

# **LEGEND LAND**

VOLUME ONE

G. Basil Barham

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## FOREWORD

**I**N those older, simpler days, when reading was a rare accomplishment, our many times great-grandparents would gather round the blazing fire of kitchen or hall on the long, dark winter nights and pass away the hours before bedtime in conversation and story-telling.

The old stories were told again and again. The children learned them in their earliest years and passed them on to their children and grandchildren in turn. And, as is natural, in all this telling the stories changed little by little. New and more familiar characters were introduced, or a story-teller with more vivid imagination than his fellows would add a bit here and there to make a better tale of it.

But in origin most of these old legends date from the very dawn of our history. In a primitive form they were probably told round the camp-fires of that British army that went out to face invading Cæsar.

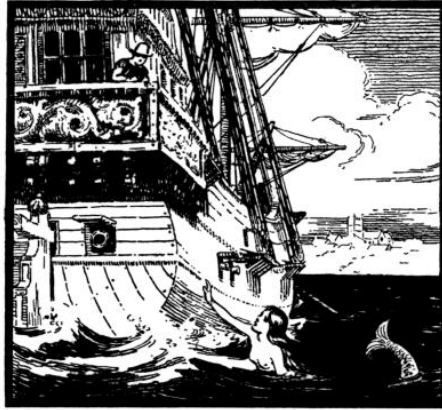
Then with the spread of education they began to die. When many folk could read and books grew cheap there was no longer the need to call upon memory for the old-fashioned romances.

Yet there have always been those who loved the old tales best, and they wrote them down before it was too late, so that they

might be preserved for ever. A few of them are retold briefly here.

All people should like the old stories; all nice people do. To them I commend these tales of Legend Land, in the hope that they may grow to love them and the countries about which they are written.

LYONESSE



## THE MERMAID OF ZENNOR

**C**ARVED on one of the pews in the church of Zennor in West Cornwall is a strange figure of a mermaid. Depicted with flowing hair, a mirror in one hand and a comb in the other, the Zennor folk tell a strange story about her.

Years and years ago, they say, a beautiful and richly dressed lady used to attend the church sometimes. Nobody knew where she came from, although her unusual beauty and her glorious voice caused her to be the subject of discussion throughout the parish.

So attractive was she that half the young men of the village fell in love with her, and one of them, Mathey Trewella, a

handsome youth and one of the best singers in the neighbourhood, determined that he would discover who she was.

The beautiful stranger had smiled at him in church one Sunday, and after service he followed her as she walked away towards the cliffs.

Mathey Trewella never returned to Zennor, nor did the lovely stranger ever attend church again.

Years passed by, and Mathey's strange disappearance was almost forgotten when, one Sunday morning, a ship cast anchor off Pendower Cove, near Zennor. The captain of the vessel was sitting idling on the deck when he heard a beautiful voice hailing him from the sea. Looking over the side he saw the mermaid, her long yellow hair floating all around her.

She asked him to be so kind as to pull up his anchor, for it was resting upon the doorway of her house under the sea and she was anxious to get back to Mathey, her husband, and her children.

In alarm, the captain weighed anchor and stood out to sea, for sailors fear that mermaids will bring bad luck. But later he returned and told the Zennor folk of Mathey's fate, and they, to commemorate the strange event, and to warn other young men against the wiles of the merrymaids, had the mermaid figure carved in the church.

And there it is to-day for all the world to see, and to prove, to those who do not believe the old stories, the truth of poor Mathey Trewella's sad fate.

Zennor is a lovely moorland village in the neighbourhood of some of the wildest scenery in Cornwall. To the south-west rugged moors stretch away to the Land's End. To the north a quarter of an hour's walk brings you to the coast with its sheltered coves and its cruel cliffs. Gurnard's Head, one of the most famous of all Cornish promontories, is less than two miles away. Grim, remote, yet indescribably fascinating, the country around Zennor is typical of that far western corner of England which is swept continually by the great health-giving winds of the Atlantic.

In its sheltered valleys flowers bloom all the year round. On its bold hill-tops, boulder-strewn and wild, there remain still the old mysterious stones and the queer beehive huts erected by men who inhabited this land in the dark days before Christianity.

Gorse and heather riot over the moorland. There is a charm and peace about this too little known country that compels health and well-being.

Yet Zennor is only five and a half miles by the moorland road from St. Ives, that picturesque little fishing town that artists and golfers know so well. St. Ives, less than seven hours' journey from Paddington, is an ideal centre from which to explore the coast and moorland beauties of England's furthest west.



*The Mermaid of Zennor: Bench End in Zennor Church*





## THE STONE MEN OF ST. CLEER

**A** THOUSAND feet above sea level among the heather and bracken of Craddock Moor, four or five miles north of Liskeard, you may find to-day the remains of three ancient stone circles known as "The Hurlers." Antiquaries will tell you that the Druids first erected them, but the people of the countryside know better. From father to son, from grandparent to child, through long centuries, the story has been handed down of how "The Hurlers" came to be fixed in eternal stillness high up there above the little village of St. Cleer.

Exactly how long ago it was nobody knows, but it happened in those early days when pious saints were settling down in the

remote parts of savage Cornwall and striving to convert the wild Cornish from their pagan ways.

Then, as even to this day, the game of Hurling—a sort of primitive Rugby football—was a popular pastime with the people. Village used to play against village, with goals perhaps four or five miles apart. And the good folk of St. Cleer were as fond of the game as any of their neighbours—so fond, in fact, that they would play it on any and every occasion, despite the admonitions of their local saint and parson, after whom the village was named.

Again and again he would notice that his little church was empty on Sunday mornings while the shouts and noise of a hard-fought Hurling match drifted across the moorland in through the open church door. Again and again he would take his flock to task for their godless ways and their Sabbath-breaking games. But it was of little use. For a Sunday or two they would be penitent and attend service. Then would come a fine morning, and a challenge perhaps from the Hurlers of St. Ive or North Hill, on the other side of the moors, and the young men would decide to chance another lecture from the patient saint, and out they would go to the hillside to do battle for the honour of their parish.

But even the patience of saints comes to an end at last, and good St. Cleer saw something more than words was needed to lead his people into the right way. And so it happened one Sunday morning, in the midst of a hot tussle on Craddock Moor, the outraged St. Cleer arrived in search of his erring flock.

He bade them cease their game at once and return to church. Some of them obeyed, wandering sheepishly off down the hill; some were defiant and told the worthy man to go back to his prayers and not to come up there to spoil sport.

Then St. Cleer spoke in anger. Raising his staff he told them in solemn and awful tones that it should be as they had chosen. Since they preferred their game on the moor to their service in church, on the moor at their game they should stay for ever. He lowered his staff and to the horror of all onlookers the defiant ones were seen to be turned into stone.

Many centuries have passed since then. Time, wind and rain have weathered the stone men out of all semblance of humanity. Some have been destroyed, but most still remain as an awful example to impious Sabbath profaners. And there you may see them silent and still, just as they were struck on that grim Sunday in the dark long ago.

The glorious moorland, rugged and wild, stretches all about them—a wonderful walking country, where one may escape from all cares and wander for hours amid the bracken and sweet-smelling grasses and find strange prehistoric remains seldom visited by any but the moorland sheep and the wild birds. It is a country of vast spaces and far views. You may see on one hand the Severn Sea, on the other the Channel; to the east the upstanding blue hills of Dartmoor and to the west the rugged highlands by Land's End—and then trudge back at night weary but happy to Liskeard, described as "the pleasantest town in Cornwall," and find it hard to believe that only five hours away is the toil and turmoil of London.



*"The Hurlers," St. Cleer*



## HOW ST. PIRAN CAME TO CORNWALL

**S**OME sixteen hundred years ago, so tradition tells, there lived in the South of Ireland a very holy man named Piran. Such was his piety that he was able to perform miracles. Once he fed ten Irish kings and their armies for ten days on end with three cows. Men sorely wounded in battle were brought to him to be cured, and he cured them. Yet the Irish grew jealous of his power and decided he must be killed.

And so one stormy, boisterous morning the pious Piran was brought in chains to the summit of a high cliff, and with a huge millstone tied to his neck his ungrateful neighbours hurled him into the raging billows beneath. This horrible deed was marked, as the holy man left the top of the cliff, with a blinding flash of

lightning and a terrifying crash of thunder, and then, to the amazement of the savages who had thus sought to destroy him, a wonderful thing happened.

As man and millstone reached the sea the storm instantly ceased. The sun shone out, the waves and the wind died down, and, peering over the edge of the cliff, the wondering crowd saw the holy man, seated peacefully upon a floating millstone, drifting slowly away in the direction of the Cornish shore, some hundreds of miles to the south-east.

St. Piran's millstone bore him safely across the Atlantic waves until at length—on the fifth day of March—it grounded gently upon the Cornish coast, between Newquay and Perranporth, on that glorious stretch of sand known to-day as Perran Beach. Here the Saint landed, and, taking his millstone with him, proceeded a little distance inland and set himself to work to convert the heathen Cornish to Christianity.

He built himself a little chapel in the sands and lived a useful and pious life for many years, loved by his people, until at last, at the great age of two hundred and six, he died. Then his sorrowing flock buried him and built over his grave St. Piran's Chapel, the remains of which you can see to-day hidden away in the sandhills of the Penhale Sands.

Although Cornwall can boast many saints, St. Piran has greater right than any other to be called the patron of the Duchy. To him the Cornish in the old days attributed a vast number of good actions, among them the discovery of tin, the mining of which has for centuries formed one of the chief Cornish industries.

This came about, according to the old story, from the saint making use of some strange black stones that he found, to make a foundation for his fire. The heat being more intense than usual one day, these stones melted and a stream of white metal flowed from them.

The saint and his companion, St. Chiwidden, told the Cornish people of their discovery, and taught them to dig and smelt the ore, thus bringing much prosperity to the country, the story of which eventually reached the far-away Ph[oe]nicians and brought them in their ships to trade with the Cornish for their valuable metal.

Good St. Piran has left his name all over the wonderful country south-west of Newquay. In Perranporth, with its rocks and caves and glorious bathing beach; in St. Piran's Round, that strange old earth-work not far away; in the parish of Perranzabuloe, which means Perran in the Sands; in Perranwell, near Falmouth, and even further south in Perranuthnoe, which looks out across the waters of Mounts Bay.

But although memorials of him are to be found over most of South Cornwall, it is the district of the Perran Sands, where he landed, lived and died, that is his true home. There, where the soft Atlantic breezes or the fierce winter gales sweep in to Perran Bay, you may look out over the dancing sea towards Ireland and America with nothing but Atlantic rollers between, or wander amid the waste of sand dunes that comprise the Perran Sands and breathe in health with every breath you take.

Perranporth is on the edge of these sandhills, which stretch away north-east to within four miles of Newquay—all within seven hours' journey from London.



*St. Piran's Chapel*





## THE LOST CHILD OF ST. ALLEN

**T**HEY never talk of fairies in Cornwall; what "foreigners" call fairies the Cornish call "piskies," or "small people." And all about the Duchy piskies still abound for those who are fitted to see them. The old folk will still tell you many strange stories of the piskies. One of the best known is that of the lost child of St. Allen. St. Allen is a parish on the high ground about four miles from Truro, and there, in the little hamlet of Treonike, or, as it is now called, Trefronick, on a lovely spring evening years and years ago, a small village boy wandered out to pick flowers in a little copse not far from his parents' cottage.

His mother, looking from the kitchen door, saw him happily engaged in his innocent amusement, then turned to make

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