

*Hommage de l'auteur
L. H. Doble.*

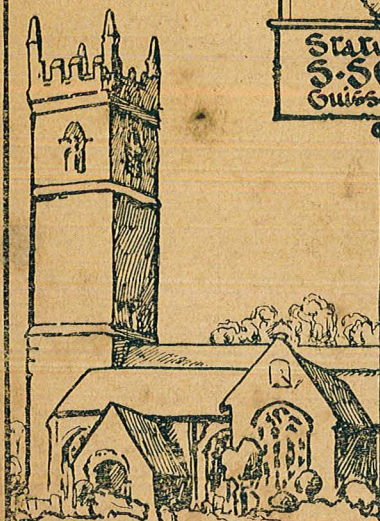
18 Dec., 1928.

Two Cornish Saints

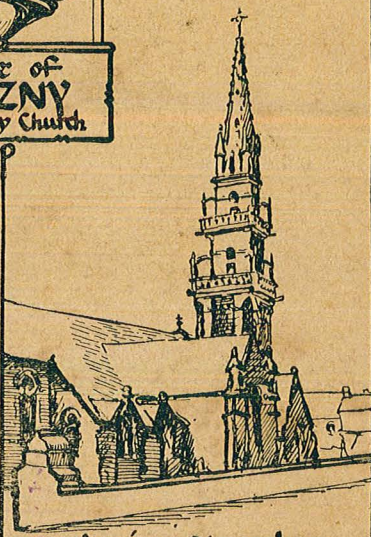


S. SITHNEY
and
S. ELWIN

Statue of
S. SEZNY
Guissény Church



Sithney Church. Cornwall.



Guissény Church.
Brittany.

"CORNISH SAINTS" SERIES. No. 18.



SAINT SEZNI

*Patron of the parish of Sithney,
Cornwall*

BY THE

Rev. GILBERT H. DOBLE, M.A.,

Author of

"S. Mawes," "S. Euny," "S. Budoc," "S. Winwaloe,"
"S. Corentin," "S. German," "S. Melaine," "S. Gwinear,"
"SS. Mewan & Austol," "S. Feock," "S. Petrock,"
"SS. Docco & Kew," "S. Melor," "S. Carantoc."
"S. Senan," "S. Nonna," "A John Wesley of Armorican
Cornwall," "S. Brioc," etc.

*Vicar of Wendron and Examining Chaplain to the
Lord Bishop of Truro.*

With some Notes on Sithney Church and Parish, by Charles
Henderson, M.A., Corpus Christi College, Oxford.

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SAINT SEZNI

PATRON OF SITHNEY, CORNWALL.

OF the Celtic saints most nearly connected with Helston, St. Sithney is the only one who is at all widely known. He is not honoured elsewhere in Cornwall,¹ but his cult is found all over Brittany, and a written Life of St. Sezni is in existence.

The Cornish tradition of St. Sithney—the softened Cornish form of Sezni—is soon told. William of Worcester in 1478 tells us that he was buried in Sithney church. Fifty years later Leland read in the Life of St. Breaca then preserved in Breage church that “Breaca came to Cornwall accompanied by many saints, among whom were SINNINUS the abbot who was at Rome with Patrick, MARUANUS the monk, GERMOCHUS the king, ELWEN, CREWENNA, HELENA.” The churchtown farm at Sithney is called Merther Sithney, *i.e.*, the martyrium or chapel of Sithney, a sure sign of an early Celtic foundation; and there appears to be a small statue of the patron saint beneath one of the pinnacles of the tower.

In Brittany, Sezni is the patron of the large coast parish of Guisseny, north-east of Brest. In 1516 Guisseny was called Ploe-sezny. *Plou* of course simply means *parish*. *Guic* is the Latin *vicus*, and in Léon is very commonly used to denote the churchtown of a parish. It is to be noted that both in Cornwall and in Brittany the consonant before the “n” had been dropped by the seventeenth century. Norden refers to the Cornish parish as “Synny. A parish called in records Sythney,” and Sithney is still sometimes

¹ There is a Bossiney (Bot-Sithney) in Tintagel, see p. 22.

locally pronounced *Sinny*.¹ In Guisseny church is a fine eighteenth century statue of the saint, and an earlier one in the porch. At Menez ar Groaz, a mile or so east of the churchtown, is the holy well of St. Sezni, in a lonely spot at the end of a little wood; over the well is a charming mediaeval statue of Sezni. (It is to be observed that this holy well is on the way to the Peniti Sant Sezni, to be mentioned later).

There was formerly a *minihy* of some note at Guisseny, as Grégoire de Rostrenen, in his dictionary (published in 1732) under the word *Moinerie* cites as instances of *minihys le minihy Plouguin* and *le minihy Guisseny*. A *minihy* (*monachia*) means a piece of Church land, granted centuries ago to some saint or monastery, and possessing certain privileges, including very often the right of sanctuary. It often bore the name of the saint to whom it had been granted, and a procession is held each year to prevent the bounds of the *minihy* being forgotten. (So important is this considered, that there is a story that at Minihy-Briac one year when the clergy considered the weather too

¹Another form of the name is *Sidney*. Sidney is now a very common English name. I think it may have partly owed its popularity to Sidney Godolphin. Now the Godolphins came from the next parish to Sithney,—Breage. So the chief city of Australia may, indirectly, owe its name to this Cornish saint. The fame of Sir Philip Sidney, however, has probably most to do with the popularity of the name. There is a place-name *Sidney* in Sussex, but the Sidney family did not take their name from it, as Sir Philip's grandfather, Sir William Sidney, was the first member of the family to acquire land in the south of England (he exchanged lands in York and Lincoln for property in Kent and Sussex in 1539). Their ancestor is said to have been Chamberlain to King Henry II, and to have come with him from Anjou (where the cult of Celtic saints is widely spread). Professor Mawer writes to me saying, "The only Sidney that I am aware of as a place-name is one in Cuckfield in Sussex. That is first found in a personal name Wm. *Bysuthenee* in a Subsidy Roll of 1296, and next as *Southney* (place-name) in a Recovery Roll of 1606. This means 'south of the water OE *ea*'". The name of our saint is *Siduinus* in the register of Bishop Stapeldon (1310), *Sidnius* in that of Bronescombe (1276), *Sydney* and *Sidnini* in that of Grandisson (1336 and 1363), *Sidenini* in that of Brantyngham (1392), *Sithnini*, in that of Stafford (1403).

bad to hold the procession, the cross and the banners went round by themselves!) "A Minihy procession, which no doubt was called *Dro sant sezny* must formerly have existed at Guisseny, for a document (*Compte de fabrique*) of 1616 refers to the *procession et tours Saint-Sény*."¹

There is a Lossefny (Loc-sešny) in Loguivy-Plougras, and a Saint-Sény in Kernilis, and a chapel of St. Sez nec which may (M. Loth thinks) be the same as Sezni, in the parish of Plogonnec near Quimper; a Trezeny in the Cotes-du-Nord, and another Guisseny in Bouvron, in the department of Loire-Inférieure—in the opposite corner of Brittany.

The principal focus of the cult of St. Sezni is at Guisseny in Léon. The written legend connects him with Guisseny, and oral traditions about him have persisted there.

The written Legend of St. Sezni has been preserved for us by the famous Dominican of Morlaix, Albert Le Grand, whose "Vies des Saints de la Bretagne Armorique" appeared in 1636. He gives the sources of his Life of St. Sezni—chiefly lections for the feast of St. Sezni in the breviaries used in the diocese of Léon, which he has worked over and re-written in his usual way. I shall give a faithful reproduction of his Life, merely noting here that a Breton translation of Albert Le Grand's version, entitled "Buez Sant Sezny," was printed at Landerneau in 1848. At the end is the name of the translator (?) Marie-Gabrielle Tréguier, with the note "This Life was made according to the desire of a Treguier girl of Kervenouen, who asked to have it long ago, hoping that she might have the happiness to beseech the Lord St. Sezny to protect before God those who had copied this Life for her. AMEN."

¹ Largilliere, *Les Minihys*, p 197.

THE LIFE OF SAINT SEZNI,

*Bishop, Confessor, and Patron of the Parish of Guic-Sezni in Leon, September 19th.*¹

I. In the time when Pope Innocent I occupied the holy apostolic see, and Arcadius and Honorius were Emperors, King Grallon reigning in Armorican Britain, in the year of grace 402, St. Sezni was born in the island of Yrlande (Ireland) or Hybernia, in the province now called *Ultonia* (Ulster) and at that time known as *Ostrinct*.² His father was called *Ernut*,³ and his mother *Wingella*, who, before their child was born, had a vision which seemed to foretell that he whom she was shortly to give to the world would be a light to enlighten many and lead them to Eternal salvation. For lying in bed one night with her face turned to the Heavens, she saw the firmament strewn with stars, one of which, more brilliant than the others, seemed to fall into her mouth and be swallowed by her. When the child was born, he was baptized, and called Sezni; and, as soon as he could speak distinctly, he was sent to school, where he profited greatly in his studies, and yet more in the cultivation of virtue. Returning to his family, he resolved to leave the world, and to retire to an island off the coast, then called *Clarac*, where he remained till he was twenty-three years old, when he was inspired by God to go to Rome, to serve Him in an occasion which was soon to arise.

II. He arrived at Rome in the year 425, in the reign of Valentinian, and began to frequent the Schools for the study of Holy Scripture, and contracted a friendship with St. Patrick, who, already consecrated Bishop, and destined to convert all the remaining pagans in Hybernia, knowing the sanctity and ability of St. Sezni, presented him to Pope St. Celestin I, who consecrated him Bishop and joined him

¹ The Bollandists observe that the Feast of St. Sezni is kept at Guissey with great solemnity on March 6th. Colgan suggests that September 19th might be the Feast of his translation.

² In some notes Fr. Paul Grosjean, S.J., of the Society of the Bollandists, has very kindly sent me, he writes:—"I have no suggestion to offer as to the connotation of *Ostrinct*, except that it looks rather impossible Irish."

³ Fr. Grosjean remarks "Duine thinks, on Colgan's authority, it seems, that *Ernan* and *Fingella* are better forms of the names of the Saint's parents. To put those names in a less Latinized shape, they would be something like *Ernan* (modernized: *Earnan*) and *Findgel* (modernized: *Fionngheal*), both not uncommon personal names."

to St. Patrick to help him in his campaign for the conquest of souls. The two saints, having received their apostolic mission, together with the Pope's blessing, bearing many fine relics and other presents, crossed to Great Britain, and from there to Hybernia, where St. Patrick, who was well received by the people, sent St. Sezni to a canton of the island then called *Warrham*, giving him some priests and monks to assist him in his work. Having arrived at the Country assigned to him, he set to work to evangelize these islanders with great zeal, and in a short time converted so many of them that they built a church, and afterwards monastic buildings to lodge him and his company; and so many people were converted every day that, to assist him in instructing them, and in catechizing, baptizing, and administering the Sacraments, he was obliged to ordain still more priests. His Mission having proved so successful, he informed St. Patrick, and also Pope St. Sixtus III (the successor of St. Celestin) who made his monastery into a bishopric, and appointed him the first bishop. The Church of his Monastery having thus become a Cathedral, he built another Monastery larger than the first, where he received a great number of young men, and instructed them in virtuous living, in order to appoint them to the Cures and Benefices of his Diocese, and to employ them in preaching and in the other duties of their Office. He was well rooted in humility, patient in adversities, untiring in the work of preaching and the conversion of Souls, chaste, a lover of poverty, austere in his manner of life, gentle to all, assiduous in Prayer and Contemplation, preaching more by example than by word; he never drank wine nor intoxicating drink, and for clothing contented himself with the skins of beasts, without using linen or wool except for his Pontifical Ornaments.

III. God sanctioned his Mission and preaching by an infinite number of miracles, by which he sealed the truth of his doctrine. The lamps of the Church being one day extinguished, he re-kindled a fire by his prayers, and carried live coals in his hands without burning himself. The holy Hermit Rhodon came to visit him one winter day when it was very cold; St. Sezni conducted him to the hospice, put fagots in the fireplace, and, not finding any fire to kindle them with, fell to prayer, and the fire enkindled of itself. Having been asked to eat with a nobleman named *Gerran*, he raised to life one of his servants who had been recently

strangled by the wolves in the forest close by. He went to visit the Prince of this Country, whom he had converted, and found the Princess *Onegia* ill in bed, and so off her feed that she could not eat anything. The saint after speaking a few words to edification, asked her if there was anything she fancied. The patient replied that she would like some blackberries, and the saint said "Madame, set your mind at rest, I will get you some," and soon afterwards he obtained some by his prayers and gave them to her, and as soon as she had eaten them she was cured.

IV. St. Patrick came to see him in his Monastery one day, and the wine (which is very rare in that country) gave out; St. Sezni made the sign of the Cross over some jars of water which were in his Monastery, and the water was changed into wine, which lasted the whole three days St. Patrick stayed there. He raised to life seven men who had been killed by robbers and their bodies thrown into a pond. A poor man having by mistake killed a fine horse belonging to his master, was, by the latter's command, thrown into prison and his feet put in irons: St. Sezni went to see this Lord and asked him to set his poor prisoner at liberty; and on his refusal, he raised the horse to life and returned it to him, and so set the prisoner free. Two Hybernian Princes having fallen out, and all attempts at reconciliation failing, resolved to go to war, and assembled their armies to fight with each other: St. Sezni visited them and exhorted them to peace, but seeing they obstinately resolved to fight, retired, saying that as he himself could do nothing God would take the matter into His own hands. The two armies regarded each other, but when they attempted to engage in combat they found all their efforts in vain, by reason of a great beam which separated them from one another each time they advanced, so that finally, seeing that they were miraculously prevented from fighting, they came to an agreement, thanking God and St. Sezni for having averted so great a slaughter.

V. St. Sezni having confirmed the Hybernians in the Faith and Doctrine of Christ, wishing to live the rest of his life in repose, was inspired by God to cross the sea, and to go to Armorican Britain, taking with him a good number of his Religious, which he did, and embarking with seventy of his disciples he was carried by a favourable wind to the coast of Léon, to a Haven named *Poullluhen*, in the Parish of *Kerlodian*, where they landed in the year 477, the same

year that the Franks or French crossed the Rhine to enter Gaul, towards the end of the reign of Hoel the Great, King of Brittany. St. Sezni settled near this port, and built there a little hermitage for himself and his companions, which is still to be seen and is called *Peneti Sant Sezni*. From there he moved to the place where now stands the Parish Church of *Guic-Sezni*, built there a Monastery, and there lived in great holiness, with his Religious, till he reached the advanced age of 127, when God called him to Himself, in the year 529, to the great regret of all the inhabitants of Léon. His body was buried in his Monastery, under the high Altar, where the vault of his tomb is still seen. God worked so many miracles at his intercession after his decease that a fleet of Hybernians, having anchored in the port of *Poullluhen*, carried off his body and bore it to his Bishopric, from which with great difficulty a few Relics have been recovered and are reverently preserved in the said Church of *Guic-Sezni*.

This Life has been compiled by us from the ancient MSS. Legendaries of the Cathedral Church of Léon and the Collegiate Church of Notre Dame du Folgoët, and from an ancient manuscript Book kept in the Parish Church of Guic-Sezni, and from the MSS. memoirs of the Noble and Discreet Messire Yves le Grand, Canon of Léon; the ancient breviaries of Léon and Cornouaille celebrate his festival with nine Lessons on September 19th; although his Feast is kept on March 6th in the parish of Guic-Sezni.

Now everyone familiar with the delightful but uncritical work of Albert Le Grand will recognize at once the characteristics of his method. Such are his attempts at exact chronology (all his "Lives" abound with dates, although real History can hardly supply us with a single certain date for the history of Brittany during the early period), his anachronisms (invariably he supposes that Brittany in the sixth century was governed exactly like the Duchy of feudal times, and his picture of Sezni's "diocese" with its "benefices" reminds one of Caxton's story of St. Augustine of Canterbury's relations with the curate of Compton in Oxfordshire who "cursed" for his tithes), and his

picturesque filling in of the character and careers of persons of whom little or nothing in reality was known with details drawn from his own imagination.

At the same time there is no doubt that Albert Le Grand found the main outlines of this Life of St. Sezni in the authorities to whom he refers. But, as the Bollandists point out in their *Acta Sanctorum* for March 6th (pp. 428, 429), the Life of St. Sezni which Albert Le Grand found in the liturgical books of the diocese of Léon is (with the exception of the last section) simply an abridgement of the Life of another Irish saint, S. Ciarán of Saighir,¹ a saint identified in the Middle Ages with our Cornish St. Keverne or Piran. In a Life of St. Ciarán printed by the Bollandists in the same volume of the *Acta Sanctorum* (March 5th, pp. 392 *seq.*), and which they say is taken from a MS. formerly in the Irish college of the Jesuits at Salamanca,² the same story of the mother's dream that a star fell into her mouth is related. A Kilkenny MS.³ says he was educated "*in the island of Glera.*" Ciarán goes to Rome, where he is consecrated bishop. He returns to Ireland and settled at Saighir, near the fountain of *Fuaran*,⁴ spelt by Capgrave *Waran* (hence Albert Le Grand's

Warrham). St. Patrick comes to Munster and baptizes the king Aengus. By accident St. Patrick's horse is killed by a man of Ossory who is brought in chains to the king to be punished. Ciarán is asked to intercede for him, but does so in vain, and finally has to buy his release with a present of gold, which later vanishes into thin air, to the king's chagrin. One April Ciarán heals the Queen of Munster, Ethne, of a languor brought on by an unlawful passion for another king: she says that nothing but a dish of blackberries can save her from death, and Kieran gives her a branch covered with ripe blackberries which he had picked the previous autumn and wrapped in a veil. Next we hear that the kings of Tara and Munster go to war, but a battle is prevented by a thick forest and flooded river miraculously appearing between the two armies. The name *Geran* seems to be taken from Capgrave's Life of St. Ciarán, though the story is different. The boy eaten by wolves appears in another part of the Life of Ciarán. The Easter fire at the abbey of Ross Bennchoir which should have been kept burning throughout the year was extinguished by a boy out of mischief, but miraculously rekindled by St. Ciarán. There follows the story of how St. Ruadhan, Abbot of Lothra, comes to visit St. Ciarán at Saighir, but unfortunately there is no fire for the guests to warm themselves. Ciarán blesses a stone, which bursts into flame and is carried in the man of God's hands to Ruadhan. A Brother upsets the milk, but at Kieran's prayers the jar is found full of excellent milk. Aengus King of Munster has seven skilled harpers, who play before him and sing to him sweetly the deeds of heroes. The harpers passing through the parish (plebs) of Muscraige Tíre¹ in Munster are slain by their

¹ E. & W. Muskerry, in Co. Cork.

¹ Often called *Ciarán the elder* to distinguish him from Ciarán of Cluain (Clonmacnoise). *Saighir*=Seirkieran.

² See the Bollandists' *Bi-bliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, 4658.

³ The MS. is now in Marsh's Library, Dublin. See *Analecta Bollandiana* 1928, p. 110. The text is in Plummer's *Vitæ Sanctorum Hiberniæ*, vol. 1.

⁴ "*Fuaran* means "the little cold (fountain)", and is not uncommon as the name of a well. The only thing known about this one seems to be that it was at or near Seirkieran. There is a lovely stanza on a fountain of the same name in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick." (Fr. Grosjean).

(The reference is to the following passage: "Then it was that Patrick made the well which is called Uaran-garad, and he loved this water very much, ut ipse dixit (=as he said himself):—

'Uaran-gar—

O well! which I have loved, which loved me;

Alas! my cry, O dear God!

That my drink is not from the pure well.'")

enemies, who conceal their bodies in a certain pond in the wilderness and hang up their harps on a tree on the bank of the pond. The king cannot imagine what has become of them, but St. Ciarán informs him. The saint then proceeds to the pond and fasts there for a day. The pond then dries up and the harpers come to life, after being a month in the water, pick up their harps, and sing sweet songs to the people before the king and the bishop. The pond has ever since been dry, but is still called *Loch na gCruitireadh*, i.e., 'The Harpers' Pool. St. Ciarán all his life abstained from the use of soft clothing and intoxicating drinks. He lived 300 years, which Albert Le Grand prudently reduces to 127.

It is perfectly clear, then, that the traditional Life of St. Sezni in Brittany is copied from the Irish Life of St. Ciarán. The only question is why two saints with names so different have been confused. The Bollandists point out that a saint named *Serenicus*, Abbot of *Sagium* (Séez) is venerated in Normandy on May 7th, and suggest that the Bretons, knowing nothing about St. Sezni, surmised that Seznaeus and Serenicus were the same, that Sagium was Saighir, and that their saint must be the well known saint of Saighir. They (the Bollandists) wisely conclude that "the only certain thing we know about St. Sezni is the existence of his cult; who he was, where he came from, and what he did, are all a mystery."

The "Life" of St. Sezni thus tells us nothing whatever about the saint. It is the Life of an entirely different saint. It is not probable even that Sezni was an Irish saint, as Sezni is a British name.¹ True,

¹ "St. Sezny a un nom bretonique"—Largillière, *Les Saints*, p. 129.

A Bishop called St. Sedna or Sidonius is found in c. IV of the 2nd Vita Sti Senani published in the Bollandist *Acta Sanctorum*. See *Saint Senan*, No. 15, in my "Cornish Saints," series, pp. 14, 15. A St. Sedna or Sethna, or Setne, was the successor of St. Carthach as Bishop at Saighir, see Vita Sti Moluae, c. 35, Vol. II, p. 218 of Plummer's *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*. The father of St. Maedoc of Ferns was a Connaught man called Sethna or Sethneus. (*ib.* p. 141). The father of St. Comgall, Abbot of Bennchor, was also called Sethna or Setneus. (*ib.* p. 3) and a Setny or Secny appears in the 1st Life of St. Brendan, c. 102. (*ib.* I. p. 150).

Leland tells us that "Sinninus the Abbot" was "at Rome with Patrick" and was among the Irish band that came over with Breaca, but it is probable that the Breton legends used by Albert Le Grand had been brought over to Cornwall by the sixteenth century and acclimatized here.

But the *last section* of Albert Le Grand's Life does contain several points of real interest. We are to notice that it says that St. Sezni's first settlement in Brittany was, not at Guisseny, but in the adjoining parish of Kerlouan. In the same parish of Kerlouan, on the road to Guisseny, is a hamlet called Treissen. The large number of place-names in these two parishes containing the name of Sezni is evidence of a long stay of the saint in this neighbourhood. The parish of Kerlouan is probably not a very ancient parish. It is clearly a fragment of the huge parish of Guisseny. The fact that the original seat of the cult of St. Sezni is not at the churchtown of Guisseny is important; the late M. Largillière notes many similar cases in ancient Breton parishes. (*cf.* *Les Saints*, pp. 55, 56, etc.)

Secondly, we learn from Albert Le Grand's Life that Guisseny could not claim the body of St. Sezni. Evidently he did not die there (the story of the Irish fleet carrying it off is of course an invention). Now William of Worcester says that Sithney church contained the tomb of the patron saint. Can it be that he really did die and was buried in Cornwall?

Every student of Brittany knows the writings of Emile Souvestre. In his *Derniers Bretons*, published in 1836, he describes a visit to Guisseny, and gives us some legends about the patron saint he heard from an old peasant there. On the sands he saw the Cross of St. Sezni, which, though only three feet high, was never, he heard, covered by the sea. This was

because it had been erected by St. Sezni himself when he landed there on his arrival in Brittany. The peasant told him that, after landing, he asked hospitality from a rich man in the neighbourhood, who churlishly refused. To protect himself from the weather, St. Sezni proceeded to build himself a chapel, which he completed in a single night, for the stones came of their own accord and placed themselves in the wall, like sheep entering their fold. When he had finished, the saint threw his hammer into the middle of a field belonging to the rich man. Next day, he knocked once more at the door of the latter's farmhouse. "What do you want?" said the owner, "I have already told you that I won't have you in my house." "I only want you to come and cut your corn, which is tall and ripe, so that I may recover my hammer which I have thrown into the middle of your field by the edge of the sea." The rich man thought the stranger was demented, as it was winter, and the corn had hardly begun to germinate. "You are laughing at me," he said. "I am not," replied the saint; "come with me, and you shall see if I lie." The farmer followed Sezni, and on arriving at the shore was dumbfounded to see his field covered with ripe corn, while all around the rest of the ground was black and without sign of so much as a blade. Moved to repentance, he fell at the saint's feet and entreated his forgiveness, and was converted, with all his house, to the Catholic Faith.

Later, Sezni filled Armorica with the tale of his miracles. One day when he was alone in his cell, God the Father revealed to him that He intended to make him the patron saint of girls. "Ah! not so, Lord, I beseech thee," said Sezni, in alarm. "There is nothing worse than women on this earth, except the devil. They will be for ever plaguing me to get them

husbands and fine clothes, and I shall never have a moment's peace." "Well then," said the Almighty, "how about mad dogs?" "Oh I don't so much mind about mad dogs," answered Sezni, "I'd rather have mad dogs than women any day." And so the well of St. Sezni flows among the sandhills by the shore, and sick dogs from all the country round are taken there to drink the water to which the saint has communicated the power to heal them. (*Derniers Bretons, 3me Partie, c. 3*) (People without a sense of humour may need a reminder that the Bretons have a very keen sense of humour, and that this story is not to be taken too seriously).

The following *Legend of St. Seny* was communicated to the late M. l'abbé Duine by a nun from Guisseney. (see *Revue des Traditions Populaires*, t. XVIII. 1903, pp. 274, 275. My friend M. Le Guennec has kindly copied the extracts for me).

I.—THE CHURCH OF ST. SENY.

St. Seny was born in England. To reach Brittany he crossed the sea in a trough. "Grant me, Lord," he said, "the grace to cast anchor in the place where I am to build my church." Now it came to pass that he cast anchor in a field of flax newly sown. "Give me this field," he said to the farmer. "Alas!" he replied, "I have only just sown it." "That's nothing," returned the saint, beloved of God. And he built his church.

II.—ST. SENY AND HIS GESE.

St. Seny had some geese, and by selling their eggs he got enough money to build his church. But one day a robber stole one of his geese. The saint set out to find the rogue, and said to him, "My friend, give me back my bird." "I haven't seen it," said the man. This lie was answered by God Himself working a great miracle, for the goose, which was being roasted in the pot, cried out, "Here I am!"

"So powerful shall my malediction on thee be," said St. Seny, "that a priest shall never be found in the family of Bervas, whose name thou bearest."

And no Bervas has ever been ordained priest.

III.—THE VENGEANCE OF ST. SENY.

St. Seny had a fountain and a beautiful statue. The faithful brought innumerable presents to this statue,—rich robes to dress it in, silver crosses, golden hearts and pretty rosaries. But robbers carried them all away. The sacristan, seeing this, said to the saint, "Aren't you ashamed, Seny? You let them strip you as if you were an infant! Do you think that does you credit? You make me blush. If this continues, I give you up." The saint heard these reproaches, and said nothing; but when the sacristan returned next morning he saw his hand gripping a robber, who screamed and struggled in vain. "That's right, Seny!" said the sacristan, "that's right, my beloved saint. After this, people will have confidence in you."

The abundance of Guisseny folk-lore about the patron saint shows the important place St. Sezni holds in the imagination of the people of that parish. But the true story of his life, as I have said, has been long forgotten. I hope parishioners of Sithney reading these lines will not get a false idea of their patron saint. He was an enthusiastic missionary, who did a great work for Christ in his day. As I have said elsewhere (in my article on "The Cornish Saints," in "Tre, Pol and Pen")—"we must not conclude from the childish and often intentionally comic legends which popular imagination has since woven around them, that the men who gave their names to our Cornish parishes were idiots or eccentrics. They were saints and heroes, 'holding forth the word of life in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom they shone as lights in the world.'" (Phil. II. 15). They set a high standard of holiness and self-denial amidst violence and unbridled

passion. They were patriots, keeping alive the national aspirations of a race exposed to the attacks of cruel and powerful enemies. They were scholars, preserving literature and learning when civilization had almost perished."

An article on the parish of Guisseny was printed a few years ago in the *Bulletin d'Histoire et d'Archeologie* of the diocese of Quimper. It was written by M. Jourdan de la Passardière and M. le chanoine Uguen, after an examination of the archives of the parish. They tell us of a tradition in the parish to the effect that when the Irish carried off the relics of St. Sezni (see p. 00) the bells of the church sounded by themselves. The Irish, pursued by the inhabitants, in their haste dropped an arm-bone, which has since been carefully preserved, and is now kept in a reliquary of ebony and silver, dating from the eighteenth century. Another tradition adds that St. Brevalaire was the companion of St. Sezni. They drew lots who should settle at Kerlouan. St. Brevalaire won, and became the patron of Kerlouan. "Well," said St. Sezni, "I will go wherever my hammer falls." He threw it into the air and it fell two kilometres away, in a field of flax then in flower. Next day the flax was ready to be cut. It was then he built the church of Guisseny.

The tower of Guisseny church was rebuilt in 1700. It is a copy of that of Plou-daniel. The church itself was rebuilt in 1721, except the north and south porches. There is a fine eighteenth century statue of S. Sezni in painted wood north of the high altar (the statue of the patron saint always occupies this position in Breton churches) an older statue in the north porch, and a third in the chapel in the churchyard. The Pardon is on the 3rd Sunday in September. The

chief people in the parish have always been glad to gain, by making a generous offering to the Church, the privilege of carrying the relics of "Monsieur St. Sezni" in the Pardon procession. There is a Breton Ballad of St. Sezni printed in the 1837 edition of Albert Le Grand.

Before the Revolution there were chapels of the following Celtic saints in the parish (including the *trève* or sub-parish of St. Fregan)—St. Tujan, Tudan or Tuzan, St. Gildas or Veltas, St. Yves and St. Guenolé. There was a chapel at a place called the Hellez, which is interesting in view of the nearness of Sithney to Helston (=Helles-ton). There is a statue of a female martyr—Ste. Haude, in Guisseny church.

Among the plays of the distinguished French, or rather Breton, dramatist Tanguy Malmanche is one entitled "Les Païens," in which the scene is laid at Guisseny. A shipwrecked Cornish sailor escapes from the waves, and when asked who he is and where he comes from, astonishes his interlocutor by replying "Sydney (Sithney) is my parish, and Cornwall is my bishopric." (Brittany is divided, not into *counties*, but into *bishoprics*). The fact of these two maritime parishes opposite each other on the Cornish and Breton sides of the English Channel having the same patron saint is most significant. At present the key to the riddle is lost, but that does not make it any the less interesting. We must patiently study everything that may throw more light on this most fascinating subject, the history of Celtic Cornwall.

The fishing village of Porthleven in the parish of Sithney takes its name from another Celtic saint—SAINT ELWIN. St. Elwin belonged to the party of Irish Saints referred to on p. 3 who landed at Hayle. When Leland visited Cornwall in 1538 he saw an old Latin Life of Elwin at the same time as he saw the *Vita Sanctae Breacae* at Breage.

He says he was a companion of St. Breaca, and it is clear that he was closely connected with that saint. Leland says "Breaca built a church in Trenewith and Talmenewth, as is read in the *Life of St. Elwin*." The visitor to Porthleven cannot fail to notice that the tower of Breage church is the chief feature of the landscape as he looks up the valley. Porthleven was obviously the port of the hill-fortress of Breage. See p. 3. In 1870 a new church was built at Hayle, and called St. Elwin. A better dedication could not have been chosen.

My best thanks are due to Miss Violet Adamson, Breageside, Porthleven, for the charming design for the cover; to Fr. Paul Grosjean, S.J., of the Société des Bollandistes, for valuable notes and suggestions; to my kind friend, M. Le Guennec, City Librarian, Quimper, for transcripts, views, etc.; and last, but not least, to Mr. Charles Henderson for his Notes on the Church and Parish of Sithney.

SOME NOTES ON SITHNEY CHURCH AND PARISH

By CHARLES HENDERSON, M.A.

According to the eighteenth century edition of William of Worcester's Itinerary (1478) the Kalendar of Bodmin Priory contained an entry to this effect: "*Sanctus Senseus jacet in parochia Sancti Justi juxta Hellyston, circa 4 Milia.*" It is probable that this should have read: "*Sanctus Sethneus jacet in parochia ejusdem, etc.*" For St. Just is nowhere near Helston but Sithney is close to it.

"*Sinninus Abbas qui Romae cum Patricio fuit*" appears in Leland's Note (1538) from the destroyed legend of St. Breaca as one of the Irish Companions of that Saint. Breage is the next parish to Sithney.

The old Celtic name of Sithney appears in the name of the Manor of Merther*-Sithney adjacent to the "Church-Town." In 1230 Roger de Antrenon (Antron in Sithney) and Nichola his wife who were then owners of the Advowson of the Church of St. Sythyni of Merther-Sithyni gave 4s. to the Priory of St. Germans to be paid for ever by the Parson of St. Sythyni. *Belesaunda* and *Salamanda* sisters of Nichola, were consenting parties to this gift.

Before 1265 Roger de Skyburiow gave to Bishop Bronescombe of Exeter an English acre of land at Merther-Sythyni in the field called *Croft-en-grous* [i.e., Croft of the Cross] together with the advowson of the Church of St. Sithney, and on April 4th, 1265 Joceus de Antrenon gave the Bishop an acre at Antrenon near *Kellyengof* (= the Smith's Grove) extending from the ditch of Roger de *Scyberio* to the Highway from *Heyl* to *Helleston* next the Glebe [*Sanctuarium*] of Sithney, together with the Advowson of the Church of St. Sithney. The Bishop having thus acquired all claims on the benefice, proceeded to appropriate it to his favourite foundation of Glasney, a College of Secular Canons at Penryn. On the cession of the last Rector in 1270 the Bishop collated the first Vicar *Alan de Hellestone* assigning him the whole Altalage (or small Tithe), with the Hay Tithe of *Fenton-Venhau* [Venton Vedna] and *Seynt-Helven* [St. Elvan] and the Tithe of Beans and Pease growing in gardens, the house in which the priests used to dwell with its gardens and two *Campi* between the fields of *Stultus* the Priest and the High road from *Helleston* to *Heyle*. The Vicars had to pay 90s. yearly to the College as a pension.

The Canons of Glasney were the owners of the Great Tithe of Sithney until the Reformation (1547).

John Urban, a wealthy citizen of London, who was born in humble circumstances at St. Johns (the suburb of Helston in Sithney parish) by his Will dated 1420 left £10 to the Church of *Syddininus*, a pair of vestments, a chalice and his Missal on condition that the parishioners prayed for his soul and those of his parents and benefactors there.

*Merther implies a martyr, and so a church in honour of a martyr or other saint.

He left also £40 to find a chaplain to celebrate Mass daily in the Church of *St. Siddininus* for nine years following his death, for his soul and that of *Urbanus* his father, Joan his wife and all his kinsfolk and benefactors. The priest thus celebrating was to have a stipend of seven marks yearly. To Isabella, daughter of John Begawe, former Vicar of *St. Sittininus* he left his brazen plates.

According to Nicholas Roscarrock (1580) the feast of *St. Senny* in Cornwall was observed on April 15th. It is now kept on the 1st Sunday in August.

Sithney Church standing high on a ridge is a prominent object in the landscape. It is an interesting building with Nave, two Aisles and two small Transepts, and dates almost wholly from the 15th century, though fragments of Norman sculptured stones show that it had a predecessor.

Croften grous or the "Cross Croft" mentioned in 1265 is now called "Grouse," but all signs of the Cross have disappeared. There is a *Gweal-an-Crowse* (or Field of the Cross) at Venton-Vedna. At Truthall on the eastern side of the parish was a Celtic Cross-base but it was broken up for road metal about 1914.

There were several Chapels in the parish. In 1398 John Kembell, Vicar of Sithney, had license to celebrate Mass in the Chapels of St. Mary Magdalene, St. Elvin and St. Gelvin. St. Mary Magdalene's Chapel seems to have been attached to a Lazar House (not to be confused with St. John's Hospital) on the outskirts of Helston. St. Elvin and St. Gelvin (probably one and the same Chapel) stood at the farm now called St. Elvan [*Sanctus Ylwanus* 1281 *Seynt Helven* 1270]. Temp. Henry VII., John Nanskyll settled certain lands in trust to provide 20s. yearly "*ad edificacionem Capelle Sancte Elvine in Lannargh*," and for celebrating Masses there for his soul and the souls of his benefactors for five years. *Lannargh* (i.e., "a Clearing in a Wood") is now Lanner, the estate to which St. Elvan belonged. There are no remains of the Chapel, which may have stood within a circular entrenchment known as the *Garland* (i.e. Sheepfold) now belonging to the Churchwardens. Leland (1538) in his quotation from St. Breaca's Life, mentions *Sinninus* and *Elwen* as among the Saints' Companions. This Elwen is clearly the patron of St. Elvan. St. Elvan's Chapel was probably as old a foundation as Sithney Church and the southern end of Sithney parish was, perhaps, its peculiar district. Porthleven the neighbouring Port, and Treleven adjoining it, perhaps contain the Saint's name. There does not seem to have been any other Church or Chapel in this Saint's honour in Cornwall.

There was another Chapel on the extreme eastern border of the Parish which gave name to the holding of *Prospidnack-an-Chaple*, but there are no records of it. Private oratories are named at Lanner (perhaps the same as St. Elvan) in 1377 and at Antron in 1332 and 1391. The last, however, seems an error for Antony near Plymouth. There is a "Chapel Close" at Penrose. There is said to have been a Chapel at Truthall but the interesting building now shown as the Chapel was clearly the Hall of the 15th century mansion of the Nance Family.

St. John Baptists' Hospital, or Priory, standing in the suburbs of Helston was served by a Prior and two or three secular Brethren. It originally stood at Menacludgy on the hill above its later situation by the Bridge. The removal took place about A.D. 1260. A Record

of this Hospital by the present writer will appear in the Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall for 1928.

A word should be said in conclusion about Merther-Sithney Fair. For many generations the towns of Cornwall, which were nearly all colonies of alien traders, planted by Norman Lords of Manors, continued to be peopled by "foreigners," and the country people held aloof, preferring to hold their markets and fairs in desert places, such as Merther-Sithney. It was not until about 1300 that the towns began to be the natural centres of the various country districts, and to have an intimate connexion with their country neighbours. (See the writer's article on Helston, in "Tre, Pol and Pen," p. 79). Until modern times a great Fair was held on July 24th at Goldsithney near Marazion, about ten miles from Sithney, for which 2s. was paid yearly to the parish of Sithney. According to local tradition some people had captured the gloves, or insignia of the Fair and carried them off to Goldsithney where the Fair has been held ever since. The writer investigated the history of the Fair and collected some notes for an Article which appeared in the *Western Morning News* of July 13th, 1925. It appears that the Fair is identical with the Market mentioned in Domesday as belonging to the Episcopal Manor of *Matela* [Methleigh in Breage] which had then (1085) been seized by the new Norman Lord of Cornwall, Robert, Count of Mortain. Merther-Sithney (or Sithney) lay within the Manor of Methleigh and when the Count moved the Fair to an open field on his own land near Marazion, the name of Merther-Sithney went with it, though by the year 1396 we find the place called *Pleyn-Goyl-Sithney* (or "the Field of the Fair of Sithney." A village grew up round the Fair field and bears the name of "Goldsithney" to this day. St. James was the patron of this Fair and there was a Chapel in his honour at Goldsithney.

The name Sithney occurs in several place-names in other parts of Cornwall. There is a Tresithney in St. Columb [*Tresythny*, 1350] and a Tresinney in Advent near Camelford. Bossiney occurs at Tintagel. Occasinney in Altarnon is probably connected with the River name of Inney.

There is, however, no reason to suppose that St. Sithney had any other Church, Chapel or Well under his patronage in Cornwall beyond the Parish Church now bearing his name near Helston.

August, 1928.
Penmount, Truro.

CHARLES HENDERSON.

There is a place in the Trevarno Valley between Sithney Green and Mellangoose called Plain-an-Guary, where there must formerly have been one of those open-air theatres in which the Cornish Miracle Plays were acted.—G.H.D.

The name of the priest *Stultus* (who was not the Vicar of Sithney) is probably a mistake of the Bishop's clerk in transcribing a Cornish name. It is hardly likely that Stultus could be a man's official name! It may, of course, be a 13th cent. Sithney joke.