

THE VOYAGE OF ST. BRENDAIN.

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ALL the beauties that can arise from sunshine, clear blue skies, mountains green to their summits, shady woods, green sloping meadows, clear lakes, and sparkling streams were there. Flowers of the most brilliant colours waved on shrubs, and sprung from the short thick herbage; they hung in festoons between the trees, or depended from the branches, gladdening the sight, and giving promise of sweet and refreshing fruit; while birds of the most beautiful and varied plumage entranced the souls of the voyagers by their melody. This melody was of a sacred character; and the natural notes of the little choiristers that produced it were as varied as those of the strings of the finest harp.

St. Brendain, judging from the style of the music that there was something supernatural about the beautiful little creatures, adjoined them in God's name to explain the mystery. The branches of the tree next him were full of the charming songsters; and as he spoke, they ceased their song, and one of them returned this answer:

"Holy man, we were all glorious angels at the time now long past, when pride and disobedience entered the heart of the unhappy Lucifer; and though we did not sympathise with his rebellious feelings, we dallied with the temptation, and were flung from heaven in his company. While the arch-enemy and his troops were piercing through the sulphurous waves of hell in their headlong fall, our descent was mercifully stayed by this island, which, bright and beautiful as it appears to you, is drear and desolate to us, who remember heaven. We still perceive the swift passage of our former glorious companions in their way to far-off worlds, to execute the will of the All-Mighty and All-merciful we see the shining traces left where they pass. Such happiness is now lost to us; but we do what is mercifully left in our power. We cease not, night and day, joining our voices to those of the heavenly choirs above; and when, in the lapse of years, this island becomes the abode of human beings, and their prayers and hymns begin to ascend

to heaven, we will be permitted to rise with them, and regain that happiness which it is not in our power to explain, nor in yours to comprehend."*

As they were leaving the happy island they were told that they would be allowed to return, and spend the next Paschal tide on its shore; and so they resumed their westward course again.

But as they hoped to be nearing the desired land, they met a strong current, which coming with a mighty rush from the southwest, swept them before it for several days. They began to feel an unwelcome degree of cold: a disagreeable wind came on them from the northwest, a fog enveloped them, and they had no means of judging in what direction they were drifting. While they were thus tossed about at the mercy of the winds and waves, they approached what seemed a low rushy island. They were wearied by the narrow limits of their little vessel; and four of the number went on shore, for the pleasure of walking about at liberty, taking a small cauldron and some fuel with them to prepare a meal.

While one of the party blew up his fire, the others walked about to stretch their limbs. They were rather surprised at the slimy elastic surface of the ground, and the hard sharp sort of grass—if grass it could be called—which it produced; but their surprise was soon changed to terror; for, as they returned towards the fire-place, they found the soil heaving, the caldron tumbling over, and the fire scattering on every side. There was no time to be lost: they hastened to the brink of the treacherous island, and scrambled into their galley. They were scarcely in safety on the hospitable deck, when they beheld the supposed isle move rapidly away, and the remnants of the fire flung on every side with the convulsive heavings of the spot on which it had been lighted. They now judged that they had intruded on the repose of some sea-monster; and immediately falling on their knees, they returned fervent thanks for their preservation.

* If the *Island of the Birds* be allowed a locality in modern maps, it may be marked on the site of the Bermudas.