

Wayland, the Smith.

Another Local Legend run to earth and crystallised,

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IN a field known as "Sniveller's Corner," near Odstone Farm and the Hamlet of Kingstone-by-Ashbury, lying in the Vale of White Horse, about a mile and a half to the N.W. under Wayland's Smithy, is a large Sarsen stone with a big indentation on one side of it. Legend has associated this stone with the great Smith. The matter seemed to be worth investigation, so I proceeded to make enquiries, and here is my little story.

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Everyone knows something about the Scandinavian myth of Wayland, the magic worker in metals.

I have just been spending, once more, a short holiday in the perfect glories of the air and the scenery of our Berkshire Downs near Wayland's Smithy, and I came across a more recent myth connected with the immortal Smith.

I wandered down into the vale below and chanced upon one of the oldest inhabitants, who seemed ready for a talk.

"Mother," said I, to this blooming young widow of about 80—no one grows old on the Berkshire Downs, they just slide from youth, after many years, into the Beyond without pain, trouble or effort—"I've heard a yarn about Wayland and the snivelling youngster; what is the real, true and original story?"

This is the old—I beg pardon, young—woman's story as she told it to me in the very broadest "Barkshire"; impossible to reproduce entirely.

"Um! ole Wellan! Gaw bless 'ee, Sur, 'ee was the wunnerf'st man wot ever lived in these 'eer parts: 'underds and 'underds o' yers ago 'ee did: up on the 'ill yander: they do call

'is 'ouse Wellan's Smithy : shod 'osses of the gentry wot rode over the ole Rudge Way, at sixpence a turn an' was mity riled if ennybody give 'im more : and mended their 'osses' 'arness he did : wunnerful man, Wellan.

'Ee'd 'ad a busy day an' 'ad run out o' nails an' things. 'Ee 'ad a nosey youngker poking about an' 'elping 'on 'en now and then : I 'av a yeard him korled Flibber Gibbet—specks he got 'anged." (? Flibbertigibbet, see Scott's *Kenilworth*.) " Says Wellan ter the kid : " You go an' get me some nails an' iron from Ashbury, an' be durned quick erbout it." An' the kid went orf ; but, Lor bless 'ee, Sur, yew knaws wot kids be : 'ee 'ent gorn ten minutes 'fore he ferget all as Wellan 'ad a tole 'un and 'e goes a bird's nestin' an' things, a wastin' 'is toime. Later in the day that blooming kid's conshunce must a' struck 'im, the blighty scratterty young pip : ever 'ad any kids of yer own, Sur ? " I smiled because I had, and I nodded to her to go on. " I knows wot I be torkin' erbout : I've 'ad foarten of the most deevlish young caddlin' wosbirds as ever wos, an' I knows wot Wellan wos a feelin' loike when young Flibber Gibbet didn't make good wif the nails an' things as wos wornted—young gowk.

" Well, 'ee got up to Wellan, hours late, an' Wellan wos in a real tear wi' rage, an' 'ee goes fer that ugly dummell like winkin' : pretty neer moithered 'un, Sur, and the kid flod down the 'ill a 'ollerin' like mad : Wellan felt pretty sick inside, so 'ee picked up a sarsen, you knoaas them big 'ard stwuns wot used to lie orl over the 'ills, about a couple o' tons, an' 'eeved it 'arter that young pup an' it cotched 'im in the 'eel at a mile an' a 'arf orf. Wellan wos a powerful mon, 'ee wos ; an' Flibber 'ee set up a 'owlin' an' a snivellin' an' slunk 'ome. And there, Sur, in the second field on the right, over the two stiles you'll see the werry stwun itself, wi' the mark ov Flibber's 'eel clean marked an' 'im, wer it 'it un ; an' ye'll see I 'ent bin a tellin' yer no lie, an' the field is korled ter this day ' Sniveller's Corner,' 'cos that's wer the kid snivelled."

There was a naughty little twinkle in the eye of the young girl of 80, but I honestly think she believed half this later myth of Wayland the Smith, and I am firmly convinced her ancestors credited it entirely.

I found the stone : it is near Odstone Farm, between Compton Beauchamp and Ashbury, and directly under "Wayland's Smithy" at a distance of about a mile and a half. It is 3 feet long above ground, 18 inches wide and 18 inches deep ; but, with the most vivid imagination, I must say I failed to identify the impress of the heel of Flibber the Sniveller upon it.