

# **LEGEND LAND**

VOLUME TWO

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## FOREWORD

**T**HE western parts of our country are richer in legend than any other part. Perhaps this is because of the Celtic love of poetry and symbolism inherent in the blood of the people of the West; perhaps because of inspiration drawn from the wild hills and bleak moors of the lands in which they live; perhaps because life is, and always was, quieter there, and people have more time to remember the tales of other days than in busier, more prosaic, districts.

Most of the Devon legends cluster around the grim wastes of Dartmoor, and, like that wonderful stretch of country, are wild and awe-inspiring. The devil and his wicked works enter largely into them, and there is reason to believe them to be among the oldest tales known to us. Possibly they were not new when the hut circles of the Moor were inhabited and Grimspound was a busy village.

Some of the Cornish stories told in this series, like the story of Lyonesse and of Parson Dodge and the Spectre Coach, have their beginning in historical fact; yet into the latter story has been woven a tale that is centuries older, in origin, than the days of the eccentric priest of Talland.

But old tales, like old wine, need nothing but themselves to advertise them. In their time they have entertained—who can say how many hearers through the ages? And they are still good—read or told—to amuse as many more.

LYONESSE



## THE CHURCH THE DEVIL STOLE

**M**OST travellers to the West know queer little Brent Tor, that isolated church-crowned peak that stands up defiantly a mile or two from Lydford, seeming, as it were, a sentry watching the West for grim Dartmoor that rises twice its height behind it. Burnt Tor, they say, was the old name of this peak, because, seen from a distance, the brave little mountain resembles a flame bursting upwards from the earth. Others—with less imagination and perhaps more knowledge—would have us believe that Brent Tor was once a volcano, and that it really did burn in ages long since.

But the old folk of the neighbourhood care less for the name of their Tor than for the strange story of the church that crowns its summit.

Ever so long ago, they will tell you, the good folk of the lower lands around the foot of the hill decided to build themselves a church. They had long needed one; so long that the Devil, who roamed about Dartmoor, had begun to consider that such an irreligious community was surely marked down for his own.

That is why, when he came upon the people one day setting to work to build a church, he was overcome with fury.

But he seems to have thought it all out carefully, and to have decided to let them go on for a while, and so, week after week, at the foot of Brent Tor, the little church grew.

At last it was finished, and the good folk were preparing great festivities for its dedication when, during one dark autumn night, the church disappeared.

In the greatest distress they bemoaned their sad plight, but they were quick to attribute the evil action to the Prince of Darkness, and to show him that they were not to be intimidated they decided to begin at once to build another church. Throughout the day they made their plans, and retired to rest that night determined to start on their pious work next morning.

But when they woke in the morning they saw with amazement their own church perched high on the hill above them. The Devil had stolen it, and to mock the villagers had replaced it on the hilltop, where, he thought, having dominion over the powers of the air, he would be able to defeat their designs.

The people, however, thought otherwise. They sent in haste for the nearest bishop, and with him proceeded to the top of Brent

Tor. And, since St. Michael looks after hilltops, to him they dedicated their church.

Hardly had the service finished when the Devil, passing by, looked in to jeer, as he thought, at the foolish folk he had deceived. But on the summit of the Tor he met St. Michael.

The Archangel fell upon the Evil One and tumbled him straightway down the hill; then, to make sure of his discomfiture, hurled a huge rock after him. And there at the base of Brent Tor you may see the very rock to this day.

If you climb to the top of the hill you will get, on a fine day, one of the most beautiful views in the West. On one side is Dartmoor in all its rugged glory; on the other, distant, blue and mysterious, the uplands of the Bodmin moors.

Lydford, from which you can best reach Brent Tor, is famous for its wild gorge. It stands on the edge of Dartmoor itself, and from it country of wonderful beauty may easily be reached. All around are hills and heather-carpeted moorland; yet a short railway journey will take you from this far-away village to busy Plymouth, Okehampton, or Launceston, the border town of Cornwall.

Here, where winds sweep from any direction across great wastes of moor, or from the sea, health and quiet are to be found more easily than in any popular holiday resort or fashionable spa.



*Brent Tor Church*





## THE PARSON AND THE CLERK

**A**LL real old stories of long ago should begin with "Once upon a time," and so, once upon a time there was a Bishop of Exeter who lay very ill at Dawlish, on the South Devon coast, and among those who visited him frequently was the parson of an inland parish who was ambitious enough to hope that, should the good bishop die, he would be chosen to fill his place.

This parson was a man of violent temper, and his continued visits to the sick man did not improve this, for his journey was a long and dreary one, and the bishop, he thought, took an unconscionable time in dying. But he had to maintain his reputation for piety, and so it happened that on a winter night he was riding towards Dawlish through the rain, guided, as was his custom, by his parish clerk.

That particular night the clerk had lost his way, and, long after he and his master should have been in comfortable quarters at Dawlish, they were wandering about on the high rough ground of Haldon, some distance from the village. At last, in anger, the parson turned upon his clerk and rebuked him violently. "You are useless," he said; "I would rather have the devil for a guide than you." The clerk mumbled some excuse, and presently the two came upon a peasant, mounted upon a moor pony, to whom they explained their plight.

The stranger at once offered to guide them, and very soon all three had reached the outskirts of the little coast town. Both parson and clerk were wet through, and when their guide, stopping by an old, tumble-down house, invited them to enter and take some refreshment, both eagerly agreed. They entered the house and found there a large company of wild-looking men engaged in drinking from heavy black-jacks, and singing loud choruses. The parson and his servant made their way to a quiet corner and enjoyed a good meal, then, feeling better, agreed to stay for a while and join their boisterous companions.

But they stayed for a very long while. The drink flowed freely and both grew uproarious, the parson singing songs with the best of the company and shouting the choruses louder than any. In this manner they spent the whole night, and it was not until dawn broke that the priest suggested moving onward. So none too soberly he called for the horses.

At this moment the news arrived that the bishop was dead. This excited the parson, who wished at once to get to work to further his ambitious designs, so he pushed the clerk into the saddle and hastily mounted himself. But the horses would not

move. The parson, in a passion, cried, "I believe the devil is in the horses!"

"I believe he is," said the clerk thickly, and with that a roar of unearthly laughter broke out all around them. Then the now terrified men observed that their boisterous friends were dancing about in glee and each had turned into a leering demon. The house in which they had passed the night had completely disappeared, and the road in which they stood was transformed into the sea-shore, upon which huge waves were breaking, some already submerging the clerk.

With a wild cry of terror the parson lashed once more at his horse, but without avail. He felt himself growing stiff and dizzy—and then consciousness passed from him.

Neither he nor his clerk ever returned to their parish, but that morning the people of Dawlish saw two strange red rocks standing off the cliffs, and later, learning this story, they realised that the demons had changed the evil priest and his man into these forms.

Time and weather have wrought many changes in the Parson and Clerk Rocks, not the least curious being to carve upon the Parson Rock the semblance of the two revellers. From certain positions you may see to-day the profiles of both men, the parson as it were in his pulpit, and the clerk at his desk beneath him.

The red cliffs around Dawlish make the place peculiarly attractive at first sight, and the attraction is not lessened by familiarity with the town. It enjoys the best of the famous

South Devon climate; warm in winter and ever cooled by the sea breeze in summer, it is an excellent holiday centre. Historic Exeter is close at hand and Dartmoor within afternoon excursion distance.



*"The Parson and the Clerk"*



## THE WEAVER OF DEAN COMBE

**A**BOUT a mile outside Buckfastleigh, on the edge of Dartmoor, a little stream, the Dean Burn, comes tumbling down from the hills through a narrow valley of peculiar beauty. A short distance up this valley a waterfall drops into a deep hollow known as the "Hound's Pool." How this name arose is an old story.

According to the legend, hundreds of years ago, there was living in the neighbouring hamlet of Dean Combe a wealthy weaver named Knowles. He was famous throughout those parts of Devon for his skill and industry. But in due course he died and was buried.

On the day after the funeral, hearing a strange noise, Knowles' son ran to his father's work-room, where, to his alarm, he saw

the dead man seated at his loom working away just as he had done day after day, year after year, in life. In terror the young man fled from the house, and sought the parson of Dean Prior.

The good priest was at first sceptical, but he returned with the frightened man to the house. As soon as the two had entered the door the parson's doubts vanished, for sure enough, from an upper chamber, came the familiar, unmistakable sound of the loom at work.

So the parson went to the foot of the staircase and shouted to the ghostly weaver: "Knowles, come down! This is no place for thee."

"In a minute, parson," came the reply; "just wait till I've worked out this shuttle."

"No," said the parson, "come thee at once; thou hast worked long enough on this earth."

So the spirit came down, and the parson led it outside the house. Then taking a handful of earth, which he had previously secured from the churchyard, he flung it into the ghost's face, and instantly the weaver turned into a black hound.

"Now, follow me," the parson commanded; the grim dog obediently came to heel. The pair then proceeded into the woods, which, so they say, as soon as the two entered, were shaken by a violent whirlwind. But at last the priest led his charge to the edge of the pool below the waterfall, then producing a walnut-shell with a hole in it, handed it to the hound and addressed it.

"Knowles," he began, "this shows me plainly that in life thou tookest more heed of worldly gain than of immortality, and thou didst bargain with the powers of evil. There is but one hope of rest for thee. When thou shalt have dipped out this pool with the shell I have given thee, thou shalt find peace, but not before. Go, work out thy salvation."

With a mournful howl that was heard as far as Widdicombe in the Moor, the hound leapt into the pool to begin its hopeless labour, and there, exactly at midnight or midday, they say, you may still see it at its task.

Buckfastleigh is on a branch line that runs up from Totnes, skirting Dartmoor, to Ashburton. All around is some of the most glorious scenery in Devon. Buckfast Abbey, founded in 1148 and for centuries a ruin, was purchased by French Benedictines in 1882, and is now a live and busy monastery once again.

Just beyond Dean Combe is Dean Prior, a place of the greatest literary interest, for it was the home of the poet Herrick for many years.

The country all about abounds in objects of beauty and interest, yet is all too often neglected by the holiday-maker at the neighbouring seaside towns a few miles away, or the scurrying motorist speeding down along the Plymouth road.



*Buckfast Abbey*



## THE DEMON WHO HELPED DRAKE

**A**LL the demons of whom the old folks tell in the West Country were not evil spirits. Some, like that one who helped Sir Francis Drake, worked good magic for the benefit of those to whom they attached themselves.

To Drake's demon a number of good deeds are attributed. One story they tell of him is of those days when the news of the fitting out of the mighty Spanish Armada had caused a thrill of apprehension to sweep through the country. The danger that threatened was very great, and Drake, like all of those who were charged with the safeguarding of our shores, was vastly worried, although he kept his worries to himself.

And one day, as the story goes, the great admiral was sitting, weighed down with anxiety, making and remaking his plans,



on Devil's Point, a promontory that runs out into Plymouth Sound. As he was thinking, almost unconsciously he began whittling a stick. How, he wondered, could he find enough ships to combat the enormous force the King of Spain was sending against him?

Looking up from his reverie, at length, across the Sound, he started in happy surprise, for floating quite close to the shore he saw a number of well-armed gunboats; each chip that he had cut from the stick having been so transformed by the magic of his friendly demon.

Later, when Drake had achieved his great victory over the Spaniards, Queen Elizabeth gave him Buckland Abbey. When he took possession, the legend goes, there was great need for stables and outhouses, and building work was set in train at once.

After his first night there, one of Drake's servants was amazed to find how much building had been done, and, feeling that something unusual must be going on during the hours of darkness, he secreted himself in a tree at dusk the next evening to see what happened. There he fell asleep, but towards midnight he was awakened by the tramp of animals and the creaking of wheels. Looking down, he saw several ox teams approaching, each dragging a wagon filled with building materials and led by a weird spectre form.

As the first team passed by, the spectre, urging the weary beasts on, plucked from the earth the tree in which the servant was hiding, in order to beat them. The unfortunate servant was

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