

**WONDER TALES
FROM SCOTTISH
MYTH & LEGEND**

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Wonder tales from Scottish myth & legend by Donald A. Mackenzie & John Duncan

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DONALD A. MACKENZIE & JOHN DUNCAN

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AND LEGEND

WONDER TALES FROM SCOTTISH MYTH & LEGEND

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WONDER TALES FROM SCOTTISH MYTHS

Introduction

The myths and legends of Scotland are full of what is called "local colour". They afford us not only glimpses of ancient times and of old habits of thought and life, but also of the country itself at different times of the year. In the winter season the great mountain ranges are white with snow and many inland lochs are frozen over, but along the west coast, which is washed by the warm surface waters of the Atlantic and bathed in mild moist breezes from the south-west, there may be found sheltered and sunny spots where wild flowers continue to bloom. The old people believed that somewhere in the west the spirit of Spring had its hiding-place, and they imagined this hiding-place to be a green floating island on which the sun always shone and flowers were

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always blooming. During the reign of Beira¹, Queen of Winter, the spirit of Spring, they thought, was always trying to visit Scotland, and they imagined that Beira raised the storms of January and February to prolong her reign by keeping the grass from growing. Beira was regarded as a hard and cruel old woman, and the story of her exploits is the story of the weather conditions in winter and early spring. She rouses the dangerous whirlpool of Corryvreckan, she brings the snow, she unlooses the torrents that cause rivers to overflow. According to folk belief, it was she who formed the lochs and the mountains. In the days when the people had no calendar, the various periods of good and bad weather were named after the battles of Beira and the victories of the spirits of sunshine and growth. Gaelic-speaking people still refer to certain gales in February and March by their ancient names—the “whistling wind”, the “sweeper”, and so on, as set forth in the second chapter. On the north-east coast even those fisher folks, who are not Gaelic speakers, still tell that the fierce south-westerly gales of early spring are caused by the storm-wife whom they call “Gentle Annie”. This Annie may be the same old deity as Black Annis of Leicestershire and Anu of Ireland, whose name lingers in the place name, the “Paps of Anu”, a

¹ Pronounced Bee'ra.