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# The History of a Calling: Meven Mordiern's Autobiographical Writings

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**RENÉ GALAND**

**THE HISTORY OF A CALLING  
MEVEN MORDIERN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS**

[NOTE: chapters of this monograph have appeared in the following publications: *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, vol. V (1988), pp. 172-186; *Bretagne et pays celtiques* (Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1992), pp.497-510 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 288 (1995), pp. 38-51 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 294 (1996), pp. 22-49 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 296-297 (1996), pp. 243-263 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 298 (1996), pp. 360-381 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 300 (1997), pp. 59-78 ; *Al Liamm*, niv. 301 (1997), pp. 162-190. The chapters published in the Breton literary journal *Al Liamm* have appeared under the Breton form of my name, Reun ar C'halan]

## CHAPTER ONE

## MEVEN MORDIERN'S UNPUBLISHED MEMOIRS

Meven Mordiern is recognized today as one of the foremost authors in the history of Breton literature. In many ways, he is quite exceptional. He was not a native speaker of Breton. He was not born in Brittany. He did not even have Breton parents. His real name was René Leroux, and he was born in Bordeaux, in 1878, the son of an army doctor. He later studied at the Lycée Condorcet, in Paris. In his childhood, however, he became passionately interested in the history and the culture of the Celts, to such an extent that he devoted his entire life to their study, eventually adopting the Breton name Meven Mordiern. His published works fully justify his preeminent place in the history of Breton literature (Yann Bouëssel du Bourg et Yann Brekilien, "La littérature bretonne", in *La Bretagne*, Yann Brekilien, ed.[Paris: Les Editions d'Organisation, 1982], pp. 371-372; Youenn Olier, *Istor hol lennegezh. Skol Gwalarn*, vol. II [Roazhon: Imbourc'h, 1975], pp. 5-20]). So does this list of Meven Mordiern's books, articles, and other writings which he planned to publish in book form, if he could find a publisher: his Breton translations of Jules Verne's *Une ville flottante* and *Les Forceurs de blocus*; *Istor ar Bed* (*Gwalarn*, 1929-1939); *Prederiadennoù diwar-benn ar Yezoù hag ar Brezoneg*, (*Gwalarn*, 1935-1936); *Notennoù amerikanouriez* (*Gwalarn*, Eost 1938); *Gant luoec an doueed* (*Gwalarn*, Mezeven-Gouere 1938); *Logotigiakos* (*Gwalarn*, Gwengolo 1938); *Hunvreoù Sant-Helouri* (Sant-Brieg: Prud'homme, 1938); *Notennoù-klokaat da Istor an Donva-loened* (*Gwalarn*, Mae 1939); *Dael diwar-benn an anoioù-lec'h ha tud* (*Gwalarn*, Ebrel 1939, Genver 1941); *Notennoù-klokaat da Istor ar Bed* (*Gwalarn*, Ebrel 1941); *Eveziadennoù hag Eeunadennoù da "Envorennoù eur Brezonegour"* (*Gwalarn*, Gouhere-Eost 1941); *Notennoù diwar-benn eur pou eus ar broioù-krec'h: Pou Gwenngenn (Pagus Vindocinensis)* (*Sav*, Nevez-Amzer 1943); *Bozadoù-deskadurez eus sac'had sant Briz* (*Sav*, Goanv 1944, Nevez-Amzer 1944); *Envorennoù diwar buhez va zad en armeoù (1840-1879)* (Brest: 1944); *Divankadurioù, Notennoù hag Eveziadennoù d'am skridoù brezonek (1911-1941)* (*Gwalarn*, Meurz-Ebrel 1942; eil gevrenn, 1941-1945) [this part was not published, since *Gwalarn* ceased to exist after the Liberation of France in August 1944]. The following works, written in French by Meven Mordiern, were translated in Breton by Abherve (i.e., Fransez Vallée): *Notennoù diwar-benn ar Gelted koz* (Brest: Skridou Breiz, 1944); *Skêtla Segobrani* (Sant-Brieg: Prud'homme, 3 vols., 1923, 1924, 1925). The autobiographical text *Talar an Hoc'h* was published posthumously by the journal *Preder* (no 56, [1963], 30 pages). Meven Mordiern wrote many other autobiographical texts of book-length. By themselves, these unpublished writings would suffice to place him among the most important of Breton writers.

I have related elsewhere how I discovered the collection of Meven Mordiern's unpublished manuscripts in the Harvard University Houghton Library ("Ur gavadenn a-bouez: dornskridou Meven Mordiern e Skol-Veur Harvard", *Al Liamm*, no 226 [1984], pp.23-24). I would like, however, to explain briefly how they happened to be there. In 1949, shortly before his death, Meven Mordiern, who was well aware of the seriousness of his illness, sought a secure place for his manuscripts. During World War II, he had been greatly concerned about the fate of manuscripts and books in the Breton language. Most of the libraries, museums, and private collections where these documents were kept were located in large cities, Brest, Rennes, or Nantes, which often were the targets of aerial bombings. After World War II, he had other reasons to be concerned about the fate of his own manuscripts. If they were to remain in Brittany, they might very well be destroyed by fanatic enemies of Breton nationalism. Political passions ran high, in these post-war years, and the fact that a handful of Breton nationalists had sided with

Germany was highly publicized, whereas the many thousands of Bretons who had fought in the Free French Forces or in the Resistance were all but ignored. The number of Bretons who fought on the German side did not exceed seventy two. On the other hand, Bretons made up half of the Free French Forces, and one third of the Résistance. Several former Free French and Résistance fighters were to play a major role in the resurgence of Breton nationalism in the sixties. Although Meven Mordiern did not manage to publish his memoirs before his death, it was his explicit desire to do so (Letter from the Comte de Koedgourhedhen, Houghton Library, Harvard University, kept with Meven Mordiern's manuscripts). He did indeed, publish that portion of his memoirs which dealt with his father's military career, the book *Envorennoù diwar buhez va zad en armeoù (1840-1879)* which I have mentioned earlier. Since the late twenties, Meven Mordiern's means had been extremely reduced. By the end of World War II, his health was poor. Under the German occupation, he had had no political activity, but he had made no mystery of his opinions: he was in favor of political autonomy for Brittany (letter to Fransez Vallée, August 25, 1940). Like all Breton militants, even those who had been anti-German, he was politically suspect in the eyes of the new regime. Paper was still strictly rationed, and little of it was made available for publications in the Breton language. Without adequate financial resources, it was utterly impossible for someone in Meven Mordiern's situation to get his memoirs published. Harvard University had a respected Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures. Thus Meven Mordiern asked a friend of his, the Count Roland de Koedgourhedhen, to donate his unpublished manuscripts to Harvard, where they would be safe. He was so anxious about it that he did not give his friend time to copy, or even to read, the manuscripts, which were placed in a locked chest. The key was sent separately to Harvard. Meven Mordiern died before the chest reached America.

The Houghton Library catalogue lists twelve separate unpublished works. In his manuscripts, Meven Mordiern usually translates into Breton the names of places and persons as well as the titles of the books which he mentions. This practice makes it occasionally difficult for the reader to identify the places, persons, or books to which he is referring. In all the cases where this might present a problem, I have given first the form used by Meven Mordiern, followed, between brackets, by the more common name or title. Of the twelve manuscripts sent to Harvard, two are Breton translations of books by the French writer Jules Verne: *An dorrieren-vlokus [Les forceurs de blocus]* and *Eur ger war-neunv [Une ville flottante]*. Another is a collection of some three hundred letters sent to Meven Mordiern by his close friend and collaborator Fransez Vallée. Of the nine remaining manuscripts, seven are autobiographical works. Here are their titles, followed, between brackets, by the abbreviations which I have used as references in the course of this study, by the English translation, and by a brief description:

1. *Tiegeziou bourc'hizien eus ar broiou-krec'h en XVIIIvet kantved hag an XIXvet kantved (1730-1896) [TB; Bourgeois families of France in the XVIIIth and the XIXth centuries (1730-1836)].* A 179 page manuscript dealing with the author's maternal ancestors.
2. *Selladou ouz an tremenet (1750-1932) [SOAT; Looking at the past (1750-1932)].* A 674 page manuscript in which the author discusses his paternal ascendants, and especially his father's life as an army doctor from 1840 to 1879. The 113 page foreword also explains how Meven Mordiern's interest in the Celts originated. What appears to be a summary of *Selladou ouz an tremenet* was published in Brest, in 1944, under the title: *Envorennoù diwar buhez va zad en armeoù 1840-1879 [Memories of my father's life in the armies 1840-1879]*. According to information received from Per Denez, three copies of this publication survived the bombing of the city. There is still another summary of this text which has been reproduced by Per Denez under the title *Envorennoù tiegezh 1750-1920 [Memories of a family 1750-1920] (Hor Yezh, no*

112, Dec. 1976. Pp. 1-78). The actual title which Meven Mordiern had given this work was: *An Istor gwelet a-dreuz envorennoù tiegezh 1750-1920* [History seen through the memories of a family 1750-1920]. The manuscript takes the form of a chronology. It lists those episodes in the life of Meven Mordiern's ascendants which were directly linked to historical events or figures: the Revolution, in which one of his maternal ancestors was guillotined; the end of slavery in the West Indies, also at the time of the Revolution, which caused the ruin of many plantation owners, some of whom were direct ascendants of Meven Mordiern; the visit which one of his great-grandmothers paid to the former Empress Joséphine, in the year 1813; the Napoleonic war with England, which did considerable harm to the commercial interests of one of his great-grandfathers; the invasion of France in 1815, during which the castle of this same great-grandfather was occupied by Russian officers; the Revolution of 1830, the anniversary of which was faithfully celebrated each year, from 1831 to 1848, by his maternal grandfather; the cholera epidemic of 1832; the urban renewal of the city of Marseilles, in the 1830's; the conquest of Algeria, in which his father took part from 1842 to 1848; the eighteen month stay in Naples of his maternal grandparents and of their family, in 1846-1847; the Revolution of 1848, during which his grandfather had to dress like a common labourer in order to get his daughter, Meven Mordiern's own mother, back from her school; the discovery of gold in California, also in 1848, which caused his father's brother to sail to San Francisco to seek his fortune; a great-uncle's casual meeting with Napoleon III, in 1851 or 1852; the Crimean War, in 1855, in which his father's took part; the Anglo-French military expedition to China, in which his father expected to participate, but did not; the conquest of Mexico, where his father served from 1862 to 1865. Out of the seventy eight pages of this particular manuscript, only twenty one do not deal directly with his father's campaigns.

3. *Envorennoù Gwiler* [EG; *Memories of Villiers*]. An 832 page manuscript, with 23 plans and maps. Villiers is the countrytown where Meven Mordiern spent a good part of his childhood.

4. *An diou levraoueg* [ADL; *The two libraries*]. A 198 page manuscript in which the author discusses the two libraries in his childhood home, and the books which he read at that time.

5. *Envorennoù bugaleaj* [EB; *Childhood memories*]. A 479 page manuscript in which Meven Mordiern relates his life between the years 1878 and 1891. This work is for the most part a revised version of mss. 3 and 4. Meven Mordiern had copied brief fragments of these childhood memories, and sent them to Roparz Hémon. This text has been published by Per Denez under the title *Envoriouù bugeliezh* (Lesneven: Mouladurioù Hor Yezh, 1983. Pp. 46).

6. *Istor eur c'halvedigezh* [IEC'H; *History of a calling*]. This 188 page manuscript explains how the author's interest in the history and the culture of the Celts originated. Much of the information provided here also appears in the foreword to *Selladou ouz an tremenet*.

7. *Istor berr eur c'halvedigezh* [IBEC'H; *Short history of a calling*]. In spite of its title, this 264 page manuscript is an expanded version of the preceding work. *Envorennoù bugaleaj* and *Istor berr eur c'halvedigezh* were written especially for the Harvard Celtic Department as "Texts for the study of Breton syntax and vocabulary".

There are two other manuscripts. One is a short tale titled *Bodadeg ar pevarzekvet* [BAP; *The gathering of the fourteenth*]. It was inspired by a dream in which the author saw himself and his family as ancient Gauls. The last manuscript, *Brouilhedou* [B; *Rough drafts*] is a collection of notes and first drafts. In two of the manuscripts, *Envorennoù Gwiler* and *Istor berr eur c'halvedigezh*, the text ends in mid sentence, and the final page or pages are missing. Is this due to the haste with which the manuscripts were packed and mailed, or to some carelessness on the part of those who first opened the chest? At any rate, the pages are numbered, and the page numbers of the manuscripts correspond exactly to those which appear in the library catalogue, which would tend to indicate that the missing pages were lost before the manuscripts ever

reached the library. It is unlikely, however, that any important information has been lost, since we have other versions of these two works. As we have seen, the manuscripts are often repetitive. If he had been able to publish them, Meven Mordiern would undoubtedly have avoided these duplications, retaining perhaps only 1600 pages out of 2800 pages of text. My main purpose, in this study, is to discuss the interest which Meven Mordiern's manuscripts may present for today's readers. The texts which are quoted in this study are my own translations from the Breton original.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AUTOBIOGRAPHY AS A GENRE IN BRETON LITERATURE

Autobiography, as a literary genre, has been much in favor with Breton writers. I shall list only a few titles which are fairly typical of the genre, in the currently available editions: Loeiz ar Floc'h (born 1868): *Va zamm buhez* [*My piece of life*] (Lesneven: Mouladurioù Hor Yezh, 1985); Jarl Priel (born 1885): *Va zammig buhez* [*My little piece of life*] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1975); Yeun ar Gow (born 1897): *E skeud tour bras Sant Jermen* [*In the shadow of Saint-Germain's steeple*] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1978); Goulven Jacq (born 1913): *Pinvidigezh ar Paour* [*The wealth of the poor*] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1977); Ernest ar Barzhig (born 1917): *Buhez ha Faltazi* [*Life and fancy*] (Brest: Brud, 1970). One should also take into account the transcripts of interviews conducted by young university researchers, mostly during the past 20 years, with native Breton speakers born prior to World War II. These interviews have been published in the journal *Hor Yezh*. All of these autobiographical works share a number of characteristic features. They all display the writers' or the speakers' attachment to a traditional way of life which was often harsh, but which also had its rewards. Even the poorest among them emphasize the warmth and the affection which were lavished on children, and the joy which they derived from their humble pleasures: running through the countryside in the spring, playing with other children, or going to the local pardons. There was a rural society, with deeply held moral and religious values. The social fabric was strong: criminality was practically unknown. The traditional Breton culture was also exceptionally rich and vital. The songs, the dances, the costumes, and even the furniture were a constant source of esthetic pleasure, as were the churches, the calvaries, and the religious solemnities in which the admirable Breton hymns were sung. In the brief span of half a century, the socio-economic disruptions caused by the industrial revolution, two world wars, and the systematic hostility of the French state toward its ethnic minorities brought this indigenous culture to the brink of extinction: hence the melancholy sense of loss which imbues most of these Breton autobiographies. The writers mourn not only the happy days of their childhood, but also the loss of a world. This is also the nostalgic mood which permeates many of the poems of Per Jakez Hélias, and especially his collection *Maner Kuzh* [*Manoir secret*] (Paris: Editions André Silvaire, 1964).

Meven Mordiern's autobiographical writings hold very little in common with the works which I have just discussed. Although he was their contemporary, he belonged to a very different ethnic and socio-economic group, the French upper bourgeoisie. Hence the tantalizing question: how did this quintessential son of the French bourgeoisie come to be one of the most militant Breton writers of his time? In *Tiegeziou bourc'hizien eus ar broiou-krec'h ...* and in *Selladou ouz an tremenet*, Meven Mordiern speaks at great length of his family background. His maternal ancestors, the Magnans, claimed descentance from an Italian aristocratic family, the Magnani, which held the title of marquess (*TB*, 2). They were a prosperous bourgeois family established in the Southern cities of Marseilles and Aix. One of his mother's great-great-uncles, Emile Magnan, was a doctor who had been appointed to the care of the King's household (*TB*, 25). He saw to it that the son of his niece Zoe, Gustave Cabanellas, also a doctor, would succeed him in his charge. Zoe Magnan had married Joseph Cabanellas, a well-to-do merchant from Catalonia who served as the vice-consul of Spain in Marseilles (*TB*, 3). Through his mother, Meven Mordiern was also descended from General Lecointe, who was the governor of Martinique under the reign of Louis XVI. Through him, he was related to the aristocratic family of Beauharnais and to the Empress Joséphine (*TB*, 45). Although not all of his mother's ancestors and relatives were

wealthy, they were well-connected, and they included among their close friends rich aristocrats, such as the family of the Baron of Pontalba, high ranking civil servants, army and navy officers, ambassadors, bankers, lawyers, stockbrokers, engineers, well-known artists and writers. Historians of French literature might well be interested in the anecdotes which Meven Mordiern has to tell about the writers with whom some of his relatives came into contact: Heredia, Henri de Régnier, Maurice Maindron, Léon Cahun, and Pierre Louÿs (*TB*, 20, 25-26, 37-38, 108-109, 123, 137; *IBEC'H*, 78-79, 121-124, 246-247).

On his father's side, Meven Mordiern's ascendants belonged to a more modest milieu. His great-grandfather was a farmer in the town of Pruneg [Prunay], near Gwennenn [Vendôme]. It is possible, although Meven Mordiern presents this possibility as a mere supposition, that he was descended from a Breton family which had settled in this area. At any rate, his father told him: "Our name is Breton", and it is true that the name is quite common in Brittany, although no more so than in France (*SOAT*, 2-3). Other relatives of his father included a lumber dealer, a road builder, and a weaver. Meven Mordiern's grandfather had enlisted in the army of the First Republic, during the Revolution, and eventually risen to the rank of lieutenant in the imperial army. Retired from active duty on account of his wounds, he had been appointed tax collector in his native town of Prunay, where he had married a farmer's daughter. Meven Mordiern's father, born in 1818, became a military doctor who served in every major war waged by France from 1840 to his retirement, in 1879: Algeria, Crimea, Mexico, and the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871. During the Franco-Prussian war, he was chief surgeon in the military hospital of Vincennes. It was there that he became acquainted with a relative of Madame Menjaud, the young widow of a doctor who had died in 1866. She already had a son, Georges. Madame Menjaud and Doctor Leroux were married in 1877, and their son René, who later was to become Meven Mordiern, was born in 1878 (*TB*, 158).

For readers interested in the history of French civilization, Meven Mordiern's memoirs offer a wealth of information. We have seen, for instance, how they show the actual impact of social troubles upon individual families. One of the author's ancestors was guillotined in Marseilles in 1794, during the Terror (*TB*, 8). The fighting in the streets, during the Revolution of 1848, merely caused his mother, then a young school girl, to remain trapped in her school for several days. In 1870, she had to flee from Paris and to take refuge in Switzerland, when the Prussian army laid siege to the capital (*TB*, 104-105, 152-154).

Less dramatic, but quite bothersome, was the impact of the urban renewal initiated in Paris by Baron Haussmann under the reign of Napoleon III. The opening of each new boulevard forced thousands of people to move repeatedly in search of new quarters, and Meven Mordiern's family was not spared the inconvenience (*TB*, 142). Meven Mordiern emphasizes the changes brought about by technological advances: how, for instance, every day life was affected when horse-drawn coaches, omnibuses, or cabs were replaced by trains or tramways. He describes in great detail the various dwellings in which his family and their friends lived: his great-grandfather's castle in Chartreze [Chartrettes], his godfather's mansion in Morkourt [Maurecourt], his grandfather's townhouse in Paris and his summer house in Maisons-Laffitte, the various apartments in which his family lived in Paris, and the country house where he spent most of his childhood in the small town of Gwiler [Villiers], near Gwennenn [Vendôme]. He discusses the architecture, the grounds, the furniture, the life style of the occupants, their clothes, their physical appearance, the ladies' hairdos, the books and the newspapers they read, what they talked about, where they shopped, the parties they gave, the shows they went to, the friends they had, the way in which they spent their days, the education they gave their children, the servants, the horses, the carriages, the cats, the dogs, the barnyard animals, down to the type of facilities which were available for bodily functions.



These families could afford to spend the winter in the south of France, to take the waters in various spas, to spend the summer at the seashore, or to travel abroad. Meven Mordiern's grandparents even spent eighteen months in the kingdom of Naples. Their prolonged stay had to do with a complicated lawsuit involving a great deal of money, which eventually was settled to their satisfaction (*TB*, 80-94). There is also the fascinating story of the great-grandfather who inherited a plantation in the West Indies, and who later became a shipowner in New Orleans, where he married a lady named Mary Van Buskirk, the descendant of Dutch colonists. Meven Mordiern greatly admired his great-grandmother, a fearless rider and an expert marksman. She had been taught how to shoot by an old Indian, and she skinned, cured, and stuffed with her own hands the game which she killed (*TB*, 47-50).

Meven Mordiern's account of his father's campaigns is equally captivating. Historians might especially take notice of Meven Mordiern's description and evaluation of the French anti-Arab policies in conquered Algeria (*SOAT*, 38-39,47). As to the Mexican campaign, a noteworthy fact, in the good doctor's opinion, was the frightfully high incidence of syphilis among the French troops. VD far outnumbered any other disabling factor, such as bullet wounds received in combat (*SOAT*, 173). Little is said about the political views held by Meven Mordiern's ascendants, but it is clear that these members of the upper classes were good establishment types, and that they held all of the characteristic prejudices of their class. Young women led a cloistered life, and were not allowed to go out without being properly chaperoned. The great-grandfather, who had been a planter in the West Indies, when he returned to France, treated his servants as harshly as he had his black slaves (*TB*,49). Another great-uncle became an overseer on a coffee plantation in Cuba, and he described his job as whipping slaves all day long to make them work (*TB*, 27-28). Yellow-skinned people were looked upon with contempt (*EB*, 241-242, 397, 410). Needless to say, Jews were considered *personae non gratae*, and there was quite a scandal when one of the daughters of the Baron de Pontalba married (for his money, no doubt) a wealthy Jewish-American banker named Kulp (*TB*,124). Meven Mordiern's memoirs thus appear quite revealing in the insights which they provide into the prejudices of a fairly typical French bourgeois family of the XIXth century. This survey leads us back to the question: how did this child of the French bourgeoisie come to be one of the most militant Breton writers of his time? I will attempt to answer the question in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ORIGINS OF MEVEN MORDIERN'S CELTIC CALLING

A major factor, in the transformation of a son of the French bourgeoisie into a militant Celt, was the kind of attitudes to which he was exposed from childhood. His mother was extremely class-conscious. In the small country town of Villiers where they lived for many years, she would not allow her little boy to play with the local children: their parents belonged to the lower classes (*EB*, 219, 304). She was heartbroken when one of her brothers married beneath his class: the bride's father happened to be the captain of a river tugboat. This unfortunate brother did something still more unseemly: he opened a café on the banks of the Seine. Why could he not have the decency to emigrate to Australia or to Argentina, where he would not have been a cause of perpetual embarrassment and humiliation for his relatives (*EB*, 253; *IBEC'H*, 82)? Madame Leroux did not like Jews, to such an extent that she had serious doubts about placing in her little boy's hands one of the two books which were then required reading for all Catholic children preparing for their first communion and for their confirmation: the *Histoire sainte* printed in Paris by Belin. The other book was the catechism. Mother and child were quite upset by the ancient Jews' rebellions against God, and by their repeated rejection of his name and of his law. The boy once overheard his mother whispering to his father: "Those Jews were the vilest!" (*EB*, 221; *IEC'H*, 10). Later, in the years 1891-1894, she would buy the antisemitic books by Gyp as soon as they came off the press, and the boy, seeing how ugly the Jews portrayed in these books were, came to detest them (*EB*, 52-53, 221; *IEC'H*, 10). When his mother returned to Paris in 1891, after having lived in the country for a dozen years, she was shocked to find that the proportion of tall blond men and women in the population of the capital had considerably decreased (*EB*, 53). She remarked that "under the Republic, the physical appearance of the population had become more Jewish looking, more Mediterranean looking" (*EB*, 221; *IBEC'H*, 53). Her son concurred, noting that prior to 1895 (the first Dreyfus trial), 1899 (the second Dreyfus trial), and 1902 (when the anticlerical politician Combes became minister), there were in the French army many officers who had the same physical appearance as his stepbrother, who served in the artillery: tall, blue-eyed, looking like warriors. After 1895, 1899, and 1902, the number of officers of this type decreased sharply, and it was at its lowest between 1920 and 1939. Seeing these dark-complexioned men, with faces which made them look like Jews, clerics, or merchants, rather than like soldiers, Meven Mordiern wondered: "What will these people do on the battlefield, when there is a war?" 1940 gave him the answer which he had expected (*EB*, 222; *IBEC'H*, 53). In the nineties, as he recalls, all of the "better people" were against Dreyfus, and Meven Mordiern shared their views. He even found it scandalous that a blond blue-eyed French girl should marry a Syrian, although the latter was a good Catholic (*IBEC'H*, 134, 139). It goes without saying that this attitude had nothing to do with any real experiences on his part, but he would not allow reality to interfere with his prejudices, although he was given several opportunities to do so. One day, as he was making fun of the ugliness of Jewish people in front of one of his great-uncles, the latter sharply rebuked him, saying that the prettiest girls he knew were Jewish (*TB*, 37). Meven Mordiern also admits that when he attended the Lycée Condorcet, it was the Jewish students who were the brightest and the most studious. And it was one of these Jewish students, who was as strong and handsome as he was intelligent, who came to Meven Mordiern's help when the latter was beset by four bullies (*IBEC'H*, 34-35; *IEC'H*, 10-11).

In her contempt for people with dark complexions, which she termed Mediterranean or Semitic, Meven Mordiern's mother proudly rejected the entire Greco-Roman tradition, and reserved her admiration for the Nordic races. Her contempt for the classical civilization of the Greeks and the Romans was a fairly common attitude in France since the beginning of the XIXth century. The superiority of the "*littératures du Nord*" over the "*littératures du Midi*" had already been proclaimed by Madame de Staël and by the Romantics, and Gobineau, in his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1854), had launched the myth of the racial superiority of the tall, blond, warlike Nordic people. For Meven Mordiern's mother, it was the ancient Gauls who best embodied this racial ideal. Meven Mordiern was only four or five when she told him, and this was only the first of many similar statements: "We are neither Romans nor Latins. We are Gauls." (*EB*, 309; *IEC'H*, 6; *IBEC'H*, 57). She then explained to him who the Gauls were, describing their military exploits through all of Europe. This was the original source of the boy's interest in the Celts. The fact that his father believed to be descended from a Breton family, and the liking and respect which both his parents demonstrated for the Breton people, only served to strengthen the child's interest in his Celtic origins. There is of course some irony in the fact that this knowledge of the Celts came entirely from books. Neither parents nor child set foot in Brittany until the summer of 1881, when they spent a holiday in Ar Poulligwenn [Le Pouliguen], nor did they know Breton people. It was only after 1892 that they went each year to spend their summer vacations in Lokeltas, near Gwened [Vannes] (*SOAT*, 1). This interest in things Celtic was probably encouraged by the fashion of the times. Meven Mordiern indicates that, in the years 1884-1887, he often wore clothes copied from traditional Breton costumes. Some twenty years earlier, it had been the fashion to dress little boys in kilts similar to those worn by Highlanders. This fashion had originated with the popularity of Walter Scott in France. Meven Mordiern's parents had in their library the 25 volume edition of Walter Scott's novels in the Defauconpret translation (*EB*, 251). He does not explain why Breton costumes had gotten to be in fashion for young boys in the 1880's. It may have had something to do with the renewed interest in Brittany, around that time, as a picturesque and somewhat exotic place. This vein would be abundantly exploited by such novelists as Pierre Loti and Charles Le Goffic, as well as by the popular songwriter Théodore Botrel.

There is no doubt, however, that Meven Mordiern's interest in the Celts was due primarily to his admiration for the ancient Gauls, and that this admiration came mostly from the nineteenth century French historian, Henri Martin (*EB*, 310; *IEC'H*, 17; *ADL*, 6, 34-35; *SOAT*, XLVII-XLVIII). When she first told him about the Gauls, Meven Mordiern's mother read to him a passage from the first volume of Henri Martin's *Histoire de France* in seventeen volumes published by Furne in 1861. As soon as he was able to read, the boy plunged into the work. Martin was a well known historian who was himself something of a Celtomaniac. He never failed to emphasize the Celts' physical beauty, their bodily strength, and their spiritual bravery, in women as well as in men. From 1888 to 1902, Henri Martin's books remained Meven Mordiern's favorite reading (*SOAT*, L). The boy was impressed by the courage, the tenacity, and the spirit of resistance displayed by the transalpine Celtic tribes which refused to yield to the Romans' military superiority. They fought to the last man, and when the war ended in defeat, of their hundred tribes, there remained only old men, women, and children. The survivors, rather than submitting to Roman rule, went in search of new territories in Central Europe. In his imagination, the boy visualized their exodus, the carts drawn by teams of oxen, led by women and old men, loaded with children and old people too weak to walk, and the young girls with their golden hair walking on the road of exile (*IEC'H*, 29). When they later found themselves confronted by superior Dacian and Germanic forces, they moved again, to Gaul this time (*IEC'H*, 25-28). The boy was thrilled by the expeditions led by Gaulish war chiefs across Europe and Asia: "I was

won, he says, heart, soul, and spirit." (*IBEC'H*, 57; *IEC'H*, 35; *EB*, 309). Later, in the second volume of Martin's history, he read about the Breton emigrants to Armorica, and about their expeditions through the Northwest of France. It was in the notes of this book that he saw for the first time a mention of the *Barzaz Breiz*. He was fascinated by the strange beauty of the Breton words, by the mystery which they held for him (*SOAT*, XLVIII; *IBEC'H*, 57-58). The names of the Breton kings and of their war chiefs had the attraction of sounds never heard before. He found them admirably suited to fearless warriors and bold riders: names like Konan, Howel, Kadwallon, Gwaroc'h, Judik-Haël, Morvan, and Erispoe (*IBEC'H*, 57-58). The boy was thrilled when he read of the victories of Erispoe and Salaün, who conquered territories extending as far as the rivers Sarthe and Vire, of the siege of Angers led by King Konan, of the expeditions led into the Berry by Riotamos, and into the plain of Belez [Beauce] by King Nevenoe. If the Breton people had had leaders capable of administering the territories which they had conquered, these lands would have been recelticized, and Brittany would have become a major power controlling all of what is now Western France. Meven Mordiern does not see this as an impossible dream: initially, the Latium was only a small area of Italy. Its power eventually extended over most of Western Europe, North Africa, and the Near East (*SOAT*, XLIXL). From then on, the boy searched through Henri Martin's books for everything that had to do with the Armorican Bretons and with the insular Celts. Until the Hundred Year War, he found enough exciting stuff to keep him interested, but afterwards, as far as the Armorican Bretons were concerned, he saw the Celtic spirit, which had been so healthy and so strong between the fifth and the tenth centuries, wane and fade away. This caused him to lose interest in the later history of Brittany. It was only in the years 1891-1900 that he came to know about the Bretons' battles against the French Revolutionary troops (*IBEC'H*, 57-58; *SOAT*, XLVIII). In the years prior to 1892, however, Meven Mordiern was far more interested in the history of the insular Celts. From Henri Martin's *Histoire de France*, he had gone to J. A. Fleury's *Histoire d'Angleterre, comprenant celle de l'Écosse, de l'Irlande, et des possessions anglaises*, published in 1852, which he had found among his mother's books (*IBEC'H*, 57-58; *IEC'H*, 11; *EB*, 310).

A third source of Meven Mordiern's interest in the Celts was literature, more specifically novels, inspired by the history of the Celts. Foremost among these novels were the books of Walter Scott. Meven Mordiern fell in love with the Welsh or Scottish heroes of *Konnestabl Chester* [The Betrothed], *Fulenn Berz* [The Fair Maid of Perth], *An Ofiser a fortun* {The Legend of Montrose}, *Rob Roy*, *Waverley*, *An Hendedour* [The Antiquary], *Redgauntlet* and *Guy Mannering*. . He especially admired the Highlanders' wild and untameable spirit. He cared less for the books in which this spirit did not shine: *Kefrisa Lammermoor* [The Bride of Lammermoor], *Kenilworth*, *Douriou Sant Ronan* {Saint Ronan's Well}, *Karc'har Dinedin* [The Heart of Midlothian], [Chronicles of the Canongate], or *Diwar-benn and diaoulou hag ar sorserezed* [Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft]. (*IBEC'H*, 55-59; *IEC'H*, 15; *ADL*, 5, 34-35; *SOAT*, XVII; *EB*, 325). Meven Mordiern, as one sees, gives only the Breton form of place names or the Breton version of book titles. Thus it may take the reader a while to understand that "Gwengenn" refers to the French town of Vendôme, or that *Fulenn Berz* is the Breton translation of Walter Scott's *The Fair Maid of Perth*. Things get further complicated when the Breton title is not a direct translation of the original. One must be relatively familiar with the context to realize that *An Ofiser of fortune* refers to The Legend of Montrose, *Konnestabl Chester* to *The Betrothed*, or *Karc'har Dinedin* to *The Heart of Midlothian*. Meven Mordiern also loved historical novels set in antiquity involving ancient Celts. Foremost among these were *Ar Glezeiataerien* [The Gladiators], by Whyte-Melville, *Bizou Kaesar* [L'Anneau de César: souvenirs d'un soldat de Vercingétorix], by Alfred Rambaud, and, by Léon Cahun, *Ar C'hoprsoudarded*] (*IBEC'H*, 58-59, 222; *ADL*, 7; *EB*, 309-310, 325). These books undoubtedly

served as models for Meven Mordiern's own *Sketla Segobrani*, which are presented as the memoirs of a Celtic warrior and which he was to publish in the early twenties. On the other hand, he did not much care for the historical romances of Paul Féval which have Brittany for their setting (*ADL*, 6).

A fourth source of Meven Mordiern's lifelong craze about the Celts, their history, and their culture, is to be found in the illustrations which represented Celts in his favorite books (*EB*, 310). He later recognized that these pictures were pure fantasy, since it was only later, in the early years of the twentieth century that Salomon Reinach, Karl Schumacher, Von Bienkowski, Joseph Déchelette, and other scholars published their research about the weapons and the clothes of the ancient Celts, and about their representation in the art of antiquity. As a boy, however, Meven Mordiern was much impressed by two illustrations which he found in a book for young people, *Kadarned-dreist ar C'hallaoued* [L'Héroïsme français]. One showed two Gaulish warriors, covered with animal skins and carrying heavy clubs. The other showed Vercingetorix on horseback, surrendering to Cesar at Alesia. In another book about women famous in history, he had seen a picture representing a young druidess from the island of Sena [Sein]. She was foretelling his fate to Vercingetorix. Meven Mordiern also remembered a young druidess sacrificing a young man lying on a dolmen, in a clearing, in the moonlight. He had seen the picture in a book by W. de Fonvielle on the history of the moon. In another book about astronomy, this one by the well-known popularizer Camille Flammarion, he was impressed by an illustration which showed druids, druidesses, and warriors gathered around a huge dolmen, in a clearing, in the moonlight. He always liked the warriors, who were handsome, strong, and virile, and the druidesses, whom he found physically quite attractive and whose appearance had none of the feminine weakness which he despised. On the other hand, he was repelled by the druids, who usually had white beards and long robes which made them look like women, and who, instead of weapons, carried only harps. He preferred the muscular men who forged and wielded weapons (*EB*, 311, 334; *IECH*, 12-15; *IBEC'H*, 59-60). Other incidents contributed to reinforce the boy's interest in the Celtic world. For several years, his stepbrother, an artillery officer, served in a regiment garrisoned in the city of Gwened [Vannes]. He thus had many opportunities to visit the countryside, where long-haired Breton peasants still wore their traditional costumes, and his relations of his excursions had piqued the boy's curiosity (*EB*, 273). As a child, Meven Mordiern had also loved the uniform worn by the Black Watch (he had seen their pictures in a book belonging to his stepbrother), and he was thrilled when, at the 1889 "Exposition", he got a chance to see real Highlanders in their authentic native garb (*EB*, 329, 461). It was a high point in his young life when, in 1892, his parents took him to Lokeltas, on the southern coast of Brittany, for the summer vacation. He was to return there practically every summer until 1906.

During the long train ride, as he drew nearer to the border, he dreamed of establishing Breton colonies on the French side, in areas conquered by him and by his followers, thus to reclaim for the Celts the lands which once had been theirs (*IBEC'H*, 161). At first, Brittany itself did not give him the same kind of thrill. When he was three, in the summer of 1881, his parents had taken him to Ar Poulligwenn [Le Pouliguen], and he mostly remembered the boats, the fishing nets, the smells of tar, rosin, and fish. It would appear, however, that he was quite impressed by Breton music, since his favourite song, among those which he heard his mother and his father sing, around the years 1883-1884, was the one which reminded him of the tunes which he had heard played on the bagpipe in Le Pouliguen (*EG*, E\*\*\*\*). On his first return to Brittany, in 1892, he enjoyed seeing the sailing ships which were still quite numerous in the port of Naoned [Nantes]. They reminded him of the navigations to the Island of the Blessed famous in Celtic lore (*IBEC'H*, 162). He was somewhat disappointed in the landscape: it did not quite come up to the expectations awakened in him by the articles of Edouard Schuré which he had read in

the July and August 1891 issues of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. He did not much like the sand fleas which were quite numerous on the beaches. He deplored that the local people no longer wore their traditional costumes, and that they did not speak Breton as they still had done in 1881. He was saddened by this neglect of a language which once had been spoken by the proud conquerors of Europe. He did, however, enjoy walking along the seashore and visiting the small fishing villages. Over the years, he got to see the walled city of Gwennrann [Guérande], the castle of Susinio, the menhirs and dolmens of Lokmariaker and Carnac, the chapel built on the tumulus of Saint-Michel, the museum containing the prehistoric artifacts and sculptures discovered in the area, and the old church in which the relics of Saint Gweltaz are preserved. He liked to walk on the cliffs where it was said that the horse of Saint Gweltaz had left the marks of its hooves, but he did not find any trace of them. The fountain dedicated to Saint Goustan gave him another kind of pleasure. Two young Breton girls were doing their washing near the fountain, and in order not to get their own clothing wet, they had turned up their skirts. Meven Mordiern walked by without staring so as not to embarrass the girls, but he did take notice of their shapely legs (*IBEC'H*, 162-164, 171-180, 197-198). During his stay in Lokeltaz, Meven Mordiern met a Breton priest who strongly advised him to marry a young Breton peasant girl, since these girls were the purest whom a young man could hope to find. Meven Mordiern, however, was not interested in marriage. He dreamt of a life of adventure in the wilderness of America, South Africa, or Australia (*IBEC'H*, 192). It was also in Lokeltas that he met another priest, a French vacationer, who challenged his conviction that the Breton people were a morally superior and virtuous race, a belief based on Meven Mordiern's reading of Henri Martin and Kervarker [La Villemarqué]. The priest told him that the Bretons had vices like any other people, thus leaving the boy shocked and disillusioned (*IBEC'H*, 192-195). He later had occasion to feel vindicated: a family friend, a young woman who lived at some distance from Paris, sometimes returned home late in the evening. To get home from the station, she had to cross a deserted area where new railroad tracks were being laid. Upon being warned that this was a dangerous thing to do, she replied that she had nothing to fear: "All the workers are Breton." This incident demonstrated to Meven Mordiern that, although she might not have read Kervarker [La Villemarqué], Brizeux, or Renan, she thought well of the Bretons, as did his own parents. And he got quite angry with a local peasant who cursed his horse, calling the animal "*Sale Breton*" (*IBEC'H*, 239-240). In Lokeltas, he had acquired a large folding knife, which he called his Breton knife. He carried it with him when he was attending the seventh grade at the Lycée Condorcet. One of his Parisian classmates made fun of the knife, but he was comforted by another classmate, a handsome Breton boy with blond hair and blue eyes, who told him: "Don't pay attention to what that guy says. I have the same knife at home" (*EG*, H\*\*\*\*). Unlike many other tourists, Meven Mordiern enjoyed Breton cooking. He was also happy to discover that the Breton language was still spoken in some areas around Sarzav [Sarzeau], and that the local priest still gave the Sunday sermon in Breton, in spite of the crowds of French tourists (*IBEC'H*, 196-198). Meven Mordiern makes it quite clear, however, that it was the history books of Henri Martin and J. A. Fleury, the novels of Walter Scott, and the Gaulish novels of Whyte-Melville and Rambaud which first drew him to study the Celts, their history, their culture, and their language. It was only later, in his early twenties, that he came to know the men who placed Celtic studies on a truly scholarly foundation: Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, the Reinach brothers, Salomon and Théodore, and their nephew Adolphe, Joseph Loth, and Joseph Déchelette (*EB*, 326; *IBEC'H*, 31, 64, 149; *SOAT*, III-IV; *TB*, 123). Meven Mordiern stresses the fact that his interests were not limited to things Celtic. He liked many other subjects: prehistory, history, the natural sciences, geography, sociology, and he found it a pleasant change to go from one discipline to another. The fact remains that he mostly used his knowledge of these other disciplines to get a better understanding

of Celtic history and culture. Looking back on the origin of his Celtic calling, Meven Mordiern comes to the conclusion that ultimately it was Henri Martin's influence which led the young René Leroux to recelticize himself and to live his life as a Celt, and in Celtic (*SOAT*, L).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HOW A FRENCH BOY BECAME A CELT

The young René Leroux was still a child when he resolved to live his life as a Celt, and in Celtic (*SOAT*, L). The recelticizing process started in a modest way: the young René Leroux took to writing his family name Le Roux, in two words, so as to give it a more Breton appearance. Since there was no solid information about his father's Breton ancestry, he made up a romance about it. When he discovered the ballad about "Janedig ar Rouz" in Luzel's collection of *Gwerzioù*, he imagined that he was related to her, and he copied the text of the ballad on a paper which he put away with his notes about his father's Algerian expedition (*SOAT*, 3). According to the ballad, Janedig ar Rouz was a young girl from Pempoull [Paimpol]. During the wars of religion, when Brittany was a battlefield between Catholics and Protestants, she killed herself rather than submit to the French officer who was going to rape her.

To live as a Celt, a Celtic language was needed. At the age of twelve, Meven Mordiern started to collect Breton, Welsh and Gaelic words. Some came from Henri Martin's *Histoire de France*, others from the novels of Walter Scott. He thus compiled a small Celtic dictionary. At the age of thirteen, he resolved to study a Celtic language, and Breton was the one for which it was easiest to get books. Moreover, Brittany was the Celtic country which was most easily accessible from Paris. From 1891 to 1920, Meven Mordiern devoted at least half an hour a day to the study of Breton, more when he felt the inclination. In 1891, he had bought Brizeux's *Marie*, at the end of which were printed *Teleenn Arvor* and *Furnez Breiz* with the original Breton text and the French translation. In 1893, he purchased Kervarker's [La Villemarqué's] *Barzaz Breiz*, which also had the Breton text and the French translation, and which he studied thoroughly for some ten years. Other books by La Villemarqué which he bought included *Ar brud keltiek pe varzoniez ar c'hloastrou en Iwerzon, Kembre ha Breiz* [*La légende celtique et la poésie des cloîtres en Irlande, en Cambrie et en Bretagne*], and *Mister bras Jesus* [*Le Grand Mystère de Jésus*]. He could not locate La Villemarqué's *Marzin* [*Myrrdhin ou l'Enchanteur Merlin, son histoire, ses oeuvres, son influence*], nor did he find *Barzed ar Vivet kantved* [*Poèmes des bardes bretons du VIe siècle*]. He vainly searched for Ar Gonideg's Breton translation of the Bible, so he bought the Protestant *Bibl vrezonek* instead, but he found the Breton so poor and so corrupted by French that he did not read it. In 1896, he also acquired Ar Gonideg's dictionaries, French-Breton and Breton-French, and he set out to memorize six or seven new words each day, as well as the sentences in which they were used, so as to learn at the same time the words and the way in which they are linked together in a sentence. This led him to find fault with Ar Gonideg, who apparently did not take the trouble of providing truly informative examples. Ar Gonideg's Breton-French dictionary included a Breton grammar. The French-Breton dictionary also included a short history of the Breton language by La Villemarqué. Meven Mordiern could not locate all of the Breton books mentioned by La Villemarqué, but he did manage to find several books by Gab Milin, Luzel's *Bepred Breizad*, Clairet's *Bleuniou Breiz*, and Lan Inizan's *Buhez Sant Fransez a Asiz, Emgann Kergidu, and Toull al Lakez*. In later years, Meven Mordiern accumulated a sizable Breton library, which he eventually gave to Roparz Hémon, in 1942 (*IBEC'H*, 61-62; *EB*, 42; *ADL*, 6; *SOAT*, LIII).

In addition to books in Breton, Meven Mordiern acquired a number of books about Brittany, but written in French: O. de Gourcuff's study of the poets of Brittany, folktales collected and translated in French by Luzel, *La Légende de la mort* by Anatole Le Braz, a collection of folktales by Charles Le Goffic, the proceedings of the "*Congrès celtique international*" held in



Saint-Brieuc in 1867, and a poem by a Breton lady (*IBEC'H*, 32, 63). Other purchases included Emile Souvestre's *An Oaled vreizat* [*Le Foyer breton*], *Envoradou eur Breiz-izelad* [*Souvenirs d'un Bas-breton* ] and *An diweza Brezoned* [*Les derniers Bretons*]. Pitre-Chevalier's *Histoire de Bretagne*, and Amédée Thierry's *Histoire des Gaulois* were additional acquisitions. He also enjoyed a book which had been bought by his stepbrother, Charles Gidel's *Histoire de la littérature française depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours*:: it included a chapter on the French medieval romances based on the Celtic tradition of the Round Table. Meven Mordiern's interest in Brittany does not mean that he liked everything Breton indiscriminately: Brizeux's *Les Bretons* and *Marie*, for instance, left him quite cold, nor did he much care for the sentimentality of Souvestre's *Les derniers Bretons*. He much preferred the *Barzaz Breiz* (*EB*, 322; *IBEC'H*, 55; *IEC'H*, 59; *ADL*, 6). One may safely assume that by his early twenties Meven Mordiern had read just about everything that was then available about the language and the literature of Brittany, and that he had acquired as much knowledge as was available about the history and the culture of the Celts.

This passion for his Celtic roots would determine the course of his life. In one page of his *Brouilhedoù*, we read this statement: "It has been the desire of my entire life to make a Breton of myself, and to turn everything that I love into Breton: the sciences, as in *Istor ar Bed*, and the memories relating to my childhood and to my family" [*B*, unpaginated]. As a child, Meven Mordiern had dreamed of becoming a soldier, like his stepbrother, or a field researcher for the museums or the learned societies of Europe or America. His health prevented it. In 1896, a medical examination detected a heart condition which made him unfit for military service, and no employer would give the kind of job he wanted to somebody in poor health. Against all his expectations, he did not die young. His stepbrother had died in 1895, of the aftereffects of a service-related accident. His father died in 1897. From then on, Meven Mordiern lived on his inheritance, although in greatly reduced circumstances after the death of his mother, in 1920, and especially after the fall of the French franc, in the late twenties. He did, however, manage to get by with the help, at first, of an old family friend, and, later on, thanks to occasional subsidies from his faithful friend and collaborator Fransez Vallée. The fact that he held no job did not mean that he was idle. His life was entirely devoted to research and to writing about the subjects which he held so dear, the history, the language, and the culture of the Celts. For his Breton publications, he adopted the Celtic name of Meven Mordiern. Although he makes use of the word "galvedigez" (calling, vocation) in referring to his passion for the Celts, Meven Mordiern makes it clear that he never felt actualled "called": what he did, he did for his own pleasure, out of respect and out of love for the Breton language, and also because no one else was doing what he did at the time (*IEC'H*, 1).

In his study of the Breton language, Meven Mordiern was helped by a young Breton priest, Mr Kadig, who, in 1901, was in charge of the Breton parish of Paris. It was through him that Meven Mordiern met another young Breton, Moris an Doz [Maurice Le Dault], who later founded and published the journal *Ar Furcher brezonek* [*Le Fureteur breton*]. It was An Doz who told Meven Mordiern about Fransez Vallée and his weekly paper *Kroaz ar Vretoned*, to which Meven Mordiern subscribed immediately (*SOAT*, LV-LVII). He would always take the paper with him during his long walks through Paris, and by the end of the week, he had it memorized (*SOAT*, XLIV). Meven Mordiern soon became convinced that Fransez Vallée was the best living authority on the Breton language whom he could find. His paper mostly contained articles about the daily life of Breton speakers, who, at the time, were predominantly farmers. They dealt with farming, the care of cattle, agricultural implements, fertilizers, and similar topics, but Vallée wanted to enrich and to modernize the language, and there were also short pieces about ships, railroads, cars, dirigibles, and airplanes. Some critics found the paper boring, but

Meven Mordiern disagreed. When the Breton writer Erwan Berthou told him: "*Eur maro eo lenn ar gelaouenn-se* [It is deadly to read that paper]", Meven Mordiern replied that one only needed compare *Kroaz ar Vretoned* with a similar Breton journal published in the 1860's, *Feiz ha Breiz*, or with such contemporary papers as *Breiz* and *Dihunamb*, to see that Vallée's was far better (*SOAT*, LVII-LIX). Meven Mordiern had only admiration for the purity and the perfection of Vallée's language. It was indeed this admiration which led him to become Vallée's friend and collaborator (*SOAT*, XII, L, LXXXVIII). He also deplored the fact that Vallée's work on the Breton language did not have a greater impact on the quality and the quantity of Breton materials available in print (*SOAT*, LX). Meven Mordiern's love for the Breton language was such that he could not tolerate any form of disrespect toward it. He lambasted what he found to be the bastardized Breton of "an aotrou Jaffrennou", who wrote under the bardic name of Taldir (*SOAT*, 103). Elsewhere, without naming him directly, he expressed his contempt for *Ar Vro* and *Ar Bobl*, the two papers founded by the author of *Hirvoudoù* and *An delenn dir*. He further identified Taldir by describing him as the man who later wrote a poor thesis on Prosper Proux and a worse dictionary, *Le Petit Larousse breton* (*SOAT*, LVII-LVIII).

At the age of twenty, Meven Mordiern had not been found fit for military service because of a heart murmur. This heart condition also kept him from the career on which he would have liked to embark, traveling and exploring all over the world in search of archeological items for the museums of Europe. He was not even able to find a job in a Paris office, since prospective employers found him too pale. In spite of his heart murmur, he kept exercising and eventually he built up his muscles to such an extent that during World War I he was found strong enough for the auxiliary service, loading supplies, shells and ammunition on trains bound for the front. After the war, he continued to live with his mother. His stepbrother had died in 1895, following an accident aboard the ship which took him to Madagascar where he was to participate in the conquest of the island. His father had died in 1897. Meven Mordiern had only one ambition, work to restore to the Celts, to their language and to their culture, the honor and respect which they deserved, and to reconquer for them the territories from which their language has been displaced by French. This would only be righting the crimes of history, since all of Gaul had been a Celtic country. His purpose is clearly defined in note 19 of his *Istor eur C'halvedigez*, which tells of the Celtic tribes which had refused to submit to Roman rule and chosen to look for new lands in Central Europe. When they found themselves again surrounded by enemy tribes, Dacians and Germans, they left again, for Gaul this time: "With this scene, with the spectacle of a land emptied of its population by the cruelties of the Romans, with the spectacle of hundreds of other lands vanquished and decelticized on the Continent as well as on the Islands, there awakened in me the hatred for all the enemies of the Celts, and a half-desire, a hidden, obscure, ill-defined desire to try to put obstacles in the way of further de-Celticization, to prevent it from being completed in respect to civilization or knowledge (the area of politics I despise). I never allowed myself, and I never will, to be blinded by this hatred, nor by any other hatred. Blind hatred is plain stupidity. There are, among the speakers of Romance and Germanic languages, plenty of good people who have done, and who will do, labors which are of value for us. My hatred goes to those only who are called, by their profession or by their inclination, to clear the way for Romance and Germanic languages so that they can expand at the expense of the Celtic languages. My hatred, full and entire, is reserved for those people, and it will remain so until my final breath. And if I had the power to annihilate these murderers, I would do it right away, without hesitation. To the readers who would be scandalized by what I write here, I will tell them to try to understand well, in truth, to look closely at the dreadful quantity of atrocities, of lies, of treacherous, crushing, shameful and vile acts accumulated by the invasion, the romanization and the germanization of lands on the Continent and the Islands which formerly were Celtic lands.

And these readers will feel the same scandal I do, unless they are just accursed lukewarm people. Our fate has been the fate of hundred other nations, of hundred other races. Anyway, let us not exaggerate things. The faults and the weaknesses which have caused us to be defeated are the faults and weaknesses of all Mankind. We only have to study closely the history of the Romans, the Germans, the Slavs, etc., to see this. Those who say the contrary are damned liars, or people obsessed and blinded by hatred, or empty-headed, ignorant people, and inexperienced people.”

Meven Mordiern pursued his study of the languages, the history, and the culture of the Celts. He had definite ideas about what was to be done in order to save the Breton language for future generations. They are presented here and there in his manuscripts, in his *Prederiadennoù diwar-benn ar yezoù hag ar brezoneg* [*Reflexions on languages and Breton*] and especially in two essays, the first one published in 1933 in Vallée’s book *Eur Breizad er C’hanada e dibenn an XIXvet kantved hag e derou an XXvet*, [A Breton in Canada at the end of the XIXth century and the beginning of the XXth] and the other written in 1945 and published on after his death. The manuscript had been left to Roland a Goedgourheden, but it was not put with the manuscripts which were sent to Harvard. It was published by the journal *Preder* in March 1964 under the title *Talar an Hoc’h. Kudenn an adsevel ha selvel ar Brezhoneg*. [abbreviated to *TH* below]. The essay included in *Eur Breizad er C’hanada* has been published by Youenn Olier, "Mennozioù Meven Mordiern diwar-benn degouezh ha dazont ar brezhoneg" [Thoughts of Meven Mordiern on the state and future of Breton], *Imbourc’h*, niv. 276 (Geñver 1993), pp. 49-59. For Meven Mordiern, there was no question as to his goal: it was necessary to save the Breton language, the only Celtic language remaining alive on the Continent, and to regain for the Celtic language and civilization the lands which had been stolen from the Celts over the centuries. The only question had to do with the means. First, one had to return to the Breton people what had been taken away from them, the pride in their ancestors’ deeds, and the desire to be worthy of them (*SOAT*, pp. CXI-CXIII; *EB*, pp. 264, 318; *ADL*, p. 2; *TB*, Kentskrid). New elites had to be formed, and this goal could be reached only through the language: "There is no nationality without Breton", he said. One had to forge the language needed for the professional and social needs of the new elites. Native speakers of Breton who had half-forgotten the language and the Bretons who wanted to learn the language of their forefathers needed books of all kinds. As early as 1902, Meven Mordiern began to write articles destined to spread scientific learning among young Bretons, but he was unable to find Breton journals to publish them (*TH*, p. 12). These articles were probably the seeds of the booklets of *Istor ar Bed* published by *Gwalarn* from 1929 to 1941. In order to incite the love for the language and the culture of their ancestors in the hearts of young Bretons, Meven Mordiern began to write his *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz* [*Notes on the ancient Celts*], a huge work which was ready for publication by 1911. He did not believe that he was able to translate all of his writings in Breton by himself, and he first thought of Erwan ar Moal (whose bardic name was Dir-na-Dor). For a number of reasons, there were delays, war broke out, ar Moal was called up, and Mordiern turned to the better qualified Frañsez Vallée (*SOAT*, pp. LXXI-LXXVII). Vallée began to work on the translation, and in 1916 he was able to write to Meven Mordiern: "I have completed the work of translating the Notennou from beginning to end" (letter dated April 4, 1916).

After the death of his mother, in 1920, Meven Mordiern no longer had any reason to remain in Paris and he settled in the village of Sant-Helouri, near the town of Saint-Brieuc where his friend was living. It was there that, with the help of the man who would remain the most faithful of collaborators until the end of his life, that he realized his dream. In his *Brouilhedou*, I have found this passage: "Of all the beautiful things which I wanted to accomplish in my life (when I was a small boy dreaming of the future) there is one only which I have been able to undertake and to make some progress on: break the evil magic circle which seems fated to keep

Breton literature imprisoned forever in the field of mediocrities, of childish games, of babble; expand and diversify its horizons, open for it new areas remained unused by it until then, and, through writings in prose about different types of subjects, make visible all the riches and powers it contained.” Between October 1920 and September 1937, when Vallée, for reasons of health, had to go to a nursing-home run by nuns in a suburb of Rennes, Meven Mordiern went to his friend’s house in Saint-Brieuc two or three times a week. Whatever he had written in French was translated orally into Breton by Vallée and written down by Meven Mordiern. This is what was done for the final sections of the *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz. Eur Breizad er C’hanada e dibenn an XIXvet kantved hag e derou an XXvet* and *Kembreiz gwechall ha breman* are translations of English texts. Vallée’s books *Envorennou diwar va beajou e Breiz-Veur hag Iwerzon* and *Envorennou ur brezonegour* were dictated by Vallée and written down by Meven Mordiern. *Istor ar Bed* and *Selladou ouz an tremened* were written directly in Breton by Mordiern and corrected by Vallée (*SOAT*, pp. CVII-CXI). By the time Vallée moved to Rennes, Mordiern’s command of Breton was good enough for him to write in Breton without his friend’s help. This is what Vallée wrote on the final page of a letter from Meven Mordiern which he returned to his friend:”You write well now, better than I do. This is why I do not see what I could correct. I have noted some small observation here and there.”

In order to attract the interest of young Bretons, it was necessary to give them more than learned books like the *Notennou*. Meven Mordiern had not forgotten how fascinated he had been by books which he has read as a child, historical novels which did much honor to the Celts, obviously, those of Walter Scott, Whyte-Melville, Alfred Rambaud and Léon Cahun, but also books like those of Mayne-Reid about the battles between Indians and Mexicans at the beginning of the XIXth century, those of Stevenson like *The Black Arrow*, books which described the expeditions of the Mahrattas through India, the conquest of Siberia by Cossacks, the charges of the British dragons against the French at Waterloo, the perils of hunters after Siberian tigers, the risks taken by trappers in the frozen lands of Northern Canada, the difficulties of explorers who were constantly in danger of losing their lives to discover unknown places, as in Jules Verne’s *Voyage au centre de la terre*. Books of this type provided enjoyment as well as learning. This is what Meven Mordiern wanted to accomplish himself with his *Skêtla Segobrani*, a historical novel purporting to be the memoirs of a Celtic warrior named Segobranos, of the Lingon tribe, after the fashion of Herodotus. Segobranos described how he followed his chief Kassignatos who, followed by a large band of warriors, set with dogs, transport-chariots and war-chariots toward the Southern lands where there was fame, booty and land to be gained. Thus they went through Italy, Greece, Asia as far as India, Syria, Chaldee, Egypt, North Africa as far as Tangiers, and Spain. He later visited other lands, beyond the Rhine, as far as the Oder and the Danube (*Skêtla Segobrani*, I, pp. 9-29).

Meven Mordiern realized that in order to save the language, dictionaries, grammars and handbooks were required. This work had already been started by people like Frañsez Vallée. He also believed that other books would be needed, books which could raise Breton to the level of other major languages, English, German, or French, and make it fit for literary and scientific works. This is what he wanted to achieve with his *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted kozh* and with his *Skêtla Segobrani*. He also wanted to show young Bretons that their language could perfectly well be used to describe the life of middle classe people living in big cities as well as the life of peasants living in the country. This is what he did in his autobiographical writings. In order to provide entertainment as well as knowledge, he translated his favorite novels by Jules Verne, *An dorrierien-vlokus* [*Les forceurs de blocus*] and *Eur Gêr war-neunv* [*Une Ville flottante*]. He would have liked to see many other books translated into Breton, and he gives the list in his *Talar an Hoc’h* (pp. 34-39): Jules Verne’s novels; Norbert Casteret: *Dix ans sous terre*:

*campagnes d'un explorateur solitaire*; Viollet-Le-Duc: *Histoire d'une forteresse*; E. Menault, *L'Esprit des animaux*; R. L. Stevenson, *The Black Arrow*; the novels of Fenimore Cooper, Karl May, L. Jacolliot, Rider-Haggart, Alfred Rambaud, Lucien Biart, Léon Cahun, Walter Scott, Erckmann-Chatrian, Sienkiewicz, Merejkowski, Bulwer-Lytton, and Whyte-Melville. These were the books which he had loved as a boy. The novels of Alexandre Dumas were not placed on the list because, in his opinion, they had no historical value.

It was also necessary to give the future Breton elites sound scientific information, and to translate books like the ones published in such series as "Bibliothèque des Merveilles" (Hachette), "Bibliothèque scientifique contemporaine" (Baillière), "Bibliothèque scientifique internationale" (Alcan), "Bibliothèque de la Nature" (Masson), "Encyclopédie pratique du naturaliste" (Lechevalier), as well as the books on history, geography, astronomy, and other sciences published by Juven. Such books were extremely important for satisfying young minds' thirst for knowledge. Meven Mordiern would open the way with his *Istor ar bed*.

Learning through books was not enough: it was necessary to learn by doing, as was done in the most progressive schools of England and America. As a child, Meven Mordiern had loved to make the weapons which he used in his war games, and he gave the Breton educator Kerlann technical handbooks to be used by his pupils. The boys would find it enjoyable to forge iron and copper into Celtic helmets, battle-axes, and other weapons to be used in their war-games skouer (*TH*, pp. 34-49; kv. *EB*, pp. 356-357; *IECH*, p. 19). Meven Mordiern also greatly admired Vallée's skill at Breton stick-fighting and archery, and he helped him with his books on the subject. The purpose was to form people able to do what had been done by the ancient Celts, and later by the English (*SOAT*, pp. CI-CVII).

Meven Mordiern had strong convictions, and he wrote what he thought, even when he did not always publish it. He thought it was shameful for Breton leaders, whether they belonged to the nobility, the bourgeoisie or the clergy, to remain indifferent before the disappearance of the language and civilization of their ancestors. They were not even able to give a little money to start real Breton schools or to publish Breton books which would look decent, not badly written, printed or bound (*TB*, pp. 12-13). Such Bretons are condemned without any pity in the first pages of *Talar an Hoc'h* (and also in the preface of his autobiographical *Tiegeziou bourc'hizien eus ar broiou-krec'h*) where one may read the following lines: "Breton has been left stranded and fallow since 700 years at least through the cowardice, the laziness and the blindness of people whose duty it was to keep it in its former rank of great language." (*TB*, p. 1). He strongly approved of what was done by people like Remont Delaporte, Marc'harid Gourlaouen, and Kerlann to teach Breton to young children, but he was rough on those who did not show in their writings the respect due to the language, the history, and the civilization of the Celts, Taldir, for instance. Taldir had been one of Vallée's students at the *Collège Saint-Charles*, in Saint-Brieuc, but he thought he had no need to apply himself. Joseph Loth, whose student Taldir had been at the University of Rennes, also had told Meven Mordiern: "*Jamais je n'ai pu le faire travailler*" (*TH*, p. 27). Taldir had published a Breton-French dictionary, *Le dictionnaire français-breton de poche*, (Karaez: Ar Bobl, 1914), and Joseph Loth, who was then the editor of the *Revue celtique*, had asked Meven Mordiern to write the review. Taldir had not been pleased with the review, and he had sent a letter of protest to Meven Mordiern, requesting its publication in the journal. I have discovered the letter, dated March 4, 1916, among Mordiern's papers. It shows how sensitive a writer's can become as soon as his name appears in print. Here is the text of the letter (my own translation):

"Taldir

formerly a poet

today  
 nothing  
 but a corporal

Sir,

News come to me that you have given such a beautiful article in the Revue celtique about my Breton and French Dictionary.

Quite a punch in the nose, they tell me, you have given me, and what I find the hardest, is that I have been stuck for the past 20 months, and it is difficult for me to find a way to answer as I would like. In your opinion, you fellow by your fire-place, with time to waste while others - and Bretons most of them - are carrying the burden of the war and the misery, in your opinion, I don't know Breton. One can know more than one Breton, you Sir shitting with fear, the Breton of Lower Brittany is one, and yours, assuredly, is another one!

Would you understand if I told you, in healthy Breton, that you now are a *worthless* peg squeaking in the cart? What? The world is being upset on its axles, and a young redhead [Taldir makes a pun on the real name of Meven Mordiern, René Leroux, Reun ar Rouz; in Breton: "rouzard" means "redhead"], with his feet warm, the heart of a partridge in his middle, dares pick a quarrel with a man called to the army without any possibility to respond in any other way than by mail? Shame would be on you, except that the time of shame is past for you, as is past, for the oaks, the time of acorns [Taldir is making a pun: the Breton word for "shame" (*mez*) and for "acorn" (*mez*) sound alike].

You already had bitten me some time ago, I no longer know why nor how, but then I was able to strike back, or at least to defend myself, although it is difficult to strike at someone who has done nothing, written nothing, except Frenchified scribblings which another poet [Taldir refers to Vallée] had to translate into our language: how would one look for lice in his head when there is no hair, nor even head possibly?

His ass-hole's shame, at least, remains somewhere, since during the war he finds the time to stay seated and to gnaw at his neighbor instead of going to help throw the Germans out of the land of the French; if there is room left on this ass to receive a kick from a soldier's boot, I beg him to feel it as if it had been delivered from up close, with a skilled foot.

I request you to publish my letter in your Revue celtique and to prove that it is not good Breton, sent by a good Breton to a bad Breton."

Meven Mordiern had forwarded the letter to Joseph Loth, and Loth had returned it. Here is the first paragraph of his answer:

"Paris 16 avril

Mon cher compatriote

Je vous renvoie la lettre de Jaffrennou [Taldir's real name]. Ça ne vaut pas la peine d'une réponse. Quelle idée se fait-il donc de la Revue celtique pour se figurer que nous imprimerions de pareilles goujateries?"

The rest of the letter has nothing to do with Taldir. Meven Mordiern, as we know, had not been called up because of a heart condition, but he has been called up for auxiliary service and employed in the risky job of loading military supplies, ammunition and cannon shells on trains bound for the front, and his feet certainly were not always kept warm in his slippers, as Taldir seems to think.

If Meven Mordiern was hard on Taldir, he would be equally hard on any Breton who did not show the proper respect to the language and the culture of the Celts. This was the case, in his opinion, of Herrieu, the editor of *Dihunamb*, who would jeopardize the future of the Breton language out of a misguided love for his own local dialect. Meven Mordiern could be hard even on his best friends. We have seen that he had blamed his collaborator Vallée because he felt that Vallée had not portrayed the Bretons who emigrated to Armorica from Great Britain between the fourth and the seven centuries as proud and fearless warriors. He would prove harder still on Roparz Hémon, who had opened to him the pages of his journal *Gwalarn*. In one of his manuscripts, Meven Mordiern mentions a “*laosk, gwan hag izil a gelenner*” [a cowardly, weak and lowly teacher] (*EB*, p. 331). What did he blame the poor teacher for? He had dared write in his Breton grammar that the sentence “*N'em eus ket bet*” could be pronounced “*Meuskebe*”. This is how a language got corrupted, according to Meven Mordiern. He did not name the culprit. This worthless individual had himself put his name in print on the cover of the book in which the evidence of his crime was plain for all to see, on p. 92 of *Grammaire bretonne* (Brest: Gwalarn, 1941), by Roparz Hemon. The example given was the following sentence: “*N'em eus ket bet kelou abaoe*” [I have not had any news since], with the phonetic pronunciation “*m eus ke be 'ke:lou a'ba:we*”. The part of *Envorennoù bugeliez* in which Meven Mordiern gave this stinging rebuke to his friend is still unpublished. Roparz Hemon's feelings would probably have been deeply hurt, all the more perhaps since he might not have felt entirely blameless in his capacity as a language teacher. I was a student at the Brest *lycée* from 1936 to 1941, where Roparz Hemon was teaching English. I never was one of his students, but the rumor was that he had a hard time keeping order in his classes. I am not surprised: some of the students were real devils. I have seen them, when women teachers were first introduced into the *lycée* (up till then, all of the teachers had been male) release small crabs on the classroom floor, and when the crabs ran under the poor women's desk and made them scream with fright, the boys would laugh and show their teeth like wolves ready to pounce on their prey.

Meven Mordiern may have had some other motive of resentment against Roparz Hemon. He might have been a bit unhappy about the parody of his *Skêta Segobrani* which appears in the final pages of Roparz Hemon, *An Aotrou Bimbochet e Breizh*. He was also quite unhappy about Roparz Hemon's acceptance of the new spelling system adopted in 1941 by a meeting of Breton writers. Like Vallée, Meven Mordiern held fast to the system adopted in 1908 by the “*Emgleo ar Skrivagnerien*”, the “*brezoneg unvan*”, or *KLT* (referring to the unified Breton created by combining the dialects of Kerne - Leon - Tregor, and he wanted no part of the “*brezhoneg peurunvan*”, or *KLTG* (Kerne -Leon - Tregor - Gwened), the totally unified Breton, created by adding the “Gwened” [Vannes] dialect and by modifying the spelling system in order to accommodate the demands of the Vannes writers. Roparz Hemon had not been quite frank with Meven Mordiern: he had led him to believe that he had been forced by the Germans occupants to accept the *KLTG* spelling, (also commonly referred to as *zedacheg* because words which in *KLT* were spelled with a *Z*, and which in the Vannes dialect were spelled with an *H*, would in *KLTG* be spelled with *ZH*). The German authorities had of course nothing to do with it, and probably could not have cared less, but Hémon's lame excuse would later cause no end of trouble: because of it, the enemies of the *KLTG* would later accuse its creators of having been tools of the Nazis.

Meven Mordiern was similarly hard on Jakez Riou's play, *Nomenoe oe!* because he felt that the author had ridiculed king Nomenoe's proud fighters for Breton independence. Was his harsh judgement partly motivated by a line in Jakez Riou's farce *Gorsedd digor?* Meven Mordiern may well have resented Jakez Riou's pun aimed at the title of his masterpiece, *Skêta Segobrani*: “*l'éclat de ses gros bras nus*”.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## MEVEN MORDIERN'S CELTIC IDEOLOGY

According to Meven Mordiern, Vallée's greatest merit was his perception that the purest Breton was not to be found in print, since only educated people were literate, and their education had of necessity been conducted in other languages, French, and, in the case of the Breton clergy, Latin and Greek. Their Breton had therefore been polluted. Mordiern saw the Church and the French school system as equally responsible for the bastardization of the Breton language. Vallée recognized that there was a tremendous difference between the language spoken by the people and the Breton materials available in print. Many words derived from authentic Breton roots could be found on the lips of the people, but not in printed works. Thus the priests would say "*adori*" instead of "*azeuli*" (to worship), or "*resusita*" instead of "*dasorc'hi*" (to be resurrected)(*SOAT*, LXXII). When Vallée began his work, it was high time. A father would say "*ibil-tan*", but his daughter would already call a match "*elumetezenn*", after the French "*allumette*". From a generation to the next, the language would thus lose not only words, but also idioms, and even phonemes. The sounds "h" and "c'h" were disappearing, "w" was being replaced by "u" or "v", and initial "s" by "sh" (*SOAT*, LXXXIV). Vallée had grown up in the middle of the XIXth century, among the native speakers of Benac'h [Belle-Isle-en-Terre] and Montroulez [Morlaix]. This was a time when people of excellent families still took pride in the purity of their Breton speech. Vallée had also explored all of Brittany, seeking preferably the old people whose speech had not yet been contaminated by French influences. In addition, he had conducted a considerable correspondence with informants from every corner of Brittany. The collected results of his research extending over a period of more than twenty years were eventually published in 1920, with the help of Emil Ernod [Ernault], too late, unfortunately, to have been of help to Meven Mordiern in his study of the language (*SOAT*, LXXXVIV-LXXXVII).

Meven Mordiern was actually quite modern in his thinking about the methodology of language learning. At the lycée, he had studied Latin, Greek, and German. The method was the same for each language: memorizing words and rules of grammar, and translating short passages. Mordiern believed that in order to know a word, one should know all of the sentences in which the word might be used. This is why the best way to learn a language, according to Meven Mordiern, is to listen to the language everyday, from morning till night, until the words, idioms, and phrases are imprinted on the brain. This was how he had learned English, spending one year in England, and eventually reaching the point when he could actually think in English. For reasons which he did not explain, and which had probably to do with his financial dependence on his family, he did not resort to this method which we now would characterize as "total immersion" for the study of Breton, but he read everything in Breton that he could lay his hands on. He never quite reached the stage where he could actually think in Breton, although, at one point, in 1907, he felt that one month spent in a Breton speaking milieu would have brought him to this point. He could not do it at the time, and later on, when it would have been feasible, he was too old and no longer had the mental adaptability required (*SOAT*, LXXXVIII-XCVII). Actually, Meven Mordiern was too hard on himself. His prolonged apprenticeship under Vallée's tutelage later brought him to the point where his master could compliment him on the excellence of his style in Breton (Letters dated December 4, 1940, and January 6, 1941. These letters are also kept at the Houghton Library of Harvard University).

A second reason for what Meven Mordiern considered to be his failure to acquire a native-like command of the Breton language as he had mastered English went beyond his



individual circumstances. Knowing such major languages as English (or French) made a tremendous amount of knowledge available to the reader. Celtic languages did not offer the same advantages. Meven Mordiern was especially impressed by the spread of the British Empire. It demonstrated a spirit of strength which he found admirably expressed in the works of Kipling. The ancient Celts possessed the same kind of spirit. In their day, they had done what the Anglo-Saxons later achieved: they had waged war, engaged in trade, populated vast areas, cleared new lands for cultivation, bred cattle, dug mines, built cities, fortresses, roads, and bridges, sent ambassadors, organized societies, governed and administered subjects of every race. Unfortunately, they did not have what is required to establish a language as a viable medium of communication: a powerful ruling class, and a large body of technical knowledge available in written form (*SOAT*, CI-CVII; *B*, unpaginated). Thinking of all the lands which had once been the Celts' domain and which had been depopulated by the Roman conquerors, of all the Celtic countries which had been defeated and decelticized, on the islands as well as on the continent, Meven Mordiern felt hatred rising in him against the enemies of the Celts, and the desire to put as many obstacles as he could in the way of this alienating process, at least in the areas of language and culture, since he despised politics. He did not allow himself to be blinded by this hatred, however, recognizing the contributions made to Celtic studies by individuals belonging to Romanic or Germanic nations. His hatred was directed at those who would do everything to extend the domain of the Romance and Germanic languages at the expense of the Celtic languages. Of those who would take him to task for this hatred, he asked only that they remember the treachery, the oppression, the destructions, and the massacres of which the Romanic and Germanic conquerors of Celtic countries had been guilty (*IEC'H*, 28-29). Meven Mordiern made it his goal to reclaim for the language and the culture of the Celts the respect to which they were entitled by their glorious past. It was his vision of this past which led him to define an ideological position which he presented most clearly in the foreword to his *Selladoù ouz an tremenet*.

If Meven Mordiern was saddened and angered by the bastardization of the Breton language, he was still more depressed by what he considered to be the bastardization of the Celtic race. Historical accounts showed that there had been many tall blond people among the Breton population of the first century A.D. (*BAP*, 3). It burdened his heart to find that men and women corresponding to his conception of the ideal Celtic type were no longer to be found in large numbers among Breton speakers, and that the accidents of history should have brought about such a breach between the language and the racial type nearest to his heart. This is why he was so pleased when he remembered seeing, on the road linking Gwened [Vannes] and Lokeltas, local peasants who looked like ancient Gauls. He also took pleasure in the appearance of a ten or twelve year old girl who looked exactly like a Gaulish girl of antiquity. In order to correct the damage caused by what he saw as the bastardization of the race, Meven Mordiern would have been willing to apply measures intended to protect the most handsome human types from the worst effects of interbreeding, just as is done with the best breeds of chickens, dogs, horses, and cattle (*BAP*, 2-3). Vallée obviously did not share Meven Mordiern's racist ideology, a fact which led Meven Mordiern to criticize some of the positions taken by his friend in *Kroaz ar Vretoned*. He accused Vallée of having distorted Joseph Loth's work on the Breton emigration to Armorica (J. Loth, *L'émigration bretonne du 5e au 7e siècle de notre ère*. Rennes, 1885) so as not to offend the Church. Vallée had pictured the Breton emigrants as a meek people chased out Britain by Germanic barbarians, lamenting their sad fate as they crossed the sea under the leadership of their priests. He had presented Armorica as nearly deserted, so that the emigrants did not have to resort to violence in order to settle there. In other writings, Vallée had depicted the Breton saints' purpose in coming from Great Britain to Armorica as the charitable desire to convert Armorican heathens. Meven Mordiern was appalled by this sentimental interpretation of history

which deprived it of all color and flavor as well as of a good deal of historical truth. First of all, the so-called Germanic barbarians had achieved a level of culture comparable to that of the British Celts. Moreover, Brittany was founded by warriors, not by pacific and timid peasants dominated by priests, by aristocratic chieftains, not by common people. They did not come from Wales, but they were the most warlike population of southern Britain, an area corresponding to the present counties of Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wilts, and Hants. The Breton saints who came to Armorica did not lead the emigration. They came much later, in response to the call of the settlers, to provide for their spiritual needs. The Breton warriors who had conquered Armorica had founded a political entity, the kingdom of Brittany. The Breton Church founded by the saints whom the settlers had invited merely completed and strengthened this kingdom by giving it a spiritual extension. When the Breton Church was destroyed, in the XIth and the XIIth centuries, by a concerted conspiracy of Rome and France, bands of French monks swooped down on the Breton monasteries. They came from the French monasteries which had in the past been plundered by Breton warriors in the course of their expeditions. It was these French monks who destroyed the priceless collections of Breton manuscripts preserved in the Breton monasteries. The *Kornovii* and the *Domnonii* who had settled in Brittany belonged to British tribes which had been part of the Roman defense system against Saxon bands. Their flag was black with a yellow skull in the middle. This was the flag of warriors, not the banner of peasants and artisans. It was similar to the Welsh red dragon, also a military flag carried before the *Dux Britanniarum*, the commander of the army of Great Britain, as a sign of his supreme command. This was undoubtedly a flag of Celtic origin which the Romans had adopted as a political sop to their Celtic subjects. The men who settled in Brittany were the boldest and the bravest among the population of Great Britain: they were the men who would not bend to Saxon rule. Meven Mordiern did note that there exist in Breton a few words of Germanic origin, probably borrowed from the Saxons. This would indicate that there were, among the Bretons who settled in Brittany, some people who had been in contact with Germanic speakers, but Mordiern could not accept the possibility that these Celts might ever have been subjected to Saxon rule. He offered another explanation better suited to his image of the Breton conquerors of Armorica. There had been Germanic bands who served in the army of the *Comes Littoris Saxonici*, the Roman force entrusted with the defense of the Eastern shore of Great Britain against Saxon attacks. It must have been from these bands that the Bretons who later settled in Armorica had borrowed some words. Meven Mordiern pictured these Bretons as similar to the XVIIth century Puritans who colonized America. They were a select minority in relation to the number of Celts who had stayed behind and who were still numerous in the South of Britain in the IXth century. Wessex remained a bilingual state for several centuries after the Anglo-Saxon conquest, and so did the Germanic kingdoms of Sussex, Essex, Kent, East Anglia, Mercia, and Northumbria. The study of place and family names showed that this Celtic population eventually lost its Breton character along with its language. British nobles betrayed their national heritage for material gain or in order to satisfy old hatreds and jealousies for their own countrymen. The common people abandoned their Celtic identity out of cowardice, or perhaps to derive some material gain from a change of masters. The name "*Lloegrwys*" given by the Celts to the Saxons had originally been a derogatory name applied to those Bretons who had become the Saxons' allies. The Celtic population which remained in Great Britain, although it was more numerous than the Saxon invaders, could not keep its language alive for more than two or three centuries. The Bretons who settled in Armorica were able to make their language the dominant language of Brittany for more than five hundred years. This was not due to the fact that Armorica was a desert. Such a claim, according to Meven Mordiern, had only one purpose: to put the Breton conquerors on the side of the right. Meven Mordiern utterly rejected this type of hypocrisy. The truth was more

virile: might makes right, and right without might is nothing. If the right was on the side of the Breton conquerors, it was because they were, by language and by nationality, the true sons of the Gauls who, in antiquity, had settled in Armorica as well as in Great Britain. The Romance speakers who lived in Armorica were renegades and traitors who had abandoned their Celtic language for the Latin brought by the great plunderer Cesar and his army of outlaws. What the Breton conquerors did was right, because they recelticized Armorica so completely that their language remained alive until the XIXth century, and it took the devil's work of the French school system and the inability of the so-called defenders of the Breton language to jeopardize the achievement of the Vth century settlers. These men had nothing but contempt and hatred for the romanized language spoken in Armorica at the time. Neither they nor their descendants deigned to learn French until the Xth century. If later generations had done the same, Brittany would have remained totally and utterly Breton, as far as the borders of Normandy, Maine, Anjou, and Poitou. For the masses, there is only one language: the language of Bread. If the Breton masters had refused to speak French, the masses would have spoken Breton (*SOAT*, LXII-LXXIX). The historical truth about the immigration from Great-Britain to continental Armorica is not easy to establish. An up-to-date survey of the problem may be found in Pierre-Roland Giot's article "La genèse des mythes autour du fait de l'arrivée des Bretons en Armorique" (*Breizh ha pobloù Europa. Articles to honour Per Denez* [Hor Yezh - Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999], pp. 283-307).

Having thus analyzed the situation, Meven Mordiern asked the obvious question: what must be done? Evaluating the work accomplished by *Kroaz ar Vretoned*, he noted that the paper was written primarily for uneducated readers, and that it hardly went beyond the immediate practical needs of a farming population. It contained nothing of value about the insular Celts, the Welsh, the Scots, and the Irish, about their history, their language, or their country. The literary pages aimed only at entertaining, and were limited to songs, ballads, tales, short fiction and plays. They contained nothing of substance, nothing that could make the language progress. Finally, and this was Meven Mordiern's most cogent criticism, *Kroaz ar Vretoned* did not contain the kind of writing needed to form purely Breton leaders. He compared the Breton people to a large herd without shepherds, surrounded and penetrated by wolves. The first goal should be to train the leaders required in order to change a herd into a nation, and this goal can be reached only through the language: "*N'eus ket a vroadelez hep brezoneg*" [No Breton nationality without Breton], says Meven Mordiern, less strikingly than the more recent nationalist slogan: "*Hep brezhoneg Breizh ebet*" [Without Breton, no Brittany]. His ideological stance thus led him to this inescapable conclusion: the social elites of Brittany must be provided with a language adequate to their social and professional needs. Native speakers of Breton who have half forgotten their Breton, and native speakers of French who have only half mastered Breton must have at their disposal a sufficient variety of texts. Providing these texts was Meven Mordiern's top priority. Fransez Vallée was the person best qualified to help him in this self appointed mission. Vallée lived in Saint-Brieuc. This is why Meven Mordiern, in the month of October 1920, after the death of his mother, came to settle nearby, in the village of Sant-Helori (*SOAT*, LXXI-LXXVII, LXXXVII).

Meven Mordiern's resentment against the oppressors of the Celts undoubtedly influenced his attitudes towards the imperialist and colonialist ambitions which characterized the major European powers in the XIXth century. This becomes quite apparent in his reaction to the conquest of Algeria and to the Mexican war.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MEVEN MORDIERN'S VIEWS ON FRENCH IMPERIALISM

#### 1. THE CONQUEST OF ALGERIA

Meven Mordiern's father, Henri Leroux, was born in Prunay (Loir-et-Cher) on May 16, 1818. After his secondary studies in Vendôme, he studied medicine in Paris and started on his career as an army doctor at the military hospital of Lyon on October 28, 1840, with the rank of assistant surgeon, 2nd class. He did not have the chance to complete his studies for the doctorate until he was sent to the military hospital of Lille, in 1848. He finally received his M.D. on January 27, 1851. As an army doctor, Henri Leroux took part in all the wars waged by France between 1840 and 1879: Algeria (1842-1848), Crimea (1855-1856), Mexico (1862-1867), the Franco-Prussian war and the siege of Paris (1870-1871). He nearly joined the expeditionary corps sent to China in 1856: he had requested service in the field hospitals, and he was so sure he would go that he had purchased field lockers and saddles. The order to go never came, and it was a sore disappointment for him. The Chinese expedition concluded in 1860 with this exploit: French and British soldiers captured the Summer Palace in Beijing and set it on fire after plundering it

In 1882, after retiring, the doctor settled in Villiers, near Vendôme. In the summer, after lunch, while having his coffee and smoking a cigarette, he would talk about his life in Algeria and in Mexico. His little boy René enjoyed hearing about places with such strange names as Jalapa, Guadalajara, Guaymas, and Mazatlán. The boy was fascinated by his father's campaigns in Africa, Crimea and America. Later, in Paris, during the years 1892, 1893, and 1894, his attention was attracted by the numerous war memoirs which were then being published mostly by Plon-Nourrit. His godfather's sons, Léon and Georges Itasse, Georges mostly, would buy them as soon as they came off the presses. They would loan them to Meven Mordiern's mother who, after reading them, gave them to her son. Meven Mordiern mentions the memoirs of such military figures as General Thébault, General Chlapowski, General Marbot, Joseph Grabowski, the field marshalls de Castellane and Canrobert, and the Prince de Joinville. He was especially interested in General du Barrail's memoirs, which his father liked more than any other, since Du Barrail had been in Algeria and in Mexico when he himself served there (*SOAT*, p.25, Notenn 1). The boy, excited by the enjoyment he got from these books, started to question his father and to write down what his father told him about his life abroad. Unfortunately, most of his notes were lost in an unexpected manner. He kept them in the drawer of a small table near his bed. One day, as he wanted to look at them and to copy them down in a notebook, they were gone. An unknown hand had taken all of the pages referring to Africa and half of the ones which had to do with Mexico. He suspected one of the several maids who passed through the house in the years 1895-1896 and who hardly stayed before they had to be dismissed. Nothing could be done about this terrible loss, since Meven Mordiern had already died when he noticed it (*SOAT*, pp. 25-26). Obviously, all of the notes had not been lost, since one reads, a little further on: "In order to compensate for the skimpiness of the remembrances above, I translate into Breton some notes taken in 1892 about the places where my father stayed in Algeria. [...] These brief notes, unfortunately, are not enough to replace the longer ones which were lost. Worse still, they are incomplete, since the last ones relating to my father's stays in Constantine, Guelma and Bône have also been lost." (*SOAT*, pp. 49-50).

Henri Leroux was in the habit of keeping every letter or paper he received: letters from relatives and friends, wedding and death announcements, visiting cards, invitations, bills from salesmen, letters having to do with his army duties, orders, affidavits, and other documents. Meven Mordiern found these papers extremely useful when, in 1932, he started to write what he remembered of his father's army life. The letters and orders related to his father's service gave him the dates and the nature of the major events, both in Algeria and in Mexico. He published his *Eñvorenou diwar buhez va zad en armeou (1844-1879)* in Brest, in 1944. The entire printing was destroyed during the bombing of the city: only two or three copies were saved, according to Per Denez, and I don't believe they are easy to locate. Fortunately, Meven Mordiern distributed what he wrote between several manuscripts, and most of his father's memoirs can be found elsewhere, in two manuscripts at least:

1. *Eñvorennoù-tiegezh 1750-1920*, an incomplete manuscript published by the journal *Hor Yezh* (niv. 112, Kerzu 1976), preface by Per Denez. There are 39 sheets in the manuscript, that is, 78 pages.

2. *Selladou ouz an tremened (1750-1932)*. This manuscript is kept at Houghton Library, Harvard University. Foreword: sheets numbered I-CXIII; text: sheets numbered 1-224, which comes to  $226 + 448 = 674$  pages.

This latter manuscript is obviously much longer and far more complete. I am inclined to believe that all of the events narrated in the 1944 publication of *Eñvorenou* are to be found in it, since there are only minor differences between the pages of the manuscript published by *Hor Yezh* in 1976 and the corresponding pages of the manuscript *Selladou ouzh an tremened*. The latter provides precious information about French imperialism in the XIXth century, especially in regard to Algeria. The accuracy of the doctor's reports is readily confirmed by the works of such recent historians as Mahfoud Bennoun [*The making of contemporary Algeria, 1830-1987* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)], and Charles-André Julien [*Histoire de l'Algérie contemporaine. La Conquête et les débuts de la Colonisation (1827-1871)*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1964)].

Meven Mordiern's father was sent to Algeria on October 20, 1842. During the years he spent there, he was assigned to numerous field hospitals: Oran (November 8, 1842); Mostaganem (November 19, 1842); El Esnam (April 9, 1843) [Meven Mordiern is uncertain about the spelling; at any rate, El Esnam was renamed Orléansville by the French conquerors]; the Daï military hospital, in Algiers (April 9, 1845); the health services of the two camps Birkadem and Ben Siam (October 26, 1845) [Here again, Meven Mordiern is uncertain about the spelling of these two names]; Guelma (1847); Bône (May 19, 1848). The doctor also stayed in many other towns: Tlemcen, Mers-el-Kebir, Oran, Arzeu, Mascara, Cherchell, Milianah, Medea, Blida, Bougie, Sétif, Constantine, Philippeville, and Tunis (*SOAT*, pp. 30-32).

There were many adventurers among the men serving in the French Army of Algeria, and they showed as much originality in their clothing as in their life. Many of them adopted the garments of the native population, Moors, Turks, Arabs or Berbers, which were adopted as military uniforms for such newly created troops as the *spahis* and the *zouaves*. When Meven Mordiern, around 1894 or 1895, read General du Barrail's memoirs, he encountered many names which he had heard from his father. Persat, an expert swordsman and lancer, had battled against the Cossacks as a captain under Napoleon I. Later he had fought in Texas against the Indians and in Greece against the Turks. Mesmer was nicknamed *Ben-Matou* ("son of a tomcat": Arabic "ben", "son"; French "matou", "tomcat") because he had spent two years in Persia training the Shah's gunners. In French, the word "shah" is pronounced like "chat" (cat). Caïd Osman was a Prussian known by the Arab name under which he had enlisted in the *spahis*. He was later killed in Mexico, at Puebla. Changarnier was known to the troops as "Général Bergamotte" because of

his natty uniforms. Other names were quite familiar to him, such as Bugeaud, Canrobert, Lamoricière (all generals), and the military administrator Wolf (*SOAT*, pp. 49b-49k).

Meven Mordiern shows frankly how the French became the masters of Algeria. His father was there in 1843, at the time of the worst fighting against the Arabs of Abd-el-Kader, in 1845, when the Berbers of the Dahra (the mountainous region between Mostaganem, Tenes, and Orléansville) had risen at the voice of a *marabout* named Bou-Maza (son of a goat), and during the murderous campaigns of 1844, 1845, and 1847 against the Kabyls of the Djurdjura. He had thus been among the first to hear of the atrocities committed to break the spirit of the natives: the hundreds of women and children in Abd-el-Kader's *smala* massacred by the sword in their attempt to escape (May 16, 1843); entire Berber tribes put to death by the sword, shot, or asphyxiated by smoke from fires in the mountain caves where they had sought refuge, or doomed to die of hunger since the French had burnt their villages, their harvests, and their fruit trees (*SOAT*, pp. 47-48). The conquering army did not take long to capture the large cities: Algiers, in 1830, Blida, and Medea. The inhabitants of Blida had dared resist: all were killed, including the women, children and Jews. Medea had been evacuated by the people. Bijaja was taken after a three-day siege: all of the inhabitants were either killed or sent into exile. Similar events took place in other cities, Constanine, Tlemcen, Mascara and Oran between 1830 and 1839.

From 1840 to 1849, the French began to occupy the countryside. They used a strategy devised by Lamoricière: lightly-armed bands of soldiers criss-crossed the country, living off the land without being encumbered by army wagons (*SOAT*, pp.49k-49d). The natives revolted. General Bugeaud gave the order to destroy everything: the villages were burnt, the fruit trees cut down, the gardens savaged, the men killed, the women sold to the soldiers. Many natives had sought refuge in mountain caves. The soldiers piled up wood in front of the entrances to the caves, set it on fire, and all the men, women and children within died from smoke inhalation and lack of oxygen. This is what was done by General Cavaignac and Colonel Saint-Arnaud in 1844 and 1845 in the Sbeah region, and by Colonel Pélistier in the Dahra caves. Pélistier thus killed 1000 persons, and Saint-Arnaud 500. The land taken from the natives was sold to colonists. The natives who had survived had to work as field hands.

Before the conquest, the Turkish yoke had been fairly light, and Doctor Leroux had noted how pleasant was the climate and how fertile the earth. Wheat, barley, olive trees, fig trees and lemon trees grew in abundance. There were uncultivated areas with plenty of game, and the good doctor took pleasure in talking about his hunting parties especially in the Mitidja plains before the French drained the marshes and turned them into farms. The doctor spent entire weeks shooting fowl. Living was cheap, and one could purchase excellent native horses for very little money, one hundred fifty or two hundred francs from Berbers and Arabs, Arabs mostly, since they occupied the areas most suitable for raising horses, the low plains along the shore, the wide valleys which cross the Atlas, and the high plains beyond the Atlas. Most of these Arabs were nomads. They lived in tents or in grass or straw huts. The Berbers, on the other hand, were mostly sedentary peasants who lived in mud or stone houses grouped in villages. They raised donkeys rather than horses. In the towns, besides Arabs and Berbers, there were Moors (white people), Turks, Jews, and Negroes (the latter were slaves belonging to all the Sudanese races). The Arabs raised horses by the thousands, since they could not do without them for traveling or for fighting. The French did much harm to the raising of horses by building roads, bridges and railroads, by imposing peace upon the warring tribes, and by taking possession of large areas of land which they turned into farms. Moreover, their attempts to improve the native breed were dismal failures: they produced horses ill-suited to local climate conditions, to the native vegetation, and to the needs of the population, and they introduced the sicknesses and defects of breeds which were not made to live in North (*SOAT*, pp. 35-40).

Before the conquest, each tribe was practically free from the Sultan's authority, as long as it paid its taxes. Each village was governed by a council elected by the whole tribe. A large portion of the arable land belonged to the tribe, and the land was apportioned between the families. The pastures were communal. The French government seized the tribal lands and divided them up between colonists from France (around 28 hectares per colonist). Out of nearly 7 million hectares owned by tribes, not even one million remained in their possession. Doctor Leroux noted that the French wanted to destroy the traditional social structures as well as the economic resources. The local elites, those who owned hundreds of horses, were drastically impoverished, since it was the policy of the French to weaken the elites and to bring the worst social elements to power (*SOAT*, p. 39).

At the head of these elements, Meven Mordiern placed Youzouf, who had sided with the French and who was rewarded for his treason with the rank of colonel in the French army. Actually, Youzouf was not an Algerian. He was a *mamelouk*, a white person who was not a Muslim and who had been kidnapped as a child by Muslims and raised to be a soldier in the Sultan's armies. Most of them were Caucasians, Turks, and Christians from Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece. Youzouf was of Italian origin. He was born around 1810 in a port of Tuscany. He was but a child when the boat on which he was traveling with his mother was captured by pirates from Barbary. He was sent to Tunis where he was brought up in the Bey's palace. The Bey had interested himself in a boy who was handsome and bright, and who later demonstrated remarkable courage, spirit, and physical prowess. Youzouf lost the good graces of the Bey on account of a love affair with one of the Bey's favourite women, and he had to flee for his life. He found refuge among the French, and he spent his whole life in their army in Algeria. He had a very successful career: when he died, around 1865, he had risen to the rank of general in command of the entire French light cavalry (*SOAT*, pp. 49-49b). What exactly was true about Youzouf's Italian origin? The information came from Youzouf himself, and historians do not guarantee its accuracy. According to Bey Ahmed, Youzouf was a renegade Jew. The Bey, to be sure, did not like Youzouf, and this rumour may have been spread by the enemies of a man whom they considered a traitor. Youzouf himself lied shamelessly whenever he could to embellish his deeds in the service of the French. He had been highly praised, for instance, when he had captured the fortress of Bône with a handful of French sailors. They had climbed over the walls of the fortress with ropes, and they had surprised the garrison. Youzouf did not say that the ropes had been thrown down to them by defenders whom he had bribed, and that there had been no risk. Youzouf had offered his services to the French as soon as they had arrived in Algeria, in 1830. He had worked for them as an interpreter, and soon after had been named a captain in the light cavalry (the *chasseurs d'Afrique*). He had advanced quickly, and by 1838 he had reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel in the *spahis*. He was hard on his countrymen: he had them beaten to force them to give up their money, he killed those who resisted, he stole their women and their property. In spite of these excesses (or possibly because of them?), he had a very successful career.

Meven Mordiern's attitude toward the behaviour of the French army in Algeria shows that he was not the worst of racists. Per Denez has commented on this point: "There are some unpleasant traits in Meven Mordiern's character. One of these is his racism. Some day it will be necessary to examine what this racism was, since Meven Mordiern is a writer whom one cannot pass over. I do not feel able to do this study. What I can say is this: it was a queer kind of racism. Meven Mordiern was attracted to primitive peoples, Indians, Arabs, Chinese,-- not to mention the Celts! --, peoples who had remained close to nature, living free in countries broad and untamed, either in antiquity or in our times. I don't recall having read the least sentence from his pen against the Jews. But in the *Skêtila* he expresses contempt for the weaker races, the ugly

races.[...] One sees the influence of this old time racism in the beautiful poem of Youenn Drezen *Kan da Gornog*. This has nothing to do with the racism of Renan, which is firmly based in his own period and in its emphasis on economical values. Renan writes: 'There is nothing repugnant in the conquest of a country populated by an inferior race by people of a superior race who come to settle there in order to rule it. While one must blame conquests between equal races, one must also recognize that the improvement of inferior races, or races which have been bastardized, by superior races obeys the divine order of mankind.' I do not like Meven Mordiern's literary racism. But compare it to Renan's technological racism! And compare the *Skêtila* to *La Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale de la France*, Ernest Renan, 1870." (Foreword to Meven Mordiern, *Envorennoù bugeliezh, Hor Yezh*, no. 205, March 1996, pp. 46-47). Per Denez is right, mostly. I say mostly, because one does find plenty of sentences against the Jews in Meven Mordiern's memoirs, and because his racism was based on the fallacious beliefs so prevalent in Pre-Romantic and Romantic times about the superiority of the Northern races. Ample confirmation may be found in the manuscripts preserved in the Houghton Library, Harvard University: *Envorennoù bugeliezh*, pp. 52-53, 221-222, 309-311, 325, 334; *Istor eur c'halvedigez*, pp. 1-7, 10-15, 25-29, 34-35, 57-60; *Istor berr eur c'halvedigez*, pp. 134-139, 222; *Tiegeziou bourc'hizien eus ar broiou-krec'h en XVIIIvet kantved hag an XIXvet kantved (1730-1896)*, pp. 3-7; *An diou levraoueg*, pp. 1-7, 34-35; *Selladou ouzh an tremened*, pp. XLXVII-L, C. Madame de Staël, at the beginning of the XIXth century, had proclaimed the superiority of the *littératures du Nord* over the *littératures du Midi*. And Gobineau, half a century later, had celebrated the strength and the courage of the tall, blond, blue-eyed and fair-skinned warriors of the North. As we have seen, Meven Mordiern's mother had found their ideal model in the Gauls of Antiquity portrayed by Henri Martin in his *Histoire de France* (Paris: Furne, vol. I, 1861), and she often read to her child the pages which celebrated their physical beauty and their bravery, adding: "We are neither Romans nor Latins, we are Gauls!" As we have seen, the lady's attitude on race was fairly common among the upper classes at the time.

Colonialism, for XIXth century Europeans, had its justification in racism. It might be truer to say that racism was an excuse and a pretext for colonialism. The British spoke of "*the lesser breeds*" and of "*the White Man's burden*", and the French of "*la mission civilisatrice de la France*". Meven Mordiern was not duped by such slogans. He had seen the true face of colonialism through his father's stories. He would have inclined to side with the colonized peoples in their struggle against the colonizers, but he realized that this would have been only a romantic gesture, a childish dream: "Like all children of the bourgeoisie in the second half of the XIXth century, I had read I don't know how many novels by Fenimore Cooper, Mayne-Reid, Gabriel Ferry and Gustave Aimard, four writers who rise above all other novelists in their description of life in the deserts of America since they have themselves led this life and seen the land and the people whom they talk about. These readings led me to be fascinated with the Indians, and one of the dreams I nurtured in my mind, when I was a child living in the country in Villiers, was to go Americas to help the natives push back the white people into the sea, a dream which has been quite common among many other children of the times." (*SOAT*, p. 159). Meven Mordiern had the greatest respect for the wild Indians of Mexico, the *Indios bravos*, those who had refused to submit to the invaders (*SOAT*, p. 159). And it must also be recognized that Meven Mordiern has never written a disparaging word about the Arabs or the Berbers. As to Algeria, he had adopted his father's judgment: "My father knew mostly the Tell, the Sahel, that is, the low plains which lie between the coastal mountain ranges (the plain of Oran, the plain of the Sig, the plain of the Mina, the plain of the Metidja), where the earth is fertile since they are covered with soil deposits brought for thousands of centuries by the rivers. Their thickness reaches from 2 or 3 meters to 30 meters or more. On the opposite, there is little fertile earth in the high plains of he



interior which stretch between the coastal Atlas range and the Ad-Atlas (or Saharian Atlas). Before the arrival of the French, in 1830, most of the coastal mountain ranges and of the highlands like the Djurdjura and the Aures covered with magnificent forests, the tall trees being mostly oaks (holm-oak, cork-oak, ilex) and pine trees (Numidian pine, Aleppo pine, umbrella pine, cedar, juniper), and, among the small trees, the underbrush and the bushes, pistachio, sandarak, broom. heather and myrtle. The worst destroyers in the world, however, are army people, officers and men, in time of war: as long as the army of France fought against the Arabs and the Berbers (that is, from 1830 to 1871), forests have been cut down to feed camp-fires, to build shelters, huts, houses, forts, food stores, barracks, and, later on, to provide the poles and the sleepers needed for telegraph lines and for railroad tracks. The destruction of the Algerian forests has been completed by the money-changers who flocked to the land pacified by the soldiers, and by the forest fires set by the Arabs and the Berbers whose best farm-land had been stolen and who tried to open new pastures for their beasts in the woods. When the sharp teeth of sheep and goats come after the fire, the trees are unable to return and the woods to be reclaimed, the topsoil is carried away by the wild water running down the mountainsides." A pity indeed for "a splendid country, full of wonders, man-made or made by the hand of Nature: towns and villages perched high on the summits of gigantic cliffs (Kalaa, Constantine, etc.), frightful gorges with tall rocks on each side and swift-running torrents at the bottom (gorges of Palestro, the Chiffa, *Chabet-el-Akra* 'the Opening of Anguish'), the gorges of the Roummel with their water-falls and their natural bridges, churning water rising above rocks of chalk and silex of all shapes and all colors (Hammam Meschoutin), etc." (*SOAT*, pp. 44-46).

## II. THE MEXICAN WAR

Mexico, after the revolution of 1854 which toppled the dictatorial government of General Santa Ana, was divided between Conservatives (wealthy landowners, church leaders, army generals, upper bourgeoisie), and Liberals, who wanted to give power to the lower classes and to the Indians. The liberal victory, in 1854, was to place the power in the hands of Benito Juárez, a full-blooded Indian. The new constitution, which was voted in 1857, brought about the 1858 civil war between Liberals and Conservatives. The Liberals won again, and Juárez remained in power. He was elected President in 1861, and he pushed through major anti-clerical legislation: the Church was separated from the State, Church property was confiscated by the State, and religious orders were dissolved. Juárez also refused to pay interest on the money borrowed by previous governments from England, France, and Spain. These countries sent a military expedition to force Juárez to resume payment, and Vera Cruz was captured in December 1861. Juárez ordered the payments to be made, and England and Spain recalled their troops. Napoléon III, however, wanted to conquer all of Mexico. He continued his campaign with the complicity of the Conservatives, and he sent more troops. Meven Mordiern's father was among them.

On May 28, 1859, Doctor Leroux had been promoted medical-major (2nd class) in the 7th Battalion of *chasseurs à pied* (light infantry) based in Besançon. This battalion, was to be part of the expeditionary army sent to Mexico. On August 20 1862, its 800 men and non-coms and its 25 officers left Besançon for Cherbourg by train. On the 22nd, they embarked on the *Tilsitt*. In addition to the crew of 450 sailors and to the 7th battalion, there was also on board the sappers of the regiment of engineers. The *Tilsitt* belonged to a fleet of five ships which transported an entire army corps composed of two infantry regiments, the 7th battalion, gunners, drivers of army vehicles, medics, and army cooks with field-stoves. The squadron stopped in the islands of Tenerife and Martinique. In Tenerife, or perhaps in Martinique, it took aboard a

squadron of *chasseurs d'Afrique* (light cavalry), along with their horses. On October 12, the fleet reached Vera Cruz. The city was almost deserted. The inhabitants had fled because of the vomito negro, the yellow fever which was then raging on the lowlands along the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, the *Tierras Calientes*. They had sought refuge on the *Tierras Templadas*, the land between 1000 and 2000 meters of altitude, or on the *Tierras Frías*, above 2000 meters. After debarking, on October 14, the army corps started for Puente Nacional, a village abandoned by the Mexican. Their progress was slow, on account of the poor roads and of the tropical heat. There was danger also: the soldiers were under fire from Mexicans hidden in the woods. They were commanded by Porfirio Diaz, who later became President of Mexico. There were other dangers: coral snakes whose bite was deadly, for instance, and sicknesses of all kinds: yellow fever, dysentery, typhus, diarrhea, hepatitis, sunstroke, not to mention the one which sent hundreds of soldiers to the hospital, syphilis. From March 6 to July 31st 1864, for instance, 905 soldiers were admitted to the San Luis Potosi hospital: fever: 448; battle wounds: 78; syphilis: 379. Two hundred more soldiers with syphilis had been taken care of in the infirmary of the 62nd regiment.

After Puente Nazional, the army corps stayed for two months in Jalapa, a very pretty town according to Doctor Leroux. There were ten to twelve thousand inhabitants. Soldiers were not allowed to hunt on account of the *guerilleros* who could have ambushed them. The army corps left Jalapa in early January 1863 on its way to Perote. One non-com deserted and went over to the Mexicans. Many more were to do the same before the end of the war. The army corps stayed one month in Perote, waiting for the entire army to gather in front of Puebla, in Amozok. General Bazaine was in command. Doctor Leroux arrived in Amozok around the 10th or the 12th of March 1863. The population of Amozok gave a warm welcome to the French. Puebla was surrounded by an army of 24000 French and 2000 Mexican auxiliaries under the command of General Marquez. General Almonte, one of the Mexicans who had favored French intervention in Mexico, was also there. The French had 56 guns, 48 of them field artillery and mountain-guns quite unable to bring down fortress walls. They had only 8 cannons fit for a siege. The Mexicans, under the command of General Ortega, had 20000 men and 151 cannons. Around the end of March, the French made an attempt to capture the fort which was the key to the defense of Puebla. The assault failed, with heavy losses on both sides. In the following days, the Mexicans attempted a sortie to make their junction with an army coming from the interior. During a battle in Cholula, two squadrons of *chasseurs d'Afrique* nearly destroyed the best cavalry Mexican cavalry troops: the Durango red lancers. Their colonel was made prisoner, and the Mexicans had trouble getting back inside Puebla. Ship cannons were sent from Vera Cruz: they reached Puebla at the beginning of May. The shelling began around the 14th or the 15th, and when the breach was wide enough, the assault began. The French soldiers rushed inside and the Mexicans surrendered unconditionally. They were imprisoned in the Guadalupe fort, on a mountain above Puebla. Later they were sent to Vera Cruz. To keep them from running away, the French took away their belts, their suspenders, and all the buttons which kept up their pants, so that in order to walk they had to hold up their pants with their hands. In spite of this, most of them managed to escape, General Ortega among them. (SOAT, p. 126)].

The French army reached Mexico City in June. Juárez and his government had to flee. Napoleon III created the Empire of Mexico, and the crown was offered to the archduke Maximilian of Austria, the brother of the Emperor of Austria Francis Joseph. Maximilian accepted, and he arrived in Mexico with his wife Carlotta in 1864. He remained in power until 1867.

Doctor Leroux had remained only ten days in Puebla before leaving for Mexico City to look into the cause of a typhus epidemic which had started shortly after the taking of the city. It was a five day ride, and he passed by two snow-capped volcanoes, the Popocatepetl ("the

smoking mountain”), and the Ixtahuatl (“the lying woman”, since it looks like a sleeping woman wrapped in white linen, the snow fields). In October 1863, the doctor was named chief surgeon of the auxiliary hospital of La Paz, but on the 28th he was assigned instead to the field hospital of Tepeji. He received his marching orders for the 31th. This order was a prelude to the events which were to unfold during the following two months in order to bring the entire country, larger than France, under the control of the French army. It was General Bazaine’s plan, first, to sweep the Mexican bands which were still resisting as far as possible toward the deserts in the North. These bands included the remains of the regular army controlled by the Liberals, and bands of partisans (*guerilleros*), among whom there were many bandits (*salteadores*). Second, to convince the peace-loving Mexicans to accept Emperor Maximilian’s rule by showing them the might of the army which supported him.

Two army corps commanded by Generals de Castagny and Douay were used by Bazaine to implement his plan. Working with them was the newly created Mexican imperial army led by General Mejía, a full-blooded Indian and an expert fighter. Mejía and Miramón were the two Mexican generals who were later executed in Queretaro by a firing-squad, along with Maximilian, after the departure of the French army. General Bazaine himself took command of a brigade marching between the two army corps to serve as a link between them and to help them clear the land. This expedition toward the North, which started in December 1863, reached its goal in January 1864. The sweeping operation planned by Bazaine had been executed successfully.

Doctor Leroux had served only one month as chief surgeon of the La Paz hospital when he was sent to Queretaro, again as chief-surgeon with the assistant-surgeon second-class Émile Lévy as his aide, to create an hospital in this city. Here is an excerpt of the doctor’s notes: “They spent only one month or two in Queretaro. The service was fairly light. Here is an excerpt of Doctor Leroux’s notes about his stay:”The town is fairly large, with beautiful avenues. The countryside is quite fertile and well cultivated, with sugar cane, orange groves and fruit trees from Europe. The town people are for the most part of Spanish descent or half-breeds, that is, born of unions with native people, the Aztecs. We were magnificently housed, my assistant surgeon and I, in a big beautiful house which had a pleasant garden with orange trees, lemon trees and coffee bushes. Many nuns whose convent had been taken and burnt down by Juárez’ soldiers. When we were in Queretaro, town people threw flowers and crowns at us. There also we went to see a play performed by a Spanish company. Later we were invited to a ball given for the army by the town people.” (*SOAT*, pp. 149-151) TThe local upper classes, obviously, were not for the Liberals.

Meanwhile, the army had advanced North. In December 1863, Doctor Leroux was sent to join the second army corps field hospital in Celaya. They made way for Guadalajara, passing through Trapuato:”From Trapuato we went to Leon. The road is fine and lined with false pepper-trees. In an *hacienda* the name of which I have forgotten, two officers from the 62nd who had gone hunting did not return. We stayed an extra day to look for them. The owner of the hacienda, a handsome man, was questioned, but could give no definite information about the two officers’ disappearance. It was only later that the murderers were found. They had disarmed and killed the officers, and thrown the bodies down a well where they were found. The killers, two *peones* of the owner, were sentenced on the spot without a trial and executed. On the very day when the two officers had disappeared, I had gone hunting and I had killed a hare and some pigeons.

After a day’s delay to look for the killers, we started for León. We arrived there the next day. León is a large city of 100.000 people. Like all Mexican cities, it has straight streets and a beautiful square planted with orange trees. This square is the first one (except for Mexico City) in which I see two story houses with exterior balconies. There is no production in León except for cereals and vegetables. The produce is excellent, the lettuce especially. The celery also is

excellent, and it is not uncommon to see girls, and even ladies, walking down the street while nibbling on or celery. León is in the middle of a huge plain which is well cultivated. Our fruit trees prosper there next to tropical fruit. We rest there for two days before resuming our journey toward Guadalajara." (*SOAT*, pp. 154-158). The doctor spent three months in Guadalajara. He then was ordered to San Luis de Potosi, where he saw Apaches. Meven Mordiern, when a little boy, especially enjoyed asking his father about the wild Indians (*Indios bravos*). He often heard him tell how he had seen Opata warriors, masters of the bow and arrow, hit coins which people threw in the air. The Opatas lived in the mountain ranges west of Chihuahua. They spoke shoshone, a language akin to the Mexican spoken by the Aztecs." (*SOAT*, p. 163). After three months in San Luis, the doctor accompanied Colonel Cousin through the Mapimi desert, where they nearly died of thirst. A providential rain-storm enabled men and horses to drink (*SOAT*, p. 160).

Doctor Leroux did not return to France until 1867. Meven Mordiern had listed all of the towns where his father had been after his exploration of the Mapimi desert, between 1864 ha 1867: Durango, Mazatlán, (Admiral Mazer's fleet), San Blas, Tepic, Guadalajara. Guaymas was attached to the list. His father had also mentioned the names of Acapulco, Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, and Orizaba, but after so many years he could not be surse his father had also been in these places.

In early February 1864, Doctor Lerroux was in Guadalaraja, kept busy with the usual load of patients: for the first quarter, the wounded in combat were only a small fraction of the total (35, against 76 cases of typhus, 214 of syphilis, 2 of diarrhea, 12 of dysentery) (*SOAT*, pp. 173-174). The number of wounded makes it clear that the Mexicans still resisted the invaders. On April 4 1864, Doctor left Guadalajara to take up new duties in León. On the way, in Tepatitlán, he was given orders to go to the San Luis Potosi hospital where he began his service on May 8 1864. In a letter addressed from San Luis Potosi to the surgeon-in-chief, Doctor Leroux mentions "fifty patients, twenty of whom wounded by gunshot" (*SOAT*, p. 179). They had been sent by the field-hospital of the first brigade. klañvdiourien).The doctor remained in San Luis Potosi until September1864. In a note attached to the list of patients for July, he mentions that there were seventy four wounded. (*SOAT*, p. 193).

The doctor was ordered to leave San Luis Potosi on September 25. Hehad been named chief-surgeon of the field-hospital for the army of the North led by General de de Castagny. He accompanied a convoy going to Vanegas. In December 1864, he was in Durango. The list of patients seen in October 1864 shows that the number of wounded soldiers was still quite small (18) in comparison with other cases (122) (*SOAT*, p. 200). On February 5, 1865, in notes written in Mazatlán, Doctor Leroux explains the army left Durango on December 22, on its way to Mazatlán. On January 1st, the first corps led by Colonel Garnier had to storm a fort defended by Corona's soldiers (*l'Espinasso del Diablo*). The French lost 10 men killed and eighteen wounded (*SOAT*, p. 201). On January 10, the second corps left a company from the 7th battalion in Los Veranos to defend a non-military convoy whose mules had been seized by the Administrative Service. At six p.m., the company was attacked and nearly totally destroyed by Corona's entire force. 25 men only were able to escape. On the following day, General de Castagny's army returned to Los Veranos. On the battle-field, they found 18 horribly mutilated bodies and some wounded, two of them near death. They died the following night in Noria of mortal wounds in the skull, the brain, and the chest. Doctor Leroux brought back only three wounded men: the commanding officed, hit by five bullets, but likely to survive, and two men hit by bullets which passed between the flesh and the skin. On the same day, the 11th, just after burying the dead, the army was attacked by Corona's entire cavalry. The French lost four men killed, one of them a major, and six wounded. One of them, a Swedish officer, was shot point blank but the bullet

went through his left shoulder without doing any significant harm. The entire army settled in Mazatlán on the 14th (*SOAT*, pp. 201-205). The roll of patients between February and June shows 36 wounded, and a much larger number of soldiers suffering from typhus, dysentery, sunstroke, malaria, and syphilis. Letters received by Doctor Leroux from other medical officers discuss the progress of the war. One of these letters, written on March 31 1865, describes the landing of French troops at Guaymas and their taking of the town:

”My dear Mr Leroux,

I keep my word and I give you news of my arrival in this country. The crossing has been nice enough, in spite of having been, during the second night, thrown about by a raging sea. We entered the port of Guaymasa on the 29th, at 9 or 10 a.m. Immediately we started with the landing. From aboard ship, we saw a number of Mexicans coming and going through the town. When the boats which carried the soldiers came close to the shore, the bands of Mexicans, one thousand or fifteen hundred men commanded by Patoni and Pesqueyra, started to run away. Seeing this, the captain of the *Lucifer* fired a few well-aimed shells which made their flight more difficult. The *D’Assas*, which was near the *Lucifer*, took part in the shelling, sending ten shells or so at the Mexicans. As soon as they were on land, our troops (two companies, one commanded by Captain Niger, the other by Captain de Ségur) pursued them for nearly one hour and a half. There quite a few rifle shots, and Vachier, the gunnery-lieutenant, had to fire three shells at them [the Mexicans]. After the affair, we did not suffer a single scratch. This is the war deed which will go by the name of the capture of Guaymas. It is probable, and even certain, that some people will say much more about our arrival in Sonora. I give you leave to call them liars if they go beyond what is related here.” (*SOAT*, pp. 210-212). On April 7 1865, Doctor Aronsohn wrote from Noria:

“My dear Leroux,

[...] Surely you know that we are piling up laurels on our heads. We have captured Corona in Naranjos. Mr ... [Note by Meven Mordiern:”The name is illegible”] has had since another fight in Coral del Santo with Lurpo’s troop, which may be considered now as totally disbanded” (*SOAT*, pp.212-213). The Mexicans had not given up, however, as is shown in this letter written from Guaymas by Doctor Cazeneuve on May 3 1865: was not tHa d’an 3ved a viz Mae 1865 e voe kaset al lizher-mañ gant Cazeneuve eus Guaymas:”[...] We are constantly on alert, always on the verge of being attacked by 1500 or 2000 men (they say), located a few leagues only from town. We have arranged everything to give them a dirty welcome if they come at us, but with the few troops we have, we can’t go after them in their lair, and their presence is enough to prevent supplies from coming to market.” (*SOAT*, p. 213). The war was going better for the French around San Sebastian, according to letters from Doctor Gouchet dated May 25, 1865, June 1st, 1865, and June 8, 1865, in which he mentions that military operations are over in his area (*SOAT*, pp. 213-215).

On July 6, Doctor Leroux wrote from Mazatlán to his friend and colleague Damour in France:”[...]You ask news of my health, of body as well as of spirit. In body, without being sick, I suffer a lot from the tropical heat which reigns in Mazatlán. In spirit, I am disheartened at times, but briefly only, and so much the better for me! One needs philosophy in life, and take the world as it is. [...] Since I have left Mexico City, I have done nothing except run around Mexico. First, I was attached to Brault’s field hospital. I made a stay in Queretaro. From there I was assigned to León. Afterwards, in Guadalajara. The chief-director’s arrival sent me away from there. Sent to San Luis, I stayed there until I was named chief of the field hospital of the second army corps after Lespiau. With the army corps, I have taken part in all of its military operations, and I have thus been through; Nuevo León, Chahuila [Meven Mordiern appends this note:”In spite of all my efforts, I cannot read anything but Chahuila. It must be a *lapsus calami* for Coahuila or

Chihuahua."], Durango, and, finally, Sinaloa where I am presently. As soon as I am promoted to first class, I plan to ask leave to return to..."(*SOAT*, p. 215-216). Doctor was to remain in Mazatlán until May 1866. He may have visited Guaymas at that time. After Mazatlán, he was in San Blas, Tepic, and Guadalajara. He kept the list of the places where he stopped between San Blas and Guadalajara:

November 18: from San Blas to Chapotillo.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 19: Navarette
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20: Trapiche
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21: Tepic (November 22 and 23: halt).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24: San Cayetano
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25: San Leonel
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26: Ojo de Agua or Los Calamos
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27: Useta
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28: Mespá
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29: El Ocote
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30: Saucillo

December 1: Tequesquite (December 2: halt)

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3: La de Teresa
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4: Amatitan
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5: Zapopan
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6: Guadalajara" (*SOAT*, p. 220)

Doctor Leroux was back in Mexico City in February 1867. He passed through Orizaba and Córdoba before going to Vera-Cruz, and he landed in France on the 11th of March or April 1867. He was among the last of the expeditionary force to leave Mexico.

The power of Prussia was increasing in Europe. The Prussian army had defeated the Austrians in Sadowa in 1866, and the government of France was scared. Napoleon III recalled the army from Mexico. Maximilian was left to fend for himself with the Mexicans who had sided with him. Doctor Leroux was not sorry to leave. Had he been sorry, he would have been the only one among the doctors and officers of the expeditionary corps, as appears from the letters he received while still in Mazatlán from others who were then returning to France. One of them wrote from Vera Cruz, on February 12: "On leaving this vile country, I give you a hearty handshake, wishing you too to leave without delay." Another one, after his return, wrote on August 12: "... Here I am, since eight days, among my folks in Autun, our good old town. Your Empress Carlotta [Meven Mordiern appends this note: "Votre impératrice Carlotta, Votre has been underlined by the writer] has arrived in France. I bet it is to settle here, and her high and mighty husband will not delay in his return either. [Another note by Meven Mordiern: "My father's colleague was completely wrong. Empress Carlotta had come to ask help and assistance from the European heads of state. She lost her mind when she saw her mission would fail. Her husband remained in Mexico and was executed by a firing squad in Queretaro on May 19, 1867, by the Mexican rebels."]. May you also leave that beautiful country which I wish never to see again!" (*SOAT*, pp. 222-223). Maximilian had not lasted long after the French army's departure. Two Mexican generals who had collaborated with him, Miramón and Mejía, were executed with him, as Meven Mordiern explained, but it was not on May 19, as he says, but on June 19.

In spite of what Doctor Leroux and his friends thought of Mexico, a few French soldiers deserted and stayed behind. Among them was one of the doctor's orderlies, an Alsatian. When the doctor passed through Córdoba on his way to Vera Cruz, he made a few days' halt in order to sell his two horses. Two days after selling his horses, his orderly deserted. He then learned that the orderly had been followed since Tepic by a native woman. The doctor then understood also

why the orderly was always requesting Indian corn to feed the horses, claiming that the rations from the army were not enough. Obviously, the orderly had been feeding his native woman with the corn. In deserting, he took with him the doctor's hunting gun, his cartridge belt, cartridges, gun powder, and other supplies. There were quite a few deserters among the soldiers and the non-coms. Of those who remained in the new country they had chosen, some did quite well. (*SOAT*, pp. 221-222).

In all of Meven Mordiern's writings about the conquest of Mexico, there is nothing that shows contempt or scorn for the Mexicans, nothing that shows that the French had any right to be there. The expedition, to be sure, was a most exciting thing for a boy who was enthusiastic about military adventures. His father's stories were full of encounters between the guerilleros and the French, of riflshots, of horses leaping through the tropical greenery. He talked of snakes slithering through the chaparral, of Mexicans hiding in the bushes, with their rifles aimed at a convoy. And suddenly the bullets flying, gunsmoke rising above the scene, soldiers swearing, horses rearing or falling wounded. What a delight for a boy who loved the smell of gunpowder (*SOAT*, p. 216). He also loved the stories about the *Indios bravos*, Navajos, Apaches, and Comanches, and about such colorful figures as Colonel Dupin. He commanded the anti-guerilla force, the best horsemen and fighters in the expeditionary corps, hotheads who enjoyed riding about the land. Colonel Dupin was a magnificent leader of men, a true XVIth century condottiere, totally fearless, a lady-killer. With his black beard and his sunburnt face, he looked liked a pirate and threw fear into the enemy. For his troops' uniforms, he had chosen red capes and wide-brimmed Mexican *sombreros*. At the head of his men, he cleared the *Tierras calientes* of all the guerilla bands which were there (*SOAT*, pp. 214-215). It is clear to the reader, however, that Meven Mordiern was not one of those chauvinistic Frenchmen who believe their country is always in the right. At any rate, if ever he had had to take sides, he would not have chosen France, but Brittany.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MEVEN MORDIERN AND THE *EMSAV* I. FROM WORLD WAR I TO WORLD WAR II

Meven Mordiern's memoirs do not provide much information about his participation in the life of the Breton movement, the *Emsav*, between 1916 and the year of his death, his death, in 1949. The names of major figures in the second *Emsav* appear in his rough drafts: Roparz Hémon, Abeozen, Andouard, Perrot, Youenn Drezen, Langlais, M. Gourlaouen, one of the Delaporte brothers, but without any further detail for the most part. There are some indications that he was on friendly terms with Abeozen, who talked about him to Roparz Hémon, and thus led to his fruitful collaboration to Roparz Hémon's journal *Gwalarn*. It was also Abeozen who, in the late twenties and in the thirties, loaned him many books which he needed for his research (*B*, unpaginated). There is no comparison, to be sure, between his detailed relation of his childhood and of his youth, and these occasional allusions to his life in Brittany. We have, however, another major source of information about Meven Mordiern and the life of the *Emsav*: his correspondence with his friend Frañsez Vallée, especially after Vallée, in 1938, left his house in Saint-Brieuc and went to live in a nursing-home run by nuns in the suburbs of Rennes. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate the letters written by Meven Mordiern to his friend, if indeed they still exist. Vallée's letters, however, are preserved with Meven Mordiern's manuscripts in the Houghton Library, at Harvard University, and they throw considerable light on Meven Mordiern's and Vallée's activities in the *Emsav*, as well as on their attitudes toward other Breton activists, and their reactions to the historical events which they witnessed and on the impact of these events on the Breton movement. The bulk of Vallée's letters were written in Rennes between 1938 and his death, in 1949. His last letter was sent on December 10, 1949, for the feast of his friend's patron saint, René. The years 1938-1948 are especially important in the history of the *Emsav*, since they include the war years, the German occupation, and the Liberation.

Meven Mordiern has explained, in his autobiography *Istor berr eur c'halvedigez* (p. 102, notenn 92), how his collaboration with Frañsez Vallée began: "In 1903, the *Notennou* [he refers to his monumental history of the early Celts, *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz*] had been written rather quickly and sent to Erwan ar Moal who was to translate them into Breton. For many reasons, he did nothing. So, in 1910, Fransez Vallée got hold of them and started to translate them and to publish them. After the first four sections were published in 1911-12 as they had been written for Dir-na-Dor [the bardic name of the Breton writer Erwan ar Moal], I followed the wise advice of F. Vallée: 'As long as we are doing it, let's do it right!': I increased, improved and enriched the other sections before giving them to be translated." The work was not finished until 1916. On April 4, Vallée announced to his friend: "I have finished translating the *Notennou*, but I don't have time to type up the final sections. As soon as I can, I will send you my work". He sends further news on a visiting-card dated October 12: "... I had to leave the translation of the *Notennou* for a while longer.

Ar Moal is on the front line: may God save him for Brittany!" There is a gap in the letters between 1916 and 1920. In his letters of that period, Meven Mordiern had probably mentions troubles and riots which occurred in Paris at that time. On April 25, 1920, Vallée writes: "Thank you for your good letter and for your collaboration which will be so valuable for the new dictionary! [...] What you say about the future is most disturbing. If the revolution were to start in Paris, why not come here? [...] I don't know for sure which direction my life will take. I will seek



to follow your wise counsel, keep working for the future of Keltia [...] Write to me to give news especially if there should be some upheaval on May 1st.” [Labor Day is celebrated on that date in France: it is often accompanied by social unrest. The next item in the correspondence is a visiting-card from Vallée dated August 27, 1921. By that time, Meven Mordiern had settled in Saint-Helouri, in Pordic, close to Saint-Brieuc where Vallée was living. Meven Mordiern’s mother had died at the beginning of the year, and he no longer had any reason to stay in Paris. Vallée had begun to translate Meven Mordiern historical novel, *Skêta Segobrani*, into Breton. Other letters written in 1922 mention various people interested the language and the culture of Brittany: Yann-Vari Perrot, the leader of *Feiz ha Breiz*; Frañsez Kaorel, a Breton poet, Ivonig Picard, a Breton writer, and the German celticist Pokorny. The latter was going to review the *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz* in a German journal. There is another interruption between the end of 1922 and the end of July 1927. Between July 26, 1927, and the beginning of 1931, there are only three visiting-cards of little importance except for the one dated February 10, 1931, which mentions that Debauvais came to visit on Monday evening, and that he will return Wednesday or Thursday, and that Meven Mordiern might wish to come. This shows that Vallée had a fairly close relationship with Debauvais, the leader of the Breton separatist movement, and that Meven Mordiern was also probably interested in meeting him.

Vallée and Meven Mordiern had been collaborating closely for years. On March 3, 1932, Vallée invites his friend for lunch on the following Sunday to look at post-cards sent by the *Canadian Pacific Railway*. Vallée was then writing his book *Eur Breizad er C’hanada e dibenn an XIXvet kantved hag e derou an XXved: F.L.T. Donroë, pennadou dibabet diwar e lizerou ha laket e brezoneg*, which was published in 1933. The following letter bears no date, but it was probably written in 1932 or 1933. It announces the visit of the Secretary of the Basque Academy, and there will be a large meeting of the *Breuziez-Veur Vreiz* to welcome him:”It will be important to hear from him what the Basques are doing to give life to their language. Come in the morning without fault.

Vallée spent the summer of 1934 in Porz-Hamonet, Gommenec’h, Lanvollon. Since he was not seeing his friend two or three times a week, as usual in Saint-Brieuc, the letters and post-cards written at that time are more numerous: eleven in three months. Vallée talks mostly about Breton words, sayings, and traditions collected by him in the area. He mentions letters he has received from two Breton writers, Ar Berr [Léon Le Berre, bardic name Abalor] and Berthou [Guillaume Berthou], and a manuscript from another Breton writer, Quaba [Kaba]. He discusses his reading: the *Mabinogion*, and a book by Roparz Hemon, *Penaos am eus adkvavet Breiz*. On September 13, he was back in Saint-Brieuc, and he could announce to his friend that their *Geriadur* had been printed [Vallée is referring to the monumental Breton dictionary which they co-authored, with the help of another collaborator, Émile Ernault].

There is another interruption in the correspondence from September 1934 to July 1935. Vallée return to Porz-Hamonet for the summer. Then he went to the meeting of the *Bleun-Brug*, a Breton cultural organization, in Skrignag. During this summer, he wrote twenty-two letters to his friend. These letters show that the two friends were mostly interested in the current state and the future of the Breton language. Vallée discusses the state of the language in the Lanvollon area: many would like to see it introduced into the schools, and the matter often comes up in conversation. He is pleased to see that some youths are interested in the language, and that the national consciousness and the wish to rise again is not totally lost among the people. Current Breton publications are a frequent subject. Special issues of the journals *Ar Falz* and *Gwalarn* have been devoted to educator Yann Sohier [a Breton educator who pioneered the use of Breton in the schools]. Ar Mason [another Breton writer] has published an essay about Buddhism in the journal *Dihunamb*. Vallée is not too sure, after reading a recent issue of *Gwalarn*, what to think

about Roparz Hemon's "*brezoneg eeun*" [Roparz Hemon's plan for a Basic Breton]. Vallée has received a letter from Canon Guillevic [a priest, writer and educator from the Vannes area] requesting him to publish his *Conseils aux écrivains*. He would like to see his *Mots classés d'après le sens* brought out by their publisher Prudhomme [this was the publisher who had brought out their major writings]. He answers Meven Mordiern's request for translations of such expressions as "do ut des" (*da gaout eskemm e roan dit*), and "to be or not to be" (*beza pe ziveza*), and others. He has a request of his own: two or three copies of *Skêtla Segobrani* for a disciple of Sohier. Having read his friend's latest work, *Prederiadennou diwar-benn ar yezou hag ar brezhoneg* [*Reflexions upon languages and Breton*], he has nothing but praise for it, both as to form and content. He sees it as a model for the language of science and knowledge. Choleau is trying to organize something for the Breton language, and Du Cleuziou is pushing for the publication of his *Conseils aux écrivains*. On September 10, he encourages his friend: Roparz Hemon will do everything possible for whatever is entrusted to him. The trust, as it turns out, was well placed. It was Roparz Hemon who had published Meven Mordiern's *Istor ar Bed* and who would also publish his *Prederiadennou diwar-benn ar yezou hag ar brezhoneg* in the journal which he edited, *Gwalarn*. Other news include a letter from An Diberder and his work for the Breton language, another letter from Kerlann [the educator Delalande] about the success of his Breton language summer school, and visits from young Bretons who want to study and work for Brittany. These letters show that Vallée's and Meven Mordiern's primary concern was the preservation and promotion of the language and culture of Brittany. This is what Vallée is doing when he is collecting local words, sayings, and items of folklore. This is what they both do when they publish dictionaries, grammars, essays on language, and when they spread Breton books and publications. The individuals whose names Vallée mentions in his letters without identifying them further are obviously already known to his friend. All of them are actively working for the same goal, the preservation and promotion of the Breton language. They are all writers, publishers, educators, or supporters of the Breton movement. Most of them are listed in Raoul Lukian's *Geriadur ar skrivagnerien ha yezhourien* [*Dictionary of writers and linguists*] (Brest: Al Liamm, 1992). This emphasis on language is easily explained. It is concisely expressed by the slogan: "*Hep Brezhoneg, Breizh ebet.*" [Without Breton, no Brittany]. One must remember that since the beginnings of the French nation-state, in the XVIth century, it has been a constant goal of the ruling power to mold a number of disparate ethnic and linguistic groups (Normans, Bretons, Basques, Catalans, Provençals, Alsatians, Flemings...) into a single political and cultural entity. The French state in all its forms (monarchy, empire, republic) has constantly sought to eradicate every kind of difference in the populations over which it exerted political control. This has been achieved through military conquest, and through an ever-increasing centralization of the government machinery, but also through every form of cultural control. Louis the XIVth, for instance, was convinced that all religious dissidents, be they Jansenist Catholics or Protestants, were a threat to his authority, and he used all the resources of the state to crush them. Language differences were also seen as a threat to government control. Since the Royal Edict of Villers-Cotterêt, in 1539, the only language recognized by French courts of law has been French, and the enforcement of this rule has become more and more rigid through the centuries. The elementary school system, which became compulsory for all children on French soil at the end of the XIXth century, has been used as a tool to impose the exclusive use of French upon all children, no matter which language was spoken in their home. The state educational system is the only authority empowered to grant diplomas or degrees at all levels, primary, secondary, college, graduate, or professional. All tax monies for the public school system are collected by the state, and only the state has sole authority over their disbursement. Local townships or municipalities have no say in the matter. This is a far cry from the American system with its local school boards

and taxes levied locally. It is obvious, therefore, that the only way in which minority languages can be introduced in the school curriculum at the local level is to bring pressure on the state. It is this pressure, exerted through demonstrations, marches, and other campaigns aimed at public opinion and influencing the political establishment, which has extracted concessions (grudgingly granted, to be sure), and made it possible for local initiative to bring about, at long last and in a limited way, the teaching of minority languages at the elementary and secondary level, mostly in the Alsatian, Basque, and Breton areas. Ironically, international pressure on the French government to sign the *European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages* has stiffened the resistance of the state. The legal monopoly of the French language has even been inscribed in the national Constitution, a provision which the government is using as an excuse for refusing to sign the European Charter. It would of course be quite easy for the National Assembly to delete the article from the Constitution, but every government, no matter what party was in power, has refused to do so. One may find an updated survey of the problem in Pierre-Yves Belan's article, "L'espace juridique du breton en droit français" (*Breizh ha pobloù Europa. Mélanges en l'honneur de Per Denez* (Hor Yezh-Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1999), pp. 57-78. It would appear, from recent news (May 1999), that the French government may sign some of the articles of the Charter, which still would have to be ratified by the French Parliament in the year 2000.

When Vallée and Meven Mordiern linked the future of the Breton people to the preservation of the Breton language, they were therefore acting quite rationally. They had in mind the example given in the early years of the XIXth century by the revival of nationalism among many European ethnic groups: Catalans, Basques, Irish, Welsh, Scottish, Greeks, Danes, and, of course, all of the non-Germanic populations which were then part of the Austrian Empire. The resolution of political and territorial conflicts originating in ethnic and linguistic differences has been achieved peacefully in very few instances only. Belgium and Switzerland immediately come to mind but this has not been the case elsewhere, as is obvious from what has happened in Ireland or in Yugoslavia. Meven Mordiern expressed his thinking on the subject in the work for which Vallée congratulated him in the summer of 1935, his *Prederiadennou diwar-benn yezou hag ar brezhoneg*. In this essay, he stresses his belief that languages and countries can be saved through the work of cultural elites. Although he is well aware of the impact of socio-political events for the future of a civilization, he considers that language and culture are the paramount factors, language most of all, since language is the essential instrument through which a civilization may flower. And civilization, for him, means above all the conquest of knowledge. Hence the paramount value of education to form the men needed to enable the Breton people to fulfill its highest destiny. No wonder, therefore, that Vallée's and Meven Mordiern's friends and acquaintances should include mostly writers, educators, publishers, and intellectuals working for similar goals. They might show interest in, and even sympathy for the leaders of the Breton autonomist party, but for them the linguistic and cultural battle must first be won. Judging from hindsight, the Breton cause would have fared much better if the political leaders of the Breton autonomist party, Frañsez Debauvais and Olier Mordrel, had not followed the example set by the Irish nationalists who, during World War I, accepted Germany's aid. Mordrel and Debauvais sided with the Nazi government, expecting to be given independence from France by the German forces of occupation. They made a grievous blunder. First, because the German government found it more expedient to deal with the collaborationist government of Marshall Pétain; second, because they should have known, as early as 1941, when Russia and America entered the war, that the Germans were bound to lose; third, because they handed subsequent French governments a handy weapon to tar all Breton nationalists with the pro-Nazi brush, in spite of the fact that only a handful of Bretons actually collaborated with Germanys, and in spite of the fact that Bretons made up a good half of De Gaulle's Free French Forces and a good third of the

*Résistance*. It took at least twenty years for the Breton movement to regain the ground lost through Debauvais' and Mordrel's error of political judgment.

There is another interruption in Vallée's correspondence from September 1935 to the summer of 1936. The letters resume on August 22, 1936. Vallée was in Skrignag again, as a guest of Yann-Vari Perrot. He keeps his friend informed of the progress of the Breton movement and of the increasing number of people returning to the Breton language: there is even one vice-admiral among them, named Laurent, who has translated a selection of Breton stories and written a well-informed preface. He discusses the quality of the Breton spoken in the area, in town as well as in the countryside, and illustrates the point with a short rhyme which pokes fun at Bretons who use inappropriate words: "*Tud Gouezeg a zo droch: / Eus ur c'hardi e reont eul loch / Hag eus eun ibil e reont eur broch.*" [The people of Gouezeg are funny:/ They call a cart-house a "loch" / And a dowel a "broch"]. He also talks of a meeting held in Vannes under the direction of Herrieu (a Breton writer who wrote in the Vannes dialect; he was the editor of the journal *Dihunamb*): Roparz Hemon had attended the meeting and he will ask him for news. In another letter dated of the 28, Vallée mentions he has had an answer from Roparz Hemon, as well as a post-card from Xavier de Langlais (a Breton writer from the Vannes area). He has been unable to go to the meeting of the *Bleun Brug* held in Rosko, because of ill health, but he has seen many of the people who had attended as they passed through Skrignag on their way home. Vallée was not pleased with Herrieu, and Meven Mordiern was not either. They thought he was a trouble-maker, a source of conflict and division in the Breton movement because of his obstinate opposition to the unification of the four major Breton dialects. Herrieu found a justification in the fact that the dialects of Kerne, Leon, and Landreger are much closer to each other than the Vannes dialect. Vallée ranks Herrieu among those difficult spirits who are always trying to mess up things. Fortunately, there are also sensible people who follow a straight path, like Perrot, who is able to attract all of the good Bretons. Perrot is also a remarkable scholar. Vallée has been able to read his papers. Perrot has done marvels of collecting. He has redone all the work of Luzel for his area: words, expressions, proverbs, nouns for clothing, furniture, boats and their equipment, the names of every island and rock along the shore, the names of hamlets and fields in several parishes, and even the oldest ballads, which he discovered in Enez Eusa [Ouessant]. It would take months to copy them all. In another, undated letter, Vallée discusses different ways of rendering the French word "*autoritaire*" in Breton: around Skrignag, one would say "*un den otus*", in Landreger, one would use the nickname "*sant-doujou*", the best would be perhaps "*un den d'e benn e-unan*". "*Inflexible*" would be "*diblegus, dihabask(aiüs)*". He is also pleased to see that there are earnest young people attracted to publications like *Gwalarn*, *Sav*, and *Breiz Atao*. On September 3, Vallée was back home in Saint-Brieuc, where he had a letter from Roparz Hemon: "In my opinion, he plans to fight Herrieu's silliness. But he will have a hard time doing it." The master plan was to unify the language, a goal which both Vallée and Meven Mordiern wanted, but on their terms, without the concessions to the Vannes dialect which had been introduced in the effort to placate people from the Vannes area like Herrieu.

Among Meven Mordiern's papers, I have discovered the rough draft of a long letter which was probably written around that time. At the top of the letter is the mention: "*Lizer da Zelaporte*". The Delaporte mentioned here is Remont Delaporte, who, with Yeun ar Gow, had started a program to teach the Breton language in parochial schools. This is a most interesting document. It shows clearly why Meven Mordiern and Vallée would remain adamant in their opposition to the "*Brezhoneg peurunvan*" until the end of their life. I give here my translation of this draft:

I have been happy to see you Wednesday at Vallée's house and to make your acquaintance. The love I have for the language and the work which you have been doing for

many years with such heart to teach Breton in the schools, lead me to explain fully my opinion about the new spelling system forged to unify Breton and the Vannes dialect. I have read the papers you left at Vallée's house, and here is what I think.

The worst fault of the new spelling lies in the difficulties which will appear in large numbers in its use. To use it without making mistakes it will first be necessary to learn the Vannes dialect, to study the comparisons between it and Breton, and, afterwards, to write new grammars and dictionaries, and all this to make more difficult, to complicate, to muddle, and to "poison" the easy, healthy and simple spelling of the unified Breton [*"brezoneg unvan"*] with useless letters employed to represent in writing the patois sounds of a dialect detached from the mainstream, the further removed there is in Brittany, and since the majority of Breton-speakers will not be able to achieve (nor even to begin!) to study side by side the Vannes dialect and Breton, the new spelling will become an abundant (a copious) source of countless mistakes of the worst kind since they will bring disorder where one had managed - with thousand pains and thanks to the collective effort of generations of courageous workers - to bring a little order and neatness. The confusion which will follow will be one hundred times worse than the current disunion.

To try to unify things which are in truth heterogeneous would be, in Brittany as elsewhere, a waste of effort, a waste of time ... and a waste of money (since it is clear that the new spelling, neither fish nor fowl, will not be to the taste of many people). No matter how much I search the history of the unified languages of the present - or of the past - I do not find any example of a unified language created by trying to represent in writing the sounds of two different dialects. What has been done in other countries give us a lesson about what is to be done here. The wisest course, the only way to go is to leave the Vannes dialect aside, and to write new schoolbooks using the spelling of the unified Breton only. Whether they will be adopted by the Vannes people or not, no matter! The Great Language of Brittany, Breton, is what must be saved, and not a dialect which, among the dialects there are in Brittany, is the one which has strayed the farthest away from the unified language of the Middle Ages.

The first Breton dialect I have heard studied and written is the Vannes dialect. I have no hatred for it. But I had to turn to the K.L.T. [Kerne, Leon, Treger: the Breton spoken in these three areas of Brittany. The *"brezoneg unvan"* is the unified language based on these three dialects. The *"brezoneg peurunvan"*, or K.L.T.G. (Kerne, Leon, Treger, Gwened) is based on the four major dialects] because I saw quite well that this language was the most deserving, the one remained closest to the unified Breton of the Middle Ages. There are good things in the Vannes dialect (for the one who know how to choose!). Words and expressions come directly from the Breton of the Middle Ages. I have borrowed them - following Vallée's advice - and often used them. One finds words from the Vannes dialect by the hundreds in my works, in the works I have written here with Vallée. But I cannot like the patois sounds of this dialect, and I strongly oppose representing them in the writing of unified Breton.

I do not wish at all for the death of the Vannes dialect. May the Vannes people continue to speak it, the longer the better. I say to speak it. Not, however, to have it in the schools. It has been heart-breaking for me to read the printer matter which you have sent to Vallée and to E. Ernault. A heart-break and a wonder! For if your tongue had been prompted by enemies of Breton, if you had had no other purpose than to destroy the language and to give it a death-blow, truly you would not have done otherwise! Under the pretext of achieving total unification, you are, Mr de Langlais [a writer from the Vannes area] and you, striking the worst blow against Breton ever struck! By bringing in the spelling of unified Breton the distorted sounds of a dialect deformed and half dead, by making, in addition, changes in the spelling which are unneded, unjustified, without reason and without value (like the abusive and excessive use you make of

w: ew instead of eo! skriwa instead of skriva! and dowr, powr instead of dour, paour!) you are throwing down, upsetting, destroying all that has been done for Breton since the time of Le Gonideg up to now. You show great contempt for the professionals, the scholars, the grammarians and the lexicographers who have taken pains, for the past century, to unravel, to clarify, to explain, and to simplify the spelling of Breton. The spelling system which you propose is a step backwards, a retreat; and I would be greatly tempted to say also: worse than the Vannes spelling since at least that spelling is easy to read for Vannes people, and yours will push them away from any reading matter in Breton.

A bad job in every respect, which shows once again (alas!) how backward the “educated” people of this country have remained, on the whole, in relation to the accepted norm of today in every field of knowledge, and how unaware they are of the experiments done in other countries. Resources for learning are numerous enough nowadays, however! One has only to try in order to know how unified languages develop and spread.

It is childish to believe that one can establish a spelling which will be scientific, sensible, solid and well-balanced without any preliminary study, to please so-and-so, by having ignorant writers take a vote and by bargaining with them. A word, an unusual place-name (so much for a map of the toponyms of Brittany), an idiom, a spelling are good or bad, correct or incorrect. If it happens that the bad and incorrect one has thirteen hundred thousand voters, or voices, for it, it remains bad and incorrect in spite of this and you ought to throw it away into the trash-can. The good word, the correct noun, the best spelling are the one which ought always to be chosen. The bad habits which imitate the rotten ways of politics and of parliamentary procedure must be left outside if one wants to do healthy work.

I deny unlearned writers - unlearned because of their negligence, of their laziness- the right to legislate the spelling of Breton. The job of the writer is to write ballads, songs, tales, novels, not to cut, unravel and legislate right and left about things which he does not understand. The bad work done in the area of grammar and lexicography by the group of writers named the French Academy reveals this plainly (there is no linguist, no scholar among them). I signed the 1907 Agreement between writers because the spelling offered us was then was only an improvement on the one of Le Gonideg, because it has been created by professionalss, by scholars, by learned men who knew the history of the language and were well-versed in the things of which they spoke. I will not do the same for the 1936 Agreement. And moreover!

It is crazy to ask that the spelling of a language be changed every thirty years to please the whims of the ignorant or to accomodate jealous people who only wish to destroy the work done by people they hate. In the difficult times in which we live, it is totally crazy to ask people to study a new spelling which is most complicated. There are other things to be done, things which are one hundred times, one thousand times more worthy! There is only one Way to go to save Breton: hold hard to the spelling of unified Breton for the new schoolbooks. Do not waste strength, time and money trying to unify things which are truly heterogeneous. What will happen here is what has happened in all the countries of the world in all periods of history: the unified language (Breton or French) will replace the dialect (The Vannes dialect). It is the worst of mistakes to believe that one can violate in this country the great laws which rule the life of languages, and for this useless labor to give to the unified Breton a ridiculous and crazy disguise which will have it mocked by everyone. For those who honor it and who love it, the Great Language of Brittany is not a maidservant whom one can clothe, doll up and disguise any way one wants. She is a Queen, and better for a Queen to die than to become a whore.

The language which truly is the Vannes dialect in the Vannes region is made up of deformities. The words and the expressions which come from Old Breton and which have been preserved by the Vannes dialect, those indeed have nothing specifically dialectal in them. They

are Breton words and expressions and they should go to enrich unified Breton. Thus the precious things which make the true value of the Vannes dialect will continue to live as long as unified Breton will live. But the narrow-minded people who have been making so much noise in the Vannes region for the past thirty years, waylaid as they are by their blind devotion to their little language, cannot comprehend this. Totally ignorant of what has been achieved in Celtic studies since the work of Kaspar Zeuss, they cannot make a choice among the matters of great fame which make their little language. One need only read the glossaries and the grammars they have written to see it. They cannot select them, winnow them, separate the good from the bad. If they had more liberal minds, if they more highly educated in the field of Celtic, if they had a wider view of the life of languages, of their growth, of their decline and rebirth, they would be among the first to ask that the Great Language of Brittany, unified Breton, be taught in the schools,

[Meven Mordiern has crossed out the passage which follows: "I am an outsider, completely free from every chauvinistic love for this or that dialect. I find dangerous these small loves which are blind, obstinate, and silly since they are the worst weakness of the Breton movement. And I find it heart-breaking to see a man whom I trusted and honored take the side of the most deformed dialect of Brittany, and destroy the spelling of unified Breton to please a small dozen of narrow-minded, obstinate people.]

With a true heart

I find it heart-breaking to see a man whom I trusted, a man whom I believed was doing great work [the sentence is incomplete]

I have just had your letter from Vallée. He gave it to me to read. I have nothing more to say. I hate wasting my time in Byzantine quarrels. You are blinded, waylaid and deluded by this mirage of total unification. Trying to make of the mirage a reality will exact a high price to a Breton language which already half-uprooted. You are opening the door wide to disorders, fancies, and errors. One cannot tell me that there is no other cure for saving Breton than obeying the shameless demands of the Vannes people. You face a few dozens of narrow-minded and obstinate people. Do without them and go ahead [The following line has been crossed out: "As to my influence on them or on other Breton-speakers, I don't care about it". It is impossible to make out the line which has been written in its place, but it includes the words "influence on Breton-speakers ". The meaning may have been quite similar]. I tell you truths which I have learned from the experience of History. To have a corrected piece of writing [the sentence is unfinished].

The schools should be opened only to the great language of Brittany, to the unified Breton composed of what is best in the four dialects of Brittany.

I find it all the more difficult to write this letter since it may give you pain. I tell you truths which I have learned from the experience of History. In order to find a corrected writing [the sentence is incomplete]

(I have lived among people from the Vannes area - from the Ruiz peninsula - from 1893 to 1905. Most of them did not care about their dialect. It would be just as easy to teach them unified Breton as to teach them French. As long as this teaching would lead to some good for them. The opposition comes only from a dozen or so of people who are obstinate, narrow-minded, ignorant of the life of languages and maddened by the blind love they have for their little language, and also by the jealousy and the hatred they feel for everything that is done outside of this little language)."

Meven Mordiern would have been right if the evolution of languages were conducted by linguists and grammarians, but this is not the case. Literary languages like French, Italian and Spanish were, originally, no more than Latin *patois*. In every corner of France, Italy and Spain, one found a *patois* different from the other *patois*, and the evolution of the language was the work of the people, not of the learned elites. Eventually, the *patois* spoken in the region which

had gained political supremacy became the language of the state. The language of the state became the official language of all the lands controlled by the state, and all the other *patois* (along with the languages spoken by ethnic minorities) were discarded. As soon as a *patois* is accepted as the national language, the authors of grammars and dictionaries want to impose their rule (in France, this is what was done by Vaugelas and the *Académie française*). In spite of their efforts, and the labour of generations of schoolteachers, the language continues to evolve under all sorts of influences: foreign languages (the problem of the *franglais*) as well as of groups of all kinds (students, soldiers, sailors, working-class people, etc.), and often enough older people are unable to understand what young people are saying. In Brittany, the language could not evolve as it did in France, since it was not used by the upper classes. In spite of this, Breton nationalists have tried to treat Breton as if it were a state language, a national language, with a vocabulary, a grammar, and a spelling accepted by everybody, just as French pupils must accept the unified French taught in French schools. They did not take as a model for the Breton they wanted the French spoken in school courtyards, in barracks, in markets, in taverns, or in jails. Little by little, however, this type of French becomes part of the official language. Breton will also keep evolving, like every other language, and it will evolve according to the choices made by future Breton speakers. This does not mean that the work done by the authors of Breton grammars and dictionaries, or by Breton writers, has been in vain, far from it. This is why the example given the writers of *Gwalarn*, for instance, will remain so important: they have forged a language strong enough to remain alive for centuries. One must keep faith that there will be other Breton speakers and writers who will follow their example, and if the language created by them happens to be somewhat different from that of their predecessors, so be it, as long as it has as much strength and life!

Aside of a letter dated November 8, 1936, there is no correspondence until August 1937. In this letter, Vallée mentions a long article which he has received about the mutation of the letter G in Welsh and in Breton, indicating that one of their primary concerns is the study of language. For his summer holidays of 1937, Vallée went to the "Communauté Sainte-Marie", a retirement community run by nuns in Sant-Nikolaz-ar-Pelem. During that summer, he sent five letters and a postcard to his friend. He enjoyed conversing with Breton-speaking people whom he met, and deplored that the boy who escorted him to the retirement community, or the nun who showed him his room, did not speak Breton. Fortunately, he knew about the woman who ran the local *Kelc'h Keltiek* (Celtic Circle: these associations preserved the Breton language and the traditions), a "dimezell Rivoallan". He lets his friend know of two packages which he received before leaving, each containing a copy of G. Berthou's excellent paper on working-people which Berthou planned to read at the next meeting of the *Bleun Brug*. Meven Mordiern will find his copy in the bedroom of Vallée's house in Saint-Brieuc. As usual, Vallée expresses his pleasure at finding good Breton speakers: the "dimezell Rivoallan", the lady at the post-office, the woman who sells newspapers, and the Mother-Prioress who knows Caurel (whose bardic name is Evnig Arvor). He has received from Le Dault a journal containing some idiotic writing by Diberder about Ernault. The same journal contained news of the Breton school run by Kerlann. Vallée, as usual also, enjoys talking about local traditions, especially the feast of Our Lady of Ruellou, where all the ceremonies were conducted in Breton, and where he noticed, above the portal of the parish church, a Breton inscription. He also saw a rhymed Breton inscription above a local tavern. The "dimezell Rivoallan" had sent some thirty young people to the Paris World Fair to show the songs and dances of Brittany. Vallée has also met the "Aotrou de Boisboissel", a local squire who owns a castle nearby and who knows some Breton: he has called the squire's attention to the sorrowful state of the Breton language, and made him subscribe to the journal *Breiz*. A post-card dated August 8, 1937, showing the castle of Boisboissel, is the final item



mailed by Vallée that summer. The next item, dated August 8, 1938, is a post-card showing the "Pavillon Sainte- Catherine", in Saint-Laurent, near Rennes. This is where Vallée has his room in this nursing-home with hospital run by nuns where he will spend the last years of his life. The letters he sent to his friend during these years give a far more detailed picture of their every day participation in the *Emsav*, since they are far more numerous.

Vallée keeps Meven Mordiern informed about his contacts with other Breton activists. Berthou has written to him about the "Dimezell Gourlaouen" [she ran the program of Breton language lessons by mail], who takes Welsh lessons with him, and Vallée will ask his sister to send her a booklet about Breton and Welsh words. He has also read stupid articles about Breton orthography in the journal *Breiz* (Sept. 3, 1938). He knows that Abalor [bardic name of Léon Le Berre] and Yann ar Rouz, who translated *Peredur* from Welsh into Breton [*Historia Peredur vab Efracw* (Rennes: Plihon-Hommais, 1923)], live nearby in a suburb of Rennes. He is forwarding a letter from Roparz Hemon which he has just received. The only newspaper available is *Ouest-Éclair*, which he strongly dislikes. The air-planes who are constantly flying about are a permanent reminder that war may be near (Sept. 6, 1938). After receiving news about the association *Breuriez-Veur* from Roparz Hemon, Vallée invites his friend to join. He also receives news from Wales, good news. He has seen the "Dimezell Guiyesse", who appears to be a woman of sense. Choleau's secretary has told him about a prize given to Yann ar Rouz for a silly competition organized by Diberder, who had managed to get into Choleau's society. Yann ar Rouz had submitted a revision of the introduction to his *Peredur* translation to Choleau, who promptly asked Diberder to be quieter in the future (Sept. 24, 1938).

With the war coming, the French government becomes harder on the Breton autonomists. The office of their newspaper *Breiz Atao* [Brittany forever] has been placed under seal, and the government has tried to do the same to their presses, so that it is uncertain whether *Breiz Atao* will come out the following month. Vallée had contributed an article on Wales to a previous issue of the journal, and this article was well received in Wales since he received a letter from the Welsh journal *Y Ddraig Goch* about it. He also contributed an article to the newspaper *Ouest-Éclair* about *Gwalarn* and the concept of "brezoneg eeun" [Basic Breton], for which he was paid 25 francs. He has submitted another long essay on Breton expressions in order to combat the silly things which are said about "brezoneg beo" (living Breton). He went by trolley to see the building of *Breiz Atao*: it was still closed and sealed. A letter from Roparz Hemon announces that good work will be accomplished for their organization "*Breuriez-Veur*" Vallée also compliments Meven Mordiern on his recent work, *Logotigiakos* [a story in a vein similar to *Skêtla Segobrani*] (Sept. 28, 1938). On October 4, Vallée discusses his own writings: a long article on Wales, published in *Breiz Atao*, for which he received a warm letter from the secretary of *Y Ddraig Goch*; an article for Roparz Hemon in the *Ouest-Eclair*, in the Breton section, for which he was paid 25 francs; another article in the *Ouest-Eclair* about Breton sayings (it will come out the following week); 3 articles for *Breiz Atao* or *Stur* [another Breton publication], on the same subject, something to demolish the silly things spread by the boys of *BBB* and their followers [Vallée is probably referring to the organization from the Vannes region *Breuriez ar Brezoneg Beo*]. In his next letter (October 12, 1938), Vallée finds himself sorry at times that he had to leave Saint-Brieuc when he wanted to help his friend to complete the publication of his work, and to have had to spend the money which he wanted to use for Breton publications. He hopes that Nemo will be able to do something for two volumes of Meven Mordiern's *Istor ar Bed*. He has been unable to meet with Professor Per ar Rouz, but he has seen Leon ar Berr and his sister, a woman of sense and learning, fellows from *Breiz Atao* and their publisher, Guiyesse [an important figure in Breton nationalist politics] and his daughter, and Bécot, who has come to Rennes in order to study Celtic literature, and wants to have Vallée as a collaborator [Levot-

Bécot will become a close friend of Vallée during the last years of his life]. Vallée refers again to the articles which he has written for the *Ouest-Eclair* and for *Breiz Atao* about nationalism in Wales, about Breton expressions, about Roparz Hemon and the work of *Gwalarn*, and about Le Gonideg: Perrot is preparing a celebration in honor of the centennial of the death of the celebrated Breton grammarian. Vallée has received good letters from Wales, from Perrot, and even from Taldir [Vallée and Meven Mordiern did not care much for Taldir (the head of the Breton *Gorsez*) whom they did not consider a serious worker and scholar]. On October 17, 1938, Vallée gives further news about his publications: the second part of his study on Breton expressions has come out in *Breiz Atao*, as well as a short article for the centennial of the death of Le Gonideg. The French police is determined to strangle *Breiz Atao*: its leaders, Mordrel and Debauvais have been summoned to appear in court. Vallée has also given a short piece to Abalor [Leon ar Berr] for the section devoted to Breton in the daily newspaper *Ouest-Eclair*. He has been asked by Bécot to correct Welsh songs which he has translated. He has met Youenn Drezen, whose novel *Itron Varia Garmez* illustrated by Creston is about to come out. He had with him an article by Diberder [a friend of Herrieu, from the Vannes region also], published in French: the same old stuff against “le breton chimique”. Vallée extracted from Drezen the promise that he would remain loyal to their way of spelling Breton [Meven Mordiern and Vallée stuck to the spelling agreed upon by the “Emgleo” [Agreement] of 1907, and wanted no part of the “brezhoneg peurunvan”]. A few days later, on October 21, he has received news from Roparz Hemon: Vallée has been elected head of *Breuriez-Veur*, succeeding Émile Ernault, a duty which he finds too heavy for his shoulders unless Meven Mordiern is willing to help. The task will not be easy, since Herrieu, and probably Diberder behind his back, has declared war in the latest issue of *Dihunamb*. For his work on Welsh, he would like his friend to send him *Dathblygau ur iaith gymraeg*, by H. Lewis, which does not appear to be available locally. With this letter, he enclosed the second part of the article he had sent to the daily *Ouest-Eclair*, “Penaos deski ar brezoneg?” [How to learn Breton?], which had come out on August 20, 1938. The first page of another letter is missing, but the context appears to indicate that it was written at about that time. He is expecting a visit by Hemon. Vallée has apparently received Lewis’ book, which he finds hard to read because of the fine print: he would like to translate some sections in Breton. On October 24, he mentions a visit by Abalor, who talked to him about a Breton feast held in Pont-L’Abbé, where there were good singers taught by Duhamel [a musicologist interested in traditional Breton folk music and songs]. Brogarour [Jean-Louis Rozec, a priest] and ar Moal are troubled by the Communists’ work on behalf of the Breton language, because their real purpose for doing so is to destroy the power of the priests over the Breton people. Vallée has written to ar Moal and told him straight that he is disgusted with all the quarrels between Breton writers, those who follow the “Emgleo” as well as others. There has been another bitter attack from Herrieu. May the *Breuriez-Veur* be a sanctuary in this sea of troubles. Two days later, on October 26, 1938, Vallée talks again of his work: he has visited the library, but the Welsh section does seem to have been increased since the days of Loth [Joseph Loth, Professor of Celtic at the University of Rennes from 1884 to 1910]. Another article of his has been accepted by the daily *Ouest-Eclair*. He has sent another one to *Breiz Atao*, but the editors are in jail once again. He has seen Hemon, with whom he is in agreement, and he hopes that Mordiern will also become a member of the committee which will be formed. A few days later, Vallée has taken another look at the library: he was too hasty with his judgment, and its implicit blame of Joseph Loth’s successor, Professor Per ar Rous [Professor of Celtic at the University of Rennes from 1911 to 1951]. In Loth’s days, for instance, there was only one novel by the Welsh writer Daniel Owen, *Y Treflau*. Now the collection is pretty complete. He also compliments his friend on his *Hunvreou Sant-Helouri*, which he has been reading with pleasure. The following letter, dated November 11, 1938, is quite

important for the history of *Breiz Atao*: "I'll do my best to follow your good advice when I see Mr Per ar Rous. It is the right thing! To make here a collection of everything that can be useful for our Future. This collection ought to be made at the University of Rennes, and I am sorry to have let go of books which would be safe here and which now will be lost, ar Gonideg's Bible, for instance.

All sorts of things have happened here during the past week. Debauvais has been sentenced to four months in prison. I went to the trial. A wonderful roomful of patriots (I was able to get into the row reserved for the press). A lawyer full of spirit and sharp-tongued threw, rather boldly, truths pretty barbed for the ears of the judges: 'In the old days, there were no better defenders of the language and the rights of Brittany than the lawyers of the Parliament', and so forth. He stressed the rights of the language, which pleased me. As soon as the sentence was pronounced, the 'Bro goz ma zadou' [the Breton national anthem] burst out like a thunder-clap, in spite of an army of guards, constables, and policemen which filled the entrance-hall and the corridor. I saw the Dimezell Gourlaouen and Mr Bec (I believe this is his name) who head the Breton language school by mail, - which goes well, from what they tell me.

I have just had a visit from a Welshman named Rees, from Caerdydd, who will stay here for a few months to study Breton and, also, to take notes about the state of the language and above all Breton in school.

Yesterday I saw Cuillandre who will work with us in *Breuziezh-Veur ar brezoneg*. He is writing a thesis, and he will be appointed a professor here after P. ar Rous, it seems.

Mrs Debauvais has been able to see her husband today. He is allowed to have books, and he is studying the 'Prederiadennou'. May he be able to stand the conditions in prison, since his lungs are weak. [...] I have received *Gwalarn*, with the explanation given by R.H.[Roparz Hemon] about the spelling. Very good. *There is nothing to fear from the trouble-makers.*"

On November 14, Vallée has many news, but of less import. Caouissin [Ronan Caouissin, a Breton writer and film-maker] is going to a meeting of the *Union des Oeuvres bretonnes* held in Saint-Pol-de-Léon. Requests from America asking for Breton books, among them one from a Miss Sullivan, Harvard College, for several thousand francs. He suggests sending her the *Hunvreou Sant-Helouri*. The *Skêta Segobrani* can be sent through the *Bureau de Breiz Atao*. A second letter was sent the same day because of the many letters thanking Meven Mordiern for his *Hunvreou Sant-Helori*: the letters were addressed to Vallée because they had been sent under his name. These letters came from universities and libraries in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. A detail in this letter shows illustrates the divisions within the Breton movement at the time. Vallée has received a nice letter from Césaire Le Coent, in Kerien. Taldir is pressuring him to join his organization, the *Gorsez*, but Vallée is pleased to hear that Le Coent studies his [Vallée's] Breton dictionary, and that he is researching the Breton words used in his area. Professor ar Rous is going to start his lectures on Welsh, and Vallée plans to attend. The day before, he had gone to a meeting of the Celtic Circles in Rennes, but he did not stay for the banquet which followed: it would have been too long for him. In his letter of November 16, 1938, Vallée talks about the Welsh course. The professor bought the books himself and loans them to the people in the course. For his subject, Vallée chose the novels of Daniel Owen. Per ar Rous would like to purchase more books for he library, especially the works of Émile Ernault.

To the end of his life, Vallée will remain bothered by the problem of the "*brezhoneg peurunvan*". On November 17, he mentions letters on this subject which he has received from two priests: Mary, from the Vannes area, and Perrot, from Leon, and concludes: "I will do my best to silence this wearisome quarrel." On November 21, Vallée talks about Professor ar Rous' lectures on Welsh literature, which he is attending, and for which he has prepared a class on Daniel Owen. Most of the students in the course will find the Welsh book assigned to them too

difficult: fortunately there is a Welsh assistant, M. Rees. In his letter of November 26, he returns to the problem of unifying Breton spelling because there was a harsh article on the subject in *Breiz Atao*. Vallée finds this surprising since *Breiz Atao* had published an article of his, a translation from the Welsh of H. Lewis directed against local dialects. More reproaches in *Dihunamb*. This is why Vallée is so pleased to have met with a young university student from the Vannes region who is not at all on Herrieu's side.

On December 17, 1938, Vallée returns to the trial of Mordrel and Debauvais: they were accused of writings and acts against the state. Mordrel has been sentenced to a prison term of one year (suspended), and a fine of one thousand francs (which in fact will come to ten thousand francs). Debauvais was given a prison term of one year (not suspended), and fined one thousand francs (ten thousand, in effect). During the trial, there have been rumors which did little honor to the judges or the state. On the 21, Vallée mentions the letters of thanks which he has received from America for the *Hunvreou Sant-Helori*, a letter in excellent Breton from a Doktor H. Rheinfelder, from Obermenzing bei München, to which he will not reply for fear of spying by the French administration. This fear, as we shall see later, was not unfounded. He finds Drezen's work dark [And it is true that *Itron Varia Garmez* is not a cheerful novel].

The seven letters written from the end of 1938 to the beginning of March 1939 are quite brief. One of Vallée's brothers has died (February 2, 1939). He is concerned about his friends lack of financial resources and he sends him three hundred francs (January 20, 1939). He mentions a letter from "an abad Fl. a Lanuon" [could this be Maodez Glanndour, the great Breton poet, whose real name was "Loeiz ar Floc'h"?] full of praise for *Hunvreou Sant-Helori* (February 18, 1939). He is still attending Professor ar Rous' lectures, but there are only three students left in the course: Rees, the Welsh assistant, Bécot, and Vallée himself (March 4, 1939). He is still working, in spite of trouble with his eyes which makes it hard for him to read, and he sends his friend an article of his published in the daily *Ouest-Eclair* in support of *Gwalarn* (March 8, 1939). His Welsh studies and his other work will soon be troubled by the impending war. The nuns have been called to take courses and exams about the care of people suffering from poison gas. There are also practice trials for air attacks: when sirens sound, everybody has to run home, close all doors and windows, and turn off all lights. Planes are constantly in the air, mostly at night (April 4, 1939). His letter dated April 22 shows that Meven Mordiern still depended on the help of Vallée: "I have read your article in *Gwalarn* and the one by R. Hemon. You ask me to mark the mistakes. There are very few, indeed. Breton now comes to you easy and correct." The same letter also shows that Vallée could be quite hard in his criticism of those who did not act, in his opinion, in the best interest of Breton, Leon ar Berr (Abalor), for instance. Ar Berr had started a quarrel which forced Yann-Vari Perrot to resign from the leadership of *Feiz-ha-Breiz*. Ar Berr came to see Vallée to apologize, but Vallée treated ar Berr, and his sister Marta, quite harshly. As ar Berr complained about the Breton nationalists, Vallée told him that he [Vallée] would be the one who would set fire to the fuse of the bomb to explode the first monument insulting to Brittany to be exploded, which caused ar Berr to leave as disturbed as if he had swallowed the fuse. Vallée alludes of course to the bombing of the monument commemorating the union of Brittany and France. This monument showed Brittany as a woman kneeling before the statue of the woman representing France, a posture which Breton patriots found quite humiliating for their country. The secret organization *Gwenn-ha-Du* (White and Black, the two colors of the Breton flag) blew up the monument in 1932. The letter dated May 11, 1939, reveals that Meven Mordiern and Vallée were in excellent terms with the leaders of *Breiz Atao*: "I have given your letter to Mordrel. He often comes here and, instead of sending, or rather forwarding your letter to him in Bois-Colombes, I have entrusted it to Mrs Debauvais to give it to him at his next passage, these next few days." On May 18, Vallée sends news about various

people: Delalande [Kerlann] has sent him a study about the Breton names of boats; ar Moal is in poor health; Caouissin is doing his best to replace Yann-Vari Perrot in Saint-Pol-de-Léon). On May 20, Vallée announces the final meeting of his Welsh course. There is nothing significant in the seven letters and post-cards written between the end of May and the end of July. Vallée had gone to Saint-Brieuc, and he very likely saw Meven Mordiern, whom he had invited to his sister's house.

The correspondence resumes on July 27, 1939. Ar Berr is annoyed because the daily *Ouest-Eclair*, for which he works, has decided to omit the Breton section from the main printing. It will appear only in the printing reserved for Quimper, Vannes and Saint-Brieuc (the Western part of Brittany, where the language was commonly spoken). And Vallée comments: "The reason given: there was too much other stuff of importance. Breton, apparently, is not considered as a matter of importance." The war is getting closer. On August 8, Vallée mentions that there was an air alert in Rennes on Monday. There are rumors about German planes not far away. It is forbidden to show any light, any electricity. He reminds his friend that if he needs money, he can use his power of attorney to withdraw money from the *Banque de Bretagne*. On August 13, Vallée talks of a young fellow whom he has met and who lives nearby, in the castle "La Héronnière". He knows Breton, has studied some Welsh, and has sent an article to *Gwalarn* about Denmark, a country he knows well. He also has lived in the Basque country, where Basque is still spoken, and where masses and sermons are said in Basque. Unfortunately, as in Brittany, French is gaining ground. This young fellow, as I learned later, was none other than Per Denez, who was then only seventeen. After I had published this letter of Vallée in the September-October 1996 issue of *Al Liamm*, Per Denez wrote to me. He had been seriously ill and had been sent to the Basque country for his health. Because of his health also, his family, which was living in Rennes, had rented an apartment for part of the summer in a country house, where the air was better than in the city. From "La Héronnière", it was only a short walk (less than 3/4 of a mile) to Vallée's retirement home.

Herrieu was still making trouble, along with his friends from the 3 B ("*Breuziezh ar Brezhoneg Beo*" [Fraternity of Living Breton]). Vallée told a man from the Vannes area who had just been to see Herrieu that Herrieu should keep to his own work without casting stones at Ernault and Vallée, as he does, but will Herrieu listen? (August 21, 1939). Two days later, on August 23, 1939, a letter from Meven Mordiern arrived. Meven Mordiern has very strong words about Herrieu: "Herrieu is an idiot, blind, ignorant, and obstinate. I would like to be a dictator for half a day, just to do this: seize that man and have him flogged to death, as is done by the Russians. In trying to raise the Bretons from the Vannes region above the other Bretons, he is doing here what has been done in Middle Europe since around 1850: separate the Slovaks from the Czechs, and lead them to raise their dialect (which is in truth a Czech dialect) to the level of a literary language. There has been secret work by the Germans there, clandestine work, and they have found idiotic servants blinded by an unjustifiable and insane love for their little region and their little dialect. We see today the fruit of this diabolic work. The evil fruit of Herrieu's and his consorts will be seen later. [Vallée has written in the margin, facing the passage from "In trying to raise..." to "will be seen later.": "read to a disciple of Herrieu."].

In a library in Saint-Brieuc, I have seen a book by that man: *Histoire de la littérature bretonne des origines à nos jours*. It is laughable! What a well of pride that little man is! A sound beating, that is what he would deserve, if there were in this land others than cowardly and weak people." Mordiern also wanted Vallée to check that the short article he enclosed was correct as to the style. This brief essay (three handwritten pages) has to do with a Celtic tribe, the Vogians, which had been displaced from Italy by the Romans and had sought new places to settle in Middle Europe. They had left rather than submitting to Roman rule, and when they

found themselves hard-pressed by the Dacians and the Germans, the same revulsion against subjection pushed them again to move, to Gaul this time. Mordiern tells their story as he first read it, when a boy, in the books of Henri Martin and Amédée Thierry. He speaks of the games he played, of the cardboard manikins which he named Postumius, the worst enemy of the Vogians, manikins which he would tear to pieces with stones, arrows, and spears, and he adds: "The greatest pleasure I have had in my life has been to see you correct and improve my Breton. Thus correct whatever displeases you in these pages and return them to me, I beg you, whenever you want to do so. There is some blank space left below to write a word or two." Vallée returned the letter with the following lines in the blank space (there is no date, but it was certainly done before the 25th of August: "You right well now, better than I. So I don't see what I could correct. I have made some little remark here and there." He has some other news: there is a rumor that 'Breiz Atao' is going to be banned. And he concludes: "May God keep the scourge away from us." In a letter dated August 26, 1939, Vallée returns to his friend's article, which he would like to see published in *Gwalarn*. He has read passages from the article to a Breton of good will, but who inclines towards Herrieu, in order to show him, by the example of the Slovaks, the evil consequences of Herrieu's divisive policy. The last letter we have for 1939 is dated September 9. War has been declared, and the hospital of the retirement community where Vallée lives has been taken over by soldiers, the roads are full of cannons and military vehicles. On the day before, sirens sounded for hours, and their sound is nothing like the harmonious song of mermaids. It has been agreed that the university library will take all of his manuscripts in deposit. Madam Anastasie [this was the nickname of the government military censorship], who had been asleep, has awakewed and and put her scissors to work. Vallée has received a letter from the Meuse district [near the border with Germany], and Anastasie could not tolerate this: she has cut open the envelope to see what was inside. The regulations and precautions against German planes which might come at night have become quite strict. Electricity cannot be turned on in the hospital rooms, nor the candles which the patients would light to shorten the nights. Worst still: to reduce the chance that any light might be seen by a passing enemy plane, all of the hospital windows have been painted blue, so that even during the day the patients live in half-darkness, like their Stone Age ancestors. In the meantime, Vallée opens wide his blue-painted window so as to see the light of day and inhale the fresh morning air. There are no letters for the period from September 9, 1939, to June 9, 1940.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### MEVEN MORDIERN AND THE *EMSAV*

#### II. THE GERMAN OCCUPATION AND THE LIBERATION

On June 6, 1940, Vallée sent a post-card to Meven Mordiern to let him know that he was safe. France has been defeated. He has more news in his letter of June 14. He has heard from Loeiz ar Floc'h [Maodez Glanndour], who runs *Studi hag Ober*. The work of *Feiz ha Breiz* is stopped for good. By July 1st, Vallée has seen a few friends, Abeozen among them. By July 7, the daily *Ouest-Eclair* has resumed publication. In the middle of the war, work on or for Breton remains Vallée's major concern. A few Bretons are returning home. For him, this means that it will be possible for *Feiz ha Breiz* to resume its activities. Unfortunately, there are no news from Roparz Hemon, who must be in England or in a German prison camp..By July 14, 1940, Vallée has heard that there has been a meeting of Bretons from the Vannes area who have been able to return home, some two hundred people. *Dihunamb* is being published. His nursing home is protected by the Red Cross, with German regulations which Vallée was supposed to copy on his typewriter. Fortunately, he has found a nurse who knew German and who could type, so she has been able to do the job quickly and correctly. He has typed the prophecies attributed to Saint Odila about the end of the war [Prophecies of this kind were quite in vogue at the time. People interpreted them so as to foretell how and when the war would end. The prophecies of Nostradamus were also quite popular]. The Germans have forbidden any form of celebration in honor of the 14th of July [Bastille Day]. The German military will govern Brittany as a single administrative entity. The military governor, a German general named Weyer, will locate his headquarter in Rennes, the ancient capital of the land. By July 18, Vallée has been able to go downtown: no change so far, except one sees German uniforms instead of British ones. There are German signs all over the place with words like "Lazarette" or "Kommandantur". German officers have come to see the nursing-home, and the nuns are afraid they may want to take it over, or part of it, to use it as a hospital, which is why, a few days before, the nuns made him go to bed in the middle of the day. As a nun told him, this way, the Germans will see sick people occupying the beds, and will be less inclined to commandeer the place. A few Breton autonomists have started a small newspaper of little consequence. They are trying to get together. Vallée told them he will be busy only with the language. And this is what Vallée has to say on July 24, 1940, about the meeting organized in Pontivy by Mordrel, Debauvais, Guieysse, and Neven Henaff [Célestin Lainé, the man who had been responsible for the bombing which destroyed the monument commemorating the union of Brittany and France by the secret organization *Gwenn-ha-Du*, as well as for other acts of violence against the French state]: "A good thing they did not mess up things in Pontivy, there was politics on the table. They have started a paper to continue the work of *Breiz Atao*. They will try to take advantage of France's situation to improve the situation of Brittany. Everybody in Brittany will be for that and a little faith comes to shine in the spirits of people. Just so that the language is not left aside!" Vallée would soon find out that the attempt to use France's defeat to Brittany's advantage was doomed to fail. On August 8, Vallée mentions a visit from a German Celticist from Marburg, Doktor Weisgerber [he wrote his doctoral dissertation on *Peredur*], who is quite familiar with their

work, the *Skêtla Segobrani* especially. The paper which has taken the place of *Breiz Atao* is called *L'Heure bretonne*. It seems that Roparz Hemon is in a prison camp in Germany, but there is hope that he will be released. There is hope also that that *Feiz ha Breiz*, *Studi hag Ober*, and *Sav* will resume their work. A few days later, on August 13, there are further news from Roparz Hemon: he was wounded and taken prisoner, but there is hope that he will get well and be released. On August 23, there have been from another friend, Loeiz Andouard, who is in Toulon. He had been in England, but he was allowed to return home, and he is on his way to Brittany. Vallée and Meven Mordiern are in agreement about autonomy for Brittany, but all the work remains to be done. One thing has been gained: the burden of untruths and bad administration which weighed so heavily on the Breton people will be lightened. No more politics: there are more important things to take care of, the work of giving life to the Land, above all. He has heard that Perrot is sick, and that *Feiz ha Breiz* is no longer published. Vallée had mixed feelings about the way in which the Breton nationalists were handling the situation: "*L'Heure bretonne* remains on the risky road of politics. It is difficult to predict what will come from the attempt. May there be neither ill-will nor persecution from the French!" As it turned out, Vallée's fears were fully justified: as soon as the French got back the upper hand, they turned on all Breton nationalists with a vengeance, not bothering to distinguish between the handful of Bretons who had collaborated with the Germans from those who had not, and without any consideration for the Bretons who, in far greater number than the French people themselves, had fought against the Germans.

For the time being, the war is fought in the air. In a letter dated August 29, Vallée mentions an air battle: bullets cracked outside his window. In Brest, Berthou [a Breton writer and activist] has to seek shelter in his basement with his family every night. Roparz Hemon is back, and *Gwalarn* will resume publication. Andouard [another writer-activist] is also coming back, and his wife, who had to become a teacher at the Collège Saint-Louis in Brest along with Berthou, is very happy. Kerlann [Delalande, an educator] also has come back and lives in Morlaix. Vallée quotes a few lines from Berthou's letter: "Meven Mordiern, his letters are a pleasure and a joy! The new Brittany will owe him a lot. There is no Breton who has done as much good as he has for Brittany." And Vallée adds: "I can say the same on my part." Vallée is well aware that the future is uncertain, and that one has to consider the situation with great care, but in spite of all his prudence he appears to be willing to accept the help of German scholars to improve the situation of the Breton language. On September 10, he looks at the bright side of things. In spite of events, people go on working. Perrot [the priest who heads *Feiz ha Breiz* and the *Bleun Brug*] is sick, but *Feiz ha Breiz* has resumed publication. Hemon, Andouard and Kerlann are back. *L'Heure bretonne* is awakening national consciousness among the Breton people. On September 17, he talks about his book, *Le Breton en 40 leçons*, which his publisher Prudhomme is going to reprint. Bécot [a close friend of Vallée] and Abeozen will help with the proofreading. The 27th is Vallée's birthday: he is eighty four, and thankful for having had the time to work for his language and his nation. And he adds: "The little I have done in this respect has been with your good companionship and your help. God's blessing to you!"

Vallée corresponded with many Breton activists and shared their letters with Meven Mordiern. Kerverziou [a Breton writer], for instance, had written to him on October 1st. He had been engaged by Roparz Hemon as a secretary for *Gwalarn* and for *Ensavadur Breiz*, a new office for the language and culture of Brittany. Kerverziou is careful to note that their work is completely separate from the work of the autonomists, but the autonomists have nothing to fear from them. They just travel two different roads, and the work they do on each side will be all the more valuable. In a letter dated October 7, 1940, Vallée mentions Berthou, from whom he has had a letter, Bécot, who is in Guipavas, near Brest, at the time, and Father Laurent, a linguist,



who is helping him with the proofs of his book. There is a rumor that the United-States will enter the war against Japan. On the 15th, he mentions a letter from Fouéré [a newspaperman who dabbled in politics], requesting Vallée's support, in his capacity as leader of *Breuriez-Veur ar Brezoneg*, for a plan of a new provincial status for Brittany. Vallée has answered immediately that the *Breuriez-Veur* had nothing to do with politics, that its only business was the Celtic language and culture of the land. Vallée lets Meven Mordiern know that he has notified Roparz Hemon of Fouéré's letter and of his answer, and that he trusts they will approve.

It appears, from Vallée's letter of October 27, 1940, that some Germans were now quartered in the nursing-home. Vallée also mentions his nephews: one of them is perhaps in Germany, another in England, another in the South of France, and there is no news of the other two. On the 28th, he has heard that Italy has declared war on Greece, and that Marshall Pétain is going to enter into an agreement with Germany. On November 11, he send his wishes to his friend on the occasion of the feast of his patron saint, Saint René, which falls on November 12. In Vallée's letter dated December 12th, he notes that *L'Heure bretonne* will have a Breton page. On the next day, he mentions a change in the leadership of *L'Heure bretonne*: Mordrel and Debauvais are out, replaced with Fréminville and Planiol [This change reflected a similar change in the leadership of the Breton National Party, *Strollad Broadel Breiz*, which was moving toward a far more moderate stance than that of Debauvais and Mordrel. Debauvais has already been replaced by Mordrel at the head of the party. The moderate wing removed Mordrel, considered too close to the Germans, and replaced him with Raymond Delaporte (Remon ar Porzh), who at first adopted a strict neutral stance toward the Germans, and later made offers of services to the Allies: these belated efforts were to no avail. Delaporte was sentenced to twenty years at hard labor, and had to flee to Ireland]. It seems that the Vichy government of Marshall Pétain will accept the teaching of the Breton language. The war does not go well for the Italians, either in Lybia or in Albania, but this will not put an end to the war. On December 19, Vallée tells his friend of the British air attack against the airport located less than three miles from his nursing-home, but far enough so that he has been in no danger, although he could hear the sirens, the bombs, and the machine-guns. The attack lasted one hour to one hour and a half. Through two university students interested in improving their Breton and through Caouissin, he has heard that Church authorities have dealt harshly with Perrot, the head of *Feiz ha Breiz*, and with Ar Floc'h and Nedeleg, the leaders of *Studi hag Ober*. It seems that their Breton activism was a grievous sin in the eyes of the Church. Vallée also hopes that Caouissin will be able at last to publish his addition to his Breton dictionary. A post-card dated December 23, 1940 contains his Christmas wishes. He also sends a useful present: small candles, precious in these times of frequent power outages.

Vallée's first letter of 1941 is dated January 6. He has read an article by his friend in *Gwalarn*, and he warmly approves the conclusion about the need for real fighters for the language. He deplores the change imposed on *Studi hag Ober*: previously, the emphasis was placed on Philosophy and History in their relation to Nationality. The latest issue marks a return to childishness. His letter of January 20 mentions Berthou's and Roparz Hemon's trip to Rennes. On February 2, the talk is about Meven Mordiern's arrest by the Germans: he had apparently violated the curfew imposed by the occupants. He was lucky to escape with one night of arrest. On February 12, Vallée again deplores what has happened to *Feiz ha Breiz*: a great loss for the *Emsav*. He has more to say on February 18. There are more and more Breton publications, and Vallée has subscribed to the most important ones: *Sterenn*, *L'Heure bretonne*, *Arvor*, and he will also take *Galv*, which is devoted to philosophy. There are also books, like *Nomenoe Hoe* [sic] by Jakez Riou, a kind of farce in the vein of *Ar Gorsedd digor*, by the same author. There are Breton lessons given by capable teachers, like Eliès [Abeozen]. Vallée notes that *Arvor* contained praise

for *Skêta Segobrani*. Would it not be a good time to reprint parts of the *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz?* He has more good news on February 27: there are more Breton publications, more Breton classes, more and better Breton programs on the radio. By March 3, Vallée has read *Nomenoe Oe!*. His judgement is harsh: "The subject of the book: the welcoming reception to honor Nomenoe in Redon after his victory in Ballon. Its body: the conversations of peasants disappointed and angry because they have been kept on the square of Redon by order of Konvoyon, bishop and mayor, without being able to go to work, to sell their beasts, their eggs, and so on, at the market, as they wanted. In spite of the police they all wind up in Trilonk's tavern where they make noise, play and dance, until Konvoyon arrives to kick them all out. Nomenoe's soldiers take all the food and all the beds in the house, and when Nomenoe arrives, on foot and dead-tired, he has to share a straw-mat in the attic with a tramp. Izidor, the tavern-keeper's son, has saved Nomenoe's life during the battle: the king was famished, and he gave him three pork sausages which he had stolen from his father before running off to the army. Izidor and his sausages are frequently mentioned, as you will see from the article I have cut from one of our national papers. The final scene is devoted to a conversation in the attic between the tramp, a figure of the true poet, Inspiration, and Nomenoe. The moral of the play: peasants, when they own property, have nothing but poverty in their heart. Tramps are the ones who are called to raise the new Brittany. There is life and confusion - too much confusion - in this work. Four scenes, out of nine, are devoted to images and conversations full of 'peasantries', with matching style and language. I am afraid you won't enjoy this kind of literature. If you want, I will send you the book." Vallée was right: Meven Mordiern would not like the book. On March 15, Vallée has bad news: the daily *Ouest-Eclair* will publish a supplement called *Bretagne*, a pseudo-Breton publication in all likelihood. His fears about its spirit have been confirmed by an article about it in *L'Heure bretonne*. He has seen that *Sav* has a piece on Breton versification by Maodez Glanndour. He expresses his concern about his friend's welfare: how does he manage with food shortages? On March 24, he has received Meven Mordiern's letter dated March 18, containing a critique of *Nomenoe Oe!*, harsh, but deservedly so. [It is quite likely that this critique was not too different from the one I found in the unpublished third part of Meven Mordiern's *Envorennoù bugeliez* (pp. 311-312 and note 423): "If in my childhood the ancient Celts and the fighters of Ballon had been pictured to me as vile monstrous figures, as tattered tramps, disgusting to look at, my Celtic calling would undoubtedly have remained in the egg, without unhatched. Small children are as impressionable as wax, and such imprints last an astonishingly long time. [...] As I wrote these lines, I was thinking of the illustrations which 'embellish' the *Nomenoe Oe!* printed in 1941. If the illustrator intended to show contempt for the people he portrayed and to provoke the reader's horror, he has really reached his goal.] Bécot, on the other hand, thinks Jakez Riou is a splendid playwright, a second Shakespeare. Roparz Hemon will publish his *Dictionnaire de poche français-breton*, which miraculously survived the English bombs. It turns out that the new publication *La Bretagne* is not so bad after all. On April 13, Vallée returns to the bombing of Brest. It is a miracle that Roparz Hemon escaped alive. The entire house was destroyed, all the furniture, the books and the manuscripts. There are further details in his letter of April 22. Roparz Hemon suffered a head wound. He had already been wounded there during the war, and had long been in German hospitals. The loss of Vallée's manuscripts [his *Envorennoù* (memoirs)] meant nothing in comparison to the damage done to the Breton language and to knowledge by the loss of Meven Mordiern's *Istor ar Bed*, especially the sections "Hentou ar Sevenadurez", which contained explanations of extraordinary value which otherwise can be found only scattered among many books.

At the end of May, Vallée has talked to Professor ar Rous, who is quite concerned: the University has to vacate its buildings. Some people are quite confident that the Breton language

and Breton history will be taught in the schools. Vallée is not quite so sanguine after what he has heard in the University. (May 23, 1941). A letter from the writer Frañsez Kervella has been preserved among Vallée's letters. It is dated May 26, 1941. Kervella had written about Father ar Berr and his work in Gabon, in Central Africa. Vallée had mentioned Father ar Berr in his book *Eur Breizad er C'hanada*. On June 6, Vallée talks about his manuscripts, a study about ancient Welsh poetry written with Bécot and the help of Professor ar Rous (probably lost with the manuscripts sent to Roparz Hemon), a study on the Breton method of stick-fighting, and another on archery. He also mentions his poems, *Teleñn ar Barz* [The Poet's Harp], which had been published in *Le Clocher breton*, but without a stanza which was too biting for the French: "Ster ar galleg, -- Kammigellek, -- Gant poullou-tro, -- Hudur a fank, -- D'ar Barz yaouank, -- 'Rofe 'r maro!" [The river of French, - Tortuous, - With its whirlpools - Repugnant with mire - To the young Poet - Would give death!].

The question of a unified Breton spelling including the Vannes dialect as well as those of Kerne, Leon and Tregor returns to bother Vallée. It seems that an organization will be formed for this purpose so as to satisfy the French state's demand for a unified Breton to which school doors may finally open. Roparz Hemon will head the organization, and Vallée has been named a member. Disputes about the alphabet to be used have already started. The deed has been done in secret, and members are forbidden to talk about it. Vallée is totally disgusted. He would like his friend's advice, and leave this idiotic organization as quickly as possible (June 17, 1941). Vallée intends to fight the "unifiers", and he has sent a study on the matter to Roparz Hemon. He has also announced that he will resign from this idiotic organization (June 25, 1941). A letter from Meven Mordiern confirms his resolve. Judging from the letters he has received from Mary, a priest from the Vannes region, it is easy to see where they are heading: to an endless debate about the alphabet to be adopted (July 2, 1941). He has written to Roparz Hemon that he will not attend the meeting to be held in Rennes, that he is against dismantling the existing spelling system, and that the group should be disbanded (July 5, 1941). There are better news from Leon ar Berr. Breton history will be taught in the schools, and the language will have its turn later. Roparz Hemon has adapted an unpublished play by Paskal a Geranveier, *Ar Farouell Goapaer* [The Mocking Clown, written in the XVIIIth century], and Vallée has heard its performance which went quite well. It will be published in "Sterenn" (Aug. 15, 1941). Other news on Sept. 7, 1941: he has seen Bécot, Father Godu, Leon ar Berr, Andouard, and Professor Per ar Rous. The latter is against the new spelling system. After reading Roparz Hemon's adaptation of Paskal a Geranveier's play, Vallée has changed his mind. Roparz Hemon has used a faulty manuscript. The play had been already published in a book which Vallée had seen in the library of the Kerdanet family. Around 1905, he had published an article about his find in the *Mémoires de l'Association bretonne*. The Kerdanet version appears to be more correct than the Brest manuscript used by Hemon. On September 28, a number of remarks: about Drezen's *Itron Varia Garmez*, which has just come out (Vallée is unhappy about the language, the numerous conversations held in the local dialect, worse than in *Nominoe-Oe!*; about the reprinting of section VIII of the *Notennou*; about Abeozen's translation of the *Mabinogion* (which he finds good). He plans to resume his study of Old Welsh after Bécot's return. On November 11, a letter sending his wishes for the feast of his friend's patron saint, Saint René. Roparz Hemon writes that Vallée may be named an honorary member of the cultural institute "Ar Framm Keltiek". He has answered that this honor should go rather to Meven Mordiern, who has written so well about the importance of such an institution for the Breton people. Kerlann complains about the difficulties caused by the new spelling system, and especially by the introduction of ZH in the words which are written with a Z in K.L.T. (Kerne, Leon, Tregor), and with an H in the Vannes dialect (Gwenedeg). The latest issue of *L'Heure bretonne* has an article in K.L.T.G. (Kerne,

Leon, Treger, Gwened), in which all the sounds related to Z (th, dd, and s) are mixed up. Same thing on December 23: Roparz Hemon writes that the new spelling will be discarded as soon as possible. Leon ar Berr says everybody is disgusted with it, especially with the ZH. Ar Berr no longer believes something will be done to introduce the teaching of Breton in the schools. In the meantime, Roparz Hemon has organized advanced Breton courses in Rennes, and the same thing will be done in Paris and Quimper. The lectures are given in Breton.

In his letters dated Dec. 29, 1941 and Jan. 5, 1942, Vallée tells his friend how to deal with shortages: how to get flashlight batteries, insecticide powder, mouse-traps, wood for fuel, etc. The Jan.16, 1942 letter deals with a more important subject: the doctoral thesis presented by Batany, a priest, on Luzel's writings. Bécot attended, along with another hundred persons: something unheard of. The examining professors were Per ar Rous, Cuillandre, Rébillon, and Poquet. Ar Rous led the discussion to La Villemarqué and accused the candidate of being too partial toward La Villemarqué and too lukewarm toward Luzel. On Feb, 2, 1942: Vallée's *Envorennoù* have come out in *Sterenn*. People enjoy them, apparently. His godson liked his memories of Kastell-Aodren about the house of his uncle the sorcerer. On March 2, 1942: The *Emsav* progresses. There is a Ti-Breiz in Saint-Brieuc. Breton classes are organized everywhere. The war continues, however. The English, as though they wanted some revenge for their disappointment in Brest, now come to drop their bombs around Rennes [I believe the disappointment alluded to by Vallée is the escape from Brest of the German war-ships *Scharnhorst*, *Prinz Eugen*, and *Gneisenau*. The British had thought the ships were trapped in the harbor, and would not avoid detection by their planes]. On April 14, 1942: bad news. Vallée's nephews on his brother's side are all in prison or in exile. Three other nephews, accused of being partisans of General De Gaulle, are in the Fresnes prison. His brother's paper-mill is closed for lack of coal. On April 24, 1942: the Résistance is beginning to be heard from, and Vallée is afraid they may all be on the side of the Bolsheviks. On the previous Sunday, in the Rennes theater, a grenade was thrown at the speaker (presumably a pro-German collaborationist). Except for a woman who was able to cause the grenade to fall into the empty orchestra pit, it would have exploded on the stage. There were no casualties. On Monday, when he went down to the garden, the gardener shouted at him with pride: "On lui a foutu une grenade au derrière." On May 18, 1942: Bécot is back from Brest, where things are quiet for the present, but people wait for the Americans' arrival to bring them salvation. The feast of Saint Erwan, the patron saint of Brittany, will be celebrated on the next day, a good time to pray for the future of the language and of the Celtic spirit.

On May 29, 1942: what Meven Mordiern is doing to counsel students about the books they should read and the conduct of their studies will be most valuable for the future of the Breton language and of Breton literature. There will be need of educators to form the teachers who will staff primary and secondary schools, of books and advanced courses. This is where Meven Mordiern's writings will prove so useful. Meven Mordiern had sent to Vallée, for corrections and suggestions, an article dated May 25, 1942. In this essay, Mordiern stresses the value of the example given by German scholars, who know the importance of team-work. By working in teams, the German scholars have been able to complete undertakings which would have been beyond the reach of any single individual. He also gives the example of what Vallée and himself have been able to accomplish by working together as a team from 1920 to 1937: *Istor ar Bed*, *Prederiadennou diwar-benn ar yezou hag ar brezoneg*, *Skêtla Segobrani*, *Envorennoù beaj*, *Envorennoù eur Brezonegour*, *Envorennoùigou*, *Kembreiz gwechall ha breman*, *Eur Breizad er C'hanada*. This gives him the right to tell young Bretons to set aside any false pride, any selfishness, any jealousy, and to work together for the Goal to be reached. Let anything else be just dirt and mud next to it. Vallée expressed his enthusiastic approval. There

are other writings sent by Meven Mordiern, dated June 7, 11, and 20, 1942. They are short, two pages only. Vallée's corrections have been written directly on the manuscript. Vallée returned the articles with his corrections, as well as some news. With the June 11, 1942 article, for instance, a piece on the way of life of people living in the desert, he alludes to the grenade incident, explaining that hooligans in the Bosheviks's pay throw grenades which make a lot of noise, but little damage [which shows that Vallée was not in favor of the *Résistance*, mainly because he believed to be under the control of the Communists.

On June 20, 1942, Vallée announces that his friend's work will be published in *Gwalarn*. With Bécot, he is redoing the piece on Welsh poetry lost in the destruction of Roparz Hemon's house. On June 24, 1942: he has seen Roparz Hemon. Good news about the *Emsav* and about *Gwalarn*. On June 28, 1942: Vallée has spoken to Roparz Hemon about *Istor ar Bed*. Roparz Hemon will contact Meven Mordiern. On July 13, 1942: Daniel, the publisher of *Sav*, has received a piece of work from Meven Mordiern. Vallée has sent to *Sav* a brief rebuttal to Yeun ar Go [a Breton writer and activist]. On July 20, 1942: Vallée has received letters from Batany [the priest who had written a doctoral thesis about Luzel]. Another priest is collaborating with him, Falc'hun [who, in 1951, will succeed Per ar Rouz at the University of Rennes, and whose new spelling system will cause additional divisions among Breton writers]. On Aug. 4, 1942: Vallée happens to be color-blind. Could it be heredity, since the ancient Celts and Latins may have had the same problem? [Vallée may have been led to this hypothesis by the fact that there is only one word, in the Celtic languages, for "blue" and for "green"]. From Aug. 4, 1942 to April 22, 1943, there are only three short letters. Vallée has been seriously ill, he has even received the last rites. With Bécot's help, he has managed to write notes against the ZH spelling system. On Aug. 3, 1943, he returns to this obsession. Everybody, he says, is disgusted with it. On Aug. 5, 1943: even Taldir, who has written against the ZH spelling, now meets with his approval. On the other hand, Herrieu has written against Taldir. On Aug. 24, 1943: Vallée hopes that Falc'hun will take advantage of the forthcoming Breton language meeting for priests from the Kemper diocese to refute the ZH partisans. On Sept. 5, 1943: Vallée continues to be bothered by the ZH spelling. He will ask Bécot's advice and assistance for the publication of the army memoirs of Meven Mordiern's father. On Feb. 20, 1944: he has given Bécot articles against the new spelling. They will be published in *Sav* and *Le Réveil breton*. On Feb. 28, 1944: for Vallée, the ZH has been a heartbreak and the ruin of the work of three centuries, from Father Maunoir to Ernault. He hardly pays attention to the way the war is going. He does, however, take note of the killing of Philippe Henriot [a French politician who worked for the Nazis. I had occasion to meet one of his killers, who was one of my fellow officers in the battalion in which I served in 1945]. There are no more letters of significance until July 28, 1944.

On October 8, 1944, after the Liberation of France, Vallée sends the following post-card, in French: "Mon cher ami, je suis sain et sauf." He has been unable to write, "*faute de moyen de communication, puis manque de cartes postales*." He gives more news on Oct. 29, 1944. There has been little damage to the nursing-home: a few holes in the walls from bullets and shrapnell, mostly broken windows. He asks his friend to watch what he writes, since his mail is "*contrôlée*". [Having been active in the *Emsav*, Vallée was automatically suspected of having collaborated with the Germans]. Around mid-November, a post-card for the feast of Meven Mordiern's patron saint, Saint René, and another one on Dec. 21, 1944, for Christmas and New Year wishes. People begin to talk about the persecution of Breton activists and of the situation of the language. All is not desperate: Per ar Rous has been named Dean, and Falc'hun is writing two doctoral theses for the Sorbonne (Jan. 24, 1945). Vallée is concerned about his friend's welfare. He would like to put his house in Saint-Brieuc at his disposal, but it has been taken over by squatters who appear to have connections among the new masters. He has written some notes

about the problem caused by the Vannes dialect: these notes have been entrusted to Per Denez. Keravel wants to start again with Sohier's journal, *Ar Falz*. (May 2, 1945). Vallée mentions Per Denez's friend and collaborator, Piette [Arzel Even. Among Vallée's letters, I have discovered a letter by Piette which deals with agriculture. Vallée was then helping Bécot with articles in Breton about agriculture]. Vallée has given Meven Mordiern's writings to Per Denez, who will help getting them published. Malmanche's plays will be reprinted. Vallée has tried to send a letter of support to Roparz Hemon's lawyer [Roparz Hemon had been arrested and was waiting trial for collaborating with the enemy](Oct. 3, 1945).

On Nov. 7, 1945, Vallée sends his usual wishes for the feast of Saint René. He is still working hard, helping Bécot with his articles and writing about the language. On Dec. 19, 1945, it is time for Christmas wishes. The next letter is dated July 17, 1946. Vallée is encouraged by the number of new Breton publications. There is hope that his friend's precious manuscripts will eventually find a publisher. His obsession with the ZH spelling has not abated, as appears in his letters of July 23 and 29, 1946. In the latter text, he deplores that Per Denez, who publishes the journal *Kened*, should be among the people who have been seduced by the magic word "*peurunvan*" [completely unified]. He has had a visit from Falc'hun, kept busy by his two Sorbonne theses. When he has his doctorate, he will try to increase the influence of the Chair of Celtic within the university. The *Association bretonne* has held its meeting in Vannes, which, hopefully, will spread. On Aug. 2, 1946, Vallée speaks of correcting the proofs of his book on Breton stick-fighting (*Ar Bazataerez*). His letter of Aug. 6, 1946 contains this warning in French: "*Olivier ne doit pas être très sûr, il aurait en ce moment de grandes difficultés. C'est un adepte du ZH.*" [Vallée is probably talking about Youenn Olier, who was then being persecuted by left wing professors at the university for his activity in the *Emsav*, as he has explained in his journals]. Vallée is receiving Welsh publications again, and notably *Y Ddraig goch*, which, in the latest issue, had an article about Brittany [The Welsh had put pressure on England to send a delegation to France, to see how the French state was treating Bretons nationalists. This delegation had a powerful effect. It is quite certain, for instance, that Roparz Hemon would have been treated far more harshly had it not been for the presence of Welsh observers at his trial] (Aug. 10 and 20, 1946). In spite of obstacles, the study of the language goes fairly well in the Leon and Vannes areas. In Rennes, Falc'hun will probably have to cancel his lectures due to illness. Bécot may be able to help with the publication of Mordiern's Breton translation of Jules Verne's novel *Les Forceurs de blocus*. Vallée is still working steadily: he has just completed a small book, *Notes de grammaire bretonne* (Sept. 7, 1946). He then goes on to work on another small book about fencing, and his letters dated September 13, 20, and 24, 1946, are devoted to the terminology of this sport. On Oct. 16, 1946, he returns to his *Notes de grammaire bretonne*: if he can have the fair copy prepared by Meven Mordiern typewritten, he will submit it to *Tir-na-Noc* [sic. This publication was later to merge with *Al Liamm*, and to take this new title, although its original name, *Tir-na-nÓg*, still appears somewhere on the cover]. Vallée would like to find some accommodation in the town of Saint-Brieuc for his friend for the winter (Oct. 22, 1946). He has heard from Andouard, who is working for the Navy. He has received an important issue of *Al Liamm*. It is getting more and more difficult to publish Breton texts. Per Denez is now teaching in Normandy, and has had to relinquish the direction of *Kened* (Nov. 4, 1946). The feast of Saint René is getting nearer, and Vallée sends his usual wishes. He has heard that the state allocates printing paper to publications which are favorable to the government, and refuses or reduces it to small quantities for book publication (Nov. 10, 1946). Bécot has given a lecture on ancient Welsh poetry in Saint-Brieuc. Maodez Glanndour attended. There is a new organization, *Société d'Études Littéraires, Touristiques et Artistiques de Bretagne*, about which Vallée appears rather doubtful. Still, the *Kuzul-Meur* meeting in Saint-Brieuc adopted a motion for Breton in

school. Saint-Brieuc also has an *Office breton du livre*. The director has heard of Vallée's *Ar Bazataerez*. Prudhomme will publish works for the *Association bretonne*. In Vannes also, the printing-house Lafolye will resume its publications. It would be a good idea for Meven Mordiern to write to them about his Jules Verne translations (Nov. 30, 1946). Other possibilities are two periodicals who might serialize them: *Vent d'Ouest*, and *Cahiers de Brocéliande* (Dec. 7, 1946). No date on the next letter, which was probably written prior to December 24, 1946, since it contains Vallée's Christmas and New Year wishes to his friend. Two separate sheets appear to be part of the same letter. Vallée urges a prompt publication of the Jules Verne translations. He knows two other possible publishing houses, Brossard, in Kastell-Aodren, and Caouissin, in Landerneau. Oberthur, in Rennes has done bilingual publications for Seite. A post-card dated Jan. 6, 1947 is just to wish Happy New Year. He has also sent his *Notes de grammaire*. On May 23, 1947, Vallée offers his friend the services of a visiting-nurse, if he needs one, and money. He no longer can read. A nurse has to read him his mail, so his friend must write in French. He finally has to acknowledge that his battle against the ZH spelling has been in vain. On Sept. 8, 1947, he is still concerned about his friend's health. He has heard of Kervella's Breton Grammar, a huge book which costs 740 Francs. He no longer can read, and it would be useless to buy it. Thanks to a typist, he has been able to write notes of grammar which have been read in a summer school for Christian teachers. These will keep them on the true path. On Oct. 23, 1947, he returns to Kervella's grammar, which represents a lot of work, but based on too little study. He regrets not having been able to make a book of the notes he had sent his friend. Falc'hun had his left lung removed. No news from small Breton journals published by young people. Two months later, a post-card for Christmas and New Year wishes. On Jan. 14, 1948: bad news, Oberthur will not publish the *Notes de grammaire*. Prudhomme, however, will. Vallée has seen Taldir and a few other poets. On Jan. 25, 1947, he gives more information. Prudhomme will publish Vallée's work "Grammaire française et grammaire bretonne" with a bunch of studies supplied by the *Association bretonne*. There will be separate offprints. Vallée has been ill, but before his sickness he had written to *Vent d'Ouest* to try to place his friend's translations of Jules Verne: did Meven Mordiern ever hear from them? The assistant-nurse reads to him articles from newspapers, news about Celtic meetings, etc. (March 7, 1948). Meven Mordiern has been ill, and Vefa de Bellaing has suggested that she could find him a maid who would look after him. It would be good for him (March 16, 1948). Vallée still has not forgotten the dispute about the ZH spelling. He asks his friend to correct the proofs of his essay "Grammaire française et grammaire bretonne" for Prudhomme, and wishes him Happy Easter (March 25, 1948). Vallée has been very ill, but the *Supplément* to the Breton dictionary of which Mordiern and Ernault were the co-authors is being printed at the same time as the grammar, and he would like Meven Mordiern to coordinate the two jobs. Since he is concerned about his friend's health, he suggests that they get the services of a competent foreign language teacher, Quentel, who will be quite able to continue the work begun by Mordiern (May 17, 1948). A few days later, he has changed his mind and decided to follow the advice given by Mordiern and Bécot: the notes on grammar will be entrusted to Keravel. Two things remain to prepare: the list of people to whom the work should be sent, and the list of forthcoming works to be printed on the cover (May 24, 1948). Before his death, he would like to make sure that his friend's remaining time on earth will be assured: he has asked his brother to assume this responsibility. He would also like to see to the publication of his friend's unpublished works as soon as the *Supplément* and the grammar have come out (June 4, 1948). On July 23, 1948, Vallée expresses his gratitude to Bécot, who comes to read him his mail, and to Meven Mordiern, who has corrected the proofs and prepared a complete book-list for the grammar study. He has received three copies from Prudhomme. A meeting of the Bleun-Brug will soon take place. There is also mention of summer schools, of youth camps, etc.

Hopefully all of these groups will bear fruit. He encloses one of his old poems on separate pages, not noticing that two lines are missing. On July 26, 1948, he sends the missing lines. The grammar booklet is ready and will be sent to Breton writers, although Vallée doubts it will do much good. At the Breton meeting in Saint-Pol-de-Léon, there will be an attempt to continue the work done by Perrot. Influential priests are in favor. Vallée sends along another of his old poems, on two separate pages. On July 27, he sends two other poems. They had appeared under the name “Ar Prederour” [The Philosopher]. On August 8, 1948, Vallée speaks of his old poems. The one titled “An Tad Santel a lavaras” [The Holy Father said] was written after the Pope’s “Message au Monde” which had been published in French at the beginning of the war and which contained rules about ethnic minorities. He has received no response about his grammar book which has been sent all over Brittany, nor about the notes copied so carefully by Meven Mordiern and sent to Keravel. He will try to have the *Supplément* to the dictionary distributed among Celticists. His brother has sent him the list of foreign universities prepared by Meven Mordiern. Vallée was unable to read it, nor could he hear the nurse read it to him since he is totally deaf since his latest bout of illness. He would like to send the *Grand dictionnaire* and the *Supplément* to universities where Breton is studied, like Aberyswyth, Swansea and Caerdydd [Cardiff] (6/8/1948). On August 23, 1948, Vallée sends the name of an extra recipient for the *Supplément* to Meven Mordiern: Professor William Smith, Columbia University, New York, who has just published a study on “Etymologies dans la toponymie bretonne”. The last message which Vallée sent to Meven Mordiern was a post-card for the feast of his patron saint, René, which occurs on December 12. Both would die shortly thereafter: Meven Mordiern on February 4, 1949, and Vallée on June 3, 1949. They are buried side by side, in Saint-Michel Cemetery, in Saint-Brieuc.



## CHAPTER NINE

### MEVEN MORDIERN'S LABORS FOR BRITTANY

Mordiern's and Vallée's collaboration took different forms. For more than sixteen years, from 1920 to 1937, they met three times a week, for several hours on each occasion. The *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz* and the *Skêvla Segobrani* were first written in French by Meven Mordiern, and then translated into Breton by Vallée. Vallée's *Envorennoù diwar va beajou e Breiz-Veur hag Iwerzôn* [*Memories about my travels in Great Britain and in Ireland*] and his *Envorennoù eur Brezonegour* (*Memories of a Breton speaker*) were dictated in Breton to Meven Mordiern, who merely wrote down what Vallée was saying. *Eur Breizad er C'hanada e dibenn an XIXvet kantved hag e derou an XXvet* [*A Breton in Canada at the end of the XIXth century and in the beginning of the XXth*], and *Kembreiz gwechall ha breman* [*The Welsh in the Middle Ages and the Welsh today*] are oral translations of French and English texts made by Vallée and taken down by Mordiern. *Istor ar bed* [*History of the World*] and *Selladou ouz an tremenet* [*Looking at the past*] were written directly in Breton by Meven Mordiern and corrected by Vallée. Mordiern was not entirely satisfied with these latter efforts. Too often, he says, "there is the stink of French about them" (*SOAT*, CVII-CXI). Nor did he make any excessive claims about the literary value of the *Skêvla*, or about the scholarly value of the *Notennou* and of *Istor ar Bed*. Nor would he compare his *Selladou* with memoirs written by major French, English, or German authors. However, there existed nothing comparable to such memoirs in Breton, and he had to manage with the materials which were available to him. His writings were to be used for the purpose for which they were intended, as steps in a ladder which would enable the user to reach new heights. When he himself was learning the Breton language, he would have been grateful for the help which such writings would have given him (*SOAT*, CXI-CXIII). *Istor ar Bed* was essentially an attempt to provide young Breton readers with a survey of modern knowledge written in their own language, thus giving them the linguistic tools which would enable them to handle any scientific subject without having to resort to French. This work thus filled a gap which Meven Mordiern had noticed when he had observed that there were no books in Breton similar to the popular series of books about science written for young Frenchmen by Louis Figuier (*EB*, 264, 318; *ADL*, 2). In his *Prederiadennou diwar-benn ar yezou hag ar brezoneg* [*Thoughts upon languages and Breton*], Meven Mordiern expressed his faith in the resurgence of Brittany, of her language, of her culture, and of her people. In the thick volume of his *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz*, he gathered just about every item of knowledge available about the origins, the history, and the culture of the Celtic people in antiquity, thus fostering the pride of his young Breton readers in their ancestors. The three volumes of *Skêvla Segobrani* are presented as the memoirs of the Gaulish mercenary Segobranos. Copious notes testify to the scope of the author's research. This work was also intended to make its Breton readers proud of the history and of the culture of their ancestors. So are Meven Mordiern's visionary tales, *Logotigiakos* and *Gant L'oez an Doueed* [*With the armies of the gods*]. In his *Hunvreoù Sant-Helori* [*Dreams of Saint-Helori*], Meven Mordiern tackled another subject, psychoanalysis, relating and analyzing dreams of his which had been inspired by his vision of the ancient Celts. Meven Mordiern utterly rejected Freud, whom he saw as a sick man, since only a sick man could have been attracted to the study of sick people. The story *Bodadeg ar pevarzekvet* [*The gathering of the fourteenth*] belongs to a similar vein. It is related to an event in his life, the death of his stepsister, in 1866,

twelve years before his own birth. The child was only eleven months (*IBEC'H*, 98). Meven Mordiern had this dream in 1936 or 1937 (*BAP*, 18). He had already taken as models for the main characters of the *Skêtle*, in the final sections which he later did not use and destroyed, those of his relatives who, by their physical appearance, recalled Gaulish or Celtic figures of antiquity. Moreover, preparing to write his memoirs, he kept his mind on his memories of his family. He had also made use, in the destroyed additions to the *Skêtle* and in his Celtic dreams, of individuals whom he had had occasion to meet in his excursions through the Ile-de-France, in the years 1900-1914, and who looked like ancient Gauls. All of these people had inspired various figures in the *Skêtle* and in *Gant Luoez an Doueed* (*BAP*, 12). Although Meven Mordiern rejected Freud, *Bodadeg ar pevarzekvet* is a typical wish fulfilment dream. The protagonist, Ategene Roudikos, is a thinly disguised projection of the author. He has traveled through the Roman empire, and beyond its borders. In India, he has learned how to create illusions which look exactly like living creatures, animal or human, endowed with the substance and the warmth of life, and how to make them come and go before the eyes of others. Riding past the grave of his sister, who had died as a child and been buried on the Mediterranean shore, he has made her form appear before him. He has embraced her, and kissed her on the forehead. She felt warm and alive, but she remained silent, as do all the shades raised by magic. He has taken her with him on his horse and returned to his native home, in the land of the Carnutes, for the gathering of the fourteenth, which is held in memory of the dead. During the long ride home, some of his heart has gone into the shade, and when he reaches home, she is able to speak. In the house, he sees all of the people whom he has cared for in his life: his childhood companion Antoniakos, the two pretty girls whom he has loved as a boy, his father, his mother, his brother, his uncles, his mother's father and grandfather. Gathered with them are also the three daughters of one of his uncles, his grandmother, his great-grandmother, and other relatives. His mother's great-grandfather welcomes him (*BAP*, 8-18). Meven Mordiern's dream is clearly a victory over the passage of time which has left him all alone in this world, a symbolic negation of death which has taken from him all of the people who might have loved him and protected him.

The scholarly articles which Meven Mordiern published in the Breton journals *Gwalarn* and *Sav* had for their purpose the defense and illustration of the Breton language, and, more generally, of the Celtic people. They were also intended to demonstrate that the Breton language could serve as a vehicle for any subject, no matter how learned or complex. His autobiographical writings, most of which, as I have explained, still remain unpublished, had a similar purpose. In the preface of his *Tiegezioù bourc'hizien eus ar broioù-krec'h...*, Meven Mordiern provided the following explanations. In languages which have been cultivated for centuries by the best and the most learned people, like English and French, there is an abundance of memoirs of all kinds which have importance and value. Had he been writing in these languages, it would never have entered his mind to prepare what he modestly calls these "*disterachou*", or trifles, for publication. He offers this justification: "Breton, however, has been left lying at the bottom and neglected for seven hundred years at least, through the cowardice, the laziness, and the blindness of people whose duty it was to keep it in its former rank of a major language. While waiting for better, that is while waiting for people who will know how to present entertaining memoirs, memoirs of importance in some regard or other, in the Breton language, these trifles will have their value, in regard to the language at least. These memoirs (as well as my childhood memories) make it plain that Breton is just as apt to depict the life of the bourgeoisie in the big cities and in their country homes as it is apt to illustrate the life of the peasantry in their fields and in their cottages. This had to be made clear to the people who hold for 'little Brittany' (if we may, without sinning, apply this beautiful name to a country rotten sick by romanization). As for me, who came to Breton by way of Old Celtic, I have never had any doubt about the superiority of the 'great language of

Gaul.'" Meven Mordiern thus made it unmistakably clear that his goal, in writing his memoirs, was to prove that the Breton language was entitled to the same respect as languages with a long established literature, like English or French. One form of proof is the simple fact that, whatever the subject, Breton never is at a loss for words. Some readers may be annoyed by Meven Mordiern's habit of giving a Breton form to words which they are used to see mostly in French. It is indeed a bit disconcerting at first to be confronted with "Gwiler" instead of "Villiers", with "Gwenngen" instead of "Vendôme", with "Belez" instead of "Beauce", with "Straed ar Gustantin" instead of "Rue de Constantinople" (*EB*, 8, 37,48, 156). This, however, should be no more annoying than it is for a Breton reader to be faced in a French text with such forms as "Morlaix" instead of "Montroulez", "Rennes" instead of "Roazhon", "Nantes" instead of "Naoned", or "Tréguier" instead of "Landreger". Meven Mordiern never had the slightest compunction about giving the Breton equivalent of foreign names or titles, a habit which occasionally makes it difficult for the reader to identify the individual, the character, or the book which the author is discussing. It may take him a while, for instance, to realize that *Fulenn Berz* refers to *The Fair Maid of Perth* (*EB*, 386). There is no reason, however, why Meven Mordiern should have been more self-conscious about giving a book in English a Breton title than were the English translators of *Les Fleurs du Mal* or *A la recherche du temps perdu* when they gave English titles to books written in French.

Two of Meven Mordiern's manuscripts bear the titles *Istor eur c'halvedigez* and *Istor berr eur c'halvedigez*. Nearly all of his memoirs are indeed the history of a calling. They enable the reader to follow its unfolding from the initial incident which planted its first seed to the works which were the fruit of its later flowering. When Meven Mordiern's mother told him: "We are neither Romans nor Latins. We are Gauls", an incident which he mentioned repeatedly, she also led him to his first attempts to identify with the ancient Celts (*EB*, 309; *IEC'H*, 6; *IBEC'H*, 57). As an only child living alone with his parents and their servants in the small country town of Villiers, Meven Mordiern was not allowed to go to the local school where he might have picked up bad language or bad manners in playing with children of a lower class. His parents engaged the local schoolteachers as private tutors (*EB*, 222-226). The child thus had no playmates. His mother taught him how to entertain himself, explaining that his stepbrother, at his age, would devise games based on the adventure novels which he read. This is what the boy did. He made use of the spacious gardens which surrounded the house as locations for his games. He had a fertile imagination, a large library, plenty of space, and he put them all to good use: a wall was a rampart, a sandy alley the arena of a Roman circus or an African desert, a thicket of lilac bushes a tropical jungle, a wine cellar served as Roman catacombs, a garden pond became a lake or the ocean, etc. Some of his favorite games were inspired by his Celtic readings. He fashioned helmets, javelins, and other weapons on the model of those used by the ancient Celts (*EB*, 354). He recreated the expeditions of ancient Celts into Southern Europe, the battle of Allia where the Celts defeated the Romans, the *trimarkisia* of the Celtic warriors as it cut to pieces the Macedonian phalanx in 281 B.C., the expeditions of the Rough-footed Scots, the Red Shanks, across the counties of Northumberland and Durham in 1327, and many other battles (*EB*, 39-40, 354-356, 379,386, 389-390; *ADL*, 16; *IEC'H*, 35-36). The chimney of an underground washroom which rose above the ground became a tower of refuge like those used in medieval times on the shores of Scotland (*EB*, 58; *IEC'H*, 147). A fence was a watch tower on the Scottish border, guarding against the English (*EB*, 72). Recreating famous battles between the Scots and the English, Bannockburn, Flodden, or Prestonpans, he would charge the enemy, his Scottish bonnet on his head and his claymore in his hand, shouting "Alben! Alben!" (*EB*,368; *IEC'H*, 32). Inspired by Walter Scott's *An Ofiser a fortun* [*The Legend of Montrose*], he would discharge his weapons at the men of Argyle (*ADL*, 20-25). He would run across the battlefield (the lawn near

his parents' house), shouting the war cry of an ancient Celtic tribe, "*Ambra! Ambra!*", or what he thought was the battle cry of the ancient Celts, "*Terriben! Terriben*", not realizing at the time that this was not, as he wrongly thought, an ancient Celtic word, but the deformed pronunciation of the Breton words "*Torr e benn! Torr e benn!*" [Break his head!] (*IEC'H*, 30). He would give the cardboard manikins which represented the enemy the names of the worst foes of the Celts, Cesar or Postumius, and he would not stop hitting them with stones, arrows, or javelins until they were totally demolished (*IEC'H*, 28). He loved to pretend that he was Lutorius, the Gaulish gladiator in Bulwer-Lytton's *Diweza dervezioù Pompei* [*The Last Days of Pompei*] (*EB*, 55). In all of the books which he read, he always sided with the Celts against the Romans, with the Bretons against the Saxons, with the Highlanders against the English, with the Welsh against the Normans (*EB*, 411; *IEC'H*, 12-13; *ADL*, 34-35). Meven Mordiern makes it quite clear that his games were far from being exclusively based on his readings about the Celts. He had plenty of other games in which he identified with other hardy men: Mahrattas riding across India, Cossacks conquering Siberia, British dragoons attacking the French infantry at Waterloo, Comanches, Apaches and Navajos waging war against the Mexicans, trappers hunting for furs in the frozen wastes of Northern Canada, or big game hunters in Siberia and Mandchuria (*EB*, 40, 59, 64, 72). The fact remains, however, that this early identification with Celtic warriors created an enduring association between the ludic pleasure of the games, the virile virtues of war, and the history of the Celts. Meven Mordiern's childhood attraction to the Celts was strong enough to influence his likes and dislikes. The West was his favorite direction since it was the direction in which lay those Celtic countries, Brittany and Ireland (*EB*, 48). He found himself attracted to people who shared his interest in and his love for the Celts. He noted with pleasure that a lady who was an old family friend had sent a subscription to *Le Fureteur breton* when he had mentioned to her that he was one of the contributors. She had been in charge of a military hospital during the Franco-Prussian war, and she had become very fond of the young Breton soldiers whom she had met. Meven Mordiern was also pleased to find that the teacher in whose house he had stayed during his year in England had some knowledge of Welsh and Gaelic (*B*, unpaginated). He took a liking to one of his parents' servants because he had the handsome face and the strong build of an ancient Gaulish warrior (*EB*, 30, 99, 101, 184, 400; *ADL*, 29). Meven Mordiern never tired of commenting upon the physical appearance of people who, in his eyes, retained the characteristic features of their Celtic ascendants. In the baker of Villiers, tall, wide-shouldered, blond, blue-eyed, skin as white as milk, he found a living portrait of the Gauls of antiquity (*EB*, 205). He greatly admired the husband of his cousin Lysie for similar reasons (*EB*, 178). A childhood friend who had black hair and blue eyes was described as being as handsome as an Irishman (*EB*, 233-234). More generally, Meven Mordiern made use of his knowledge of ancient Celtic art to describe the appearance of people. One of his private tutors, for instance, had a beard similar to that of the Gauls' heads which adorn the upper corners of the Amendola sarcophagus (*EB*, 224). So did his uncle Raoul, who, by his physical appearance, reminded him of the Celtic chiefs who led their bands of warriors to the conquest of Europe (*EB*, 247-248; *IEC'H*, 43; *IBEC'H*, 161; *SOAT*, XXIII). It always was a pleasure for him to meet with country people who had retained this perfect physical type (*IBEC'H*, 248). On the other hand, he hated those illustrations which turned the Celts into objects of ridicule: hence his acerbic criticism of the edition of Jakez Riou's play *Nomenoe oe!* (*EB*, 312). In another play, *Gorsedd digor*, Jakez Riou had poked fun at the hero of *Skêtla Segobrani* by alluding to "l'éclat de ses gros bras nus", a pun which could not have pleased Mordiern.

Another indication of the extent to which Meven Mordiern succeeded in recelticizing himself may be found in his constant use of the history, the language, and the civilization of the Celts as frames of reference. Whenever he wants to make something clearer, since he writes in

Breton, he provides the reader with a Breton equivalent, in the case of an expression, or a Breton point of comparison, in the case of a situation (*EB*, 234, 238). He thus explains that farm houses, in the region of Vendôme, are not scattered about the land, as they are in Brittany, but grouped in villages (*SOAT*, XI). Similarly, a childhood memory is related to a Scottish proverb (*EB*, 129). A legend which he heard as a boy is linked to Celtic or pre-Celtic cults (*EB*, 262, 430). America must be the land referred to in *Imram Brain maic Febail ocus a Echtra*, the *Tir-nan-Og* (*EB*, 99, 162). Place names are traced back to their Celtic origins. The word "*Ballon*", for instance, probably goes back to a Celtic root which may be found in the Welsh "*bal*" (mountain), or "*losgval* (fire-mountain, i.e. volcano) (*EB*, 270). The Old Celtic root "*nant*" (valley) survives in a number of place names: *Grenant*, *Nanteuil*, *Dinant*, *Ternant*, *Pernant*, *Lournand* (*EB*, 418). The name of the river "*Nonette*" is seen as probably related to the Celtic radical "*non*", which means "spring", as in Welsh (*TB*, 117). The Celtic etymon of "*Nogent*" was "*Novientos*" (*EB*, 450). Other examples include "*Argantioalos*" (*Argenteuil*), and "*Altheia*" (*Authie*) (*EB*, 465). The Celtic word "*bann*" (height) was retained in the Breton place name "*Bann-Nin*" (*EB*, 462). Meven Mordiern also liked to speculate on the form which Gaulish place names would have taken had the land remained under the control of Celtic-speaking people. Old Celtic "*Ledos*" would have become "*Loez*", not "*Loir*", and "*Beliza*" would have been "*Belez*" instead of "*Beauce*" (*SOAT*, VIII). The name of Reims, which Meven Mordiern traces back to the Gaulish "*Remi*", would have become in Breton "*Roef*", "*Roev*", or "*Roe*". The countryside which Meven Mordiern saw from the train, in his excursions around Paris, appeared all the more attractive to him when he thought that the forests before his eyes remained exactly as they had been seen by the Gauls who once ruled over the land (*IBEC'H*, 233). It should be pointed out, nevertheless, that Meven Mordiern was not a fanatic about all things Celtic. It annoyed him that Breton writers always made use of the same old chestnuts, the legend of Ker-Is or the story of Deirdre. He had loved the story when he had first read it, in 1900, in D'Arbois de Jubainville's study of the Irish epic, but he was against using the same material over and over again (*EB*, 32; *TB*, 43). Good Breton translations of such books as Viollet-Le-Duc's *Histoire d'une forteresse*, E. Menault's *Spered al loened* [*L'esprit des animaux*], Jules Verne's *Beaj da greiz an douar* [*Voyage au centre de la terre*], or Norbert Casteret's *Dix ans sous terre: campagnes d'un explorateur solitaire*, would have been far more useful to Breton children. Such books were needed to gain and to retain new generations of young readers for the Breton language. So were good translations of novels by Mayne-Reid about the wars of the Indians and the Mexicans in the early years of the XIXth century, or of Stevenson's *Ar Saez du* [*The Black Arrow*] (*EB*, 32, 64, 235, 308, 317; □ *IEC'H*, 66). Meven Mordiern himself translated two books by Jules Verne. He would have liked to see many other books made available to young Breton readers: books about boat-building, about gymnastics, about volcanoes, about butterflies, about Nineveh and Babylon, about explorers, anything that might awaken the curiosity of young minds, teach as well as entertain (*EB*, 343, 367-368). As a child, he had delighted in fashioning himself the weapons which he used in his war games. He gave Kerlann, the founder of the first all-Breton school, technical manuals which, in his opinion, could be put to good pedagogical use by appealing to the children's imagination. Boys, for instance, would enjoy learning the techniques of metal-working in order to build weapons for playing war, like Celtic helmets and throwing axes (*EB*, 356-357; *IEC'H*, 19). Meven Mordiern greatly admired Fransez Vallée's skills as a bow-maker, and he gave him whatever help he could in the preparation of his Breton manuals about archery and the art of stick-fighting (Fransez Vallée, *Ar Gwaregata, C'hoari ar saez, levr-dourn klok-mat ar waregerien* [Sant-Brieg: Prudhomme, 1942]; *Ar Bazataerez breizek displeget e pemp kentel hag eun daolenn-arvest. Ouz e heul: ar C'hanennataerez ha C'hoari Piloued* [Sant-Brieg: Prudhomme, 1946].

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE LEGACY OF MEVEN MORDIERN

As we have seen, Meven Mordiern could be a harsh critic. Youenn Olier has gone so far as to write: "... in truth, he had neither friend nor comrade" (*Istor hol lennegezh: Skol Walarn* [Roazhon: Imbourc'h, 1975], p.6). In point of fact, he did have faithful friends, if only Frañsez Vallée. He also was on friendly terms with Abeozen, judging from what I have read in his *Brouilhedou*. Abeozen loaned him books which he needed, and he directed him toward *Gwalarn*, which would publish many of his writings during the thirties. We have also seen, in the letters sent by Vallée to Meven Mordiern between 1920 and 1948, that both knew most of the people who were then active in the Breton movement: Erwan Berthou, Loeiz Andouard, Yann-Vari Perrot, Kerlann, Youenn Drezen, Langleiz, Loeiz ar Floc'h [Maodez Glanndour], Herri Caouissin, Father Godu, Leon ar Berr, Frañsez Kervella, Vefa de Bellaing, Per Denez..., and several of these names also appear in the *Brouilhedou*. Youenn Olier, however, does show that Meven Mordiern was highly respected in the *Emsav*, first of all because of the consideration which Roparz Hemon had for him (he called him "hor prederour bras" [our great thinker]), and secondly because of his ardent love of Brittany (Youenn Olier, *ibid.*)

The last years of Meven Mordiern's life were not happy ones. Galloping inflation had left him destitute, and it was only with the help of a few faithful friends (Vallée, mostly), that he was able to survive. These were also the darkest years in the history of the Breton movement, and he never could have foreseen the extraordinary rebirth of the *Emsav* which would take place in the sixties. He knew, however, from Vallée's letters, that there were still some young Bretons who kept the faith alive: Per Denez, Arzel Even, and Youenn Olier, for instance. He even exchanged a few letters with Youenn Olier. He also was aware of such new Breton publications as *Avel*, *Kened*, *Tír-n-an-Óg*, and *Al Liamm*. Most of all, he could derive some comfort from the fact that on the whole, he had achieved what he had set out to do.

Meven Mordiern did motivate an entire generation of young Bretons to take pride in their Celtic heritage, in the history, the language and the civilization of their ancestors. Through his work with Vallée and Ernault (their Breton-French dictionary, primarily), and through books which were based on the most recent advances in scholarship and science, he also provided them with the linguistic instrument required for life in the modern world. In 1945, he had written an essay in which he had gathered together his main ideas about the problem of retrieving and saving the Breton language for future generations. This essay was not published in his lifetime. It was left in the care of his friend, the Comte de Koedgourhedhen, but for some reason it was not sent to Harvard with Meven Mordiern's other manuscripts. The Count later made the text of this article available to the Breton journal *Preder*, and it was published in March 1964 as a separate issue (Meven Mordiern: "Talar an Hoc'h. Kudenn an adsevel ha selvel ar Brezhoneg", *Preder*, Kaier 57 [Meurzh 1964]. Pp. 50). In this essay, Meven Mordiern makes it quite clear that the Breton language can resume its rank among the major languages, provided the right solutions to the problem are applied. We have already seen what these solutions are: the formation of a Breton-speaking social and intellectual elite, and, in order to achieve this goal, the development of adequate linguistic tools. Grammars and dictionaries which would include scientific and technical terms were needed, and this work was done by people like Vallée, Ernault, and Meven Mordiern himself, as well as by members of such groups as *Gwalarn*.

More was required. Meven Mordiern advocated the publication of books of all kinds which would excite young Bretons' thirst for knowledge, and awaken in them the desire to increase this knowledge in all possible fields: history, geography, sociology, zoology, botanics, astronomy, etc.. This could be done in two ways: with novels which would teach and entertain, and with scientific and technical works. In the first category, Meven Mordiern listed novels of adventure and exploration by Mayne-Reid, Karl May, Fenimore Cooper, Louis Jacolliot, Jules Verne, Rider-Haggard, and Lucien Biart, the historical novels of Alfred Rambaud, Léon Cahun, Walter Scott, Stevenson, Erckmann-Chatrian, Sienkiewicz, Merejkowski, Bulwer-Lytton, and Whyte-Melville (but not Alexandre Dumas, whose novels have no historical value whatsoever). As to scientific and technical works, he took as models the books published in the following series: the "Bibliothèque des Merveilles", published by Hachette; the "Bibliothèque scientifique contemporaine", published by Baillière; the "Bibliothèque scientifique internationale", published by Alcan; the "Bibliothèque de la Nature", published by Masson; the "Encyclopédie pratique du naturaliste", published by Lechevalier, and books on history, geography, astronomy, and similar subjects published by Juven. Translated and published in Breton, such works would provide the most advanced and accurate information in every field of knowledge. Textbooks and technical manuals would be equally essential, since "learning by doing" (Meven Mordiern actually used the English phrase) is the best way of acquiring knowledge.

Meven Mordiern, as Youenn Olier has demonstrated, did not have much respect for what he called "lennegezh diduellañ uhel" [high literature of entertainment] (Youenn Olier, *op. cit.*, p.8). He believed that scientific and technical works were far more useful. His example has been followed by the third *Emsav* since the resurgence of Breton nationalism in the late fifties and early sixties. In addition to textbooks, grammars, and dictionaries, a number of scientific and technical glossaries are now available. There are specialized dictionaries for commerce, jurisprudence, anatomy, computer science, psychoanalysis, etc. What Meven Mordiern advocated in *Talar an Hoc'h* has been accomplished by such organizations as *SADED* and *Diwan*, for instance, in regard to education. Grammars and dictionaries have been made available by *Al Liamm*, *Preder*, and *Skol Vreizh*. Jul Gros has collected terms and expressions caught "au vol", as Abeozen advocated, to Meven Mordiern's approval (*TH*, p. 42). Young researchers have also collected and studied the life stories of farmers, fishermen, and artisans. Considerable efforts have also been made to educate young students in Breton up to the university level. This was the main purpose of the organization which went by the acronym of *SADED*. The struggle has been pursued with the creation of the *Diwan* schools, and with current efforts to establish a major university degree, the *CAPES*, for the Breton language, thus placing it on a level comparable to that of other major languages in the secondary schools and in the universities. Present conditions still lag far behind Meven Mordiern's goals, but whatever progress has been made in the educational area has been very much in line with his suggestions in this domain.

Meven Mordiern's published works have had a powerful influence on the rebirth of Breton literature in the twenties and the thirties. The *Notennou diwar-benn ar Gelted koz* and *Skêta Segobrani* have inspired poems like *Kan da Gornog*, by Youenn Drezen, or *Epona ha Manos*, by Kerverziou. Younger poets, like Youenn Gwernig, still turn to the *Notennou*, as he has done in his *An diri dir*. Some of the poems in my collection *Klemmgan Breizh* also show traces of this influence.

Meven Mordiern never exaggerated the value of the work he accomplished for his adopted mother-land, Brittany, as he acknowledges in the first pages of his *Istor eur c'halvedigez*: "For lack of a more appropriate word, I will do here with the word 'calling'. It is a big and proud word, and, like all big and proud words, a wrong word too, as least as far as I am concerned. I have never felt called, or entrusted with the mission of doing this or that for Breton.

What I have done, or tried to do, I have done for my pleasure only, out of love for the Language, out of respect for it, and after many years, when I was in my decline, because I saw there was no one else in this country who wanted to do it.” What he did, he did because he wanted too, as he reiterates in this page of his *Brouilhedou*: “It has been the desire of my entire life has been to bretonize myself, and to bretonize everything I loved, the sciences, as in *Istor ar Bed*, and memories of my childhood and my family.” His goal was clear: a free Brittany, an autonomous Brittany, but he refused to take part in political struggles. Politics was not, in his opinion, the most effective way to reach his goal, language and culture were. When the elite of the population would be truly Breton, everything else would follow. He had an unmovable faith that the course of history would change for the Celts. May this faith remain as fast in the hearts of the Bretons to come.



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