

BRITTANY AND DEVON-CORNWALL: GEOGRAPHICAL TWINS

MABEL P. CROMPTON

Illinois State Normal University, Normal, Illinois

The striking similarities between Brittany, the northwestern peninsula of France, and Devon-Cornwall, the southwestern peninsula of England, were impressed upon me during a three months' sojourn in Europe in the summer of 1939. I took a motor coach trip through Brittany during the middle of June and then, after travelling for many miles through other countries, I journeyed through Devon and Cornwall in the middle of August. The twinlike nature of these areas was outstanding. Like all twins, however, there were, in spite of numerous similarities, enough contrasts to make each interesting and individualistic.

These twins are located one on the south side and the other on the north side of the wide end of the English Channel funnel which narrows to the Strait of Dover. Although located right along this great commercial route of the world these areas have not profited by such closeness because the freight moves past their shores and on nearer the centers of the commercial activities to Le Havre for France and to Southampton or London for England. This happens in spite of the fact that at its far west side Brittany has the harbor and city of Brest with its direct rail connection with Paris and Devon-Cornwall has Plymouth with its direct rail connection with London. Because of their remoteness from the great centers of activity in these two countries the peoples of these outlying corners still preserve ancient traits and customs.

The present surface conditions of these two areas have been developed in much the same way. The great series of mountain-building movements toward the end of the Paleozoic Period resulted in great east-west folds in both. The worn-down remnants of these early folds are clearly visible today in the east-west stretch of moorlands. Although of little value agriculturally these are beautiful spots when

the yellow gorse and purple heather are in bloom.

Great granitic intrusions were forced into and through the ancient rocks. This granite has been utilized in developing the cultural landscape of both regions. Most of the present-day buildings, as well as the fences, are made of granite blocks, the streets of the cities have been paved with cobblestones of granite, wayside crosses have been cut out of granite. Into the granite was carved the stories of the Bible for people who could not read. These are the calvaries many of which are still found in Brittany. They were used also in Cornwall but were destroyed along with many of the old cathedrals during the Reformation.

Neither of these peninsulas was reached by the Ice Invasions hence the soil is largely residual, very thin, and infertile where the granites and schists outcrop, and deeper and richer in many of the areas of sedimentary outcrops. In either case it is badly leached lacking lime and phosphorus. However, there are some small areas of deep alluvial soils.

Brittany and Devon-Cornwall have a typical marine climate—cool summers, mild winters, and a fairly evenly distributed rainfall in the form of drizzles, mists or light rains. The mildness of the climate in the sheltered coastal valleys is reflected in the presence of such warm climate plants as fuchsia hedges and palm trees.

These two areas are decidedly twin-like in their agricultural development. The mildness of the winters especially in the sheltered coastal valleys plays an important role in the production of early vegetables and fruits for the London and Paris markets respectively. The raising of early potatoes and early peas is of especial importance in both areas. However, the well-kept gardens of broccoli, string beans, onions, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and artichokes are an im-

portant part of the landscape. The possibility of getting strawberries on the market early has led to an important development of that crop. The greatest development of the fruit and vegetable industry has taken place in those coastal areas where there are main rail connections with London or Paris. On slopes protected from harsh winds are many apple orchards and, instead of beer or wine, cider has become the local drink.

In both peninsulas the cool, damp, misty marine climate, the rolling to rough surface, and the thin rather infertile leached soils have discouraged the use of the land for the production of grain and encouraged its use for animal industries. While the higher moorlands and rougher surfaces are used as grazing land for sheep, the ploughed areas of the less rugged parts are used for the clovers and sown grasses or the barley and oats grown together and cut green for fodder. About 50% of the sown grass is cut for hay. In both areas the haystacks are protected from the large amount of moisture by being thatched and in wind-swept sections the thatch is held in place by a weighted rope network.

This land utilization suggests the importance of the dairy industry providing the famous cream of Devon and butter of Cornwall and Brittany. These areas are too remote from the great centers of milk consumption in their respective countries to try to develop the whole-milk phase of the industry. In both peninsulas hog-raising and poultry-raising have developed as by-product industries of dairying.

Following the Ice Age the sea invaded the land transforming the lower areas into gulfs and bays and the higher ones into great promontories or headlands or completely separating them from the mainland and forming a fringe of rocky islands. The sea is constantly at work digging away at the rocky headlands and building tiny beaches in the peaceful sheltered bays. Many are attracted to these lovely spots for their holidays.

Along such an irregular high-latitude shoreline with its hundreds of protected coves one might expect to find fishing villages. Brittany is no exception nor is Devon-Cornwall. Lobster pots may be piled along the shore and nearby may be a canning factory or packing plant. The fishing villages of Brittany are es-

pecially picturesque for the hulls of the boats are likely to be painted a bright blue or green and the thrifty Breton fisherman dips his sails in a henna-red preserving fluid which protects them from the salt water. The lovely blue nets used in the sardine fishing may be billowing from the masts or flapping along the railings along the piers as they dry. No less picturesque are the fishermen as they clatter about over the cobblestone pavements in their wooden shoes. Their suits need protection against the salt water and consequent rotting so they also have been dyed with a red or a blue preserving fluid.

Similarly, in almost every sheltered cove of the Devon-Cornwall rock-girt coast is a little fishing village. The chief fish caught along this coast is a close relative of the sardine, the pilchard. Lobster pots also are a common sight in many of the Cornish villages. The Cornwall fishing village, however, is not nearly so interesting as the Brittany one because it lacks the colorfulness.

These fishing villages have more than supplied their share of recruits for the British and the French navies.

The twins are most unlike in the mining and quarrying industry. Brittany has little activity along this line except for the securing of granite for buildings and fences and slate for shingles and for the use of local clays in Quimper for making a heavy, figured ware sold extensively in northern France.

In the Cornish peninsula, however, associated with the granitic intrusions were tin, copper and lead lodes. Earlier these were of major significance but today they are completely overshadowed by the working of the china clay deposits which occur in irregular pockets in the surface of the granite masses. This clay is dug out, washed to free it from fragments of quartz and other impurities, dried, bagged, and sent to The Potteries for the famous English china industry or it is shipped abroad.

Thus we see that these geographical twins are most nearly alike in their location, their surface features, their soil conditions, their climate, their agricultural responses and the development of their fishing industry and that they are most unlike in their mining and quarrying activities.