

## PROTESTANTISM IN BRITTANY

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Many people in Wales seem to think that there are only Catholics in Brittany. In fact, the great majority of the Bretons are Catholics, but there also many Protestants and the Breton Protestants, although they are only a minority have had a great importance in the Celtic revival in Brittany.

In Lower-Brittanny, i.e. the Western part of Brittany, where 1.200.000 ~~xxxx~~ speak Breton, there are about fifty houses of worship. Twenty of these temples are in big towns - Brest, An Oriant, Gwened - and French only is used there for preaching and praying: They seem to be frequented only by French people living in Brittany.

In the other thirty temples, Breton is the usual language. These (ones) interest us especially as they are frequented by Bretons.

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The hold of Rome on the Breton Christians dates from 1200 A.D. only, when the Dol arch-bishopric was suppressed. Until then, the Bretons were independent from Rome's influence. The scheme had been contrived by the French monks in order to overcome the resistance of the Bretons to the influences coming from the East.

When the Reformation came, the Bretons were quite willing to drop Rome's influence and it seems that the greater part of Brittany - if not the whole - adopted it. Gaspard Carmel, the friend of Calvin in Strasbourg and

Geneva was a Breton and spoke Breton fluently. The ~~envoy~~ <sup>envoy</sup> of Venice in Brittany sent a report to his government, saying that Brittany was among the countries where the "heresy" was spreading the most rapidly. At that time too, a revolt took place in Bro Leon (North-Western Brittany) and the people killed the officials, except the Protestant ones. The Latin catechism of Father Canisius, especially intended for re-catholicizing the countries where the Reformation had been adopted, was translated into Breton by Jili Kerampulh. It is also supposed that the catholic revival started by the Father Maner and Michael Noble~~z~~ in the XVIIth century aimed at suppressing Protestantism which might have been prevalent at that time.

At the beginning of the XVIth century, a Breton ~~xxx~~ Bible was published in London by the Welsh. Not a single copy of that bible is still existing, which is not surprising when one thinks that of the first Welsh Bible printed about ~~at~~ the same time, only one copy remains. which Morgan, the translator gave to Cannon Goodman of Westminster.

However, in spite of ~~the~~ persecutions, Protestantism remained alive in Brittany until the beginning of last century when the Welsh sent over to Brittany Welsh missionaries who had learned Breton. Parch. Jenkins<sup>who</sup> was one of the first Welsh <sup>missionaries</sup> in Brittany translated into Breton the New Testamant with the help of the Breton Writer Rico<sup>pu</sup> whom he had converted to Protestantism.

In ~~xxx~~ 1889 the Rev. Coat of Trezel (Treger), pu-



published a full Breton translation of the Bible. Hymn books were published, "Kanaouennou Kristen ha Toniou koz Breiz-Izel" (Christian songs and old tunes of Lower Brittany), by Rev. Koat, of Tremel, and "Teleenn ar C'hristen" (The harp of the Christian,) by the Rev. Jenkin Jones, of Kemper (Kerne), which was edited twice. Many other hymns as well as religious poems, and were published on loose leaves by the Rev. Omnès and Mr. Kere.

The only bilingual school Brittany ever had was founded in the XIXth century by the Protestants. They were so good that the catholic Breton newspaper <sup>Arvor</sup> published in 1898 an article giving these schools as an example of what should be <sup>done</sup> ~~made~~ all over Brittany. But these protestant bilingual schools were secularized by the French government and from then on both religion and Breton were banished from these schools.

The influence of the <sup>5</sup>welsh missionaries has been prevalent in the new protestant movement in Brittany. Is there a better proof <sup>of</sup> ~~to~~ it than the book published in 1927 by Rev. S. Bourguet - himself a French missionary in Brittany - under the title of "A pioneer of evangelization in Brittany, W. J. Jones ? In the first part of his book, Rev. S. Bourguet says that the Welsh have more facilities than the French for evangelizing the Bretons, as they are of the same race and Breton is similar to Welsh. Further he gives the following advice "In order that he might succeed in evangelizing Brittany a stranger - <sup>2</sup> ~~1~~ as speaking of the French as well as of the Welsh - must give himself completely not only to

his evangelization work, but also to Brittany herself."

It is ~~mere~~ no mere coincidence that the Celtic revival in Brittany began at a time when Welsh missionaries were being sent over to the Breton peninsula.

The Breton protestants themselves founded in 1885 a Breton protestant magazine, "Almanak Mat ar Vretoned", - the Good almanack of the Bretons - which was published until ~~1914~~ 1914. In 1931 a Protestant Breton society, "Kengarantez Vreiz", was founded and published Breton protestant pamphlets.

In 1909, Mr. Paul Guieysse, a Breton protestant, M. P. for Vobrihan and ex-government minister, at the head of a delegation of Breton M.P.'s asked the French government to let Breton be taught in the schools. The head of the French government answered that such a demand could not be granted, as the French government could not ~~xxxx~~ foster "separatism". As a matter of fact the first Breton nationalist party was created in 1911. When Mr. Paul Guieysse died in 1914, he had collected hundreds of signatures for a petition he was preparing in favour of Breton which remained unsubmitted.

Mr. Marsel Guieysse, the son of Mr. Paul Guieysse, a protestant and ex-préfet himself, is one of the best-known leaders of the Breton movement. Before the war he published two books - "Protestantism in Brittany" in 1932 and "The Breton Language" in 1936. Mr. Marsel Guieysse, although seventy years old, blind and crippled, is now serving a sentence of five years' imprisonment for Breton activities during the German occupation. It must



also be pointed out that Mr. Abel Omnès; of Plougrescant (Treger), the son of Rev. Omnès and himself a government schoolmaster, was in 1938 the first government teacher to have Breton taught in his school. Mr. Abel Omnès was also put into a concentration camp for many months.