



SAINT MEWAN AND SAINT AUSTOL

*Patrons of the Parishes of St. Mewan and
St. Austell, Cornwall.*

BY THE

Rev. G. H. DOBLE, M.A.,

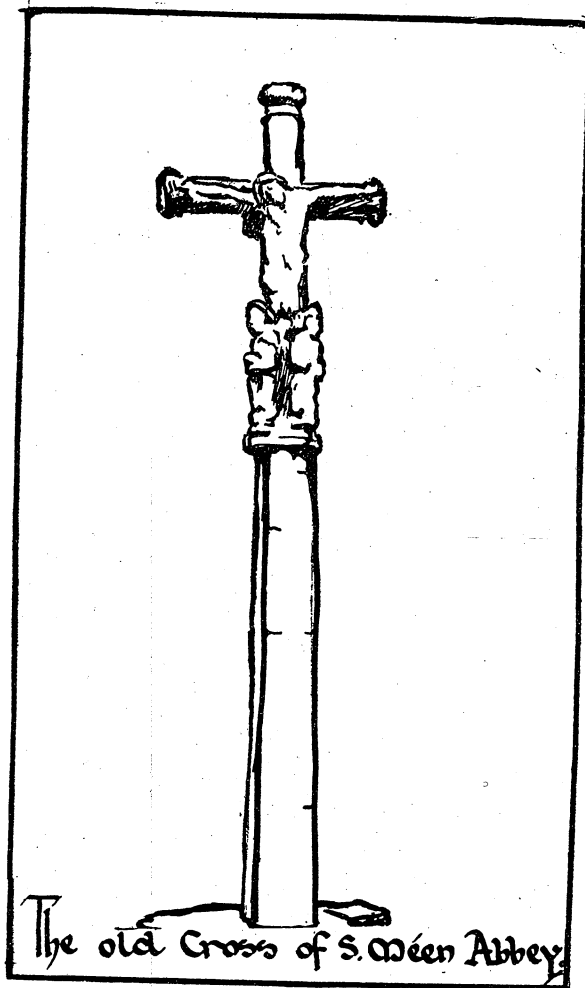
Author of "S. Mawes," "S. Euny," "S. Budoc,"
"S. Winzvaloe," "S. Corentin," "S. German,"
"S. Melaine," "S. Gwinear," etc.

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SAINT MEWAN and SAINT AUSTOL,

Patrons of the Parishes of St. Mewan and St. Austell, Cornwall.

"And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood." 2 Kings vi: 1—4.

In the late Canon Hammond's well-known account of the large and populous parish of St. Austell, entitled "A Cornish Parish," the second chapter is devoted to the question of "The Name." The name "St. Austell" has puzzled many—visitors and natives, and it seems to have puzzled Canon Hammond. The chapter in which he deals with the question is the least satisfactory in the book, the flippancy in which he speaks of the ancient Cornish saints being as unworthy of serious history as the wild guesses in which he indulges, (Canon Hammond actually attempts to father the vulgarism "orspital" on the mediæval inhabitants of this Cornish parish!) And the writer's failure is all the less excusable, as he had the true answer in his hands,—on p. 5, note 1, he mentions a letter in which Sir Paul Molesworth had pointed out that "Austol and Mewan were monks of the same monastery," quoting Dom Lobineau's Lives of the Breton saints. The oldest form of the name Austell is *Austol*, which occurs as early as 1150, and again in a deed of 1169—a charter in which Robert Fitzwilliam frees the "Sanctuarium de Sancto Austolo" from all imposts and obligations (the right form of the

name lingered on as an alternative with *Austell* for some considerable time ;) and as the two adjacent parishes of St. Austell and St. Mewan bear the names of two Breton saints who were companions, and one of whom was a very well-known personage indeed, there ought to be no doubt remaining in the mind of anyone who considers the nearness of Brittany and the large number of Breton saints who have given their names to Cornish parishes. The tradition about the two saints was still living in the remembrance of the people of St. Austell in the 16th century. Leland in 1538 was told that "Austolus was a hermit,"† and Mr. C. G. Henderson has discovered traces of the story of St. Mewan and St. Austol lingering on at St. Austell as late as 1581. The truth is that Canon Hammond has made a mystery out of what was really no mystery at all. The revival of Celtic studies is fortunately making this sort of thing less common now.

At the present day St. Mewan is but a country suburb of the important town of St. Austell, but in hagiography the position is reversed—St. Austol is only known as the companion of the far more celebrated St. Mewan. In this little book I shall therefore deal mainly with St. Mewan, duly recording the place St. Austol has in the story of his life. I shall first give the legend of St. Mewan as it has been handed down to us, and I will then deal with the evidence which may be deduced from the study of placenames in Brittany and Cornwall, and describe the cult of the saint on both sides of the Channel.

I.

Conaid Mewan, or Mevennus—as his name was written in Latin, was born in South Wales, in Gwent, in "Orcheus pagus"—says his oldest biographer, *i.e.*, in Erkye or Ergyng, now Archenfield, in Herefordshire, west of the Wye. He was of noble birth. At school he distinguished himself by good conduct and application to study, but his charity was even more conspicuous than his love of learning—"he supported poor pilgrims out of his own purse, and received the needy and wayfarers into his house."* His family

* This quotation from the lessons for the Feast of St. Mewan in the Breviary for the use of the diocese of Dol, printed in 1519, may be merely a hagiographical commonplace, but it seems just possible that some tradition of Mewan's charity may explain the rule governing pilgrimages to his shrine, referred to on page 17.

† Vol. VII., p. 111., (marginal note) "Austolus erat eremita."

was allied to that of St. Samson. He became a monk in Samson's monastery, and followed him to Cornwall and Brittany.

This is all that is told us of the youth of St. Mewan. We can supplement it from the Life of St. Samson. St. Samson holds the chief place among the founders of the Church in Brittany. His Life, which may be as old as about 625, and cannot be later than 850, is the earliest, longest, and fullest of all the lives of the Breton and Cornish saints that have come down to us. (The reader can study it in Canon Taylor's excellent translation, recently published, with introduction and notes, by the S.P.C.K.) Samson was a Welsh monk and bishop, a disciple of St. Illtydd, in whose monastery of Llanilltydd he was brought up. (Llanilltydd is now Llantwit Major, a country parish on the coast of Glamorgan, midway between Barry and Bridgend; the very interesting Church contains five Celtic crosses, several of which have inscriptions on them—two containing the name of Samson, though probably not our Samson.) Soon after his consecration as bishop, while praying in the Church one Easter Eve, he saw in a vision an angel, who bade him leave his native land and go to assist his brethren beyond the seas. He left Wales and sailed to Cornwall, landing at Padstow on the estuary of the Camel. After visiting the monastery of Docco, now St. Kew, and staying some time in Cornwall, where he converted a number of Cornishmen engaged in idolatrous rites round a menhir in the country of Tricurria (now Trigg), he embarked on the river Fowey and sailed to Brittany, where he founded the abbey-bishopric of Dol.

Samson was a born leader of men, and he took an active part in the politics of Brittany. The northern part of Brittany formed a semi-independent principality, called Domnonia—after the British kingdom of Dumnonia (from which the county of Devon gets its name) which included at that time most of the south-west of this island. The greater part of the colonists who had crossed the channel and settled in Brittany came from Dumnonia, and they gave the name to their new home, just as the French and English settlers in Canada and the eastern coast of North America gave those countries the names of New France and New England. A usurper, named Commor (or Conomor) had expelled the rightful heir to the throne of Domnonia, Judual, who had been sent as a prisoner to the court of the Merovingian King of the Franks,

Childebert, the overlord of Domnonia. Samson took his part, visited the Frankish king's court and obtained his release. So completely did Samson win Childebert's favour that the latter gave him a considerable piece of land at the mouth of the Seine, on which he built a monastery. (see p. 20) Taking Judual with him, Samson sailed from the estuary of the Seine to the Channel Islands, which he had visited on his way from Cornwall to Brittany, and where he possessed great influence. Here they raised an army, returned to Domnonia and overthrew the usurper.

It was apparently in connection with this affair that Samson sent Mewan on an expedition to the court of Weroch (or Gueroc), the prince who ruled over the Breton settlers in the neighbourhood of Vannes. (The country round Vannes was long known as Bro-Weroch—The Land of Weroch.) He had to pass through the Forest of Brocéliande. On his way he was warmly welcomed by a local chieftain named Caduon, who had made a little settlement in this wild district, which he generously offered to Mewan and his monks. Mewan, on his return to Dol, obtained leave from Samson to accept this offer, and the rest of his life was spent at the abbey he built about the year 600, on the land given him by Caduon, in the Forest of Brocéliande, on the banks of the little river Meu.

The reader may have been in Brittany, but it is probable in any case that he only knows the coast of Brittany. Yet the interior of the peninsula is well worth a visit. Towards the west it consists of the high moorlands known as the Black Mountains and the Montagnes d'Arrée, which resemble Dartmoor and the Cornish moors. The east was formerly covered with a vast forest, the forest of Brocéliande, which plays a very important part in the Arthurian romances. It was long looked upon as an enchanted forest, the abode of fairies and supernatural beings. There the wizard Merlin lay a prisoner, under the spell of the fairy Vivien.* In the "Quest of

* The reader will remember Tennyson's adaptation of the story in the "Idylls of the King,"—"Merlin and Vivien,"—

"Touching Breton sands, they disembarked.
And then she followed Merlin all the way,
Ev'n to the wild woods of Brocéliande.
For Merlin once had told her of a charm,
The which if any wrought on anyone
With woven paces and with waving arms,

the Holy Graal" Sir Galahad finds in the Forest of Brocéliande the enchanted well of Barenton, the water of which was cold as ice, and the sand red as blood and hot as fire,—three times a day the water became green as an emerald and bitter as the sea. Continuing his journey through the forest, Sir Galahad comes to a great and fair monastery built on a lake called "Louc'h Rouan," (=The Queen's Lake), and finally arrives at a chapel where he finds the Book of the Graal. The chronicler Wace visited the well of Barenton in the 12th century, and tells us of the marvels related of it. If the water of the well was sprinkled on the great stone close by, men said, strange voices were heard through the forest, the trees seemed to blaze as if all the forest were on fire, terrific battles seemed to be raging in its recesses, and thunders shook the earth, to be suddenly succeeded by a dead silence. One of the Arthurian romances tells us how Kynon, one of the knights of the Round Table, found by the spring, under a great tree, a silver cup, fastened by a chain of the same metal to a marble rock. He filled it at the fountain and poured the water on the rock. Immediately the thunder roared, and a storm of hail, so fierce that the knight could scarce endure it, burst upon him. When it had ceased, the sun shone once more, and the branches of the tree, stripped of its leaves by the storm, were covered with birds singing with unearthly sweetness such as Kynon had never heard before. Then appeared a knight in black armour, who fought with Kynon and vanquished him. Kynon returned to the court of King Arthur and told his adventures. Another knight,

The man so wrought on ever seemed to lie
Closed in the four walls of a hollow tower,
From which was no escape for evermore;
And none could find that man for evermore,
..... and he lay as dead
And lost to life and use and name and fame.
And Vivien ever sought to work the charm
Upon the great Enchanter of the Time,
As fancying that her glory would be great
According to his greatness whom she quench'd.

Till at last
Merlin, overtalk'd and overworn
Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,
And lost to life and use and name and fame."

Owen, who was listening to Kynon, resolved to try his fortune. He set out, and finally overthrew the black knight, married the lady of the castle, and became the guardian of the enchanted spring. The forest of Paimpont is the largest remaining fragment of this once vast forest; many place-names in the neighbourhood, such as "The Valley of the fairies," "The Valley without return," "Folle-Pensée," "The field of tournaments," "The garden of love," etc, recall its ancient legendary fame.

The missionaries who followed the British emigrants to Armorica evangelized the interior of the country as well as the coast. They penetrated into this mysterious forest of Brocéliande, and planted settlements there, which became centres of culture and true Religion. The heathen forest was christianised, and its legends and wild romances took a Christian colouring. Mewan was the chief Christian evangelist of the Brocéliande country. He founded on the land given him at Gaël by Caduon an abbey which became the most important religious house in the interior of Brittany, and a centre of missionary work. The Old Testament story (2 Kings vi: 1-4) which I have prefixed to my little book is a picture of what was going on in the Forest of Brocéliande and throughout Brittany during the 5th and 6th centuries. The "sons of the prophets" building themselves a new home prefigured the Celtic monks making ever new settlements in the wildernesses of Britain and France, where they were, like the prophets of Israel, "men of God" who lived in close communion with the Lord and were His messengers to His people; Elisha, the leader of the bands of prophets, the inspiration and hope of the whole people, "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," has his anti-types in Mewan and the other saintly Breton abbots and bishops.

Water was wanting at Gaël, but Mewan fixed his staff in the ground and prayed, and when he arose from his prayer and withdrew his staff a fountain sprang up, which, we are told by Albert le Grand, the 17th century Breton hagiographer, in his life of St. Mewan, "is still seen, and is famous for the powers it possesses of curing a malady called by the doctors *Prosa*, and by the common people 'St. Mewan's evil,'* which is a malignant mange, which eats away the flesh down to the bone."

The monastery became so famous that one of the Kings of Domnonia, Judicaël, was given the habit by Mewan and became a monk there. One account says that his entrance into the abbey was due to his being forced to escape from the usurpation of his brother Haëloc, and certainly similar motives not infrequently led to royal personages taking refuge in Celtic monasteries. We have an instance in St. Bernard's Life of St. Malachy (c. 4) where the King of Munster, expelled from his dominions by his brother, flies to Malachy's monastery, and there edifies all men by his humility and his strict observance of monastic discipline, until Providence stirs up a neighbouring king to expel the usurper and restore him to his throne. The version of the legend of St. Mewan I have just referred to represents Haëloc as being later converted and abdicating the throne of Domnonia, to which Judicaël succeeds, and after many years of prosperous rule returns to end his days in the monastery at Gaël. On the other hand, the next incident in the history of St. Mewan shows us the brutal Haëloc as the lord of a castle close by, which would make the abbey of Gaël a very unsafe refuge for Judicaël. In any case it is certain that Judicaël, Prince of Domnonia, felt a strong attraction for the monastic life. On a visit to the King of the Franks, Dagobert, he met Dadon (St. Ouen, afterwards Bishop of Rouen) and Eligius (St. Eloi or Loy) who are known to have been ardent admirers of the Irish monastic rule as introduced into Gaul by St. Columbanus, and were evidently "in sympathy with the ascetic spirit of Judicaël."* It is certain that he entered the monastery of Gaël. He was regarded as a saint (his Festival was kept on 17 Dec.) and he became one of the chief glories of the abbey. A charter of Louis the Pious in 816 speaks of the abbey of Gaël as "the house of the church of St. Mewan and St. Judicaël which is in the place called Wadel."

"The most pious Duke Judicaël," says the ancient Dol breviary, "had a brother very unlike him in character, living near the monastery of St. Mewan. One day he threw one of his servants into prison on some trilling accusation, and sentenced him to death. The blessed Mewan passing by heard his cries, and, moved with pity betook himself to the aforesaid Haëloc and besought him to release him. Haëloc proudly refused, but, in answer to St. Mewan's prayers,

*Duine, Memento.

* In Breton "Rouign. sant Men" (Breton Dict. 1732.)

the servant was miraculously set free and fled to the monastery for refuge. Haëloc pursued him and brought him back by force. The saint announced to the fierce chieftain that, as a punishment for what he had done, he would die in three days. Haëloc was immediately struck down by a deadly disease (Albert Le Grand says he was thrown from his horse) and, thus brought to repentance, he sent for the saint, confessed to him his sins, received the Body of Christ, and died at the end of three days, as St. Mewan had prophesied.*

We are next told how the fields cultivated by the monks were ravaged by wild animals from the forest. At last Mewan went out, and, after praying and making the sign of the cross, charged them to leave the abbey lands unmolested. The beasts obeyed him, and never repeated their ravages.

"After some years Mewan make a pilgrimage to Rome. On his return he passed through the city of Angers. A certain pious lady approached him and asked him to deliver her lands from a huge serpent who infested them. He asked where the serpent lived, and she replied, 'Between St. Florent, Claremont, and the city of Nantes.' Next morning he made his way to the place named, and guides, standing at a safe distance, indicated to him the serpent's abode. Trusting in the Lord, he boldly approached the serpent and, fastening his stole round its neck, led it after him, like a dog, to the river Loire, into which he precipitated it, saying 'Hurt no creature from henceforth.' Then, at the prayer of the said holy woman, he accepted her land as a gift and built there an oratory and house (monastery.) The people of the neighbourhood flocked to see him and offered him gifts, which he bestowed on the poor.†

Not long afterwards Mewan fell ill, and, feeling his end drawing near, he called the brethren round his bedside and addressed to them a final exhortation. Perceiving a young monk and priest, named Brother Austol, who was his god-son, grieving more deeply than any of the others, he called to him to draw near, and himself wiping away his tears, said to him in the spirit of

* A similar story is found in the Life of St. Malo. The reader will observe the inconsistency between this story and that just related.

† Breviary of Dol, 1519.

prophecy, "My son, do not grieve over my departure, for we shall not be separated from each other for long; I am, as your father, going before you, and you shall follow me in eight days; prepare yourself bravely for your passage from this mortal life." Having said this, he gave up the ghost, "the angels singing and accompanying his soul to heaven, where he reigns with Christ in peace eternal."* It was on the 21st of June. A week later Austol died, as Mewan had foretold, and the festivals of the two companions were ever after duly observed in the monastery where they had lived on the 21st and 28th of June.

II.

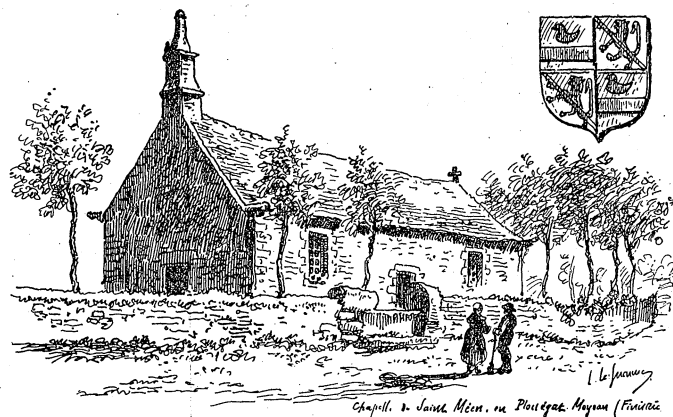
Such is the legend of S. Mewan handed down to us in Breton hagiography. The greater part of the story I have related is contained in an 11th century Life of St. Mewan, written by a monk of the abbey, named Ingomar (who also wrote a Life of St. Judicaël.) It cannot, of course, be unreservedly accepted as serious history. It was written long after the time of St. Mewan, in an uncritical age, and nearly all the incidents it contains resemble, and may have been suggested by, similar incidents in the lives of other Celtic saints. At the same time, it cannot be dismissed as valueless. It may really tell us something about its hero. All legends contain some grain of truth, and the earnest seeker after truth will carefully sift them again and again to find that grain of truth. All these ancient lives of the saints must be carefully studied, for they are almost our only written sources of information for this period, and the student of history and folk-lore can learn much from them.‡

But besides these more or less early written Lives, almost always somewhat disappointing, we have another source of information. "Place-names," says a great scholar, (M. Largillière) "are documents of indisputable sincerity," and the study of the names of places in Celtic countries can tell us much about the doings of the ancient Celtic saints, for so many place-names in Wales and

* Breviary of Dol, 1519.

† *e.g.*, For example, so critical a writer as Mgr Duchesne says "Weroc, prince of the Vannetais, is mentioned in several legends, notably in those of St. Gurthiern of Quimperlé, of St. Gildas of Rhuys, and of St. Méen of Gaël; there may be some truth in the relations between him and these saints described in their legends." Waroch or Weroc is certainly a historic personage, known to us by the works of Gregory of Tours. He succeeded his father Macliaiv in 576.

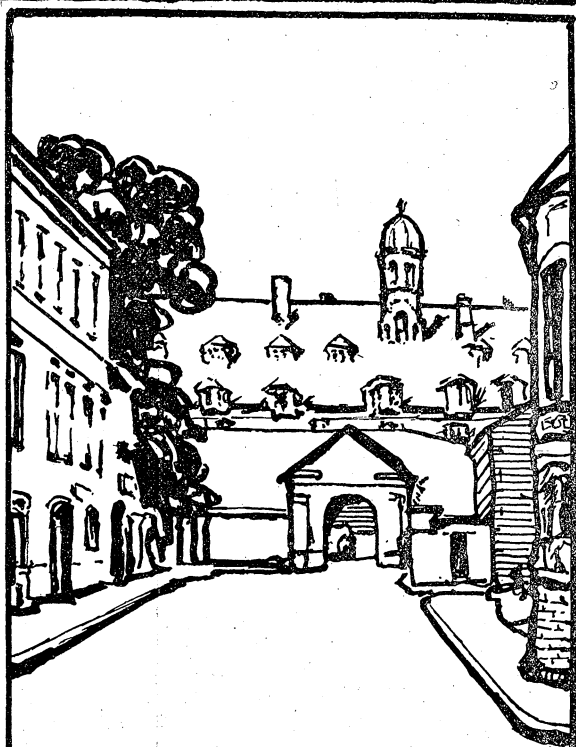
Cornwall and Brittany contain the names of saints. "In these three countries," M. Loth has said, "it is not the Lives of the saints that tell us most about the existence of the saints and the national organization of Religion, but the names of places." The fact that a parish or village or farm or well is called after a saint is sometimes a proof that he lived there, sometimes it is a proof that it afterwards belonged to his monastery and that monks from his monastery visited it, or that some of the saint's relics were at a later period given to the church there. In any case the fact of the existence of the cult of a saint in any particular place is always of importance to the student of local history, and to the student of folk-lore. By patient study of the evidence before us discoveries of great importance may be made.



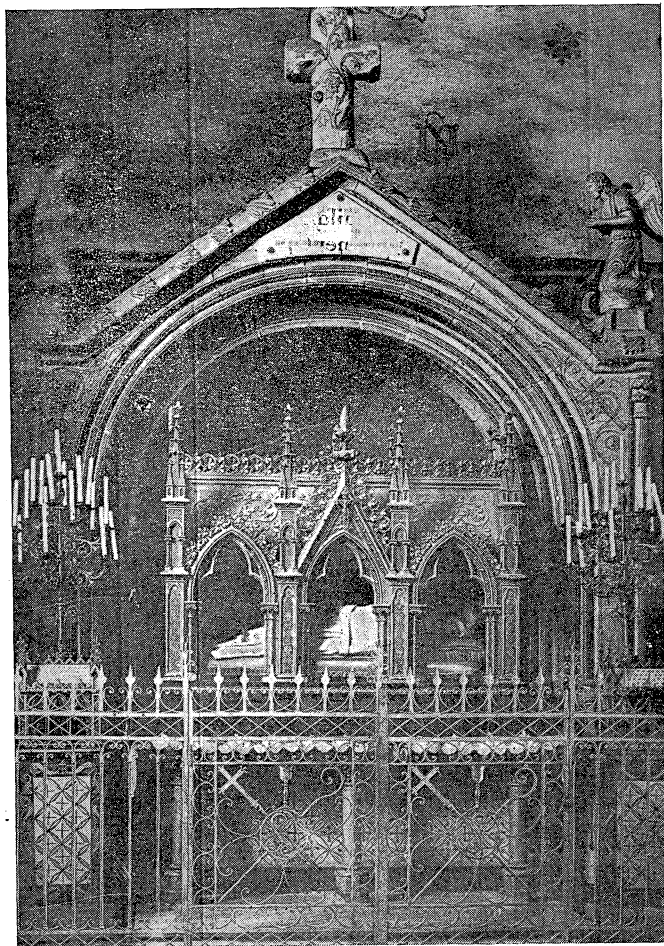
The study of philology and topography throws considerable light on the history of St. Mewan (though naturally not so much as we should like.) In several points it confirms what the Legend handed down to us about him tells us. The *name* is an early Celtic one, it is derived (says the greatest living Celtic scholar, M. Loth) from the root *maw*=servant. It is found in the oldest class of place-names in Brittany—these beginning with *plou*, *lan*, and *tre*. "Most certainly this saint belong to the early period; he is the *éponyme* (patron saint giving his name to a place) of Ploéven in Finistère, of Tréméven (Cotes-du-Nord) and probably of several

Lannévens. (=Lan-Meven.) There are innumerable places called Saint-Méen." (Places beginning "Saint—" almost invariably belong to a later period.) "Everyone knows that the cult of this saint had a great vogue in Brittany during the Middle Ages on account of the special healing powers attributed to him." (Largillière, *Les Saints and l'organisation chrétienne primitive dans l'Armorique bretonne*, pp. 41,42.) In the parish of Plouegat-Moysan near Lannion is a chapel dedicated to SS. Mewan and Judicaël, in which the aid of St. Mewan used to be sought for the cure of skin-disease; in the diocese of Dol there was in 1032 a church "Sancti Mewen Judichel." There is thus widespread and early evidence for the association of "the monk with the king his protector." (ib. 81.) (At the same time M. Largillière thinks it possible that the original patron of the two places called Lannéven, and of the parish of Ploéven, may have been, not our St. Mewan, but an ancient missionary of almost identical name. Ploéven was Ploemeguen in 1468, and the patron of Lannéven in the parish of Begard is called in local legends *Min* or *Minic* and is described as the uncle of St. Idunet, patron of the adjoining parish of Pluzunet. In that case the celebrated St. Mewan has supplanted him as patron in these three places, as he has supplanted many other saints in the diocese of Vannes.)

Foremost among the places bearing the name of our saint naturally comes the great Abbey he founded. It became for a time the favourite place of residence of the bishops of Aleth or St. Malo. Separated from the coast by a forest, the district of Gaël (it was known as Poutrocoet=The Land beyond the Wood) was much less exposed to piratical raids than Aleth. Sometimes the Bishop of Aleth was even called "the Bishop in Poutrocoet." The district afterwards became the archdeaconry of Porhoët. The village of Saint-Méen-le-grand, as it proudly calls itself, is situated two and a half miles to the north of Gaël where St. Mewan founded his monastery on the banks of the Meu. It owes its origin apparently to another monastery founded by our saint. The monastery of Gaël was destroyed by a Frankish invasion in the time of Charlemagne, in 786. The great king rebuilt it in 791, but it became a dependency of St. Méen-le-grand, whose monastery grew into a famous abbey. The chancel, transepts and central tower of the abbey church still remain, and form a very fine example of a Gothic church of the 12th



Entrance to the Seminaire, - some
of the old Abbey Buildings.



and 13th centuries. The nave was pulled down in the 18th century, and the high altar is now under the tower, at the west end of the church. In the north transept is the tomb of St. Mewan—a mediæval structure. In the 17th cent. a reforming bishop of St. Malo, who was also commendatory abbot of the abbey of St. Méen, expelled the Benedictine monks and introduced the Lazarist priests of St. Vincent de Paul, turning the abbey into a seminary for training candidates for holy orders. The abbey buildings, rebuilt in 1712 by the Lazarists, still remain, and are a fine specimen of the dignified domestic architecture of the period. In 1906 the State confiscated them and the seminary has had to find shelter elsewhere. Since then, as no one wants the building, the sacrilegious possessors of the house have let it out in tenements to the lowest class of tenant. It was sad to see the dirty state of this magnificent building when I visited it in June 1926. The tenants had broken up all the panelling of the great corridor for firewood, and a notice had had to be put up forbidding the emptying of slops out of the windows, under pain of expulsion! Such are the results of the unjust and petty anticlericalism which has too long governed France.

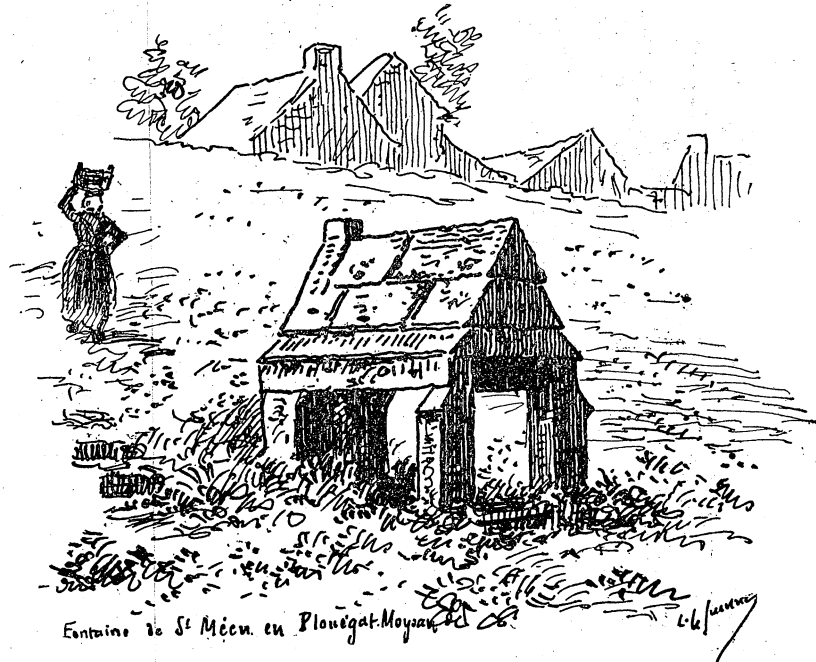
The abbey of St. Méen was pillaged by the Normans who temporarily occupied Brittany during part of the 10th cent. The relics of St. Mewan, in common with the relics of all the other Breton saints, were carried into the interior of France in 919, to escape the Northmen. They were brought back from St. Florent in 1074, on 18 January. We learn from a service book printed at St. Malo for the use of the abbey of St Méen in 1769 (*"Officia propria insignis ecclesiae abbatialis Mevennensis"*) that Jan. 18th was kept in the abbey as a great festival. The same authority tells us the abbey contained the relics of St. Mewan and "of his disciple St. Austol," and that the festival of St. Judicaël, "King of Brittany and Confessor," was observed on 17 December. Still more interesting is the fact that the abbey kept with great solemnity the feast of the Cornish saint Petrock on 4 June. Now the Life of St. Petrock describes him as a companion of St. Samson, the master of St Mewan—oral traditions collected by the late abbé Duine in the diocese of Dol agree with the written legend. (In the 12th cent. a Breton priest stole the body of St. Petrock from Bodmin and carried it over to Brittany to the abbey of St. Méen. Henry II. enforced its restoration.) (On 25 July 1858 a reliquary was given

to St. Méen and a festival held, on the occasion of which a large picture was printed showing St. Austol, St. Mewan and St. Judicaël in their stalls in the Abbey choir. It has become very rare.)

A large number of places in Brittany, especially in Higher Brittany (the eastern part of the country) bear the name of St. Mewan. In the case of some of these places, especially of places in the ancient dioceses of St. Malo, Dol and Rennes, in the Brocéliande district, and on the St. Malo coast, it may mean that they were evangelized by St. Mewan. In most cases it is probably due to his reputation as a healer. "To the Breton peasant the saints are men of extraordinary virtue, who were venerated during their life and possessed miraculous gifts, on account of their holiness, and have now become supernatural powers."* In every European country during the Middle Ages the saints were thought of in this way, but in Brittany the belief survives with unabated force. Certain saints were regarded as specially efficacious for obtaining relief from particular diseases, which were often called after them,—we have all heard of "St. Vitus's dance," and "St. Antony's fire." Certain kinds of skin disease were known as "St. Méen's evil." (In a book of French proverbs published in 1640 we find that "demoiselle de Saint Main" = a woman suffering from scurf.) We have seen how Albert le Grand tells us about the pilgrims who in his time used to come to the well St. Mewan caused to spring up near his abbey. At one time, it is reckoned, between 4000 and 5000 used to come every year, from every part of France. Between the years 1653 and 1685 more than 40,000 passed through Rennes on their way to St. Méen, mostly poor people. In 1650 a charitable citizen of Rennes, Guillaume Regnier, built a kind of shelter for them, at the Tertre de Joué, east of the city, which became later the Hospice St. Méen, and is now a lunatic asylum. Presently people began to resort for the same purpose to other wells, and to churches and chapels possessing a statue of St. Méen. This explains the extraordinary way the cult of St. Mewan has spread, not only in Brittany, but to almost every part of France.

Already in the 16th century the habit of pilgrimages to shrines of St. Mewan had become very widespread. A Bishop of Avranches

of that period, Robert Ceneau, speaks of "That famous St. Main, whose help is implored by everyone for the cure of 'furfures.'" He tells us that the following rule had to be observed by pilgrims seeking cure:—"they must live on alms while they are on the pilgrimage, however wealthy they may be, in order to conquer their pride. But on their return they must give to the poor the money they would have spent on their sustenance during their journey."



Fontaine de St. Méen. en Plouégat-Moyan

In the neighbourhood of Dol we find the cult of St. Mewan at Cancale, on the coast, where a stone is said to bear the impress of his feet, and there is a holy well; at La Fresnais, at Plouer, Langrolay and Lanvallay on the banks of the Rance, above St. Malo, and at Auceleuc and Bourseul. He is one of the patrons of the church of Plélan, he has, or once had, chapels dedicated to him at Bains, Gennes, Plechatel, Renac, Vezin, and Plaguet (near Vitré). There are

* Dr. Desmars. Assoc. Bret. 1924.



Statue near Moncontour.

local traditions of his having preached at Bonnemain and Talensac.* In Higher Brittany the scabious is called "l'herbe Saint-Méen." In the Department of Ille-et-Vilaine is a place with the curious name "La Chapelle-aux-fils-Méen." There are statues of St. Méen in the church of Paimpont and in the chapel of Notre-Dame-du-Haut, near Montcontour. In the diocese of Vannes there are fountains of St. Méen at Gerguy (in the Forest of Brocéliande) Grézieu, and Guenin, chapels dedicated to him at Beignon, Le Saint, Ploemel (with old stained-glass window of the saint and fountain in which rickety children are dipped,) Colpo, Guegon, Languidic, and formerly at Gerguy, near the well. He is patron at Queven, Larré, Montertelot, Monteneuf, and Guilligomarch, where there are relics of the saint, the object of great popular devotion. There are a stream, a heath, and four hamlets called after him. At Berne he is honoured under the name of *san Mewen*. A priest of the diocese writes "Fountains and altars dedicated to St. Méen are very numerous in the diocese of Vannes. In several places his cult has been substituted for that of other saints."

* On the edge of the Forest of Talensac, near the hamlet of La Chapelle-ès-Oresve, is a block of ferruginous schist (slate), shaped like a hone, called *Le Grès Saint-Méen*. The upper side shows a certain number of cylindrical perforations, and lines cutting crosswise, clearly the work of man. The local tradition is that St. Méen was a carpenter, and used to sharpen his tools on this rock—hence these marks.

There were relics of the saint at Rhuys in 1636.

In the diocese of Quimper there is a relic of the saint at St. Nic. In the church of Plouegat-Guerrand there is a little statuette of St. Mewan over the door in the South porch, dated 1536. There is a fine statue of the saint at Ploéven, on the epistle side of the altar, he is vested in cope and mitre adorned with gems, he carries a book in his left hand, and in his right a staff piercing the jaw of a monster at his feet.

In Normandy St. Méen is venerated in a large number of parishes; at Hattenville (near Fauville in the Pays de Caux) where there is *confrerie de St. Mein*, and a popular *cantique* in honour of the saint in French, as well as a hymn in Latin, and a booklet published containing the rules of the Confraternity, Prayers, and a Life of the saint, together with advice for devout pilgrims—they are recommended, if they can, to pay for the maintenance of some poor person for nine days, or at any rate to give some alms: at Auberville-la-Renault,



Statue at Paimpont.

One day St. Méen, after having sharpened his axe on the rock, waved it round his head, and said

Oú ma hache tombera
Méén batira.

(Where my axe falls, Méén will build). It fell at Talensac, two kilometres away, where the parish church is dedicated to St. Méen.

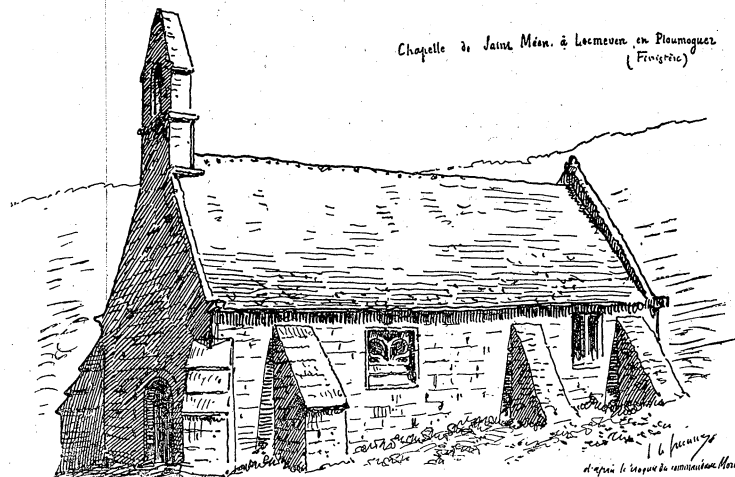
near Goderville-en-Caux, where St. Marcou shares with St. Mewan the patronage of the Confraternity, which uses the same manual for pilgrims as at Hattenville; at St. Vandrille and d'Ouville-l'Abbaye, and in the neighbourhood of Bolbec: the curé of St. Valéry-en-Caux wrote to M. Duine in 1903 saying "Many churches in the centre of the Pays de Caux, as far as the (modern) parish of St. Vincent de Paul in Havre inclusively, possess statues of St. Méen and pilgrimages in his honour." In the diocese of Coutances St. Mewan is honoured at Ste-Mère-Eglise, Ancteville, (where he has a statue and is invoked to cure children's skin-disease) Bricqueville-sur-mer, and at Teurteville-Hague, near Cherbourg, where he has a holy well and a pilgrimage. At Carbec-Grestain, on the south side of the estuary of the Seine, east of Honfleur, there is a greatly-venerated statue of St. Méen in the parish church. The springs in the valley close by are regarded as efficacious for healing the worst diseases of the skin—one of them bears the name of St. Méen and is an object of pilgrimage. Now Carbec-Grestain adjoins the little group of parishes dedicated to St. Samson which, down to the Revolution, formed an *enclave* of the diocese of Dol. (The diocese of Dol used to possess a number of enclaves or islands in other dioceses, just as many English counties and parishes possess islands in other counties and parishes). This enclave probably marks the site of the abbey of Pental, built by St. Samson on land given him by King Childebart (see p. 6) It is surely very significant that the cult of St. Mewan should be found close to the cult of his master St. Samson in Normandy. It looks as if the two saints had worked together at Grestain and perhaps elsewhere in Normandy. We must remember that there was no such country as *Normandy* in the 6th century. What is now Normandy was then the purely Gallo-Roman country of Neustria. The influence of the Celtic saints in Pre-Norman Neustria is a subject to which attention needs to be paid. It is significant that the principal parish church in Rouen, the capital of Normandy, is that of St. Maclou (St. Malo or Machutus) and that St. Maclou is the patron saint of the church of Auberville-la-Renault, mentioned above.

The cult of St. Méen spread all over France. We find pilgrimages to a statue or holy well of St. Mewan as far south as Nailloux (Hte Garonne) at Jaleyrac (Cantal), and at Grandrieu

(Lozère), where there is a basin cut in the rock, concerning which the following proverb is repeated—

Din lou bassin de sain Men
Aquel qu'a pas la rougno l'y pren.

(rougno=ringworm): also in the departments of l'Aveyron and l'Hérault. His cult is found as far east as Salins (Jura) and Attigny, near Rheims. In 1774 the curé of Attigny, in response to a questionnaire addressed to the curés of the diocese by the Archbishop, wrote "There is a pilgrimage to Saint-Méen. Pilgrims come in large numbers every year to be healed of skin-disease, and are usually healed at the end of a novena." He refers to the rule for



pilgrims to St. Mewan mentioned by Robert Ceneau, but an abuse, he says, had crept in. Pilgrims lived on alms, but forgot to make up for it by generosity to the poor on their return! A popular cantique in French is still sung at Attigny, beginning—

Célébrons la mémoire
Du vénérable Mein,
Que le Dieu de la gloire
Couronna de sa main.
Chantons les dons de grâce,
Et les rares vertus
Qui lui font trouver place
Dans le rang des Elus.

Not far from Attigny is Montmarin, where, close to the church, there is a well in which pilgrims wash their sores, afterwards hanging the towel they have used on a bush which stands near the well: this is done especially on June 12th, which, for some reason, is the Feast of St. Méen at Attigny. In Languedoc our saint has been confused with another Saint,—St. Majan.

At Lasse and elsewhere in Anjou are fountains and stones bearing the name of St. Méen, and a considerable popular cult of the saint.

St. Méen is the patron of the parish of Ruillé-le-Gravelais near Laval, where there is a fountain which the saint is said to have caused to spring up to save a long journey to a woman on a pilgrimage who had stopped there to dress her sores!

At Amiens relics of St. Méen were once to be seen, and there was a confraternity of St. Méen at Abbeville.

The name of Méen was borne by several of the seigneurs of Fougères in Higher Brittany, and the Norman conquest carried the cult of St. Méen (with that of other Breton saints, like Winwaloe) to East Anglia, where it became a family name. (The career of Henry Meen, classical scholar, a native of Norfolk and sizar at Emmanuel College, Cambridge in 1761, known as "Little Meen," will be found in the Dictionary of National Biography.)

But for the majority of my readers the most interesting fact in the history of the cult of S. Mewan is its existence in Cornwall. Mewan and Austol are the patrons of two large adjoining parishes in Mid-Cornwall, and Mewan may be also the patron of Mevagissey* (=Meva hag Issey, Cornish for "Meva and Issey.") Does this mean that S. Mewan and his disciple S. Austol visited Cornwall? The fact that the two parishes are so near that of S. Samson, Golant, which represents the site of S. Samson's embarkation for Brittany would seem to point to this; on the other hand M. Loth thinks that the absence of any mention of these two saints in the description of the visit of S. Samson to Cornwall in his oldest Life would seem to indicate that when that Life was written the cult of SS. Mewan and

Austol had not been established in the neighbourhood. It is possible that the cult of these two saints may have been brought to Cornwall by Breton influence. The problem is a fascinating one. At present it seems insoluble. We must wait patiently till further evidence is discovered to throw fresh light on this most interesting and romantic but obscure period of our history.

It is the writer's hope that this little book may assist in the preservation and due observance of St. Austell Feast. That of S. Mewan has unfortunately been allowed to drop into disuse. The Rev. J. T. S. Stopford, Rector of S. Mewan, wrote to M. Duine in 1903 "The following details have been supplied me by the old sexton of the parish, who knows all the ancient traditions of the neighbourhood: Formerly the Feast of S. Mewan was held on the 5th Sunday before Christmas, and the Revel on the following Monday. Disorders took place at the Revel, which has been neglected for some time. Efforts were made to replace it by festivities of a less rowdy character, but without success. Nothing but the memory of the Revel now remains."

It is a pity that these efforts to preserve this ancient institution were so half-hearted. Could not some lovers of Old Cornwall try and revive the Revel? The clergy have done this successfully in some parishes. Where there's a will there's a way.

Mr. C. G. Henderson writes, "S. Mewan is always given as *Mewanus*, but in Mevagissey the rare references to the saints give *Meva* and *Ida*, as far as I remember. I don't know if we can be certain that this Meva and S. Mewan are one and the same person.

The name Mewan probably occurs in such names as Trevowan. There is a place called Austell in Altarnon, but I rather fancy that it derives from *Austine's well*.

In Domesday a manor called Tremaruustel is found, but it seems to have been far away, in the parish of Kea.

The Celtic Religious sites in S. Austell and S. Mewan parishes, other than churches themselves, are Menacuddle (from Meneth-Coidel), where is a holy well of the 15th cent. and an estate which was attached to the church of S. Austell in the 15th cent.; and possibly

22] * Close by.

Towan, where is a holy well (15th century), called anciently Fenton-Gellan, which had a chapel near it, now destroyed. The chapel of S. Mary at Molingey was a 14th century oratory. There was another chapel at Treverbyn. S. Blazey was of course only a chapelry to S. Austell, but originally it was called Landreath (=the Lan on the strand.) I can't discover that S. Austell ever bore the name of Lan, and it seems probable that Landreath was the only Lan in the parish.

Nicholas Roscarrock c. 1580, says :—

“ They hould by tradition that St. Austell and St. Muen were great friends whose parishes joyne and enjoye some priviledges together and thet they lived here together. The feast of St. Muan is Nov. 19th.”

St. Mewan is the Manorial Church of Trewoon (the Tregoin of Domesday—held by Hamelin).

St. Austell Church seems to have belonged to the manor of Treverbyn whose Lord in Domesday was Richard Fitz Turol (of Cardinham).

S. Austell church had a large *sanctuary* or glebe so early as the 12th century, on which the town now is largely built. There was a chapel of S. Michael in the churchyard, which became an integral part of the Church although it had its own *custos* and endowment.

At S. Mewan there is a Holy Well on the glebe, but it has no building over it of any interest. I can discover no Lan name in this parish.

Mevagissey used to be called Lanmorrick (Lann vorech 1230 Lamoreke 1330. Ecclesia Sanctarum Meve et Ide in Poudre 1420. Mevagysye 1569), and the churchtown farm is now Lavorrick. There is a Lamorrick in Lanivet. Morroc is a very well-known personal name, meaning, I believe, a dolphin (mor-hoch=sea-pig).—C.G.H.

My best thanks are due to Miss Violet Adamson, Breageside, Porthleven, and to M. Le Guennec, Librarian of the Public Library, Quimper, for the charming sketches they have contributed to this little book, and to M. Le Vicomte Henri Frotier de la Messelière for very kindly sending me his sketch of the statue of St. Méen, with the effigy and arms of Oliver Guiho, abbot of Paimpont 1407-1452, in the old abbey church of Paimpont. Also to Mr. C. G. Henderson for his valuable notes.—G.H.D.

