



## History & Geography

For history and geography, we've included a brief history on England's patron saint, St. George, as well as "The Story of How the Giant's Dance Was Brought to Britain" & "The Coming of Arthur" from H.E. Marshall's *Our Island Story*.

*"England will still be England, an everlasting animal, stretching into the future and the past and like all living things having the power to change out of all recognition and yet remain the same."*

~ George Orwell

History & Geography

# The Story of How the Giant's Dance Was Brought to Britain & The Coming of Arthur

Excerpts from *Our Island Story* by H. E. Marshall

## ***The Story of How the Giant's Dance Was Brought to Britain***

Vortigern was dead, but the Saxons whom he had brought to Britain were still rulers of the land. So after burning the castle of Vortigern, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon marched against the Saxons. They defeated them in a great battle, and Hengist was taken prisoner.

Then Aurelius Ambrosius called all the British nobles together in council to decide what should be done with Hengist. Aurelius was a very brave man, but he was not cruel. He was noble, and above all things he hated a lie. Hengist was brave too, but he was cruel, revengeful, and deceitful.

Aurelius would have spared Hengist's life, because he was such a brave man. But Edol, Earl of Gloucester, that noble who fought so well when the Britons were destroyed on Salisbury Plain, stood up. 'It is not right,' he said, 'that Hengist should live. He has brought much sorrow on our land. Through his fault nearly all our nobles were killed on Salisbury Plain. Let him die.'

Then all the people shouted, 'Let him die.'

So Aurelius bowed his head and said, 'It is just. Let him die.'

Edol then led Hengist away and cut off his head.

But although their leader was gone, many Saxons still remained in Britain, and afterwards you will hear how powerful they became.

Aurelius was now chosen to be King of Britain and, like Vortimer, he began to restore order and rebuild the churches and towns which the heathen Saxons had a second time destroyed. The land which the Saxons had stolen he gave back to those of the Britons to whom it really belonged. He revised the laws, and once more peace and justice reigned in the kingdom.

When Aurelius had put everything in good order, he went to Salisbury Plain to see the place where so many of his people had been put to death by Hengist and his wicked Saxons.

As he stood upon the great plain, he felt very sad. Turning to his nobles who surrounded him, he said, 'My people died trying to make peace for their country. Yet there is no stone to mark the spot. I will have a noble monument raised, so that the wickedness of Hengist and the bravery of my people may be remembered for ever.'

Then Aurelius sent for all the best builders and masons in the country, and told them to make a splendid monument. But, one after another, they refused. 'We are not clever enough to do such a great thing,' they said.

This made Aurelius sorry, for he wished very much that people should not forget these British heroes.

Then a wise man came to him and said, 'Send for Merlin. If any one can build a great monument he can.'

'Who is Merlin?' asked Aurelius.

'Merlin is a great magician,' replied the wise man. 'He used to live with Vortigern and do wonderful things for him. Since Vortigern's death he has been hiding somewhere in Wales. If you can find him he will build the monument for you.'

A magician is a person who can do difficult things quite easily. His real home is in fairyland, and he understands fairy language. The fairies come and whisper their wonderful secrets to him, although no one else can see or hear them.

Aurelius was very glad to hear about Merlin. He sent messengers into all the land to look for him. They searched about for a long time, until at last they found Merlin and brought him to the king.

As soon as Merlin knew what Aurelius wanted, he said, 'If you really wish to honour the burying-place of these men with a monument which will last for ever, send to Ireland for the Giant's Dance.'

'What is the Giant's Dance?' asked Aurelius.

'The Giant's Dance is a great ring of stones,' replied Merlin. 'They are so wonderful and so old that no one is sure how they came there. But it is said that long, long ago giants brought these stones from a far-off country called Africa.'

When Aurelius heard that, he burst out laughing. 'How is it possible,' he asked, 'to remove such big stones from a far-off country? Have we not enough stones in Britain with which to build a monument?' and he laughed again.

'Do not laugh,' said Merlin gravely. 'They are wonderful stones. Every one of them will cure some kind of illness. They are fairy stones.'

When the Britons heard that, they made up their minds to have these stones, and Uther Pendragon was chosen to go with Merlin to bring them. So, taking a great army of men and many ships, they set sail for Ireland.

When they arrived in Ireland they sent a message to the king, asking him to let them take the Giant's Dance away.

It was now the King of Ireland's turn to laugh. 'What mad people these Britons are!' he said. 'Was ever such folly heard of? Have they not enough stones in their own country, that they must come to take mine? I shall certainly not give them one single stone of the Giant's Dance. Tell them to go home again and not to be so foolish.'

But the Britons had quite made up their minds to have the Giant's Dance. As the King of Ireland would not give it to them, they resolved to fight for it. This they did, and soon put the Irish to flight.

Then Merlin led the Britons to the place where the Giant's Dance stood. When they saw it, they were filled with joy and wonder, and set to work at once to move the stones. But try how they might, they could not move even the smallest of them one single inch. They pulled and pushed, struggled and strained, till they were hot and tired, but the stones stood as firm as rocks.

Merlin sat by, watching them and smiling. Then when they were all worn out, and cross and tired, he rose. 'Now let me try,' he said, 'it is really quite easy.' And in a very short time, with the help of his wonderful magic, he had moved all the stones and put them on board the ships. The people looked on in amazement and, as soon as he had finished, they set sail for Britain with great rejoicing.

When they landed, messengers were sent to tell King Aurelius Ambrosius. He gathered all the nobles and clergy, and wearing his crown and royal robes, rode to Salisbury Plain. There, with great feasting and ceremony, the stones were set up as a memorial to the dead British heroes. They were placed in exactly the same order as they were found in Ireland. Aurelius changed the name from Giant's Dance to Stonehenge, and the great monument may be seen on Salisbury Plain to this day.

Most people say this is a fairy tale, and ought not to be put in a history book. They say that the stones on Stonehenge were there long before Merlin lived, long before Hengist and his Saxons, or Cæsar and his Romans, even long before Brutus of Troy, came. They say that probably no one will ever find out how these stones came to be there, or why they were placed as they are. I dare say they are right, but fairy tales are very interesting, and this fairy tale (if it is one) is to be found in some of the first histories of Britain that were ever written. So certainly at one time people must have believed it to be true.

Unfortunately, soon after this, a wicked Saxon poisoned the good king, Aurelius Ambrosius. The Britons were very sad at his loss, and they buried him within the Giant's Dance, where so many other noble Britons lay. Then, because Aurelius had no children, the people chose his brother Uther Pendragon to be king.

He, too, was good and wise, but he had to spend most of his time fighting against the Saxons. After the death of Hengist very many Saxons had remained in Britain, and now many more came again in ships from Germany. Fierce and terrible battles were fought, and although the Saxons were often defeated, the Britons could not succeed in driving them away altogether.

But the name of Uther Pendragon became a terror to these heathen. It is said that when he was so old and feeble that he could not stand, he was carried to battle in a litter. And so great was the power and fame of his courage, that the Saxons were utterly defeated.

'Ah,' he said, laughing, 'these heathen call me the half-dead king. And so indeed I am. Yet victory to me half dead is better than to be safe and sound and vanquished. For to die with honour is better than to live with disgrace.'

But alas! Uther Pendragon, like so many of the good kings before him, was also poisoned by the wicked Saxons. So he died, and the people buried him close to his brother, Aurelius Ambrosius, within the Giant's Dance on Salisbury Plain.

### ***The Coming of Arthur***

As soon as Uther Pendragon was dead, the mighty nobles of Britain began to quarrel among themselves as to who should be king next. Each noble thought he had the best right, so the quarrelling was dreadful.

While they were all gathered together, fighting and shouting at each other, Merlin came among them, leading a tall, fair-haired boy by the hand. When the nobles saw Merlin, they stopped fighting and were silent. They knew how clever he was, and what wonderful things he could do, and they were rather afraid of him.

Merlin stood quietly looking at them all from under his bushy eyebrows. He was a very old man. But he was tall and strong and splendid, with a long white beard and fierce, glittering eyes. It was no wonder that the Britons felt afraid of him.

'Lords of Britain,' said Merlin at last, 'why fight ye thus? It were more meet that ye prepare to do honour to your king. Uther Pendragon is indeed dead, but Arthur, his son, reigns in his stead.'

'Who is this Arthur? Where is he?' asked the nobles angrily. 'Uther Pendragon had no son.'

'Hear me,' said Merlin, 'Uther Pendragon had a son. It was told to me that he should be the greatest king who should ever reign in Britain. So when he was born, lest any harm should befall him, he was given into my care till the time should come for him to reign. He has dwelt in the land of Avilon, where the wise fairies have kept him from evil and whispered wisdom in his ear. Here is your king, honour him.'

Then Merlin lifted Arthur up and placed him upon his shoulders, so that all the people could see him. There was something so noble and splendid about Arthur, even although he was only a boy, that the great lords felt awed. Yet they would not believe that he was the son of Uther Pendragon. 'Who is this Arthur?' they said again. 'We do not believe what you say. Uther Pendragon had no son.'

Then Merlin's bright eyes seemed to flash fire. 'You dare to doubt the word of Merlin?' he shouted. 'O vain and foolish Britons, follow me.'

Taking Arthur with him, Merlin turned and strode out of the hall, and all the nobles followed him. As they passed through the streets, the people of the town and the women and children followed too. On they went, the crowd growing bigger and bigger, till they reached the great door of the cathedral.

There Merlin stopped, and the knights and nobles gathered around him; those behind pushing and pressing forward, eager to see what was happening.

There was indeed something wonderful to be seen. In front of the doorway was a large stone which had not been there before. Standing upright in the stone was a sword, the hilt of which glittered with gems. Beneath it was written, 'Whoso can draw me from this stone is the rightful king of Britain.'

One after another the nobles tried to remove the sword. They pulled and tugged till their muscles cracked. They strained and struggled till they were hot and breathless, for each one was anxious to be king. But it was all in vain. The sword remained firm and fast in the rock.

Then last of all Arthur tried. He took the sword by the hilt and drew it from the stone quite easily.

A cry of wonder went through the crowd, and the nobles fell back in astonishment leaving a clear space round the king. Then as he stood there, holding the magic sword in his hand, the British nobles one after another knelt to Arthur, acknowledging him to be their lord.

"Be thou the king and we will work thy will,  
Who love thee." Then the king in low deep tones  
And simple words of great authority  
Bound them by so strait vows to his own self  
That when they rose, knighted from kneeling, some  
Were pale as at the passing of a ghost,  
Some flushed, and others dazed, as one who wakes  
Half-blinded at the coming of a light.

Arthur was only fifteen when he was made king, but he was the bravest, wisest and best king that had ever ruled in Britain. As soon as he was crowned, he determined to free his kingdom from the Saxons. He swore a solemn oath that he would drive the heathen out of the land. His knights he bound by the same solemn oath.

Then, taking the sword which he had won, and which was called Excalibur, and his mighty spear called Ron, he rode forth at the head of his army.

Twelve great battles did Arthur fight and win against the Saxons. Always in the foremost of the battle he was to be seen, in his armour of gold and blue, the figure of the Virgin upon his shield, a golden dragon and crown upon his helmet. He was so brave that no one could stand against him, yet so careless of danger that many times he would have been killed, had it not been for the magic might of his sword Excalibur, and of his spear Ron.

And at last the Saxons were driven from the land.

# Saint George



Saint George is a remarkable Christian saint, remembered for his courage, strong faith, and the legendary tale of him allegedly slaying a dragon. Though little details are known about his life, he most likely lived during late 200 and early 300 A.D., a time when Christians were often persecuted for their beliefs.

George was born in a part of the Roman Empire that is now modern-day Turkey. It is believed that his parents were Christians and raised him to be strong in his faith. As a young man, George became a soldier in the Roman army and was known for being a brave and honorable man.

When the emperor at the time, Diocletian, ordered that all Christians be punished, George refused to give up his faith. Because of his courage and unwavering faith, George was arrested, tortured, and eventually killed. He became a martyr—someone who dies for their faith—and was honored by Christians all over the world.

Over time, stories began to spread about Saint George's bravery, in some instances growing larger than life, including the famous legend of Saint George and the Dragon. In this tale, George saves a town—and a princess—from a fierce dragon, symbolizing the victory of good over evil. Though it is doubtful that this ever happened to the real George, it inspired many medieval artists to create beautiful pieces of art, and in them, the historical legend takes on a life of its own.

Saint George is remembered as a symbol of courage, faith, and standing up for what is right. His feast day is celebrated on April 23rd in many countries, especially in England, where he is the patron saint and is considered an important icon of the country. Shakespeare himself even mentioned him in his play, *Henry V*, when King Henry inspires his troops during war: "Follow your spirit, and upon this charge cry 'God for Harry, England, and Saint George!'"

Though we may never know all the exact details of his life, the legacy of Saint George continues to remind us of the power of standing firm in our beliefs, facing challenges with bravery, and being willing to do what is right—even when it's difficult. His story still encourages people of all ages to live with courage and faith today.