

1: Myths and Legends of our New Possessions and Protectorate

Myths Legends of our New Possessions Protectorate This book was converted from its physical edition to the digital format by a community of volunteers You may find it.

A daring Irish lad reached it, borne by a horse as white as the foam, that never sank. He paused on the way to slay a giant who held a princess in his enchantment, and reached, at length, a land where birds were so many that the trees shook with the burden of them, and the air rang with their song. A floating spear was found near the shore one day, rusted and scarred with battle, and as he grasped it memories of old wars returned to him, so that he was sick with longing to go home and hurl the cutting metal through the ribs of his enemies and see the good red flood burst from their hearts. He remounted his white steed and reached Ireland, careless of the happiness he had left: He reached his home to find men grown too small and mean to fight him, which probably means that he had waxed so great as to make them seem like dwarfs. His age came suddenly upon him, and he died. In one of the great Irish monasteries lived St. Brandan, of the holy brotherhood that tilled the soil, taught the permitted sciences, copied and illumined the works of the early Christians, fed four hundred beggars daily, though living on bread, roots, and nuts themselves, lodging and studying in unwarmed cells of stone. Once in seven years the people saw from shore the island of Hy-Brasail. The monks tried to stop its wanderings by prayer and by fiery arrows, yet without avail. Kirwan claimed to have landed on it, and he brought back strange money that he said was used by its people. So late as Brasail Rock remained on the British Admiralty chart, to show how hard tradition dies. The appearance of this phantom land made Brandan long to explore the realm of mystery wherefrom it had emerged. Seventeen priests set sail in the coracle, or boat of basket work covered with leather. They had no fear, for they were holy men, and in those days Christians were immune from peril. Not long before a company of nuns had been blown across the sea and back again, seated on a cloak that rode the waves like a ship. Next they disembarked on what they thought to be a rock to cook a dinner, but it was no rock; it was a whale, that, feeling the sting of flame through his thick hide, rushed off for two miles, carrying their fire on his back. They hastily re-entered their boat before the monster had gained much headway and ere long reached the Paradise of Birds, where they enjoyed the music made by thousands of little creatures with their wings a music like fiddling. After this came visits to a den of griffins; to a land of grapes such as the Norsemen told about; to a mountain country aflame with the forges of one-eyed people, or cyclops. Twice, on Easter Sunday, they put lambs to death, and so, being blessed for the sacrifice, were allowed to reach the Island of Saints, where an angel bade them take all the precious stones they wished, as they had been created for holy people, but to attempt no exploration beyond that point. No men appeared; still, in order to leave the impress of their calling, St. Malo, one of the company, dug up a giant who had died several years before, preached to him and baptized him. These reformatory services revived the giant a little, though he was pretty far gone, and he died again as soon as the priest stopped preaching. Brandan went back to Clonfert, where three thousand monks joined him in good works, and mendicants swarmed from all over the land to benefit by their labor. He often told the people and the brethren of the wonders he had seen in lands Columbus was to rediscover nine hundred years later, and he dwelt with marvelling on the mercy of God as shown to Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ, who was encountered in the northern seas, lying naked on an iceberg in silent delight. Brandan recognized him by portraits he had seen and hailed him. Judas then told his story; he was roasting in hell when the Lord remembered that once in Joppa this disciple had thrown his cloak over the shoulders of a leper who was agonized by a wind that blew sharp sand into his sores. An angel was sent to tell the doomed one that for this mercy he would be allowed, for one hour in every year, to breathe the wholesome air of the upper world, and stretch his scorched body on the ice. Moved by this tenderness toward the most despised of men, St. Brandan bowed and prayed, just as Judas, with despair in his upturned face, slipped down again to the deeps of fire. Some men of Ross, Ireland, had killed their king, despite his successful wars against his rival monarchs, some of whose kingdoms were as large as a township. For this offense the heir to the throne, or his advisers, decreed that sixty couples should be set adrift on the ocean, to meet what fate they might. A guard was put along the shore to keep them from landing again, and an

easterly gale blew them quickly out of sight of their relatives and friends. For years none dared to seek for them. Conall Ua Corra, of Connaught, had prayed in vain to the Lord for children, so in anger he prayed to the devil, and three boys were born to his wife. Their father had long regretted his hasty prayer to the evil one, and had tried to regain the good-will of heaven by industry, and by giving freely of his substance to the sick and pauperized. By advice of St. It was suggested by some designing neighbor that if they were to search for the one hundred and twenty exiles they would be doing a service to heaven and the world. This suggestion was promptly acted on. In a frail coracle they swept the sea, discovering strange lands, in one of which the half-forgotten people of Ross were found, living so contentedly that few of them cared to go back. If the blow fell short it made the sea boil and sent billows rolling for a mile. Some of the shore folk said it was icebergs that the shipmen saw; but icebergs never sailed so far from the pole, they answered. Despite its wandering habit, the map-makers eventually agreed on a site for this rock of the smiting hand, calling it Satanaxio. It can be seen on charts of the eighteenth century. He found a race friendly and gentle, sharing with one another whatever was given to them, as not knowing selfishness. This prelate burned his ships, that his people might not return, laid off the largest island into seven bishoprics, and, impressing the natives into his service, built churches and convents, for there were women in his company whom he placed in nunneries. This island, which figures on early maps as Antillia and as Behaim, was known also as the Land of the Seven Cities, from its seven bishoprics. When Coronado heard of the pueblos of Arizona and New Mexico, he may have confounded them with the towns of Oppas, and to this day the seven cities of Cibola are a legend of our desert. Near Florida was the island of Bimini, with its fountain of youth. Juan and Luis Ponce de Leon sought it vainly among the Bahamas, then crossed to Florida and kept up the search among the pine barrens, the moss-bearded cypresses, the snaky swamps, and alligator infested rivers. The Indians, strong, active, healthy with their simple, outdoor life, their ignorance of wine and European diseases, seemed so favored that the Spaniards believed they must have bathed in the magic fountain and drank its waters. Green Cove Spring, near Magnolia, is the one where Luis bathed, hoping that he had found at last the restorative fountain; but an angry Indian shot a poisoned arrow through his body, and neither prayers nor water stayed long the little life that was in him. So the spring is in the unfound Bimini, after all. The Buccaneers How the free traders in the West Indies became smugglers, how by easy stages they passed from the profession of illicit dealing to piracy, are matters that concern history rather than legend. Their name of buccaneers comes from buccan, an Indian word signifying a smoke-house, in which beef and other meats were dried; as one of the earliest enterprises of the rovers was the stealing of Spanish cattle in San Domingo, and the drying of their flesh in the native buccans for use at sea. Indeed, throughout the seventeenth century the pirates operated principally against Spain, and were tolerated because of the injury they did to her ships, her people, her property, and her trade. Having finally ruined her commerce, they sacked her colonies, and, the lust for blood and treasure having been roused to a sort of madness, they cast off patriotic allegiances and became mere robbers and outlaws. For a handful of dollars they were ready to wreck a city, reduce even its ruins to ashes, slaughter women and babes, and cut the throats of the aged. They were as harsh and treacherous toward one another as they were toward peaceable men, and for acts of rebellion against a leader they were killed off-hand, while it was customary, also, to butcher a sailor whenever a chest of treasure was buried, and place his body on or in the chest, that his ghost might guard it and terrify intruders. Yet the ultimate influence of the buccaneers was for good, inasmuch as they wrested a part of the rich Antilles from the cruel and ignorant Spaniard and gave it to more enlightened powers. When the freebooting days were at their height there was no harbor of safety between Rio and Halifax; but there was, in every town the rascals visited, an element that profited by their robberies:

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Ararats in the Sierras, in Alaska, in Hawaii, in the Philippines. It sets us a-thinking when we find Noah in a Hawaiian myth, and there called Nuu when we learn of the white god of Mexico who is to return and free his people, for which reason houses in the southwest are still built with doors.

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