

The “Gwerz” or Ballad of Dom Jean Derrien¹

By A. Le Braz

Dom Jean Derrien is in bed. A voice speaks to him in the night, and says:

“Dom Jean. Derrien, you sleep on down, and I can never sleep!”

“Who comes at this time of night to my door to wake me? It is but three nights since I received the priesthood, and I have not slept a wink. I know not if it be the devil or the dead!”

“It is not the Evil One! It is I, your mother—she who bore you! It is I, your mother, Jean Derrien, who is here to make expiation! I am condemned to the fire and the flame if my son Jean come not to my assistance. I shall be ages in the flames if thou comest not to my succour, Dom Jean Derrien!”

“Tell me, poor little mother, what shall I do for thee?”

“In the old days, when I was amongst the living, I promised to go to Germany, and to the sanctuaries of St James in Spain, and in Turkey.”

“Tell me, my poor little mother; would it help you if I could go?”

“It would be the same to me, if thou didst go, as if I had gone myself 1”

“Then I will go, little mother. Were it to be my death, I will help you!”

Jean Derrien said to his sister, who lived in his house,—“Make ready for me fitting garments, that

I may be seen to be a priest.”

His sister Marie answered him,—

“Now that all we had has been spent upon your studies, dost thou desire to leave the country?”

“Hold your peace, sister, and be not angry. It is for the mother that bore us. I am going to St James’s sanctuaries for my mother and yours.

“Say not so, my brother. I will send another pilgrim in your stead.”

“No one shall go in my place! I will go, for indeed I must!”

¹ A popular ballad in illustration of this idea of pilgrimage in verse in the original.