

ST. IVES

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DURING this Coronation summer, the charm and beauty of Old England will doubtless be a topic of discussion among Canadians both here and abroad. No one should say, perhaps no one can say just what part of England is the loveliest, but we all have our own ideas, whether based on our armchair reading of H. V. Morton or on our actual travels in the tight little Isle. What would be your choice, for instance, supposing you were among those many visitors now in London who are about to set forth into the quiet countryside far from the noise and bustle of the crowded metropolis? I know there will be protests and counter-suggestions when I name St. Ives in Cornwall as mine. Lest any one think I am prejudiced in favour of that dear old place because I have seen few others, I feel bound to say that I have spent many days amid the fairy like beauty of Lynton and Lynmouth, those twin villages on the North Devon coast, I have watched the sun go down in the hills behind Lake Windermere and rise over the mountains at Keswick, I have wandered among the Scottish Trossachs on misty autumn days, I have walked through country lanes in Norfolk and Suffolk and under apple blossoms in Kent, and I have rested in the evening calm of cathedral closes in many an ancient city throughout the land. All these and many more come to my mind when I think of England, and yet the spell of St. Ives still persists.

Perhaps you can best "see" St. Ives by combining in your imagination an old fishing village and a picturesque art colony. If your imagination be vivid enough, you can walk down the crooked, cobbled streets with me and examine the curious, tumble-down houses whose lower floors have been converted into shops and sometimes stables, or peek into queer irregular court-yards where the weekly wash hangs drying with the fishing nets, and old women talk to one another from second storey windows, while their husbands lounge below and think of the sea. The fishing industry along this coast has been "on the rocks" for some time; but the old salts, their pre-war beards turned white, still swagger about in blue sweaters and wear their sailor caps at a slant that even the late Admiral Beatty might have envied. They and their ubiquitous cats lend a very real tone to the place and are a boon to

the artist seeking local colour. They can tell grand tales of the sea, too, as they bask in the bright sunlight and idly watch the little fishing boats which lie in the well protected harbour.

The artists do not, as you might imagine, live high up on the terraces of the modern town where the tourists usually stay. On the contrary, you will find most of them down among the fishermen. Bright blue shutters against ancient whitewashed cottages—a shining brass plaque—and perhaps a queer wooden door painted green—announce that the tenants no longer make their living from the sea. Sometimes a special notice invites passers-by, quite free of charge, to inspect the owner's work. There is an atmosphere of friendly, tolerant bohemianism about the place which soon makes you agree with the person who said that to walk through St. Ives is to walk through Chelsea transported to the sea.

The names of the streets must have been taken from a fairy tale. There are few cities or villages in England that can boast a superior to the *Pudding Bag Lane* of St. Ives, which is well supported by *Dick's Hill*, *Squashfield Hill*, *Teetotal Street*, and *The Digey*. One expects *Fish Street*, *Quay Street* and *The Wharf* in St. Ives; but *Bunker's Hill* seems a bit out of place. The signs hung out at the taverns also exhibit an individualistic touch. After all the *White Swans*, *Black Bulls*, *Red Lions*, and *Fox and Hounds* that call out to the thirsty throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles, it is a pleasure to find some originality at St. Ives, where the proprietors of *The Sheaf of Wheat* and *The Sloop Inn* announce that they are "fully licenced". It cannot be concealed, however, that there is also a very common *Golden Lion* which is always "open until ten".

St. Ives has been called "the gem of the Cornish Riviera", and no wonder! The colours of the sea and sky are unbelievable. Their ever-changing beauty provides an unending quest for artists who have been flocking to the district ever since its "discovery" by Whistler half a century ago. Today, it is said, there is a St. Ives picture in every important art gallery in the world. The present St. Ives Society of Artists is a flourishing organization and you cannot walk down the narrow sidewalks, called footpaths there, without bumping into at least two or three R. A.'s, R. O. T.'s, R. W. S.'s, P. R. E.'s, or P. R. B. A.'s.

The climate is actually sub-tropical in this south-western part of England. Even many Englishmen are unaware of this or, what is more likely, won't believe it. While they shiver in the damp cold of the ordinary English winter, the people of St. Ives enjoy warm sunshine and clear skies. Rain is not infrequent

during the winter, but it is very mild and very necessary for the perennially green shrubs and hedges. Even during the coldest months, you will often see beautiful flowers blooming under the shade of palm trees. This is particularly true of the Morrab gardens at Penzance, another paradise for artists not far from St. Ives. There are many other evidences of a mild climate that will cause you to blink, should you chance to be a visitor in January. The sound of a lawnmower may awaken you in the morning, white tennis flannels, worn by enthusiasts playing on hard courts, may catch your eye during the afternoon, or, on particularly fine days, bathers along the magnificent sand beaches may cause you to stop and stare. Five or six months later, of course, when summer is well begun, you will see nothing but colour on land and sea. It defies description and must be seen to be believed.

The wild cliff scenery between St. Ives and Land's End challenges comparison; but the hinterland is lonely and bleak. Great round hills, brown with bracken and often crowned with queer rock formations, stretch away in every direction. There are more pre-historic remains about these hills than any other one district in Britain. The uninformed, however, may easily mistake the crumbling works of an old tin mine for the remnants of an early British hill fort, as I did one afternoon. The scarcity of trees in this district has led to the old saying, exaggerated like most old sayings, that "Cornwall does not grow enough wood to make a coffin".

There are legends galore to be heard in St. Ives. The Parish Church, whose square tower dominates the lower town with the friendly assurance that all is well, is dedicated to St. Ia or Eia, a lady missionary, who is supposed to have sailed over from Ireland to convert the heathen of St. Ives on nothing more substantial than a leaf. There are stories, too, of foul murder in the ancient smugglers' coves found along the coast. But why speak of sudden death in the gleam of gold when one can tell of the Cornish *piskies*? These little people, who are probably first cousins of the Devon pixies, seem to play quite a part in the lives of the people. The belief in their supernatural powers is deep-rooted in the nature of all Celts. If you tend to scoff at this, you can read for yourself scores of testimonials of the luck that the piskies bring. These testimonials are on display in the shops. An advertisement in one front window used to declare that over 1,400 owners of *Joan the Wad*, the Queen of the piskies, had won a combined total of £1,000,000 on the Irish Sweepstakes. You were invited to buy a *Joan the Wad*, for "one and six", and let her back your fancy. A

special ceremony in connection with the piskies occurs every Good Friday, when the maidens of Polperro, a small fishing village on the other coast, dip their *Joan the Wads* in the Lucky Saints Well. Another ancient custom, this time at St. Ives itself, takes place every five years when ten little girls, dressed in white and accompanied by two widows and a fiddler, dance round the monument of John Knill and sing the Hundredth Psalm. This is all carried out in accordance with the will of John Knill, who was mayor of St. Ives about 1766.

You, perhaps, remember St. Ives from the old rhyme,

As I was going to St. Ives,
I met a man with seven wives.

I feel quite certain the man found all his wives in St. Ives. It would not have been difficult to pick out seven spouses from among the pink-faced fisher lasses and dark-eyed village beauties. Perhaps the latter are descendants of those sailors from the ill-fated Spanish Armada who were washed up alive along the shores of Western England. More likely, however, their ancestors were among those dark Celts who took refuge there during the Roman invasion. Cornwall remained Celtic long after the rest of England was Saxon. This explains why Cornishmen consider themselves a race apart to-day and why, even as late as the second half of the eighteenth century, there were still people who spoke "Cornish". The frequently recurring prefixes to modern names and places such as *Tre* (dwelling), *Pol* (pool), *Lan* (church), *Caer* (town), and *Pen* (fort) are the last remnants of the old language.

A thousand years before Christ, certain people assure us, the Cornishmen were trading with the merchants of Phoenicia and Tyre. There is some doubt about this, but it can never affect the belief of the more romantically inclined. Certainly Cornwall was known to the Greeks four centuries before the Christian era. I wonder what they thought of St. Ives.