

BRITAIN'S MYSTERIOUS COUNTY

Ceaseless Battle With Sea

CORNWALL'S NATURAL BEAUTY AND LEGEND

After reading Mr. Arthur Mee's book "Cornwall" (Hodder and Stoughton, 7s. 6d.), published today, which is fourth in the series "The King's England," even a Cornishman must be impressed by his own incomplete knowledge of his county.

At a moderate estimate, many months of exploration and expedition must have been necessary to compile such a study of Britain's most mysterious county. We need not marvel at the presentation of this essay, for it displays the clear, picturesque phraseology employed by Mr. Mee when he edited "The Children's Encyclopedia."

His main achievement is that this essay provides in a compact 300 pages a detailed sketch of Cornwall's history, topography, natural beauty, and legend.

FROM the attention devoted initially to "Atlantic England" it is apparent that Mr. Mee has succumbed to the fascination of the north and West Cornwall. He revels in the ceaseless battle between sea and cliffs. He describes the small bays and inlets on that coast as Norwegian fiords in miniature. With one exception—that of Tintagel—Mr. Mee has approached Cornwall with an untrammelled mind. He has found so much beauty that he has no time to discuss the ugliness which admittedly exists in some of those places where man has ousted Nature. Even the clayhills of Mid-Cornwall, which are nothing more than waste-heaps of industry, inspire him to compare them with snow-capped peaks, and he rejoices that they are synonymous with prosperity and employment. To Tintagel he pays many compliments, especially for the wild and mystic grandeur of the coast.

"It is a bit of the magic of England," he declares, "and seems to us as wonderful in truth as in imagination. It is an incomparable piece of this incomparable coast. Its rocks rise sheer from the sea, crowned with green arched, with fragments of ancient walls creeping over them, with lichen-covered caves and moss-grown waves and tiny coves, and what is left of an old monk's chapel, here a doorway, here a window, here a graveyard, with one of Cornwall's oldest churches looking down on the waters of the Atlantic weeping in below."

Mr. Mee's criticism of Tintagel is mild.

"As for the village of Tintagel, it has thrown away its glory and deserves no reputation. It is a long, unlovely street. It has a Saxon cross in front of a hotel, an ancient house looking weary with the centuries, and a 14th century cottage; but almost the only thing that man has made beautiful in this long street is something we came upon as a great surprise, King Arthur's Hall."

Mr. Mee's first impression of Cornwall is that there is no county like it. The coast and moors to him like something apart, and the traveller feels that its people are a "little less glib than any other English people in the land." He qualifies this last statement with the tence: "We would not have it otherwise, these quiet folk and this romantic land are delightful as can be."

GARDEN LIKE A FAIRYLAND.

Comparing Cornwall with the French Riviera, the author expresses a decided preference for the holiday territory in the West-ntry. He praises its sunshine, majestic escarpments, tea, and "a garden like a fairy-land."

"The climate does not betray them as on the French Riviera, the weather at Falmouth is far more reliable than the weather at Cannes, and the sea is sweeter. Here in Cornwall are tropical gardens, hedgerows a blaze of colour, acres gay with gorse and heather, the creeks with wooded banks and lovely sandy bays. All the winter through Cornwall is warm enough for any traveller. It is the loveliest coast in England, with the mildest climate and the loveliest winter garden."

Everything conspires to produce an impression of magic and mysticism for Mr. Mee in Cornwall. He does not wonder that it was the piece of the country to be included in the land.

Analysing the county from the geographical point of view, the author contrasts the mild, fertile south coast of Cornwall with its barren boundary. It is dramatic, he declares, and the snug coves and villages of the south, then to turn the corner at The Land's End discover a new England.

From The Land's End to Morwenstow is another world. We begin to feel it at St. Ives. The broad Atlantic spreads its deep waters before us for 3,000 miles and batters out a hundred miles of Cornish coast. It is a little better not to bathe too near the rocks, for many this is the most thrilling of the stern scenes of our land, and in every available nook of it where a boat may be beached a little settlement of fishermen. When in the mineral mines of Cornwall Mr. Mee discovers a romance.

One of the most picturesque facts in our history is that metals from Cornwall may have been built into the Temple of Jerusalem, which the eyes of Our Lord so often gazed.

In those days the Phoenicians were trading with Cornwall for tin, and King Hiram of Phoenicia was a friend of David and a trading partner of Solomon, so that we may be certain that the Cornish tin taken home by his traders would reach Jerusalem.

CHURCH WOOD-CARVING.

Mr. Mee admits that Cornwall is not a great county for church screens, but he considers that the wood-carving in some of the older edifices is among the best in the country, and for its bench-ends it is hardly to be beaten. He mentions the array of saints and bishops, monsters and demons at Kilkhampton Church; the pipers, fiddlers, jesters, and dancers depicted on the benches of Altarnun; and the wonderful collection of bench-ends, telling the story of the Passion, at Poughill.

Mr. Mee has discovered some curious objects in Cornish churches which are by no means well known to us Westcountrymen. In Crantock, for instance, "the churchyard has the ancient stocks and the wooden figure of the last man to sit in them, a feather in his jaunty cap."

This essay is tinged with an appreciation of Cornwall's history. Boconnoc is mentioned as the birthplace of the first William Pitt, and that in the great house in that village lived Thomas Pitt, later Lord Camelford. In his entertaining style, Mr. Mee tells the story of several great men in Cornish history. He recalls that Bossiney, a village with neither church nor monument, a mere group of houses and a small Atlantic cove, was Sir Francis Drake's constituency. On a mound still visible at Bossiney men raised their hands to send Francis Drake to Parliament, and Bristol merchants brought their slaves for sale.

DARING ESCAPE.

At Cotehele House Sir Richard Edgcumbe made his daring escape from enemy soldiers. He fled from his house through the woods and, being hard pressed, threw a large stone and his hat into the river. His pursuers believed him to be drowned when they heard the splash and saw the cap floating away.

On his visit to Camborne Mr. Mee discusses the achievements of Richard Trevithick with his steam locomotive. He remembers that at Gwinear lived Tobias Lanyon, who left Lanyon Farm to go round the world with Captain Cook, and who saw the famous mariner struck down by cannibals at Hawaii.

The author has not forgotten that many celebrities of modern times lived in Cornwall at some time in their lives. Outstanding among them is naturally Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, "who named the place (Fowey) Troy Town and clothed its stories with the flowers of his infinite imagination and his exhaustless fancy." There was Sister Borlase, born at Helston, who became famous in the Great War for her heroic service to the wounded. There was also Henry Trengrouse, who gave the world his life-saving rocket and received £50 for it from the Admiralty.

At Lidcott Farm, Lanest, lived John Couch Adams, self-taught astronomer, who discovered the planet Neptune by mathematical calculation before he had even seen it. At Linkinhorne Daniel Gumb, the eccentric Cornishman, lived in a granite hut under Stone Age conditions and studied books and the stars. Parson Hawker, of Morwenstow, is another notable character whose life story is summarized by Mr. Mee.

ISLES OF SCILLY.

Unfortunately, Mr. Mee devotes only about six pages to the Isles of Scilly, an outpost of England which is conspicuous in the romantic and historic senses. He rightly describes Treco as the "Beauty of the Isles," but he incorrectly mentions St. Helen's as an inhabited island and Bryher as "desolate," (for St. Helen's is now uninhabited, while there are several families living on Bryher).

This book will not only provide pleasant reading for those who seek to know Cornwall. It will doubtless inspire many to explore those cliff paths and snug villages relished by Mr. Mee.

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