

S^T MELAINE



Patron
of

Mullion.
Cornwall.

Statue of S^t Melaine, at Brain.



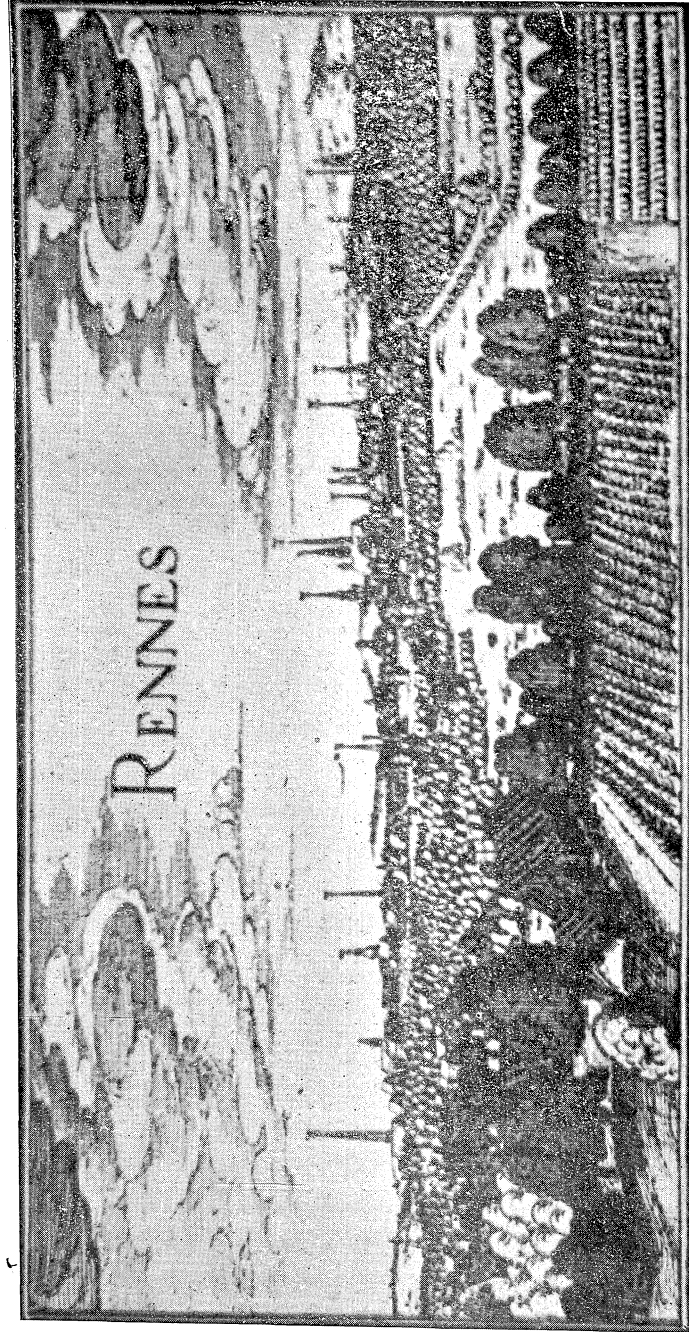
Abbey of S^t Melaine.
Rennes.



Rennes
Cathedral.



Mullion Church. Cornwall.





S. MELAINE,
BISHOP OF
- **RENNES.** -

Patron of Mullion, Cornwall.

Being a sermon preached in Mullion Church
on the Sunday after the octave of the
Patronal Festival. (November 15th, 1925.)

BY THE

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Église catholique
en Finistère

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S. MELAINE, Bishop and Confessor.

"It was Simon, the son of Onias, the great priest, who in his life repaired the house, and in his days strengthened the temple."—Ecclus. I. 1. (R.V.)

The last of the "famous men" with whose praises Jesus the son of Sirach ends the book called *Ecclesiasticus* is "Simon the son of Onias, the high priest." The father of his country, the "leader of the people by his counsels" (*ib.* xlv. 4), the defender of Jerusalem, was the high priest whose officiating at the Temple services is described with such loving care and fulness of detail in this chapter from which my text is taken.

"When he put on the robe of honour, and was clothed with the perfection of glory, when he went up to the holy altar, he made the garment of holiness honourable.

When he took the portions out of the priests' hands, he himself stood by the hearth of the altar, compassed with his brethren round about, as a young cedar in Libanus; and as palm trees compassed they him round about.

So were all the sons of Aaron in their glory, and the oblations of the Lord in their hands, before all the congregation of Israel.

And finishing the service at the altar, that he might adorn the offering of the most high Almighty, he stretched out his hand to the cup, and poured of the blood of the grape, he poured out at the foot of the altar a sweet-smelling savour unto the most high King of all.

Then shouted the sons of Aaron, and sounded the silver trumpets, and made a great noise to be heard for a remembrance before the most High.

Then all the people together hasted, and fell down upon the earth on their faces to worship their Lord God Almighty, the most High.

The singers also sang praises with their voices, with great variety of sounds was there made sweet melody.

And the people besought the Lord, the most High, by prayer before Him that is merciful, till the solemnity of the Lord was ended and they had finished His service.

Then he went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to rejoice in His name.

And he bowed himself down in worship the second time, to declare the blessing from the most High." (vv. 11—21.)

"It was he that took thought for his people that they should not fall, and fortified the city against besieging." (v. 7, R.V.) The people looked to their religious leader to defend their temporal interests as well as to minister to their spiritual needs. They felt that the wisdom and courage and moral superiority required in a chief pastor of souls made him fit to be their protector and representative towards the powers of this world in "things pertaining to this life."

I.

And such, History tells us, was the feeling with which in early times Christians used to regard their bishops. In an Augustine, an Ambrose, a Basil, an Athanasius, we see the bishop, as the head of the Christian people, the beloved and trusted father of a great family, the spiritual leader of the majority of the population of a great city, the representative and legislator of the Church, rapidly becoming the chief citizen. The influence of the bishop increased as the civil power grew weaker and weaker, and the world seemed to become the prey of anarchy. Gradually, as in Western Europe the Roman Empire began to collapse, the bishop became the *Defensor civitatis*, the temporal as well as the spiritual head of his diocese. As the French historian Taine, describing the benefits conferred on the world by the Christian Church at the beginning of the Middle Ages says, "In a State which was gradually becoming depopulated, falling to pieces, and inevitably becoming a prey to the forces of violence and disorder, the clergy had formed a living society, guided by a strong system of discipline and by laws which were obeyed as a matter of conscience and duty, joined together by a common purpose and a common creed, upheld by the devotion of its leaders and the loyal obedience of the faithful, the only society capable of subsisting in face of the flood of barbarians entering the Empire by every breach,—there you have THE CHURCH." The Christian bishop confronted the hordes of barbarians pouring across the Rhine and

overawed them by the majesty of his bearing. They recognised in him the culture of Rome, and, above all, the power of a religion infinitely above their own. "How glorious was he when the people gathered round him, at his coming forth out of the sanctuary." (Ecclus. I. 5.) He was, they felt, the ambassador of the most High. He held the keys of heaven. Before the moral power he represented the invading barbarians paused in reverent respect. To the barbarian invaders of Gaul, it has been said, the Christian bishop seemed to resemble, not their own heathen priests, but rather the divinities they had worshipped. He became their spiritual father, the chief counsellor of their kings; he tamed their fierceness, shared with them in governing the country, protected the conquered population.

Such was the Archbishop of Rheims, Remigius, whose personal influence converted Clovis, the King of the conquering Franks, and so laid the foundations of that Christian France which has made such rich contributions to the cause of Jesus Christ, has given to the Church so many great teachers, preachers and saints. When on Christmas Day 496, after the victory of Tolbiac, Remigius baptized Clovis in Rheims cathedral, it was not merely the king but the Frankish people that was regenerated. It was the spiritual birth of a nation. As the procession passed through streets hung with tapestry and garlands, illuminated with perfumed candles, sweetened with vials smoking with fragrant odours, and entered the cathedral, blazing with lights and full of clouds of incense, the Franks thought they were entering heaven itself. "Holy father," said Clovis to Remigius, "is this the kingdom of heaven you promised me?" "No," replied the archbishop, "it is the gate of the path that leads you there." "Bow thy head, Sigambrian," he said as he baptized the king, "burn what thou hast adored, and adore what thou hast burned." In those words are embodied the civilizing power of the Church, triumphing over savagery in the person of the converted barbarian.

II.

Now Melanius, Bishop of Rheims, the patron saint of this parish, lived at the same time as Remigius, and shared, it seems, in his influence over the mind of Clovis. Melaine was born near Redon,

in Brittany, at a place called Plaz, in the parish of Brain, in the latter half of the 5th century. A local legend tells of his piety as a child. One day, while guarding his parents' flocks, he went without permission to pray at a neighbouring oratory, and remained there several hours. On his return he was punished by his mother, who put him over her knee and chastised him soundly with a birch made of broom. Since then, broom has never grown in the parish of Brain, though it is found in abundance in the surrounding parishes! The young Melaine became a monk, and, later, was made abbot of his monastery. The bishop of Rennes at this period was S. Amand. Feeling that his end was near, in obedience to a supernatural revelation, he sent for Melaine. As the young monk appeared among the crowd surrounding the dying Prelate, Amand called him and announced that he was to be his successor in the see of Rennes. Melaine was consequently taken from his monastery by the people, after Amand had breathed his last, and acclaimed bishop. Thus Melaine became the spiritual and temporal head of this great Roman city, the most important strategic point of the West, when Clovis began to make himself master of Gaul. He became, we are told in the oldest Life of Melaine, one of Clovis's most trusted advisers. There is nothing improbable in this. The support of the Bishop of Rennes was of value to Clovis in securing the adhesion of the Gallo-Roman population of the West, while the latter naturally turned to the Franks for aid against the Saxon pirates who invested the mouth of the Loire, and the British immigrants who were pouring across the English Channel.*

We find Melaine at the Council of Orleans in 511.

You see, then, of what interest Mullion Feast on November 6th each year is to every thoughtful and instructed person. It reminds us of the power for good which the Church of Christ has exercised in the history of the world, and it reminds us that this power has again and again been exercised through the bishops, as the natural leaders and representatives of the Church. Bishops are among the greatest figures in History. England and France were converted by bishops. Our cathedrals were built in very many cases by bishops. Many of the greatest Christian books have been written by bishops. We might note, in passing, that nearly all the great bishops of antiquity, to whom we owe so much—Athanasius, Ambrose, Martin,

Germanus, Augustine—were chosen by popular acclamation, or designated by their predecessors. It is since bishops have been chosen by the civil power (often as a reward for political services, or for even less worthy reasons) and imposed on dioceses which had not asked for them or wished for them, that episcopal influence has declined. The appointment of bishops by the State has been one of the principal causes of the decay of Religion in England and in France. If bishops in England are to recover their proper authority and influence, a change must be made in the method of their appointment.

III.

Melaine thus played an important part in the history of France. He also played a part in the history of another country, which, though now part of France, is no more French than Wales is English,—I mean Brittany. Melaine is one of the Saints of Brittany, but he is not a Breton saint. The Bretons in his time had only recently begun to colonize Armorica. They never colonized Rennes, and Rennes only came under the rule of a Breton king 300 years after Melaine's death.

Melaine was brought into relations with the British immigrants who were to alter the name of the country he called *Armorica* into *Brittany*, but his relations with them were not of a very friendly nature. I am afraid he regarded them very much in the light of "undesirable aliens,"—turbulent, barbarous, and of doubtful orthodoxy. A very interesting letter has been discovered, signed by Melaine and by the bishops of Tours and Angers, and addressed to two Breton priests, Lovocat and Catihern, who, in defiance of their authority, were wandering among the Breton colonists, "from cabin to cabin," celebrating the Holy Mysteries on portable altars, accompanied by women whom they called *conhospitæ*, and who actually administered the chalice during the communion of the people. Melaine calls on them to "renounce these abuses."

This is all we know of Melaine's relations with the Bretons. The oldest Life speaks of his evangelistic missions to what remained of the heathen Gallo-Roman population of Armorica. By raising a dead child to life he converted pagans at Vannes. He turned his family estate at Plaz into a monastery, where he frequently retired.

[6] * Lavissee, *Histoire de France*, cited by Duine.

On one occasion a fierce soldier of Vannes, named Eusebius, irritated with the people of Comblès and Carentoir, had them brought to his camp at Marsac, where he cut off their hands and put out their eyes. He was punished for this wickedness by an agonizing paralysis of all his limbs. Thus brought to repentance, he sent for Melaine at Plaz, and the saint came, and, after imposing on him a severe penance, healed him by anointing him with consecrated oil.

Another story from the same source represents Melaine as going to Angers to visit S. Aubin. He celebrated the Holy Mysteries in a church there, and during the service distributed the *eulogia*, a kind of *pain bénit*, to the bishops present with him. One of them, named Marsus, instead of eating it, concealed it in his bosom. Looking for it later on, he was horrified to find it changed into a serpent coiled round his body! He went to Melaine, confessed his error, received his blessing, and straightway found the serpent had once more become a harmless piece of bread! The story is, no doubt, a bit of folk-lore, inserted by the compiler of this ancient Life with the intention of doing the saint honour.

Melaine died (somewhere between 520 and 549) at Plaz, and later legends speak of the ship carrying his corpse sailing up the river Vilaine without sails or oars to Rennes, amid the chant of hymns and litanies. A story related by a contemporary writer, Gregory of Tours, gives us some interesting details about his tomb. A lofty wooden tower had been constructed over it. One day this tower took fire and was burnt to the ground, but the people, anxious lest the relics of their patron saint should have been destroyed, were overjoyed to discover that the tomb, and even the linen veil which covered it, were quite unhurt. The great Abbey of S. Melaine at Rennes, which still exists, afterwards arose on the site.

After the time of Charlemagne the Breton chief Nominoë conquered Rennes, and it became the capital of the kingdom, and, later, of the duchy, of Brittany. The French-speaking part of Brittany became the more important half of the duchy* and the Breton kings became French dukes, but Brittany retained its

* We have a parallel case in our own island. The Celtic Kings of Scotland conquered the English-speaking Lowlands which then became the predominant part of their Kingdom.

regionalist feeling and sense of ancient independence. Melaine became a saint of Brittany, and as such is found among the Breton saints invoked in the Litany of St. Vougay (about 1100.) His cult extends all over the diocese of Rennes, as we should expect, but we find him honoured in that of Vannes, and westwards as far as Moelan, Plobannelec, and Morlaix (where a singularly beautiful 15th century church bears his name.) At Plélauff, in the Côtes-du-Nord, is a chapel of S. Melaine to which dogs are taken to preserve them from hydrophobia. There are three holy wells of S. Melaine in the East of Brittany.

As a well-known saint of Brittany, Melaine at last actually supplanted the original patron saint of this parish. He cannot possibly ever have come to Mullion. The original patron of Mullion, who may be the same as the Breton St. Mollien or Moellien,* was a compatriot of the Lovocat and Catihern with whom Melaine was so little in sympathy. But both your patrons, the old and the new, are a tie between you and that most fascinating and romantic land, the land of heroism and deepest religious feeling—Brittany.

AUTHORITIES.

The ancient Life of Melaine, referred to in this sketch, is a document "the historical residuum of which is very slender. It exists in three versions, of which the oldest is not earlier than the 11th century, in the opinion of Krusch, Molinier and Duchesne." (Duine, *Memento*, No. 13.) The letter to Lovocat and Catihern, which is of undoubted authenticity and of the very first importance (it was discovered by Mgr. Duchesne) was written between 515 and 520. The reference to his tomb at Rennes by Gregory of Tours (died 594) is also of interest and importance as practically contemporary evidence. The relics and miracles of Melaine are referred to in a letter of Gervais, Archbishop of Rheims (1055—1067) to Even, Abbot of S. Melaine. Albert Le Grand (17th century) of course fills his

* Loth, *Noms des saints bretons*, p. 92. Melaine is also now, and since the 13th century at any rate, the patron of S. Mellion in East Cornwall, of which Mellion was the original patron. (*ib.*) It is to be observed that the Cornish name of Mullion Cove is Porth Mellin.

story of the saint with his own picturesque fancies and inserts the most amazing anachronisms.

I need hardly point out that the saints mentioned by the late Rev. E. G. Harvey, formerly Vicar of Mullion, in his description of the parish, as possible patrons of Mullion, have no more claim to the title than "the plant Mullen."*

Mr. C. G. Henderson writes "Melian appears to have been the way both places, St. Mellion and Mullion, were pronounced in the Middle Ages. Mullion occurs as *Eglosmeylyon juxta Lanfrouder* in 1343. The personal name Melyan occurs in numerous placenames in Cornwall—*Trevelyan* in St. Veep, *Trevellan* (formerly Trevelien) in Luxulyan, *Rosemullion* (Rosemelyan) in Mawnan and Luxulyan. *Lamellyn* is a common Cornish placename, but it is almost invariably a corruption of Nans-melyn = the Mill valley (Melin = mill.) Where however the name is Lamellion it is more probable that the personal name Melan or Melion is intended. At Lamellyn or Lamellion in Lanteglos by Fowey (always written *Lamelyon* in the Middle Ages) is the site of the chapel or hermitage of St. Wyllow, who (according to the garbled version of his legend as given by William of Worcester in 1478) was beheaded here "by Melyn ys kynrede" (*i.e.*, the kinsfolk of Melyn.) In Liskeard is a place called Lamellion where was a chapel of the B.V.M. in 1442 (Lamelen) but this name may be Nans-Melyn, the mill valley.

A moor on the Cury boundary of the parish, some way from the churchtown, is called *St. Maloes* Moor in 1840, but I cannot discover any older authority for the name. I do not think Porthmellin has any more significance than its English translation Mullion cove."

* "S. Mellonus is called S. Malo by Usher; and Dr. Oliver decides that Mellonus, Malo and Meen are identical, and seeing that we have S. Malo's moor in the parish to this day, I would rather suppose that S. Malo, a Briton by birth, gave the name to this parish than go out of my way to seek, as some have done, in the Persian language, for a word resembling "Mullyon" and meaning "smooth," particularly as there is nothing smooth about us either by sea or on land—than trace it to the plant "Mullen," which really grows in much greater abundance in the neighbouring parishes than with us, or, than place myself under the patronage of St. Melanie." (p. 2.) "S.

Malo, it would appear, was a man of many aliases—as Mellonus or Melanus, Melanius, Melan, Melonius Britannus, Mellion, Maclovius, Maclou, Machutus, Mahut, Menvennus, Mawes and Meen—perhaps some others also," (p.22.) He would indeed be a man of many aliases if these were all his names, but as a matter of fact they are the names of at least six different persons. SS. Melon, Melaine, Maclovius (Malo), Machutus (a saint of the city of Saintes in Saintonge, mistakenly, though at a very early period, identified with Maclovius of Aleth) Mewan and Maudez (Mawes) are all confused here. Mr. Harvey admits that the parish feast is on 6th November, the feast of S. Melaine at Rennes, not on 15th November, the feast of S. Machutus (Malo), and it is quite certain that S. Melaine of Rennes has been the patron saint of Mullion since the early Middle Ages. No one at the present day pays any attention to Dr. Oliver's "decision" that "Mellonus, Malo and Meen are identical," which they certainly are not.

The design for this cover was kindly drawn by Miss Mary Rees. The frontispiece is from an engraving of Rennes by Tassin, "Plans et profilz des villes de Bretagne, 1631." It is of great interest as showing the old Gothic cathedral, which perished in the disastrous fire of 1720, which lasted seven days, when great part of the city was burnt down.



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