

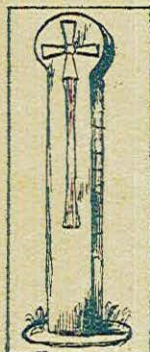
First Bishop of
Armorican Cornwall



Cury Church Cornwall.



St. Corentin's Cathedral.
Quimper



Cury
Cross.

M. P. 1885

The frontispiece is a reproduction (not very successful, I am afraid), of a magnificent granite statue of S. Corentin now in the road in the parish of Cast (Finistère)—it comes from an ancient chapel in the parish.—G.H.D.



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S. CORENTIN.

FIRST BISHOP OF
ARMORICAN CORNWALL,
Patron of Cury.

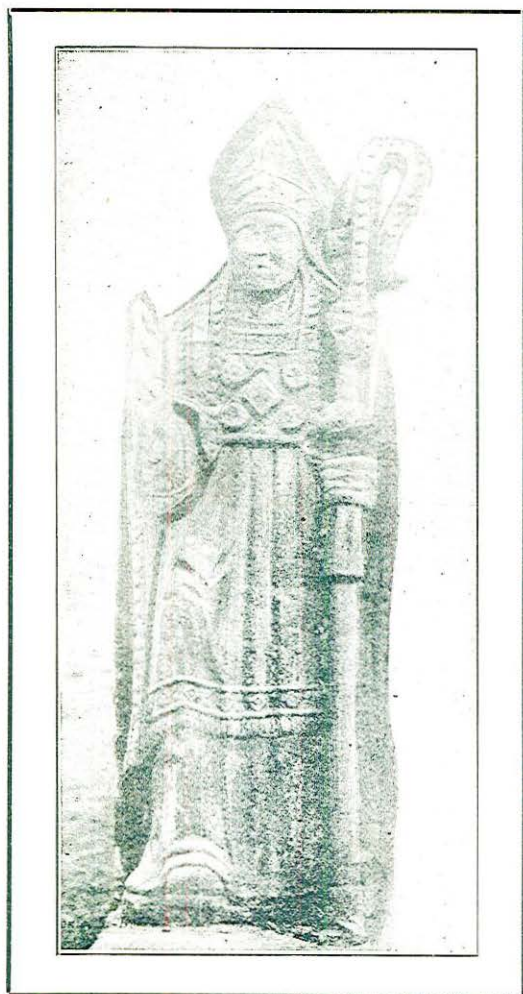
A Sermon preached at Cury Parish
Church on Sunday, August 9th, 1925,

BY THE

Rev. G. H. DOBLE, M.A.
*Vicar of Wendron, Examining Chaplain to
the Lord Bishop of Truro.*

THE "KING'S STONE" PRESS, LONG COMPTON.





A.M.D.G.

S. CORENTIN, First Bishop of Armorican Cornwall.

"He was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel."—Luke i., 80.

In these words is summed up the greater part of the life of S. John the Baptist, and they exactly describe that of S. Corentin, the patron saint of this parish of Cury. The legend of S. Corentin tells us nothing whatever about his parentage or early life, except that he was born of Christian parents in Armorica, and that he chose a hermit life at Plomodiern in the forest of Nevet.

There are few more lovely views in the world than that of the Bay of Douarnenez. As you stand at Douarnenez and look northwards across the blue waters of the bay, you see in front of you the cliffs of the long peninsula of Crozon (on the other side of which is the Abbey of Landevennec) stretching westwards towards Brest. To the right of you rise the three peaks of the beautiful mountain called the Menez Hom.* You have half Cornouaille before you, and between you and the lofty Menez Hom is the site of the hermitage of S. Corentin. "A spacious chapel, built in the form of a cross, covers the spot where his cell stood. In its Gothic windows are the remains of ancient stained glass. Behind the high altar is a carved reredos on which is represented the saint being consecrated bishop. The chapel is shaded by noble trees, whose foliage hides from view the surrounding country. A few steps away is a fountain covered with

* The "authorities" followed by the author of *The Churches and antiquities of Cury and Guntvalloe* have led him into some strange blunders, among others that of identifying the Menez Hom with Menheniot!

a granite arch; it is on a little slope, and the stream which flows from it falls in a cascade, whose murmur is the only sound which breaks the solitude, except when the wind blows from the sea, and you hear the roar of the waves in the Bay of Douarnenez, which is close by, though out of sight. The spring is the most abundant in the whole country, with the exception of that of Sainte-Candide at Scaër." (*S. Corentin*, par l'abbé A. Thomas.)

In this fountain, or in the stream flowing from it, lived a miraculous fish. Each day S. Corentin cut from it a slice to serve for his daily meal, and the instant he replaced it in the water the fish was whole as before. It came to pass that one day Grallon, King of Cornouaille, was hunting in the forest with his suite, and found S. Corentin by the sacred fountain. The King and his courtiers were tired and hungry, and asked for food. Corentin undertook to feed the party, and going to the fountain he cut from his fish sufficient pieces to satisfy the wants of all. The courtiers were stupefied, and one of them, out of curiosity, took the fish himself and cut a piece from it, - but it was now bleeding and mutilated. Corentin healed the fish and warned it to disappear to avoid further ill-treatment, and it was never seen again. To show his gratitude, King Grallon gave to Corentin his property in the neighbouring forest and a hunting seat it contained. (Down to 1789 Plomodiern belonged to the bishops of Quimper.)

One day Corentin left Plomodiern to visit another hermit in the forest of Nevet, S. Primel (or Primaël.) (Readers of Anatole Le Braz will remember his description of S. Primel in *The Land of Pardons*, Bk. ii., c. 1.) The site of his hermitage is marked by a ruined chapel in the parish of St. Thoïs. (The visit of S. Corentin to S. Primel is the subject of one of the paintings by Yan Dargent in the Cathedral of Quimper.) After a day spent in conversation about sacred things, the night was passed by the two holy men in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. In the morning they prepared to celebrate the Holy Mysteries. Water was wanted to mix with the altar wine; Primel departed to fetch some. The well was distant, and Primel was old and lame. Moved with compassion, Corentin struck the ground near the oratory with his staff, and a copious spring gushed forth. (This incident is probably introduced on account of the fact that a chapel of S. Primel existed in Quimper, the city of Corentin.)

The report of these miracles soon after brought to Corentin's hermitage two saintly visitors, S. Patern and S. Malo. Corentin gave them a warm welcome, and offered them hospitality; he had nothing in his cell except a little bread, but going with his pitcher to the fountain to fetch water, he found it full of eels, which he cooked and set before his guests. The water in the jug had also become wine. Patern and Malo returned home full of wonder at what had happened, and praising Him Who "openeth His hand and filleth all things living with plenteousness."

Finally it came to pass that the people of Cornouaille demanded Corentin to be their first bishop. (Nothing is told us with regard to this extremely interesting and important step of the creation of a new diocese of Cornouaille, about which we should be so glad to be informed. Nor are we told by whom Corentin had been ordained priest. He was sent to Tours to be consecrated by S. Martin, in company with two monks conspicuous for wisdom and holiness, S. Winwaloe and S. Tudy. S. Martin laid his hands on him, and hallowed him to be bishop, but when asked to bless Winwaloe and Tudy as abbots of two monasteries in Cornouaille, he refused, saying that that was the office of Corentin as their diocesan, and that if he did so, it might be a precedent to his successors to claim it as a right, to the prejudice of the bishops of Cornouaille. (The Sanctoral of Quimper of 1500 states that Grallon sent Corentin, Winwaloe and Tudy to S. Martin, asking him to consecrate whichever of the three he thought most fit for the office.)

Corentin returned to his diocese, and was received with great honour. He blessed Winwaloe and Tudy, and installed them (presumably at Landevennec and Locudy.) He diligently watched over the flock committed to him, and proved a shining example of every virtue (in painful contrast, says the anonymous author of the oldest Life of S. Corentin, with too many of his successors at Quimper.) By his preaching he converted wicked men, unbelievers, and apostate Christians, and brought back to the fold of the Church many erring souls. At length, worn out with his labours, he restored to Christ the talent committed to his keeping, and departed to the joys of heaven. After his death many miracles made his name a household word in Brittany. He was succeeded by S. Conogan.

Such is the legend of S. Corentin. Legend is history, in the sense that the legends and traditions of a people are part of its history. Everyone who learns the history of Rome is told the story of Romulus and Remus. No one would know Brittany who did not know its legends and its folklore. From the legends of Brittany we learn that the soul of the Breton people was moulded at its birth by the saints of the 5th and 6th centuries. "The delicate tone of pure and sincere enthusiasm which characterises the Breton and Irish legends of the Saints," said no less a person than Renan, "is truly wonderful, and no Church has anything to compare with it."* But criticism must rigorously examine and test in each case the stories handed down about the early Breton saints. What has criticism to say with regard to the legend of S. Corentin?

It is clear that the author of the MS Life I have paraphrased lived after the primatial dignity of Dol had been abolished and Brittany had become once more part of the ecclesiastical province of Tours. No Breton writer earlier than the 12th century would have represented S. Corentin as having been consecrated by S. Martin, which in itself is of course impossible, as S. Martin died before the immigration from Brittany into Armorica had begun. The Life of Corentin this old writer has left us contains very little, if any, trustworthy information about him. But one thing I think we may learn from the legends it records. S. Corentin was a hermit saint. The most characteristic feature about the Celtic church was its preference for the monastic and eremitic life. It is quite what we should expect to find when we are told that the first bishop of Quimper was taken from a hermitage. (The Life of our own S. Petrock shows us SS. Samson and Guethnoc, already bishops, living in cells by themselves.) A curious example in our own time of a hermit of the Celtic type may be found in Charles de Foucauld. At Beni-Abbès in the Sahara, "the natives," says M. René Bazin, "respected the enclosure of Brother Charles. His reputation for holiness made everything within it sacred. The Bedouin unloaded his camel inside the row of pebbles which marked its boundaries, the poor Arab woman left her fagot there, the butcher deposited his pile of bleeding goatskins, sure to

find them there next day unmolested." (This most interesting biography shows, by the way, how legends grow up about remarkable characters even during their lifetime. "Already Legend had taken possession of the story of the hermit of Nazareth and Jerusalem, and embellished it with its ornaments, so often groundless and false. The villagers related that Brother Charles loved to let himself down to the bottom of a dry well, there to pray undisturbed for hours. Nothing was true in these and similar stories, except the veneration which created them.")

Further, it is very significant that the Bishops of Quimper, down to the time of the Revolution, were not entitled Bishops of Quimper, but Bishops of Cornouaille, the diocese was called the diocese of Cornouaille and the canons of Quimper Cathedral were canons of Cornouaille. Contrary to the universal custom of the Western Church, the bishop of this Breton see took his title, not from a city, but from a district, a district the name of which, identical with that of a modern English county, shows it to have been a colony from the S.W. extremity of Great Britain. It is just possible that the see city of Cornouaille may have been originally Carhaix, which was certainly the capital of the district in Roman times, but it is probable that Corentin lived at Quimper, as there is a holy well there bearing his name, (on the south side of the river Odet, in the Rue Pont-Firmin,) the cathedral is dedicated to Our Lady and S. Corentin, and Quimper was known as Quimper-Corentin down to the Revolution. (He is also the patron of Poullaouen, and at Baud.)

The first mention of S. Corentin in history is found in Wrdisten's Life of S. Winwaloe (c. 880,) where a verse of poetry associates the three names of Winwaloe, Grallon, and Corentin, and says they lived after the time of S. Tudual, founder of Tréguier. These three names were clearly the names handed down by tradition as those of the three chief figures in the early history of Cornouaille,—the King* or Count of Cornouaille, the first Bishop, and the founder of Lande-

* I would mention the reference to the Breton saints, especially SS. Winwaloe and Corentin, in c. 4 of René Bazin's charming Breton novel *Madame Corentine*.

* There was in the 17th century a kind of cult of King Grallon. Albert Le Grand tells us that in his time the parishes near Landevennec, as Argol, Dineol, St. Nic, etc., used on certain days to go to the abbey and sing a service in the oratory of King Grallon for the repose of his soul. Down to the Revolution it was the custom on S. Cecilia's day for the clergy to ascend to the statue of King Grallon between the two western towers of

vennec. Several counts of Cornouaille in historical times bore the name of Grallon, and it is significant that all through the 10th and 11th centuries the counts and bishops of Cornouaille were closely connected, the bishop being always chosen from the family of the count. (For some time the Bishopric was hereditary.)

The next references to S. Corentin are found in ancient litanies. In the very ancient litany known as the litany of S. Vougay, at the head of a long list of Breton saints whose prayers are invoked come the names of the founders of the sees of Dol (S. Samson) of S. Malo, and of S. Briec, S. Guidal, S. Melaine of Rennes, S. Patern of Vannes, and finally S. Corentin (spelt SCE CHOURENTINE. M. Loth says that *Corentin* would be the original form of the name,) followed immediately by S. Winwaloe. S. Corentin's name is found in the Canon of the Mass in a Winchester missal of the 10th century, (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) and in the litany of a Psalter of Tours used at Christ Church, Canterbury, in the 11th century. (In the 12th century, the Abbey of Abingdon claimed to possess a bone of S. *Caurentin*.)

S. Corentin is mentioned in the Roman d'Aquin, in the second half of the 12th century. (Edition Jouon des Longrais, vers 3023-3040, and note p. 178.)

I have said that, in a certain sense, legend is history. The cult of the saints is also history.

We find the cult of S. Corentin in Brittany all through the Middle Ages. A favourite Breton mediæval devotion was that known as *Tro Breiz*, the pilgrimage made four times a year to the shrines of the Seven Saints of Brittany, the founders of the sees of

Quimper cathedral, where a hymn was sung with orchestral accompaniment. A man then climbed up on to the statue with a glass of wine and a serviette; he offered the glass to the king, drank it himself, wiped the king's lips, and tossed the goblet to the crowd below. If anyone caught it unbroken he was rewarded with 100 crowns, but the reward is believed never to have been claimed.

Dol, S. Malo, S. Briec, Tréguier, S. Pol de Léon, Cornouaille, and Vannes. S. Corentin was one of the seven. A sequence used on his festival began:—

Septem sanctos veneremur
Et in illis admiremur
Septiformem gratiam.

His praeulsit Corentinus,
Consecravit quem Martinus
Praesulem Cornubiae, etc.

The author of the oldest Life of the saint tells us that owing to the miracles wrought at Quimper they had had to pull down the cathedral, and build a larger one. In 1018 Alain Caignard, Count of Cornouaille, feared he was going blind. At the instance of his wife Judicaël, he had himself carried to the cathedral of Quimper, and after praying there, and offering on the altar a charter giving to God and S. Corentin certain lands, he found his sight completely restored. Two young men of the House of Cornouaille were saved from sickness and death by the prayers of S. Corentin. A woman who intended to offer several ounces of wax at his shrine changed her mind at the last moment, but found that she could no longer open the hand she had closed to withdraw the offering. On her repentance S. Corentin appeared to her in a dream and healed her. A thief from Léon who stole some silk at the Pardon of S. Corentin on 1st May was struck with fever and palsy, but was healed by the saint on his repentance. The abbey of Marmoutiers near Tours, where the body of S. Corentin was carried during the Norman invasion of the 10th century, and retained by the monks, who were very proud of it, was one day visited by brigands, who broached a large cask containing the monks' winter store of wine. After other relics had been brought without effect, those of S. Corentin were brought, when the wine immediately ceased to flow out of the cask, and the brigands departed in consternation! Such were the stories of wonders due to S. Corentin's intercession, told round the fireside by Quimper men in an uncritical age.

The miracle of the fish will recall to every Cornishman the story in the life of S. Neot, represented in one of the ancient glass windows of his church in East Cornwall. It occurs again in the Life of S. Petrock. (It has been suggested that the miraculous fish is derived from a heathen Irish myth,—the "Salmon of Science" that lived in "the Fountain of Coppla.")



The cult of S. Corentin received an extraordinary impetus in the 17th century. The 17th century saw a great religious revival all over France, and especially in Brittany. If in Brittany it did not leave the wonderful literary monuments sermons like those of Bossuet and books of devotion like those of S. Francis de Sales it produced in other parts of France, it left a no less lasting monument in the intense and permanent devotion to the Catholic Religion it aroused in the entire Breton peasantry. The leader of the religious revival in Brittany was Father Maunoir. Maunoir was the John Wesley of Brittany. It was through the influence of an enthusiastic Jesuit of Quimper, Fr. Bernard, that Maunoir was called to this work. In 1639 and 1640 the plague visited Quimper, and a third of the inhabitants died. In obedience to what he believed to be a supernatural admonition, Fr. Bernard called together the burgeois of the city, and they made a vow to erect a screen in the cathedral, and place there the relic of the arm of S. Corentin recently recovered from Marmoutiers by the personal exertions of the bishop of Cornouaille. The fountain of S. Corentin was restored, and the image of the saint beneath the shrine that covered it, which had been broken by a young libertine, was replaced by a new statue and the old one reverently repaired and re-erected in the Jesuit college. The plague then ceased. The same year Maunoir began the Breton missions, in which he was to labour for 43 years. S. Corentin was Fr. Maunoir's favourite saint. Among the Breton hymns he wrote to sing during his missions (another parallel with the Methodist movement in Cornwall) was a metrical *Life of S. Corentin*. There is also a Breton hymn to our saint by Michel Nobletz, the precursor of Maunoir. During this period there lived in Quimper a girl called Catherine Danielou, who was closely associated with those engaged in the work of the Breton missions. Catherine was a child driven from home by an unnatural mother and brutal stepfather. Her life is one long story of visions and supernatural events. She was told to take S. Corentin in the place of her father, and the saint constantly appeared to her and befriended her.

In the Middle Ages the chief festival of S. Corentin was on 1st May. At the present time it is on 12th December. At 5 a.m. the heavy bells of Quimper cathedral thunder forth a joyous peal, and the church is immediately invaded by an immense crowd of pilgrims

from all parts of Cornouaille. (A crowd of peasants who have walked 15 miles and more to church in the dark and cold and pouring rain is a sight more frequently seen in Brittany than in England). At the mass there is a sermon in praise of S. Corentin in Breton, and Breton hymns are sung. No one returns without having purchased a supply of cornies. *Cornies* are a special feature of the Feast of S. Corentin, as Easter eggs are of Easter. They are little cakes of oatmeal, shaped like a mitre, slightly raised in the centre, which is gilded. Bought at S. Corentin's fair, they are sent to absent friends. (The custom is first mentioned in 1790, but is much older.)

The church of Cury is dedicated in honour of S. Corentin. It is "Capella Sti Corentini" in Bishop Stapeldon's Register. During the Middle Ages the parish was dependent on that of Breage. In 1890 a fresco was discovered in Breage church, representing S. Corentin in cope, dalmatic and alb, with a massive pastoral staff and a very large mitre. By his side is the legendary fish, and above his head in black letters are the words "Ste quarentine ora pro nobis."

Mr. C. G. Henderson writes in a letter to me dated 10th July, "Cury is sometimes called Egloskerry in old deeds, and sometimes Curriton, i.e. Corentin. I don't think however that Egloskerry near Launceston is the same saint, for in the 15th century the dedication is given to St. Keria, Virgin, one of Brychan's children. There is no doubt that Cury is S. Corentin, and that there was a Celtic monastery there, as the name Lamanna (Lan-manach) would imply. Lamanna is near Cury church. The subjection to Breage was probably only a post-Conquest arrangement, due to the fact that the manor of Winnianton extended into Breage."

I end with a few fragments from hymns in honour of our saint, in Latin, Breton and French:—

Pange solemnes, pia turba, cantus
Hac die cunctis tibi sanctiori
Quae Corentinum cumulata palmis
Vexit ad astra.

Carne dum piscis redit integrata
In cibum sese toties daturus
Aequa lex strictae quoties suadet
Prandia mensae.

Sant Corentin, Patron Kerne,
Diouallit mad hor bro ;
Grit ma virimp lezen Doue
Beteg heur ar maro

E Kerne, menez ha traonien
Zo deoc'h a berz Doue ;
Glepet int bet gant ho
c'houezen
Dalc'hit stard d'ho leve.

St. Corentin, Patron of Cornouaille
Defend thy land well,
Make us to keep the Law of God
Unto our lives' end.

In Cornouaille, mountains and
valleys
Are thine, by gift of God ;
The scene of thy labours,
Keep well thy land.

O peuple de Cornouaille
Célèbre ton Pasteur !
Sol du Léon, tressaille
Pour l'élu du Seigneur.
Que nos bourgs et nos villes
Chantent saint Corentin,
Sur les flots, dans les îles
Exaltez-le sans fin !

*My best thanks are due to Miss Mary Rees for designing
the cover of this little book.*

