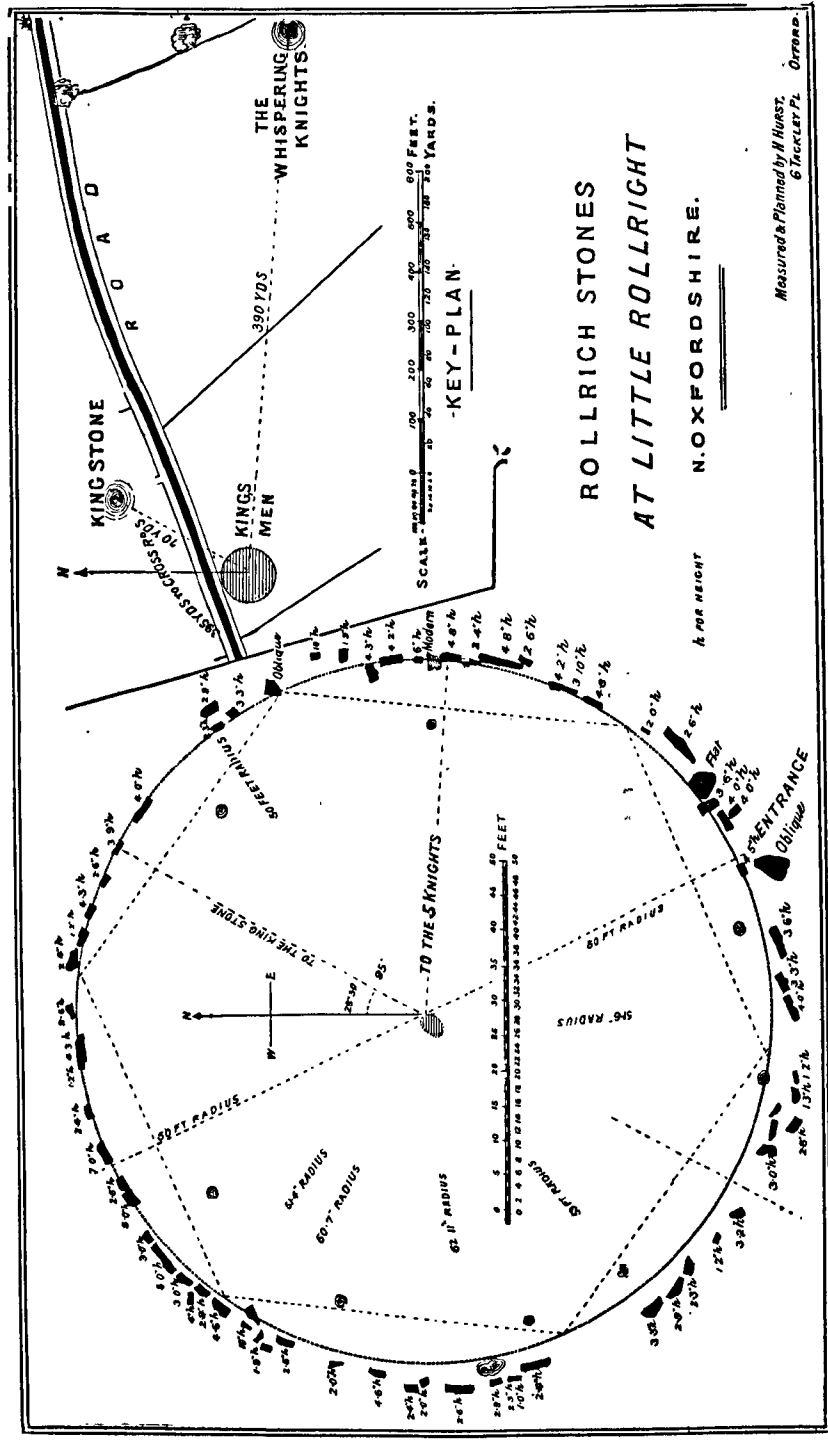
By the shrunken borders of the Forest above Ascot stands, or stood till lately, in a dilapidated condition, the Hoar Stone or "Hore Stone,"<sup>1</sup> and to the North another megalithic monument by the village of Enston was also, with the neighbouring "Hawk Stone," at one time sheltered by the Forest. The Hoar Stone is not, as its name would seem to imply, a solitary block. It has another smaller one by its side, and in an old drawing preserved by Gough,<sup>2</sup> a third is seen at right angles to this. It stands, or stood, by the remains of a mound, and was obviously originally a dolmen like "the Whispering Knights."

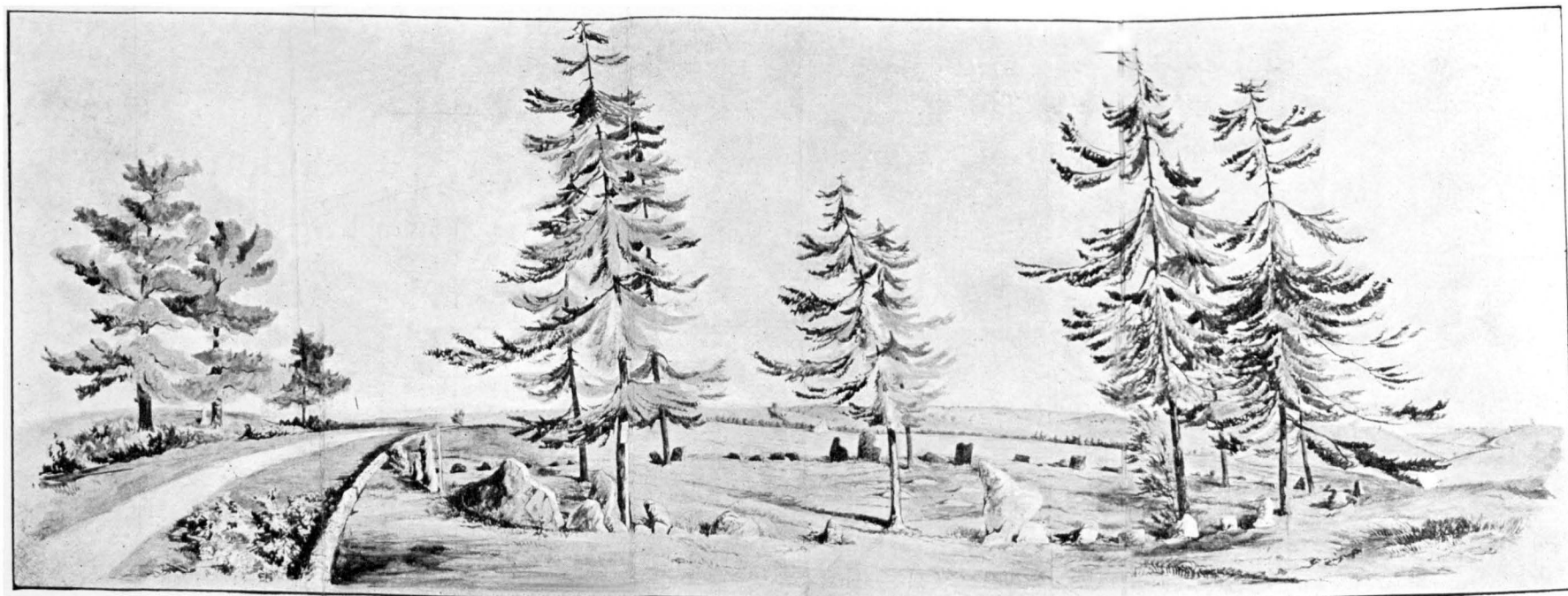
Within the ancient limits of the Forest on the Oxford side stood the scattered blocks to which the name of "Devil's Quoits" has been attached. From my own investigation of this group of stones I had independently arrived at the conclusion that it formed originally part of a great megalithic circle, standing on a low embankment, considerably larger than Avebury; and I notice that Mr. Akerman in his account of the Forest of Wychwood has enunciated the same opinion. He considered from the position of the stones that they had once formed part of a circle some 900 yards in diameter, and, as I had myself been led to do, lays stress on the name of the village (Stanton, A.S. *Stán-tún*, the stone enclosure)—a name, it may be remarked, associated elsewhere with more perfect megalithic circles, as at Stanton Drew, Somersetshire, or the "Nine Ladies" of Stanton Moor, in Derbyshire. As bearing on our present subject, it may be remarked that from Stanton Harcourt and the neighbouring village of Standlake—from the precincts, that is, and partly perhaps from within the limits of this once colossal monument—have been obtained at various times British antiquities belonging to the Bronze and Early Iron Age, while at Standlake were discovered the hut circles of a village of British troglodytes.

The Rollright circle itself belongs to a well-marked class

<sup>1</sup> Akerman, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> In the Bodleian Library.





ROLLRIGHT STONES - GENERAL VIEW.



of what Ferguson<sup>1</sup> has called "hundred foot circles." Its mean diameter indeed is as nearly as possible 100 feet. (See Plan, Pl. I.)

From the comparatively small size of the Rollright circle, and judging from the analogy of similar monuments in various parts, there is a high probability that it once contained an interment. Ralph Sheldon<sup>2</sup> indeed seems to have dug inside without result, but such an examination as conducted some two centuries ago was not likely to have been very exhaustive. During the present century the stone enclosure was turned into a plantation, and the trees, which till a few years since covered the whole area, must have done much to destroy any evidence of sepulture that may have been still remaining.

The neighbouring dolmen known still as "The Whispering Knights" may also have been set up in a sepulchral connection, though excavation would be here impossible without doing harm to the monument. As it is, it has been considerably ruined since the first representation of it was made by Camden towards the end of Elizabeth's reign.<sup>3</sup> A sketch of it as it existed in the last century is also to be found in a drawing inserted in Gough's edition of the *Britannia* in the Bodleian Library, and a view of it as it at present appears has been executed for me by Mr. H. Hurst. (Pl. II.)

<sup>1</sup> *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Plot, *Nat. Hist. of Oxfordshire* (ed. 1677, p. 338), who says that Ralph Sheldon "industriously dug" into the middle of it to see whether he could find any symbols or marks "either who might erect it or for what end or purpose," but that he "could not find any such matter." Cf. Stukeley, *Abury*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Camden speaks of the picture inserted in the folio edition of his *Britannia* (1607, p. 265), as "jam olim expressam." He does not say whether he himself drew it. The "Whispering Knights" are placed quite near the circle in this drawing, and the height of both is grossly exaggerated. The dolmen is represented as four times the height of a man beside it. In another version of the same drawing, this ideal prospect is improved upon. The dolmen there appears four times the height of two knights on horseback, who are seen riding towards it!

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The "King-stone" (Pl. III.) stands about seventy yards to the N.E. of the centre of the circle, near the flank of an elongated artificial mound. The bank by which it stands, boldly described as an "Archdruid's Barrow" by the ingenious Dr. Stukeley, does not answer to any known category of sepulchral tumulus existing in the British Islands. It certainly is not what is technically known as a "Long Barrow"—a long, low mound, that is, with an interment at the East end, in this part of England generally contained in a megalithic chamber such as that of which we see the ruins in "Wayland's Smithy," and belonging to the Neolithic Period. Neither does it answer to any of the round barrows of the Bronze Period. It seems unlikely that it was of sepulchral origin, and there is no good analogy at hand for determining whether the menhir which stands near its flank was—as seems most probable—one of several or whether it always stood alone.

In one important point this mound, or rather bank, differs from the class of sepulchral barrows. These, when associated with a ditch, are surrounded by it, or at least, as in the case of the Long Barrows, accompanied by it on both sides. In the present case the mound looks down on the side of the road on an oblong hollow. Out of this oblong hollow, excavated in the oolite rock, obviously came the material for the bank above it, perhaps too the blocks which supplied the material not only for the King-stone but for the neighbouring circle.

When Stukeley wrote, the immediate neighbourhood of Rollright was still an extensive heath; at the present day, unfortunately for antiquaries, it has for the most part yielded to cultivation. The account of the barrows in the adjoining tract which Stukeley has left us has therefore a considerable value, though his theories about "Archdruids" and the like may be consigned to the same category as his derivation of Rollright from a supposed Welsh word "*Rholdrwg*, which means the Druids' *wheel* or *circle*."

PLATE III.



THE KING-STONE.

PLATE IV.



THE BARROW — *from an old drawing.*

Speaking of Table III., representing a view of Rollright inserted in his work on Abury, Stukeley observes: "In the same plate may be seen another barrow, but circular, below the road to the left hand, on the side of the hill. Under it is a spring head running eastward to Long Compton. This barrow has had stonework at the east-end of it. Upon this same heath eastward, in the way to Banbury, are many barrows of different shapes within sight of Rowldrich; particularly near a place call'd Chapel on the heath is a large flat and circular tumulus, ditched about, with a small tump in the centre: this is what I call a Druid's barrow; many such near Stonehenge, some whereof I opened; a small circular barrow a little way off it. There are on this heath too many circular dish-like cavities, as near Stonehenge; we may call them barrows inverted."

"Not far from the Druid's barrow I saw a square work such as I call Danish Courts or houses. Such near Stonehenge and Abury. 'Tis a place 100 cubits square, double ditch'd. The earth of the ditches is thrown inward between the ditches so as to raise a terrace going quite round. The ditches are too inconsiderable to be made for defence. Within are seemingly remains of stone walls. 'Tis within sight of the temple" (*i.e.* the Rollright stones) "and has a fine prospect all around, being seated on the highest part of the ridge. A little further is a small round barrow with stonework at the east-end like that before spoken of near Rowldrich; a dry stone wall or fence running quite over it across the heath."<sup>1</sup> Stukeley then goes on to speak of the dolmen known as the "Whispering Knights." "'Tis what the old Britons call'd a *kist vaen* or stone chest."

The "barrow with stonework," described by Stukeley as lying above the spring head and below the road, has long disappeared, but I am able to reproduce an old drawing of it (Pl. IV.), inserted in Gough's edition of Camden in the Bodleian Library. The broken block seen in the drawing

<sup>1</sup> Stukeley, *Abury*, p. 12.

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was clearly a standing stone which had once surmounted the barrow, and had broken in two in its fall. In an accompanying sketch-plan this monument is described as "fallen stone on a mound undermined," and is placed about 220 yards W.N.W. of the King-stone. It seems to have been a true "Round Barrow," with a menhir at top, which may have fallen owing to the sinking in of an internal cist.

The road which runs between the circle and the King-stone is, as already observed, of great antiquity, and represents no doubt an ancient British trackway. Along its side may in places be traced the stones of ruined cists and perhaps small circles; and in a field to the north of it, about half a mile from Rowldrich itself, is a small circular clump of trees and bushes surrounded by a double line of stones, and evidently representing an ancient barrow. There is, moreover, a feature about the road itself which is of special interest. At intervals along its side may here and there be seen upright stones which seem to show that the road itself was regarded as a kind of *Via Sacra*, as affording access to the group of ancient sepultures and monuments scattered along the hill-top. The progress of cultivation and enclosure has made it impossible now to obtain more than general indications of these once extensive relics of ancient funereal cult that once surrounded Rowldrich, and which in Stukeley's days were still comparatively untouched.

Stukeley is no doubt quite right in comparing the "disk-shaped barrows"—as is now the accepted term for the class—about Rollright with those near Stonehenge, and he notices that "the diameter of the outer circle at Stonehenge and this circle at Rowldrich are exactly equal"—a statement approximately true. The main point that we have to bear in mind is, that though Stonehenge represents a much more elaborate monument of its kind, both it and the Oxfordshire circle belong to the same general class of monuments. And what is very important is that both stand

in immediate relation to a large group of sepulchral barrows.

As to the relation in which Stonehenge stands to the surrounding barrows, I have already put forth elsewhere<sup>1</sup> some observations which may be here briefly summarised. The class of barrows with which Stonehenge stands in the nearest relation are the disk-shaped kind thus described by Dr. Thurnam: "The disk-shaped barrow consists of a circular area on the same level as the surrounding turf, generally about a hundred feet in diameter, though sometimes much less and sometimes nearly double this size. The enclosed area is surrounded by a ditch and a bank on the outside very regularly formed. In the centre there is usually a small mound of very slight elevation, not more than one foot in height; sometimes there are two or three such mounds corresponding to so many sepulchral deposits. So insignificant are these central mounds that they are scarcely recognised as sepulchral tumuli by the casual observer, who remarks chiefly the surrounding ditch and bank, and calls the whole a ring or circle."<sup>2</sup>

With this form of barrow Stonehenge itself presents some remarkable analogies. The diameter of its great stone circle is itself 100 feet; and like the disk-barrows it is surrounded by a ditch and bank, though in this case the ditch is outside the embankment.

But these disk-barrows, which show such remarkable points of agreement with the neighbouring stone circle, must themselves be reckoned the latest class amongst the surrounding sepulchral mounds. We see in them the complete triumph of cremation over the older skeleton interment of the Neolithic period, which still survived awhile during the earlier Bronze Period in this country side by side with the newer form of urn burial. They show besides a remarkable approach to the "urnfield" form

<sup>1</sup> "Stonehenge" in the *Archaeological Review*, Vol. ii. (1889), p. 312 *seqq.*  
*See especially p. 320 seqq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia*, xliii. 292.

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of burial in the flat earth<sup>1</sup> which became prevalent in Britain during the last two centuries before the Christian era. On every ground then they must be referred to the latest period of the British Bronze Age, which in South-Eastern England reaches down to about the third century before our era. On this and other grounds supplied by relics found in Stonehenge itself and the surrounding barrows, I have ventured to refer at least the beginnings of this great monument—for like other great stone circles it was in all probability, in part at least, of gradual construction—to the centuries immediately preceding 250 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> when, approximately speaking, the "Late Celtic" culture, bringing with it the use of iron, of which we have no trace in Stonehenge, began to be spread by the Belgic conquerors in Southern Britain.

In the case of the Rowldrich or Rollright stones, the extension of megalithic remains, to which attention has been already called, over the neighbouring Wold and Weald enables us to go beyond the sepulchral group still existing in Stukeley's days in its immediate neighbourhood, and to compare its associations with those of the once far larger circle at Stanton Harcourt on the other side of Wychwood. Here we are confronted by a series of trenched circles, formerly regarded as "Fairy Rings," lying in the vicinity of the area once occupied by this Oxfordshire Abury; and in this case some at least of these survived to a time when they could be scientifically explored. This was done in 1857 by Mr. Stephen Stone under the inspection of Mr. Akerman, and an account of the results of the excavation has been published in *Archæologia*.<sup>2</sup> The circles—one

<sup>1</sup> See "Late Celtic Cemetery at Aylesford," &c., *Archæologia*, vol. lii., p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> "An Account of the Investigation of some remarkable Circular Trenches and the Discovery of an Ancient British Cemetery at Stanlake, Oxon," by J. Y. Akerman, Sec. S.A., and Stephen Stone, Hon. Memb. Ashmolean Soc., *Archæologia*, vol. xxxvii. (1857), p. 363 *seqq.* Cf. "Account of certain (supposed) British and Saxon Remains in the County of Oxford," *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, vol. iv. p. 92.



can hardly call them barrows—consisted of a circular trench<sup>1</sup> enclosing a flat area of from about 80 to 106 feet in diameter, in which were ancient British interments. The “disk” most fully explored had an area of 102 feet in diameter, almost exactly answering to the dimensions of Rollright, and contained the remains of about 80 interments, consisting of cremated bones stowed away in rude British urns. The urns themselves were mostly very plain and as uncouth as those of the Neolithic interments of Britain, from which they are directly descended. But from the occurrence of some fragments with herring-bone and other ornaments, and the presence of a barbed arrowhead of flint, a type which in this country seems to characterise the early age of metal, the remains must be referred to a later period. The characteristic form presented by a spiral ring of bronze found in one urn leads us indeed to believe that these flat disk-barrows of Stanlake belong to a time when iron was already coming into use. From the neighbouring hut circles, belonging in all probability to the people who here buried their dead, was obtained a fine specimen of a curved iron knife in its bone handle, and another handle of a similar knife without the blade; and these relics belong unquestionably to the Early Iron Age in Britain and to the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era. A clue perhaps of a somewhat later date to the nationality of the British occupants of Stanlake is found in an ancient British coin with the inscription BODVOC found at this place in 1849,<sup>2</sup> and which must unquestionably be attributed to a prince of the Boduni or Bodunni.<sup>3</sup>

This evidence fits on to what has been cited in the case of the “disk-barrows” about Stonehenge, and we have here additional grounds for assigning the stone circles at Stanton Harcourt and Rollright to a comparatively late period in British history.

<sup>1</sup> In one case oval.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Ingram, *Genl. Mag.*, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> Sir J. Evans, *Ancient British Coins*, p. 135.

## PART II.

## THE FOLK-LORE OF ROLLRIGHT.

The folk-lore of which the Rollright stones have become the centre is of the highest interest, and it would be difficult to find any English site in which it is more living at the present day. I have myself taken down from the lips of the country people in the immediate neighbourhood, but especially about Little Rollright, a quantity of tales relating to the stones; and though the stories were generally prefaced by an explanatory statement that the teller of them simply repeated what he had heard, and that such things could not really have happened, this was often a reserve of half-belief in the old tales.

With regard to the King-stone and the circle, or "King's men" as they are called, the main outlines of the story are as follows:

A certain King—the name is not, as a rule, remembered<sup>1</sup>—had set forth at the head of his forces to conquer all England. But as he went up the hill on which Rowldrich stands there appeared to him the Witch<sup>2</sup> to whom the ground belonged. The King was now within a few steps of the crest of the hill from which the village of Long Compton would be visible in the combe below, when

<sup>1</sup> Only once, in answer to many inquiries, I was told that he was sometimes called King Charles. Mr. Hurst heard him spoken of as "King Billy," which recalls the Breton "Roi Guillaume," attached to similar monuments.

<sup>2</sup> In some accounts the witch is called "Mother Shipton." In a communication of R. H. Cooper to *Notes and Queries* (1853, p. 58) entitled "Oxfordshire Legend in Stone," some Rollright stories are given. The practiser of the witchcraft is called "Magician," but no such expression is known to the villagers. With them it is always a "Witch."

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she stopped him with the words, "Seven long strides shalt thou take,<sup>1</sup> and—

"If Long Compton thou canst see,  
King of England thou shalt be."

The King, who now thought his success assured, cried out exultingly:

"Stick, stock, stone,  
As King of England I shall be known!"

So he took seven strides forward, but lo! and behold, instead of his looking down on Long Compton there rose before him the long mound of earth which still stands before the King-stone, and the Witch said:

"As Long Compton thou canst not see  
King of England thou shalt not be.  
Rise up, stick, and stand still, stone,  
For King of England thou shalt be none,  
Thou and thy men hoar stones shall be  
And I myself an eldern-tree."<sup>2</sup>

Thereupon the King and his army were turned into stones where they stood, the King on the side of the mound and his army in a circle behind him, while the Witch herself became an elder tree. But some day, they do say, the spell will be broken. The stones will turn into flesh and blood once more, and the King will start as an armed warrior at the head of his army to overcome his enemies and rule over all the land.

<sup>1</sup> In other versions the King uses the words himself. The "seven strides" are also mentioned in a note on the Rollright stones by J. W. Lodowick (*Notes and Queries*, 1876, p. 291). Mr. Lodowick's informant, an old man born and bred at Great Rollright, called the king "a Danish king," but we see here probably the influence of literary conjectures like those of Camden about Rollo the Dane.

<sup>2</sup> This is the best version that I myself have been able to hear from the country people. The epithet applied to stones is uncertain. Another version has "Fall down, king," instead of "Rise up, stick;" but the latter, referring to the metamorphosis of the Witch herself, is decidedly the better version. Another version runs, "Rise up, mound, and stand still, stone."

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The last touch sets us thinking of Arthur at Avilion or Barbarossa in the cave of Kyffhäuser. Some say that there is a great cave beneath the King-stone, and according to some the same exists beneath the circle too.

The Witch-Elder still watches over the victims of her magic. As to the exact position of the tree, however, the tradition is shifting. According to some accounts it used to stand in the field not far from the dolmen called the "Whispering Knights." Some say that it was near the circle, but was blown down not many years ago. Others say that it is to be found in the hedge by the road not far from the King-stone, or further in the field beyond the mound where an elder-bush that stood by a large stone was some years since pointed out to a friend as "the Witch." As a matter of fact the elder still grows in luxuriant clumps along every hedgerow and wherever a waste patch is to be found in the country round. When the district was wilder the stones must have been surrounded by a dense elder thicket. Indeed the idea may well have grown up that Dame Elder had turned the king and his army into stone for molesting "her ancient solitary reign."

The proof that the elder is a witch is that it bleeds when it is cut. And with regard to this I came upon a remarkable tradition, which an old woman, the wife of a man of eighty, told me she had heard many years ago from her husband's mother. On Midsummer Eve, when the "eldern-tree" was in blossom, it was a custom for people to come up to the King-stone and stand in a circle. Then the "eldern" was cut, and as it bled "the King moved his head."<sup>1</sup> It is to be observed that this breaking of the spell by blood-letting itself fits on to a very widespread superstition regarding witches, of which I found many surviving expressions in the neighbouring village of Long Compton. They say there

<sup>1</sup> This turning round of the King-stone is paralleled by many French legends, the favourite time being midday or at the sound of the Angelus.

that if you only draw her blood, "be it but a pin's prick," the witch loses all power for the time.

For the "eldern-tree" to bleed it must be in blossom. The more sceptical spirits amongst the country people explain the matter by the catch, "If you cut the elder with your hand on it it will bleed," but among the children at least the more literal belief in the bleeding elder has not died out. An old man of Little Rollright told me that some years ago he was up by the stones and a ploughboy asked him whether it was really true that the elder-tree bled if it was cut. "Lend me your knife," said the old man, and forthwith stuck it into the bark. "Won't you pull it out?" said the boy. "Pull it out yourself!" was the reply, but the boy was too scared to do so. It was only at last, as they were about to go home for the night, that the boy, fearful that he would lose his knife altogether, approached the tree "tottering with fright and all of a tremble," and, snatching it out, rushed away without waiting to see whether the tree bled or not.

In these interesting superstitions we see traces of a time when the elder-tree was itself regarded as a supernatural being, a Tree-Goddess akin to the Dryads of old, before human witchcraft was called in to explain this survival of primitive animism. The idea of the sacred tree bleeding when injured is very widespread, and recalls the oak of Ceres described by Ovid:<sup>1</sup>

"Cujus ut in trunco fecit manus impia vulnus  
Haud aliter fluxit discussa cortice sanguis  
Quam solet, ante aras ingens ubi victima taurus  
Concidit, abrupta cruor e cervice profundi."

The special superstitions attaching to the elder are perhaps explained by the effects of drinks such as are prepared from its berries<sup>2</sup> and blossoms. We learn from

<sup>1</sup> *Met.*, viii. 742.

<sup>2</sup> The blood-red berries themselves partly account for the lingering on of the superstitious belief in the quasi-human life of elder-trees. In parts of Essex the dwarf-elder is called "Dane's blood."

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one of Andersen's fairy tales that those who drink of elder-flower tea see the "Elder-Mother" (Hyldemoer) herself in their dreams, seated amidst her sweet-scented flowers and foliage. In Denmark the tree itself has been seen to move about in the twilight. In Nether-Saxony, before undercutting an elder, it was usual to go down on bended knees before the tree with uncovered head and folded hands and pray as follows: "Dame Elder, give me some of thy wood and I will give thee some of mine when it grows in the forest."<sup>1</sup> In Ireland the elder is regarded as unholy. Of the early association of this tree with witchcraft in this country, a record is preserved in the canons of King Eadgar,<sup>2</sup> which speak of the "vain practices that are carried on with elders."

The fairies dance round the King-stone of nights. Will Hughes, a man of Long Compton, now dead, had actually seen them dancing round. "They were little folk like girls to look at." He often told a friend who related this to me about the fairies and what hours they danced. His widow, Betsy Hughes, whose mother had been murdered as a witch, and who is now between seventy and eighty, told me that when she was a girl and used to work in the hedgerows she remembered a hole in the bank by the King-stone, from which it was said the fairies came out to dance at night. Many a time she and her playmates had placed a flat stone over the hole of an evening to keep the fairies in, but they always found it turned over next morning.

Chips were taken from the King-stone "for luck," and by soldiers "to be good for England in battle." Betsy Hughes told me that her son, who had gone to India as a

<sup>1</sup> Arnkiel, i. 179. Thorpe, *N. Myth*, ii. 168: "As I in my younger days have heard and seen." See on the Elder Cult, R. Perrott, "Gleanings of Legendary Mythology," in *Arch. Camb.*, 1863, 226. In Sudermanland, Sweden, the juniper bleeds when cut. The belief in the magical virtues of elder-sprigs is widespread in England and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Cap. 16. Thorpe, ii. 248.

soldier, had taken a chip with him, "but it brought him no luck, for he died of typhus." A man told me that he had been offered as much as a pound for a chip at Faringdon Fair; and the Welsh drovers, who used to trench the road with their cattle before the railway was made, used continually to be chipping off pieces, so that formerly the stone was much bigger than it is now.<sup>1</sup> A man at Great Rollright gave me a chip that he had kept in his house for years.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of this practice there were many who held that to do an injury to the stones was fraught with danger. In Wales one of the most frequent punishments that falls upon those who thus transgress against the stones is the breaking down of the transgressor's wagon,<sup>2</sup> and this belief still survives at Rowldrich. A ploughman informed me that one day a man who was driving along the road from Banbury swore to a friend who was with him that he would carry off a chip of the Kingstone "though his wheel locked." He got down from his cart and chipped a piece off the stone, but when he tried to drive on he found that one wheel was locked in such a way that nothing he could do would make it go round again.

A curious kind of sanctity seems to linger about the spot. As one of my informants—a well-to-do farmer of the neighbourhood—was going along the road at the top of the hill one Good Friday, he met a labouring man that he knew who stopped him and said, "Where do you think I be going?—Why, I be a going to the King-stones, for there I shall be on holy ground." The man who told me this

<sup>1</sup> This is corroborated by a writer in *Notes and Queries* (1859, p. 393), who on visiting Rowldrich was informed by his local guide that the stones were daily diminishing "because people from Wales kept chipping off bits to keep the Devil off."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barnwell, "On some South Wales Cromlechs," *Arch. Camb.*, 1872, p. 135.

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said that "Some think the place was consecrated ground in the old Romish days." It appears, moreover, from a passage in Stukeley, that the oblong hollow by the Kingstone was in old times a place of festal pilgrimage. Stukeley<sup>1</sup> relates that near the "Archdruid's Barrow," as he calls the mound, "by that called the Kingstone is a square plot, oblong formed on the turf. Hither on a certain day of the year the young men and maidens customarily meet and make merry with cakes and ale." He himself suggests that "this seems to be the remain of the very ancient festival here celebrated in memory of the interr'd for whom the long barrow and temple were made." However this may be, it seems highly probable that the Midsummer's Eve gathering described to me by the old woman, when the blossoming elder was cut, and the merrymaking described by Dr. Stukeley, were one and the same festival.

Various other traditions are attached to the Kingstones, the name by which the stone circle as well as the "King" himself are known to the inhabitants. The Kingstones and the "Whispering Knights" of the neighbouring dolmen are said to go down the hill at midnight to drink of a spring in Little Rollright Spinney. According to some accounts they go down every night when the clock strikes twelve; according to others at certain special seasons, "on Saints' days for instance." What is more, the gap in the bushes is pointed out through which they go down to the water. In some versions of the tale, the King<sup>2</sup> also goes down to the stream at the same hour with his men; but others say that "the King goes down to the water to drink when he hears the clock strike twelve," meaning, as my informant was at pains to explain to me, that as he cannot hear the clock he

<sup>1</sup> *Abury*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Sometimes, too, the king's men with him. In some accounts the stones descend to drink at a stream by Long Compton.



stays where he is. One sceptic assured me that he had passed by the stones many a time at midnight and never seen them move. Here we certainly seem to be on Celtic ground, and recall the Breton tales of how the stones of Carnac go down to the sea on Christmas Eve, or how those on the heath of Plouhinec once every hundred years rush hurtling down "like a troop of drunken giants" to drink at the Intel brook.<sup>1</sup> Once a year the "Pierre de Minuit" goes to drink in the Yonne. Legends of the kind seem very widespread, not only in Brittany but in other parts of France where megaliths are found.<sup>2</sup> They recur in Ireland, where, for example, the white boulder of Cronebane<sup>3</sup> goes down every May-day morning to wash at the Meeting of the Waters. The superstition does not seem to be unknown elsewhere in our own island.<sup>4</sup>

At midnight, again, the stones of the circle become men again for a moment, join hands, and dance round in the air. This dance recalls the *Chorea Gigantum*, or "Giants' Dance," which was transported, as Giraldus Cambrensis tells us, from Ireland to Salisbury Plain, and is better known as Stonehenge. In Cornwall, indeed, the usual name for such stone circles is Dawns-mên, or the Stone-dance; and Borlase observes that "in the circular figure there is a very ancient dance or play ('tis called *Trema-*

<sup>1</sup> See Émile Souvestre, *Le Foyer Breton*, p. 186 *seqq.*

<sup>2</sup> Examples are collected by S. Reinach. "Les monuments de pierre brute dans le langage et les croyances populaires" (*Rev. Archéologique*, 1893, p. 343). The French stones generally go down on Christmas Eve once a year or once a century.

<sup>3</sup> Co. Wicklow. See *Folk-Lore Record*, v. 170.

<sup>4</sup> A similar belief attaches itself to King Arthur and his knights in the Cadbury folk-lore. They come riding down from Camelot to drink of the waters of a spring by Sutton Monks Church on the eve of every Christmas Day (J. A. Bennet, *Cadbury*, p. 4). According to another account, related to me by Mrs. Church, King Arthur goes down to drink on St. John's Eve, and anyone he meets, if not of perfectly pure life, he strikes dead.

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theeves) still practised among the Cornish."<sup>1</sup> In Cornwall the story usually runs that they were men turned into stones for dancing on Sunday.

These circle stones at Rollright cannot be counted. Men have come from a distance and tried over and over again to reckon up their number, but they never could count them twice the same. A baker once swore that he would count the stones. So he baked a quantity of penny loaves and set a loaf on every stone, but when he tried to count his loaves he could not reckon up the number rightly,<sup>2</sup> for he always found one stone without a loaf, and however often he laid them on there was always one missing. "The man will never live who shall count the stones three times and find the number the same." The superstition that the stones cannot be counted is found in the case of the ruined dolmen at Aylesford known as the "Countless Stones" and elsewhere in the account already referred to of the "Marvels of Britain," inserted in Nennius' history. So, too, in Sir Philip Sidney's poem on the Seven Wonders of England it is said of the stones of Stonehenge, "No eye can count them just." There appears a similar tale of the tomb of Anir, son of Arthur Knight, which cannot be measured. Sometimes the length appears six feet, sometimes nine, sometimes fifteen, but the measurement never comes out the same.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Borlase, *Antiquities of Cornwall* (Oxford, 1754), p. 183. In Cornwall and elsewhere the explanation that these are dancers turned into stone "for dancing on the Lord's Day" is very general. So too of "Hurlers."

<sup>2</sup> A similar version of this is given in *Notes and Queries*, No. 168. "You will hear of a certain baker who resolved not to be outwitted, so he tied to the spot with a basketful of small loaves, one of which he placed on every stone. In vain he tried; either his loaves were not sufficiently numerous or some sorcery displaced them, and he gave up in despair." On another occasion, according to Mr. Thomas Beesley in his paper on the Rollright Stones, communicated to the North Oxfordshire Archaeological Society in 1854 (*Trans.*, vol. i. p. 63), a man who wished to count the stones placed his basket on the stone at which he began, but when he thought he had completed the circle and looked for his basket it had been spirited away.

<sup>3</sup> Nennius, *Historia Britonum*, § 73.

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The "Whispering Knights" are traitors who, when the King with his army hard by were about to engage with the enemy, withdrew themselves privily apart, and were plotting treason together, when they were turned into stone by the Witch. Some, however, say that they are at prayer. I was told that once upon a time the big flat stone (the capstone) was taken away to make a bridge across the brook at Little Rollright.<sup>1</sup> It took a score of horses to drag it down the hill, for at first it would not move, and they had to strain and strain to get it along till every bit of the harness was broken. At last they got it to the brook by Rollright Farm, and with great difficulty laid it across to serve as a bridge. But every night the stone turned over back again and was found in the morning lying on the grass. So when this had happened three nights running they saw that the stone must be taken back to whence it came. This time they set a single horse to it, and the single horse took it up the hill quite easily, though it had taken twenty times that number to drag it down,<sup>2</sup> and that they could hardly do. With regard

<sup>1</sup> According to another account at Long Compton. In *Notes and Queries*, 1876, p. 291, appears the following version of the story. "It was said that a miller in Long Compton, thinking the stone would be useful in damming the water of his mill, carried it away and used it for that purpose, but he found that whatever water was dammed up in the day disappeared in the night, and thinking that it was done by the witches, and that they would punish him for his impertinence in removing the stone, he took it back again; and, though it required three horses to take it to Long Compton, one easily brought it back." In another version, given in *Folk-Lore Record* (ii. 177), the stone is wanted by a farmer for his outhouse. In taking it down-hill his waggon is broken and the horses killed. Next his crops failed, cattle died, &c. His only remaining horse is put into a cart and takes it up with ease. Then all goes well with him.

<sup>2</sup> The number of the horses on the two occasions varied in the different accounts given me. In one case it was 40 and 1, in another 21 and 3, in others 12 and 2, 8 and 1, 6 and 1, 23 and 1; but in most versions the stone was dragged up again by a single horse. At Long Compton the stone is said to have been taken down to a brook in "the Hollow" on that side of the hill which takes its rise beneath some ancient elms.

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to this tale, I found generally the most absolute belief among the country people, one man going so far as to say that there were those now living who had spoken to men who had helped to bring the stone down and up again, and "that it was done in Farmer Baker's day, who was not so very long dead." Stukeley at the beginning of the last century had heard the same story in a somewhat different shape. A man who had removed one of the larger stones was smitten with remorse or religious fear, and, according to one version of the story as it is still told, "Farmer Baker had no rest" till he had taken the stone back to its fellows. So, too, at Stanton Harcourt there is a tradition that one of the "Devil's Quoits" was removed to make a bridge and then replaced. No doubt in its original form the tradition took the same] poetical shape as at Rollright; but in the rationalized version that has been preserved the stone was simply replaced by a member of the Harcourt family. But the essence of the Rollright story, the refusal of the stones to stay at the spot to which they had been removed, reappears in one of the earliest bits of old British folk-lore that has been preserved to us. Nennius, in his account of the "Marvels of Britain," relates that in the land of Buelt is a stone on a cairn with the imprint of the foot of the dog of Arthur Knight, and which Arthur himself set up. "And men come and carry off the stone in their hands for the space of a day and a night, and next day it is found again upon the cairn."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Nennius, *Historia Britonum*, § 73. "Est aliud mirabile in regione qui dicitur Buelt. Est ibi cumulus lapidum et unus lapis superpositus super congestum, cum vestigio canis in eo. Quando venatus est porcum Troynt, impressit Cabal, qui erat canis Arthuri militis, vestigium in lapide, et Arthur postea congregavit congestum lapidum sub lapide in quo erat vestigium canis sui et vocatur Cain Cabal. Et veniunt homines et tollunt lapidem in manibus suis per spacium diei et noctis, et in crastino die invenitur super congestum suum." In a mediæval collection of the *Mirabilia Britannia*, published by Hearne as an appendix to his edition of *Robert of Gloucester* (vol. ii. p. 572 *seqq.*), there is a similar tale. "Lapis est non magnus in vertice montis quem

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Similar stories of megaliths returning to the place whence they had been removed by impious hands are also rife in France. Thus a holy stone in Poitou carried away by the people of the district during the Revolution returned next day of itself. With reference to this M. Salomon Reinach<sup>1</sup> appositely compares the ancient legend of the Penates, who when transported from Lavinium to Alba returned to their own home.

Perhaps, however, the most interesting feature in the Rollright folk-lore, so far as concerns the "Whispering Knights," is that the dolmen has become to the young girls of the neighbourhood a kind of primitive oracle. At least it has been so used within the memory of man. Old Betsy Hughes, of whom mention has already been made, informed me that years ago, at the time of the barley harvest, when they were often out till dusk in the fields near the "Whispering Knights," one of the girls would say to another, "Let us go and hear them whisper." Then they would go to the stones, and one at a time would put her ear to one of the crevices. But "first one would laugh and then another," and she herself never heard any whispering. Another old crone told me that the stones were thought to tell of the future. "When I was a girl we used to go up at certain seasons to the 'Whispering Knights,' and climb up on to one of the stones to hear them whisper. Time and again I have

si quis portaverit spacio duorum miliarium vel quantumcumque voluerit subsequenti die sine dubio in eodem loco in vertice montis unde assumptus fuerit inveniri" (p. 574). Carn Cavall still gives its name to a mountain in the upper part of Bualth, or Builth, in Breconshire, and "on one of the cairns of this mountain is a stone that still bears the impression of the dog's feet" (*Arch. Camb.*, 1874, p. 88; cf. *Mabinogion*, ii. 260). In another British legend of a similar nature the stone altogether refuses to be moved. In the "Vita Sancti Winifrede" (Rees, *Lives of the Cambro-British Saints*, p. 205), a certain knight tries to remove St. Beuno's stone, which interferes with a mill-course. A hundred yoke of oxen fail, however, to move it, and the knight himself trying to stir it with his foot, his leg withers.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 344; *Varro de lingua latina*, v. 144.

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heard them whisper—but perhaps, after all, it was only the wind." Who that has stood on the wooded steep that overhangs the ruined sanctuary of Dodona, and has heard the breeze rustling through the prickly leaves of its immemorial oak-wood, will not understand this primitive impression?

Whispering stones of the same kind are known in the Pyrenees;<sup>1</sup> and in other parts of France megalithic blocks are known to sing or talk, like the *Pierre qui Chante* of the Yonne and the two menhirs known as *Fistillerien* on the isle of Sein.<sup>2</sup> It looks as if primitive oracles of this nature had once been widely diffused in the Celtic and Iberian lands.

Some of the folk-tales about Rollright appear already in 16th and 17th century writers. Camden's allusion has already been quoted. Stukeley<sup>3</sup> repeats Camden's story of the men turned into stone, &c., and says, "This story the country people for some miles round are very fond of, and take it very ill if anyone doubts of it: nay, they are in danger of being stoned for their unbelief. They have likewise rhymes and sayings relating thereto." Further on<sup>4</sup> he says, "The people who live at Chippin Norton and all the country round our first described temple of Rowldrich affirm most constantly, and as surely believe it, that the stones composing this work, are a king, his nobles, and Commons turned into stones. They quote an ancient proverb for it concerning that tall stone called the King-stone:

'If Long Compton thou canst see  
Then King of England shalt thou be.'

Stukeley himself notices that "the very same report

<sup>1</sup> In the Glen of Larboust, *Bulletin de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris*, 1877, pp. 241, 242, 244.

<sup>2</sup> S. Reinach, "Les monuments de pierre brute dans le langage et les croyances populaires" (*Rev. Archéologique*, 1893, pp. 337, 344).

<sup>3</sup> *Abury*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *Abury*, p. 83.

remains at the Druid temple of Stanton Drew," Somersetshire. "This noble monument is vulgarly called the Weddings; and they say, 'tis a company that assisted at a nuptial solemnity thus petrify'd. In an orchard near the church is a cove consisting of three stones like that of the northern circle in Abury or that of Longstones; this they call the parson, the bride, and bridegroom. Other circles are said to be the company dancing: and a separate parcel of stones standing a little from the rest are call'd the fidlers, or the band of musick."

Stonehenge, regarded as the "Giants' Dance," "Long Meg and her Daughters," near Penrith, and "The Nine Ladies," near Bakewell, in Derbyshire, are other English examples of the same kind of tradition that at once suggest themselves. The stone alignments of Carnac and Ashdown are armies turned into stone. Classical parallels, such as the transformation into rocks of the Sidonian maids, companions of Melicertes,<sup>1</sup> or of Niobe and her daughters, or biblical, such as Lot's wife turned into the pillar of salt, illustrate the same idea. But in the case of the megalithic blocks composing the stone circles of primæval days, this ever-recurring tradition of their having been originally human beings turned into stone is in all probability, in some sense, coeval with the monuments themselves.

For the best commentary on these traditions we have in fact only to turn to certain parts of our Indian dominions, where megalithic piles in every respect the counterparts to those erected in Britain in prehistoric times are set up by the native tribes to this day. In their beliefs the connexion between the erection of these great stone monuments and the cult of departed spirits is brought out at every step. In some cases the setting up of these stones is not a mere honorary act, but the stone itself in some mysterious way personifies the departed and absorbs as it were his ghost.

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Met.*, iv. 549 *seqq.* Dr. Stukeley cites this parallel.

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The Khassias, for instance, a very wild jungle tribe of Bombay, set up a tall rough slab of stone near the house representing the deceased, to which they make daily oblations. In their eyes, then, it is the actual person, as it were, in a stony form. So too the dolmens are in some parts regarded as themselves the deified spirit of the departed, and thus as a demon or god.

We have moreover an interesting trace of the former prevalence of such ideas in Western Europe in a passage of Aristotle referring to the sepulchral rites of the Iberians; the representatives of the older pre-Celtic population of Gaul, Spain, and Britain, from whom in a large measure the Celts themselves seem to have taken over their megalithic cult. Aristotle<sup>1</sup> says that the warlike Iberians set pointed stones (*ὀβελίσκοι*) round their graves, and that each of these stones placed round a warrior's grave represented a slain enemy.

If, as is probable, human sacrifice was resorted to at these primitive funerals, the stones set round the grave might actually represent, and according to the Indian notion even to a certain extent personate, a human victim. So we find the memorial stones set over the grave in more than one region regarded as a kind of equivalent for the deceased, and in later times carved with his image, at first rude like the Kammenaye Babe, or the Stone Women of the barrows that strew the Russian steppes, but in a more civilized society gradually assuming, as in ancient Greece, a more perfect or ideal likeness of the departed. It has been recently observed that many of the French megaliths contain traces of human features. Traditions such as those that still live on the site of Rollright and elsewhere, that these rude stone circles and dolmens and menhirs were once themselves flesh and blood, may I venture to think be traced back to those once widely prevalent primitive notions which transferred to the

<sup>1</sup> *Politics*, viii. 2.



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stone that marked the resting place of the departed something of his very material being—notions which lie at the root of so much later idolatry. Occasionally the dolmen itself is personified and represents the deified departed; and in India, where every stage in this primitive belief may still be studied by modern observers, we find it leading up to local traditions regarding megalithic piles precisely similar to those that live on in our own folk-lore. At Shahpûr, for instance, in the Deccan, there is a great parallelogram of stones enclosing a low tumulus which contains layers of human ashes. One of these surrounding stones larger than the others is here supposed to be the chief and the others his men, and they are believed to be watching grey cattle in the middle space where stands the barrow.<sup>1</sup>

It is only by going back within the primitive circle of such ideas as these that we can hope to find the clue to the ancient lore which is still handed on by these Oxfordshire villagers. The recurring tradition of the baker who brings small loaves one for each stone and then tries to count them—may it not go back to the times when offerings of small cakes and food offerings were still made as in India at the present day to such hoar-stones? The stones in this primitive belief had a being of their own—they might indeed be regarded, and often were regarded—as the stony dwelling places of souls that once were human. Could human kindness, then, refuse them such small offerings of food? There, too, on the parched hill-top, how often might they pant for the water-brooks below! What more natural than that when the darkness of night threw over them its invisible mantle—at the hour when spells are broken—they too should snatch a momentary life and hasten down to quench the thirst of ages?

<sup>1</sup> Col. Meadows Taylor, "Description of Cairns, Cromlechs, Kistvaens, and other Celtic, Druidical, or Scythian Monuments in the Deccan" (*Trans. of R. Irish Academy*, 1862 (24), pt. ii. p. 329).

## PART III.

THE OXFORDSHIRE ROLAND AND HIS CONTINENTAL  
COMPEERS.

In the local folk-lore regarding the King-stones we have been able to trace certain elements at least as old as the monument itself, and for which the most striking points of comparison are to be found in a large Celtic area. But the name that attaches itself to the spot in its two variant forms—Rowldrich as applied to the stones, Rollright to the two neighbouring villages—leads us in a very different direction. These names, although the fact has hitherto escaped the attention of our antiquaries, are of quite exceptional interest in connection with a whole cycle of legends relating to the early struggles of Christian paladins against the paynim South and heathen North, that have attached themselves to ancient monuments over a large part of the Continent.

The form in which the name appears in Doomsday as attached to the two villages now known as Great and Little Rollright is Rollandri. It may hence be inferred that the original form of the name must undoubtedly have been "Rollandriht"—the "right," as will be seen = the jurisdiction of Roland. The parallel and alternative form of the word Rowldrich or Rolldrich, more exclusively applied to the stones, leads us back to the same name. In a mediæval account of the *Mirabilia Britannia*<sup>1</sup> the place where the stones stand is called Rolandrych. This is obviously a slightly later form of Rollendrice or Rollandrice, the kingdom or dominion<sup>2</sup> of Roland.

<sup>1</sup> Published by Hearne in his edition of *Robert of Gloucester*, vol. ii. p. 578.

<sup>2</sup> Like the German *Reich*, the Old English *rice* is untranslatable by any modern English equivalent.

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The name thus takes us back to the time when "Roland the brave" stood forth as the legendary champion of Christendom against the Paynim. The historical Roland—in the original form of his name Hruodland—præfect of the Britannic March, is recorded by Einhard<sup>1</sup> to have been surprised by the Basques or Gascons at Roncesvalles during Charles the Great's retreat from his Spanish expedition in 778 A.D., and to have perished with the whole rearguard. Already by the middle of the ninth century, as we gather from the *Vita Hludowici*, this episode had become the subject of popular epic,<sup>2</sup> which from this time forth swelled in bulk and took many shapes in different lands and languages. Roland, with his "paladins and peers," becomes the heroic champion of Christendom against the Saracen. He himself assumes a giant's shape, his sword Durendal and his "dread horn" Olifanda find their place in many a tale of supernatural combat against paynim and ogre. That this cycle of legends early took root in England, mainly no doubt through Norman instrumentality, there is abundant evidence. The *Chanson de Roland*, the most perfect existing form of the romance, seems indeed to have taken shape on English soil between 1066 and 1095;<sup>3</sup> and it was a lay of Rolland (*cantilena Rollandi*)—such is the earlier form of the name as at Rolland-right itself—that Taillefer sang before the Norman charge.

What, however, more nearly concerns our present subject, the name of Roland seems early to have connected itself with ancient monuments in many parts of Europe. In North Germany, especially in Lower Saxony and the

<sup>1</sup> *Vita Karoli Magni*, c.g.: "In quo prælio Eggihardus regie mense præpositus, Anselmus comes palatii et Hruodlandus Britannici limitis præfectus cum alijs compluribus interficiuntur."

<sup>2</sup> *Pertz*, ii. 608: "Infortunio agente extremi quidam in eodem monte (sc. Pyrenæo) regij cæsi sunt agminis. Quorum quia vulgata sunt nomina dicere supersedi."

<sup>3</sup> See T. A. Archer, "Legend of Roland," in *Enc. Brit.*, vol. xx., 1886.

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Brandenburg March, the name of *Rolandsäule* was attached to a class of stone monuments, often of colossal size, standing in the market places of various towns, where such pillars,—in later times, at least, carved into the effigy of knights with sword and shield,—came to be regarded as a symbol of independent power, and a mark therefore of Free Cities of the Empire.

Apart, however, from this special class of Roland Stones, to which we shall have occasion to return, there seems to have been a general tendency to fit on the names of the legendary heroes of the early struggle between Christendom and Islam to ancient monuments, especially those of colossal size in various countries, at the cost of earlier cycles with which these mighty works of old had no doubt previously been associated. Sometimes this is the case with historic monuments. The great amphitheatre at Pola, for instance, is known as the "Orlandino," or "Orlando's house."

Sometimes the name of Roland attaches itself to mediæval strongholds like the Castle of Rolandseck, or the Rolands-Thurm on the fourteenth-century wall of Frankfort-on-the-Main, or to a great bell like that of the Bellefort tower at Ghent. So, too, in Sussex, there is a "Rowland's Castle." At times we find the name of the paladin coupled with natural features, such as Roland's Fountain, at Anghirra, on the Lago Maggiore. His name connects itself with a mountain, such as one near Naples, and another in Sicily, of which Godfrey of Viterbo writes :<sup>1</sup>

"Mons ibi stat vastus qui dicitur esse Rolandus."

<sup>1</sup> *Chronicon*, Part xvii. Another Sicilian mountain, according to Godfrey took its name from Oliver.

Especially was this process at work in the case of rude prehistoric piles, and it is in this way, no doubt, that the name of "Sarsen" or "Sarcen" stones is applied to the huge blocks.

There can be little doubt that it is in the same way the name of Sarsen or Sarcen stones, as applied to the huge blocks of Avebury or Stonehenge, or the ordered stones of Ashdown, took its origin. The "Sarcen" is simply the old English name for Saracen, a name which had already taken this popular form, as we know from its appearance in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in days before the Conquest. As a matter of fact the name as attached to megalithic piles is not confined to England: a Breton dolmen bears to this day the name of "the Saracen's Oven" (*Four du Sarrasin*), and another in Guernsey that of the *Tombeau du Grand Sarrasin*. A similar application of the word Saracen to such monuments has in fact a wide currency in France.<sup>1</sup> At Forez there is a *Roche des Sarrasins*. Near Arles the megalithic galleries, or "allées couvertes," are known as prisons, or *magasins des Sarrasins*; in the East Pyrenees the dolmens are called by such names as the Moor's Cave, or Cabin, and in Spain the megalithic blocks become *pedras gentiles*.

So, too, the paladins, of whom Roland was the chief, and often Roland himself under his own name, are connected with such prehistoric monuments in France and elsewhere on the Mediterranean coasts. Near Taranto, in the extreme South of Italy, I have myself seen a dolmen locally known as the "Table of the Paladins" (*Tavola dei Paladini*). A dolmen in the Eastern Pyrenees is known as the *palet de Roland*<sup>2</sup> and a menhir of Corrèze as the *Grave de Roland*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See S. Reinach, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Congrès de Paris*, 1. 173.

<sup>3</sup> *Matériaux*, &c., xx. pt. 1.

38 *The Rollright Stones and their Folk-Lore.*

The names Rollandright or Rollandrich—"Roland's Right," or "Roland's Realm"—attached to our Oxfordshire monument, with the ideas of jurisdiction and dominion suggested by them, bring it into a more special relationship than the general one indicated above. It is impossible not to recall the colossal figures of Roland, already alluded to, which were set up in so many North German towns, especially in Lower Saxony and the Brandenburg March. The "Rolandsäule," as such were called, represented, in mediæval times at least, a youthful knight in armour, holding sword, gauntlet, and shield, and came to be regarded as a symbol of independent power and a mark of the Free Cities of the Empire. The drawn sword held by Roland was an universal symbol of supreme judicial power—the *Blutgerichtsbarkeit*, or power of life and death—and in this aspect the Rolandsäule may be regarded as the later representative of the "pole of justice," the *Blut Säule* or *Gerichts Säule* of the Salic Law, which, from a sword being suspended to it, was sometimes known as the "Sword pole" (*Schwerdpael*).<sup>1</sup> Another form of this seems to have been the "Blood Stone," *Blutstein* or *Lapis sanguinis*, set up in places where moots were held and capital cases decided.<sup>2</sup> It also served to indicate market rights, and under the name of *Weichbild* gave the name to a Saxon Code. "The

<sup>1</sup> "Schwerdpael vor dem Gerichtsstoel." Document of 1452, J. Grimm, *Rechtalterthümer*, p. 852; Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, p. 62. Wehner (*Observat. practic.*, s. v. *Weichbild*, cited by Z., p. 337) who wrote at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries, has an important note on the "Weichbild," another name by which (v. Gryphiander, *op. cit. infra*) the Rolandsäule was known. "Olim signari solitum lignea cruce in finibus cui imposita manus et gladius in signum der Gericht über Hals und Hand." He seems to have placed the Weichbild on the frontier in accordance with a very doubtful derivation given by him for the word from "Weichen," because those who came to it "wieder zurück weichen."

<sup>2</sup> Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

Roland Statue, or 'Rulandsbild'" wrote Gryphiander "is nought else than a 'Weichbild,' that is, an image by which it is made manifest that at that spot is a public forum for pleading and jurisdiction, a place of justice, a district or territory, or as the old Germans did properly call it a public *Mallum* (Moot), a *Mahlstadt*, where free imperial justice was holden."<sup>1</sup>

The Rolandsäule extend from Thuringia through the whole of North Germany on the one side to the boundaries of Holstein and Sleswick, on the other through Saxony and the Brandenburg March to Pomerania and even West Prussia. Many of them were originally of wood, and some wooden examples have survived, as at Nordhausen and elsewhere. From the dalmatic, royal mantle and crown that many of them wear, and from the eagle that they bear on the shield, it appears that in the Middle Ages they often took the forms of kings and emperors, so as the better to stand forth as the emblems of imperial power and privilege. In this sense we find Free Cities outside Germany which wished to proclaim their immediate dependence on the Empire setting up similar columns. As far afield as Ragusa, on the Dalmatian coast, where Orlando—to take the Italian form of his name—was traditionally said to have slain a Saracen corsair, a similar column was set up at an early date, and one in full armour, placed in the market-place in the Emperor Sigismund's time, became for the Republic a badge of independent jurisdiction. In Lombardy, owing, doubtless, to the Frankish conquest, the same practice seems to have prevailed, the statue of Roland placed in the chief cities under the form of a knight holding a sword

<sup>1</sup> Gryphiander, *De Weichbildis Saxonis sive Colossis Rulandinis* (1625 ed., p. 254), who quotes Goldastus,

indicating there, "the supreme right or right of the sword" ("jus supremum quod jus gladii").<sup>1</sup>

This "Jus Rollandi" of Lombardy and other parts of Charles the Great's empire gives us a clear insight into the order of ideas that gave birth to the names Rollandriht, Rolandriht, or Rollriht, for the Anglo-Saxon word *riht* includes the idea of *jus* in the Roman sense.<sup>2</sup> The crown set on the Roland columns of North Germany again takes us to our "King-stone," which, as the chief block at Rollright, was no doubt the one to which Roland's name specially attached itself, and to the alternative form of the name Roldrich, Rollendrich, or Rollandrice (Roland's realm). It is, however, sufficiently obvious that these names could only have been transferred to the megalithic pile on Cotswold by analogy. The circle standing hard by, which, according to some traditions, appears as the king's court or council, helped to make the parallel complete, and stood for the moot or *mallum*, which, as we have seen in North Germany, met before such monuments.<sup>3</sup> How natural was this association may be seen from Dr. Plot's theory that Rollrich was a place where councils

<sup>1</sup> In a transcript of a fourteenth-century Ragusan MS., entitled *Cronice le più antice di Ragusa* (in the Franciscan monastery at Ragusa), containing the account of Orlando's exploit against the Saracen corsair (who is given the unsavoury name of "Spuzente" or "Spucente"), there occurs the following gloss: "Rolland apud Longobardos. In Metropoli erigebant statuam videlicet armati hominis gladium ferentis hoc jus supremum quod jus gladii ostendendis (sic)." See Wendelin Böheim, "Der Rolandstein in Ragusa" (*Mitth. d. k. centr. Comm., &c.*, 1870, p. cxxxiii., seq.).

<sup>2</sup> So *Ealdormanna riht*, Alderman's "law" or jurisdiction = *jus publicum* *ánre burge riht* = *jus civile*. *Ryhtes wyrde* = entitled to call in the aid of the law. (See Bosworth's *A. S. Dict.*, ed. Northcote Toller, s.v.)

<sup>3</sup> Gryphiander. *Tract. de Weichbildis Saxonia*, cap. 73, No. 7: "Est Rulands Bilt per quam notatur esse forum publicum causarum jurisdictionum, locum justitiæ, districtum territoricum."



were held by the Danes for the election of their kings.<sup>1</sup>

That such a name, however, should have been transferred by analogy to this old British monument in the days before the Norman Conquest is itself a most remarkable fact. It evidently points to Old Saxon influence during the period in question, and is of great importance in its retrospective bearing on the antiquity of the Continental Roland stones. The earliest documentary evidence of a Rolandsäule is in a *Privilegium* of the Emperor Henry V. to Bremen, apparently dated in the year 1110, allowing the image of Roland, which we may infer already existed in that city, to be "adorned with a shield and our imperial arms."<sup>2</sup> It hardly needed, however, this præ-Norman parallel in England to show that their origin must be traced to a considerably earlier date. From the many heathen usages and beliefs attaching to these columns throughout North Germany, which at times recall the Sword-God, Tiu, Chrôdo (the Saxon

<sup>1</sup> Plot, *Nat. Hist. of Oxfordshire* (1677, p. 339) cites Olaus Magnus account (*Monument. Danic.*, lib. I. c. 12) of similar erections in Scandinavia. "Reperiuntur in his oris loca quædam in quibus reges olim solenni creabantur pompâ, quæ cincta adhuc grandibus saxis, ut plurimum duodecim, in medio grandiore quodam prominente cui omnium suffragiis electum regem imponebant magnoque plausu excipiebant."

<sup>2</sup> "In signum hujusmodi libertatis et gratiæ licentiamus eisdem (civibus) qui in eorum civitate Bremensi possint signum et imaginem Rolandi ornare clypeo et armis nostris imperialibus." See Deneken, *Die Rolands-Säule in Bremen* (1828), p. 2 *seqq.* Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, p. 176 *seqq.* The impossible date "1111" has been corrected to 1110. The next record is at Halle (1341), then Hamburg (1375). From the fifteenth century the mention of them becomes common. Of existing examples none probably are earlier than the fifteenth century. The original monument at Bremen was of wood, Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, p. 171. It was destroyed in 1366 in civil strife, and set up again in stone in 1404. The existing Rolandsbild seems to represent the monument of 1404 as restored in 1512. It bears the inscription :

"Vryheid do ik ju openbar  
De Karl und manning Vorst verwehr  
Deser Stadt gegeben hat  
Des danket Gode is min Rad."

Saturn); or even Woden, it is evident that, in their origin at least, they represent the rude stone or wooden images of the old Gods, baptized with a new name, and finally shaped after a more civilized model under the pressure of militant Christianity.

The most probable period in which they could have arisen is that which marks the destruction of heathendom in the North at the hands of Charles the Great and the Saxon Dukes during the ninth and tenth centuries. According to the legendary account, the columns were set up by Charlemagne himself in honour of his paladin Roland, who here appears as his son-in-law and as taking part in his Northern wars. By the middle of the ninth century the Roland of Romance was, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> already in being, and his name may have already begun to attach itself to the christened idols before which, under their pagan forms, folk-moots had gathered and rude justice had been executed from immemorial time. What the Rolandsäule and kindred forms like the "Sword-pole" or "Blood-stone" really stood for in later times is curiously illustrated by a Scandinavian record preserved by Olaus Magnus. He tells us<sup>2</sup> that just as at Bremen a statue of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 35. Zoepfl, in accordance with a theory of his which connects Roland (Redland) with the "Red Emperor," would place the date of their origin in Otto II.'s time, that is, in the last half of the tenth century. But the process was in all probability very gradual, and may have begun a century earlier than this.

<sup>2</sup> Olaus Magnus, *De Gentibus Septentrionalibus*, lib. xiv. c. 15: "Quemadmodum præclaræ urbes Italiæ, ob excellentissima hominum ingenia vel facinora, pro eorum perpetuanda memoria, ingentes statuas posuere ut Verona suis Plinii, Mantua Virgiliti, Roma Herculi: ita et Germanicæ ac Gothicæ civitates, ob heroica gesta, statuas virorum excellentium in locis publicis apponere non dubitarunt ut Brema sui Rolandi et Scheninga vetustissima urbs Ostrogothorum sui Thuronis longi qui duabus concatenatis saxis rationabili causa ad clavam in humeris dependentibus pingitur." Adulterers, he continues, were punished before this image with fines or death. In lib. vi. c. 18, again he says of the market place of Scheningen: "In hoc foro stabat gigantea statua Turonis longi nomine, instar Rolandi Bremensis, insignita ad cujus genua publica quæstione corripiebantur malefactores, præcipue adulteri."

Roland was placed in the market place, so at Skeningen, in East Gothland, there formerly stood in a similar position a colossal statue, holding a club to which two stones were suspended, and known as "Long Thor." This image, moreover, had a further correspondence with the German Rolandsäule, in that evil-doers, notably adulterers,<sup>1</sup> were brought before it for punishment or execution. Grimm<sup>2</sup> observes on this, that just as the legendary Charlemagne took to himself the attributes of Woden (Wuotan), and headed the Wild Hunt, so his chief paladin Roland became in his turn at times Thunder or Thor, the Giant-killer.

The heathen superstitions still attaching to the German Rolandsäule are very numerous,<sup>3</sup> and some of them show a curious resemblance to those which cling to the monument at Rollright. In Ditmarsh and parts of Holstein there was a shrovetide custom called "Rulandsritt," or "Rulandsfahrt." At Meldorf, where the ceremony survived to 1828 in its most perfect form, a puppet representing Roland dressed as a peasant in red old-fashioned costume, with a shield in one hand and a bag of ashes in the other, was driven round in a waggon accompanied by the villagers on horseback, and afterwards turned into a kind of quintain and tilted at, whoever broke the shield keeping the image till the succeeding year. In many places dances are celebrated round the Rolandsäule at Whitsuntide.

The Roland image is thought in many places to come to life at midnight. At Bramstedt, in Holstein, he turns round three times when the clock strikes twelve. At Wedel, also in Holstein, on the night of St. Walpurgis Eve (Walpur-

<sup>1</sup> So, according to early Frankish laws, women of bad character were shorn of their tresses before the "Pole of Justice" ("*ad palum tondere*"), and the same was actually done at Halle (Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, p. 60) before the Rolandsäule as late as the last century!

<sup>2</sup> *Deutsche Mythologie*, 326, 327.

<sup>3</sup> They have been collected by Zoepfl, *op. cit.*, *Zweite Abtheilung: Nachrichten von den einzelnen Rulands-Säulen.*

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gismacht), a harrow is placed against the base of the statue with its spikes inward. A number of witches are bound fast beneath this till midnight, but as soon as the tower-clock strikes twelve their chief, the Devil, sets them free. Thereupon they come out right and left from under the harrow, and, mounting on broomsticks, ride through the air before Roland's face. But Roland swings his mighty sword, and before the last stroke of midnight all are cut to pieces. With regard to the superstition that Roland starts into life when the clock strikes twelve, there are rife certain German catches which curiously remind us of what is said by the Rollright people of the King-stone, that he goes down to drink when he hears the clock strike. Thus at Stendal, in the Altmark, it is said that "if Roland hears the night-clock strike at midday he comes down from his stone perch and walks up and down the street."

The power to injure wheels possessed by our King-stone finds also some remarkable analogies in North Germany. Thus at Wedel, once more, in Holstein, the following story is told about the Rolandsäule. In Pastor Rist's time he was called shortly before midnight to go off some miles into the country that he might give the sacrament to a dying woman, whose husband had sent his servant with a cart to fetch him. When they were starting the man asked to be allowed to drive three times round the "Roland" that stands in the market place, "so that no ill luck may happen and that we may have Roland's help." The pastor allowed this to be done, but, we may believe, scoffed at the man's superstition, for in a wild part of the road the Devil (in which the pagan original of the image is easily discernible) broke one of the hind wheels of the cart. The man cursed, but the pastor bade the Devil in God's name to take the place of the wheel; which accordingly he was obliged to do, till they reached their destination. Similar stories are told of St. Bernard, in Bavaria.

This wheel story, however, in connexion with Wedel has

a special interest, if we may believe that Roland there represented an old local Saxon God called "Wedel," whose name and attributes are recorded by Meissen Chroniclers. His form was as of a man with rays to his head, holding a wheel before his breast with both hands.<sup>1</sup> This heathen "Wedel" has by Zoepfl<sup>2</sup> been brought into connection with a kind of sacred trunk Weda, or Weidenbaum (literally, willow-tree), of the veneration of which as a kind of Irminsul, by the Old Saxons, more than one record seems to have been preserved. Weda further appears as a legendary God with a shield on his arm like Roland. The wheel held by "Wedel," moreover, brings us at once into connection with the mysterious Saxon god "Krodo," whose idol King Karl is said to have overthrown on his conquest of the East Saxons in 780. According to the mediæval Saxon chronicle,<sup>3</sup> which is our one source for this statement, King Karl in 780, after conquering the East Saxons, overthrew the idol "like unto Saturn, but of the people called Krodo, on the Hartesburg." This somewhat mysterious God the best comparisons with whom, according to Grimm,<sup>4</sup> are to be found in Slavonic regions,<sup>5</sup> reappears in the Anglo-Saxon form Sæterne (Saturnus) or Sætere, to whom *Saturday* owes its name, and the Burg of the East Saxon "Saturn," in the Harz finds an English parallel in the Sæteresburg mentioned in a charter of Edward the Confessor. Krodo is described as standing

<sup>1</sup> Albinus, *Meissnische Land-und-Berg Chronica* (Dresden, 1589), p. 153: "Sein form ist gewesen eines Menschen so für seiner Brust mit beyden Henden ein Rad gehalten und ein breiten Schein mit Stralen gehabt." He connects this "Abgott" with "Sol," and brings in Salzwedel under the form "Soldwedel."

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 154 *seqq.*

<sup>3</sup> Bothes, *Sachsenchronik*, (Leibn. Scrip.) 3, 286.

<sup>4</sup> *Deutsche Mythologie*, i. 171, 205, 206.

<sup>5</sup> The Bohemian "Kirt," founded on one of Hanka's glosses, is indeed open to suspicion, and his "Sitivrat" (Saturnus) is exploded. Widukind, however (*Pertz*, v. 463), mentions a bronze "simulacrum Saturni" among the Northern Slaves.

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on a perch and holding a wheel.<sup>1</sup> When therefore we find the Roland Stones of the Old Saxon land connecting themselves with the cult of this heathen wheel-holder, we may at least allow for the possibility of his English equivalent the name-giver of Saturday having exercised some influence on the folk-lore of our Roland stones. The special power over wheels exercised by the King-stone at Rowdrich is in this connection certainly suggestive. The story has already been told of the man from Banbury whose impiety in taking a chip from the King-stone was visited on him by the locking of his wheel; and at Long Compton I heard another tale which, though told of a witch in the neighbourhood of the stone, rather than of the stone itself, suggests a still closer parallel to some of the German stories. A man driving a muck-cart on the road past Rowdrich met a witch. At that moment one wheel came off his cart, but thanks to the witch's power he drove on with a single wheel. Here we are not told that the witch herself, or the Devil, as representative of all the vanished powers of heathendom, took the place of the wheel as at Wedel, but we feel that the story may once have taken that form.

It has been perhaps worth while to suggest these parallels between the folk-lore of Rowdrich and the heathen traditions attaching to the Roland stones of the old Saxon lands. It is possible, however, that the likenesses that appear between the two are really due to more general causes, and in both cases belong to a common stock of beliefs regarding great stones and trees handed down by Celts and Teutons alike from very primitive times, and

<sup>1</sup> That the type of a wheel-holding divinity was early diffused in the North is now rendered certain by a relief on the wonderful silver bowl from Gundestrup in Jutland, where a Gaulish God is seen holding a wheel in his right hand. See Sophus Müller, *Det store Sølvkar fra Gundestrup i Jylland* (1892), Pl. x., and p. 51. In representations of Gaulish divinities the wheel is a frequent attribute.

perhaps in both cases largely taken over from still earlier inhabitants of the land. In the local traditions attaching to the King-stones, a Germanic element may not be wanting; yet on the whole the character of the folk-lore seems to be rather that which, in historic times at least, has been generally associated with the old stone monuments on Celtic soil.

Be this, however, as it may, it is quite evident that the local names attaching to our Oxfordshire monument, Rollandríce or Rollandriht, Roland's Realm or Roland's Right, represent a comparatively late importation from the Continent, due to the influence of the Rolandsäule in Charles the Great's empire. It must not, however, for a moment be imagined that the King-stone of Rowldrich is a Rolandsäule in the formal sense in which the word got to be used in North Germany. We cannot suppose that the stone here, for instance, was ever a market stone, or was ever fitted with sword and shield, or hewn into a human effigy however rude. The name was in this case taken over by analogy merely. But that the name of Roland should have been taken over by an ancient monument in England already before the days when Doomsday was drawn up, is itself a highly interesting and instructive fact. The pre-Norman existence of a Roland stone in England supplies itself a most important argument for throwing back the origin of the North German Rolandsäule to a comparatively early date. Even then, however, it is extremely improbable that the name of Roland as the legendary champion of the imperial power against the heathen could have been given to the German monuments before the middle of the ninth century. By what agency, at some time between that date and the Norman Conquest, it was affixed to the megalithic pile of Cotswold remains uncertain. It may, indeed, be suggested that in this wild district on the border, perhaps at that time actually within the limits of Wychwood, some independent spirits found for them-

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selves a kind of No-man's-land, and using the analogy supplied by Old Saxony, turned the stone monument of an earlier age into a Roland of their own. In naming their settlement "Rolandright," they may thus have sought to assert their independence of a lord.

Of one thing at least we may be sure, that the hero with whom in historic times this monument was associated was no other than the legendary hero of Roncesvalles. The theory originally put forth by Camden, and recently revived by Mr. Ferguson,<sup>1</sup> that we have here a record of a combat in which Rollo the Dane took part,—so impossible both on historic and archæological grounds,—hardly needed refutation. When, however, in an account of the proceedings of the Anthropological Society<sup>2</sup> published as lately as 1875, we find Dr. Charnock reverting to Stukeley's derivation, "Rholdrwyg, the wheel or circle of the Druids," as "perhaps the most reasonable etymology," it may be admitted that it was high time that some attempt should be made to trace the true origin of the familiar names of Rollright and Rowldrich.

As a matter of fact, Roland himself is by no means unknown in English folk-lore, and the connexion in which he appears throws a double light on the appearance of his name in the present instance. There exists an old English story, consisting partly of prose, partly of ballad verses, the hero of which is "Childe Rowland," and who is there described as a son of King Arthur. Three verses of this ballad-story are quoted by Edgar in Shakespeare's *King Lear*,<sup>3</sup> and the tale is told in full by Jamieson in his

<sup>1</sup> *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Anthropologia*, vol. i. p. 516.

<sup>3</sup> *Act III., Scene 4:*

"Child Rowland to the Dark Tower came . . . .  
His word was still 'Fie, Foh, and Fum';  
I smell the blood of a British man."

The last two lines of the quotation refer to the King of Elfland and not to Rowland.



*Illustrations of Northern Antiquities.*<sup>1</sup> Its scene is laid in "Merry Carlisle." King Arthur's sons, with their sister "Burd Ellen" in their midst, are playing at ball. Childe Rowland kicks the ball and Burd Ellen runs after it, but she is carried off by the fairies and shut up in the "Dark Tower" of the King of Elfland. This "Dark Tower" is further described in the tale, as "a round green hill surrounded with rings" and entered by a stone passage leading to a more spacious chamber; in other words, as has been well pointed out by Mr. Joseph Jacobs,<sup>2</sup> it is a glorified chambered barrow such as that which contains the haunted vault of Maes-How. Childe Rowland, instructed by the Warlock Merlin, makes his way into the Dark Tower, and with the aid of his magic sword rescues "Burd Ellen."

The connection of "Childe Rowland" in this tale with a megalithic pile supplies an interesting parallel to the relation in which Roland the Paladin has been made to stand to the mighty monuments of a mysterious eld both at Rollright and elsewhere. Nor ought we to neglect the fact that in this instance he appears as a son of King Arthur. For though the name of Roland the Paladin has unquestionably been attached to the stones of Rollright throughout the period of which we have any record, it is obvious, from the late origin of the romance itself, that here, as in other cases, Roland has usurped the place and attributes of the god or hero of some earlier cycle. There can be little doubt that had Rowldrich been situate more to the West or North of our island the local folk-lore would have been linked with the name of Arthur. The tale of the stones that will not suffer removal recurs, as we have seen, in Arthur's Cairn; the story of the midnight journey

<sup>1</sup> *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities* (1814), pp. 397 *seqq.* The story has been recently republished with a valuable commentary by Mr. Joseph Jacobs in his *English Fairy Tales*, pp. 238-45, and *Folk-Lore*, vol. ii. pp. 182 *seqq.*

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*, see esp. Appendix to *English Fairy Tales*.

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to the water recalls the Cadbury tale of Arthur and his knights; here too we have dim hints of a king in a vault below the earth, who some day will come back to the light of day and will reign over all the land. At Stanton Harcourt, on the other side of the same forest region, the Devil is given the Quoits that West of Offa's Dyke are Arthur's. Considering that the name of Roland could hardly have been attached to the Rowldrich stones before the tenth or eleventh century, there seems at least a possibility that he may have here actually displaced the British hero.

But whether the local legends were at one period attached to Arthur or not, it is evident that taken as a whole they betray some very marked Celtic affinities. It is not too much to say that in this small district of Oxfordshire, cut off for at least twelve centuries from direct contact with the Celtic parts of Britain, there have been preserved all the most characteristic features of Celtic folk-lore regarding similar megalithic piles, such as we find them not only in the Celtic parts of England, in Wales and Ireland, but in Brittany in perhaps an intenser degree. Some of the folk-tales, indeed, such as those of the stones coming down to drink, seem to be better known at present among the Breton peasantry than in any part of our own island. This isolated and purely local survival of these old British tales, which in many cases indeed may have been Iberian before they were Celtic, how, it may be asked, could it have taken place at all unless the people who have handed down these primitive traditions belong themselves in a great measure to the old British stock?

We recall that the Wold on which the Rollright circle stood is part of the long range that still bears the half British, half English name of Cotswold, the latter part of which reduplicates the meaning of the Celtic *coed*. It is a bilingual name analogous to Benknowl in Somerset, and clearly points to some British survival. In the list of local names

occurring in the Perambulation of Wychwood in Edward I.'s reign (A.D. 1300), there is the name of one spot at least which has a curiously Cornish sound. "Tremaunmere," between Bishopsden and Akemanstreet, looks very like a word of the same kind as Cotswold or Benknowl. "Mere" is the old English for landmark. "Tremaun" seems certainly tremaen, "the place of the stone,"—perhaps a ruined dolmen like the Hoar Stone at Enston, which was also a landmark. It looks as if here again we had a form like Cotswold and Benknowl, in which the English termination is in fact the translation of the Celtic name expressed in the first part of the word. That the British *Maen* should take the form of "maun" is quite according to phonetic laws. It still takes the form of "mawn" in the dialect of Cumberland<sup>1</sup> where the Celtic element is known to have lived on to comparatively recent times, and where, indeed, Celtic numerals are still not unknown to the shepherds of the fells. By a parity of reasoning we are justified in believing that some lingering knowledge of the old British tongue survived in Wychwood far into the Middle Ages.

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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30th, 1894.

JOINT meeting of the Folk-Lore Society and the Irish Literary Society, held at the hall of the Society of Arts, the President of the Folk-Lore Society (Mr. G. L. Gomme, F.S.A.) in the chair.

A paper entitled "The Earliest Irish Conceptions of the Other World" was read by Mr. Alfred Nutt.

<sup>1</sup> See *Arch. Cambrensis*, 1884, p. 105.