



The Lays of Beleriand (History of Middle-Earth)

J.R.R. Tolkien

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This is the third volume of the History of Middle-earth, which comprises here-tofore unpublished manuscripts that were written over a period of many years before Tolkien's *Silmarillion* was published. Volumes 1 and 2 were the *Book of Lost Tales, Part One* and *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*. Together, these volumes encompass an extraordinarily extensive body of material ornamenting and buttressing what must be the most fully realized world ever to spring from a single author's imagination.

"I write alliterative verse with pleasure," wrote J.R.R. Tolkien in 1955, "though I have published little beyond the fragments in *The Lord of the Rings*, except *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*." The first of the poems in *The Lays of Beleriand* is the previously unpublished *Lay of the Children of Hurin*, his early but most sustained work in the ancient English meter, intended to narrate on a grand scale the tragedy of *Turin Turambar*. It was account of the killing by *Turin* of his friend *Beleg*, as well as a unique description of the great redoubt of *Nargothrond*. The *Lay of the Children of Hurin* was supplanted by the *Lay of Leithian*, "Release from Bondage", in which another major legend of the *Elder Days* received poetic form, in this case in rhyme. The chief source of the short prose tale of *Beren and Luthien* is *The Silmarillion*. This, too, was not completed, but the whole *Quest of the Silmaril* is told, and the poem breaks off only after the encounter with *Morgoth* in his subterranean fortress. Many years later, when *The Lord of the Rings* was finished, J.R.R. Tolkien returned to the *Lay of Leithian* and started on a new version, which is also given in this book. Accompanying the poems are commentaries on the evolution of the history of the *Elder Days*, which was much developed during the years of the composition of the two *Lays*. Also included is the notable criticism in detail of the *Lay of Lethian* by C.S. Lewis, Tolkien's friend and colleague, who read the poem in 1929. By assuming that this poem is actually a fragment from a past lost in history, Lewis underlined the remarkable power of its author's imaginative talents and academic competence.

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