



An Aimsir Cheilteach

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ST. ERWAN PATRON OF BRITTANY

Erwan Helori (Ives) was born in 1253 of noble parentage at the demesne of Kervarzin, near Landreger (Regener) during the reign of Yann I.
From his early boyhood, he studied for the priesthood with great ardour and he was known to walk to the school several miles away every day. Later, he spent a few years in Paris University which was then attended by students from many countries; unaccessible to foreign influence he longed for his country. Back in Brittany he stayed in Rennes for a while as a judge at the diocese court, then to that of Landreger, and became a Parish Priest to a few country parishes. The reputation of his eloquence and force of conviction as a preacher soon extended beyond the bounds of the diocese as he went to preach in the neighbouring dioceses as well. A model priest, great theologian and a learned law expert, he became the father and the defender of the poor; his charity knew no bounds; he sheltered the beggars, gave them his possession without thought for himself. In his bed at the demesne of Kervarzin, he used a stone as a pillow.

Saint Erwan was watchful of the interests of his country and always in the forefront of their defence. When in 1295, the king of France, Philippe le Bel, thought of trying to impose a tax on the Church property in Brittany to thus introduce a state of overlordship over Brittany, St. Erwan, true champion of national rights and freedom, had all the valuables of the Troger diocese locked in Landreger Cathedral and called on the people to protect them. Replying to some cowardly bourgeois who feared the power of the King of France, he quietly told them: "As long as I live I will defend with all my might Justice, the rights of the Church and the freedom of my country" and exhorted his people to defend them fearlessly. The following night he went to pray in the Cathedral at the shrine of St. Tudgal, the first bishop of Landreger. He went alone into the crypt. His valet, who had remained behind in the church heard the noise of voices; St. Erwan came out at last stating that peace had prevailed. In the morning, it was learned that the Frenchmen had gone, chased by the power of the Saints of Brittany and all the people sang the glory of Erwan Helori, the defender of his people. The regal rights and power of Yann I to impose taxes on Church property in his country, the symbol of full sovereignty, were recognised outside as well as in Brittany.

When Saint Erwan died in 1303, the whole country was in mourning, miracles multiplied, and one day came when the Pope, upon the request of the Breton sovereign, gave his solemn sanction to the spontaneous devotion of the Bretons for St. Erwan. St. Erwan's Day is celebrated on the 19th May. A church named "St. Erwan of the Bretons" has been built in Rome; he is the personification of Brittany there, and is recognised everywhere as the Patron Saint and the defender of the Bretons.

TOWARDS A "UNION OF CELTIC PEOPLES"

To the advocates of a Federation of Self-Governing Celtic peoples the appearance on the bookshelves of "An Aimsir Cheilteach" has been profoundly welcome. Although at present few may appreciate the fact, nevertheless the whole Celtic world stands in a debt of very deep gratitude to those who have so courageously ventured. Their patriotism and their political foresight are an example and a challenge to the rest of us. The originators of "An Aimsir Cheilteach" are to be sincerely congratulated; may they be as sincerely supported by every Celtic patriot in all six Celtic countries. We have some excellent maxims to point the way.—from Kernow "One and All"; from Alba "Touch one, Touch a'"; from Eire "Sim Fein".

Let us turn for a moment to the history of the Celtic Peoples in our interrelationship with one another. In reflecting upon that history one can scarcely escape amazement at the very completeness with which our Peoples have been split up and disassociated from one another. In practically every factor of import in life of nations, in politics, economics, religion, in cultural intercourse and in the fraternal cooperation of nations of like racial kinship the Celtic Peoples have become divided from one another. Through our divisions we have been conquered, annexed, quasi-obliterated.

Not only have we been subjected wrongly to other races but, our greatest shame, we have only too often been the instruments of our own subjection. A record of the sad occasions upon which this has been the case would make a long and miserable chronicle. Our Peoples have suffered at the hands both of the treacherous individual prepared to sell his own national birthright and his particular People's freedom and also at those of the Celt who has grown fat and waxed great by cooperation in the subjugation of sister Celtic Peoples. The general attitude of Celts towards their national responsibilities seems to this writer, to have been finally typified in the activities of the "hero of the Great War", of whom it can be justly said that the wrong perpetrated by him on his fellow-Celts across the Irish Channel was only surpassed by his clever betrayal of the struggle for national independence in his own country. We have been duped, one as another, century by century. In confessing to the treachery of the Celtic opportunists we should be wise to design our future action with the lessons of the last 800 years clear in our minds.

This split goes deeper than the occasions, referred to already, where paid mercenaries, individually or en masse, from one Celtic country have abetted the projects of foreigners upon some other Celtic country. This split reaches right down to the underlying conception of a fundamental Celtic unity; as a consequence, that historic conception has become blurred and lost. There is, for example, among the mass of the Welsh people an absolute apathy toward the fortunes of sister Celtic countries; and this apathy is quite as characteristic of the "cultured" million in Welsh society as of the govern. One even meets with

Nationalists who lack all sense of our Celtic affinities. To such people and to others it should be said that the next great creative surge in all fields of social and cultural achievement in the Celtic countries will be released by a reimpregnation of Celtic life with the message and meaning of Celtic history in all its facets. Any development not a consequence of this fact will be a distortion and of temporary duration and signification. As civilisation passes into the era of Nationalism the great need of the Celtic Peoples, and the task of our scholars, is the grand reintegration of the whole vast canvas of Celtic history. As soon as that has been completed and our countries effectively liberated there will come artists and poets, architects and designers, inventors, men of politics, of law and of religion who will appraise and utilise the message and meaning of that history in the rebirth of our fondered society. And when we shall all have taken long deep draughts at the springs of that inspiration (that "golden wine" from the Gaelic—see H.M.C.D.) the world will begin to notice the unmistakable rebirth of an ancient and dignified civilisation along the shores of the Western Ocean, a civilisation broken, once, by Rome, broken for a second time by England, but rising at last to the full majesty of its inherited promise and its splendid destiny.

It is not the purpose of this article to discuss history at any length; however, a few general remarks are relevant to the present argument. As far as Wales goes there is nothing in modern Welsh tradition to link Wales sympathetically with any other Celtic People; and one feels that this applies vice versa to our sister Peoples. Under the trials and blows which alien rule has inflicted upon us we have become exclusively self-centred and have as a consequence forgotten historical links of vital importance.

Celtic achievement in pre-Roman times, which was immense and, in many respects, quite astounding, has been enclosed in recent times and by certain partisan aspirants to fame in a very careful smokescreen. This was a period, of the utmost importance in relaying the basis of Celtic unity, must however receive adequate exposition and publicity in due course.

The period of crucial importance is that of the 500 years or so after the going of the Romans. During this time there developed that historical phenomenon and portent, the path of the Saints from Brittany through Cornwall, South Wales and on to Eire, Man and the North. The intercourse along this route must have been considerable; for many centuries it formed a world in itself, a Celtic Axis. I am myself from the gorge-covered moors of Cornwall and I have heard and have followed all my life the footfalls of our hallowed ancestors. The route of the Thurons, of the Celtic Saints, the souls of the forefathers will again be the path of the children.

The seal of Canterbury to extend in ecclesiastical matters an authority extemporaneous with that pursued in temporal affairs by the Norman-French opened the

floodgates of the Celtic world to centuries of trial and tribulation. The consequence of our troubles was that our sense of kinship became obliterated. This splintering and isolating of the Celtic Peoples has been a disaster for us, one and all. Divided we fell, and there, to all intents and purposes, we remain.

It is my opinion that our continued division, if persisted in, is likely to ensure for us in the future misfortune as severe as those borne by us in the past. In other words we simply must rediscover our common affinities. The intense difficulties now besetting the European social order are perilously magnifying the threats to the continued existence of the Celtic languages, and thereby of the Celtic Peoples. Those difficulties also contain possibilities; in co-operation it will be easier to seize opportunity when it offers.

England stands today in the brink of ruin. She is already eclipsed but the consequences of that change have yet to wreck their full havoc in English life and thus to become apparent to her citizens. When however a nation with the imperial traditions of England and with her density of population finds itself at the end of its tether any extremism becomes possible; every thing has its excuse. In such circumstances the wisest way to obtain from England a proper respect for the Celtic Peoples, for our languages and our national rights is for us to federate in defence of those rights. A federated Union of Celtic Peoples within the British and European Federations of Nations should, I suggest, be our goal.

The immediate thing is for us to get to know much more about one another. We must know more than the external facts which represent the individual problems of each for us. We must be taken to the life and homes of the working people. We must get to know the real problems behind the politics in all six Celtic countries. For this purpose "An Aimsir Cheilteach" is indispensable. Few realise the salutary effect which the evolution of a Union of Celtic Peoples is going to have in Western European politics; and few within the Celtic countries realise today the strength and status which such a Union is going to bring to each individual unit. As Hugh MacDiarmid has so long and wisely pointed out, such a Union will not only save the Celtic Peoples from eventual extinction but will also, by its example and its leadership provide for Europe a way of recovery out of the morass into which European civilisation is gradually sinking. We have in the Celtic countries all the elements necessary for so historic a task. The Celts have yet a mighty contribution to make to human civilisation. Beyond our suffering and struggle there are deep strings.

It is time we commenced to build so representative a body of knowledge concerning our Peoples that we shall obtain an overall picture of the Celtic problem and shall thereby be enabled to draw up a tentative plan for a Federation of Self-Governing Celtic Peoples.

Sion a Cernyw

The Clann Albainn Society and the future of The Scottish Highlands.

The planners are turning their attention with a vengeance to the Highlands of Scotland. On my desk as I write, is a collection of recent books and pamphlets with such attractive titles as "The Problem of the Highlands", "Highland Depopulation", "Highland Power" and "Labour Policy for the Highlands" and a pile of newspaper cuttings dealing with such things as afforestation, atomic research and plans for bigger and better bombing ranges. From these pamphlets and cuttings, it is obvious that the planners regard the Highlands, not as the home of the Gaelic people, but as an area of land, rich in natural resources, largely undeveloped, and ripe for exploitation.

Secure in comfortable arm-chairs in London offices, they contemplate the inundation of large tracts of arable land to provide cheap hydro-electric power for the industrial areas south of the Tweed, the setting up of factories and industrial estates—subsidiaries of English concerns—in the beautiful straths and glens, the blanketing of the hill-grazings with forests of conifers, and the provision of a steady supply of nitrates and superphosphates of the "improvement" of whatever arable land happens to be left. Presumably, from their frequent references to the tourist traffic, local colour and interesting customs, they also propose to retain a sufficient number of the indigenous inhabitants, suitably arrayed in tartan, to act as gillies to staff the new luxury hotels and to dispoil wealthy visitors from abroad in a picturesque manner.

The problem of the Highlands is not simply a question of how to put an area of mountainous country to its best economic use; it is a question of the future of Highland people, a race great, not in the degraded modern sense of the word, but truly great virile, active, intelligent, highly cultured and with a long history behind them of liberty and democracy. The present assault by planner-exploiters may be the last chance in the struggle between the dull grey-worsted of industrial mania with its mass produced goods, its mass regimentation and its bright tartan of simple and natural living, with its accent of liberty and the importance of the individual. We may submit to this invasion and perish without trace—and the world will be a much poorer place; or we may reply, in the way the Islanders of Lewis replied to Lord Leverhulme's plans to industrialize the island—by refusing to work in his factories, watching the machinery rust away and then quietly dropping it into the sea!

For several hundred years English governments, assisted by Scottish quindlings, have tried by means of brutal persecution, mass evictions, military conscription and economic pressure, to stamp out all traces of Celtic civilisation in Scotland. They failed, but they succeeded in creating the Problem of the Highlands. Briefly, the problem is this: governmental neglect and British imperialism have ruined the basic industries, agriculture and fishing; no money is forthcoming to develop new industries; to improve transport and communications or to provide the elementary facilities and amenities which make life possible

the young people are forced by economic conditions to emigrate, to enlist in the armed forces or to seek employment in the cities and an ageing and declining population is left. Houses fall into disrepair, drains are choked and arable land is overgrown with rushes, bracken spreads over the hill-grazings, transport and other facilities are withdrawn, piers and roadways are left unrepaired and a vicious downward spiral develops.

The question which I am a every Scot today is this: are we to leave it in the hands of the planners—the lineal descendants of the very people who erected the problem—to work out our destiny?—or are we going to tackle the problem ourselves in our own way?

Let us examine the progress made by the planners in recent years. Atomic scientists have so far, succeeded in producing only weapons of destruction—and ill-health, sterility and death among the workers in the laboratories; hydro-electric development so far has almost entirely been directed towards producing cheap power for non-Highland districts, what little has been diverted for local use being at a cost far beyond the reach of the average crofter; afforestation has, until now, been limited to the ruining of good agricultural land with forests of conifers; and "because of shortage of labour" the few industrial enterprises undertaken have been staffed with foreigners and displaced persons.

With these lessons in our minds, we feel that the way to solve the problem is not to start at the top, armed with plans and blueprints, and build downwards but to start right at the bottom and build upwards from a healthy agricultural basis. Conditions being what they are, the only way this can be done is by deliberate and systematic re-colonisation of the Highlands. The function of the Clann Albainn Society is to rally all lives of Scotland, in the Celtic countries and throughout the world, to undertake such a re-colonisation. We aim to acquire, by gift or purchase, a deserted glen in the West Highlands, and in it establish a community of young people who will concentrate on reclaiming the land for agricultural purposes. Attention will also be paid to fishing, afforestation, trout-farming, weaving and home industries and others pursuits, and Celtic culture and a re-ignition in and development of Scottish arts and letters will be fostered.

We will build our own roads, houses and bridges and through time hope to have our own hydro-electric scheme, a hotel and other facilities for tourists and visitors, our own transport system and small factories for the processing of our products. Further similar communities will be established in different parts of the country.

At the moment we are concentrating on establishing branches of the Clann Albainn throughout Scotland and elsewhere, on collecting funds and on training an efficient team of young men, and want to lay the foundations of our first colony.

Anyone interested in the aims and objects of the society, is invited to get in touch with: Ronald K. R. Taylor, Temporary Secretary, Kildrowan, Knockduin, HAIRDRIE, Perthshire, Scotland.

