



CHAPTER VI

DIVERSIONS IN EUSCARAN: A STUDY IN PERSISTENTLY INFLUENTIAL HEREDITY

IT IS a strange language, this Euscaran, or Basque; by far the most unique and distinctly interesting of all the twenty-eight tongues in which one may telephone in this great cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires. But it is stranger still, when we come to study the Spanish settlement and colonization of the New World, called America, how these same Basques, who comprise only three per cent of the population of Spain and who have never occupied more than one and one-half per cent of its area since Spain has become a united kingdom, should have been to all Spanish America what the Dorian hive was to Greece, or New England to the United States of America. For they stretch from California to Cape Horn; and we find the Basque Elisa active in the Spanish settlement at Nootka Sound in 1789, which was as far north as the Spaniards ever tried to settle. There have been French Basques enough in Canada itself; but that is another story.

Not very long ago the governor of the northernmost Mexican province, and the mayor of Punta Arenas in Chile, the southernmost city in the world, were Basques; and it is only thirteen years since three

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Basques were, all at one and the same time, presidents of the Argentine Republic, Chile, and Uruguay,—Uriburu, Errázuriz, and Idiarte Borda. This coincidence merely repeated what had happened about one hundred years before, when Mendinueta was Viceroy of New Granada at the same time that Azanza was Viceroy of Mexico. As regards the explorers and discoverers, both Buenos Aires and Montevideo were founded by Basques, Juan de Garay and Pedro de Zavala; La Rioja and Jujuy were both founded by another Basque, Juan Ramirez de Velasco; Pascual de Andagoya was the first governor of the city of Panama; and Martin de Zubieta explored the Straits of Magellan in 1581. Long before this, Magellan's second in command, Sebastian d'Elcano, the first captain to round the world, also came from the Basque provinces. Martin Garcia de Loyola, a cousin of the great Basque theologian Ignatius de Loyola, who founded the Jesuit order, married a niece of the last Inca of Peru; Echegoyen was a colonial administrator in Santo Domingo; while Diego de Ibarra explored that part of Mexico which he called Nueva Vizcaya for his native land. Remember, also, that Uruguay was once called Nueva Vizcaya. The great river Paraná was first explored and developed by Diego Martinez de Irala and his Basques in 1548.

I really cannot agree with M. Julien Vinson (though what does he not know about the Basques?) when he says, "*Mais le cerveau des Basques est rebelle aux*

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sciences positives." Perhaps there may be; but the exceptions almost prove the rule. I am willing to grant that there may have been many Basques—we will discuss some of them a little later on—who were noted for their literary attainments of various kinds; but nobody can convince me that when this morning's paper says that young Inocentio Mendieta, a Cuban Basque boy, is looked on with longing eyes by Manager Clark Griffith for the Washington baseball team, that there are not some Basques who are familiar with one of the greatest of modern positive sciences.

Again, is not sheep-farming and sheep-raising a positive science? My friend Mr. Onagoity sells about 3,000 sheep a day to one soulless corporation or another; in fact almost all the present meat supply that we are drawing from Argentina is handled by Basques in one way or another. Ten to one it was a Basque shepherd or herdsman that took care of the cow or sheep whose meat will soon lie upon the breakfast table of the United States public in general, when it roamed in a primitive condition over the pampas of the Rio Negro or of Buenos Aires province.

Is not seamanship a positive science? The great Spanish admiral Oquendo, prominent in the first half of the seventeenth century, and Alava y Navrete, famous for his circumnavigation of the globe in 1791, as well as Commander Ugarriza of the Argentine navy, who superintended the construction of the Argentine dreadnaught "Rivadavia" at Fore River, all

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of them Basques, were certainly practical sailors. "All is lost save honor," said Francis I of France, when taken a prisoner by a Basque soldier, Juan de Urbietta.

Though the Basque provinces were free from military service until 1876, when they were finally and fully incorporated into the rest of Spain, they produced soldiers enough in both the Old and the New World. Zumalacarregui was the backbone of the Carlist struggle of 1833-39, while the name of Simon Bolivar—of almost pure Euscaran ancestry—needs no comment. He was not the only Basque to play a prominent part in the Spanish-American War of Independence. According to the Venezuelan historian Aristides Rojas, at least fifty of his Venezuelan companions were Basques; while Necochea, Azcuenaga, Larrea, Urdininea, Uriondo in Argentina, Zañartú in Chile, Oribe in Uruguay, Unánue in Peru, Urdaneta in Venezuela, and Iturbide in Mexico, were of the same stock. So were many of their opponents, as Iturrigaray, the last Viceroy in Mexico, and Goyeneche in Peru.

Finance is certainly a positive science. The Basque Mendízabel was Minister of Finance of Spain; and, while I write, the Secretary of the Treasury of the Argentine Republic, Dr. Iriondo, is another, as is Dr. Guiñazú, the City Treasurer of Buenos Aires. More than a fifth of the members of the Chilean Chamber of Deputies have Basque names. Three of the twelve Argentine presidents since 1853 have been Basques. Let us look farther north again. Manuel

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de Alava was in command when Nootka Sound was evacuated on March 23rd, 1795; Arrillaga was governor of California, 1783-1814.

But where are your Montts, your Comonforts, your Amats y Junients, your Guiriors, and all the rest who came from Catalonia and the ancient and very noble kingdom of Aragon? Did they not do fully as much in the New World as the Basques? Perhaps they did; but they spread over a very much greater area in Spain than did the Basques, they had a larger population and area to draw from; and for a long while they had Naples and Sicily to develop and play with. We will take them up again some day; just as the Estremadura people and the Gallegos deserve special mention, to say nothing of those from the two Castiles and Leon; but the Basques must come first; when people live on a stern and rock-bound coast, they generally make their influence felt whenever they care to emigrate.

When you have a people who speak their own language, when everybody about them has had to go to the Latin to borrow theirs, and who are proud of this unique and highly specialized method of expression of their own; who are better in defence than in attack, who are willing to take the risk of responsibility of being an emperor of the Mexicans or taking charge of a few hundred sheep on the lonely pampas, you have one of the finest types of the modern pioneer. I think St. Francis Xavier was a typical Basque. He

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stopped at absolutely nothing, he wore himself out to fulfil his life purpose ; yes, he died for it, on a little island off the Chinese coast in 1551, just as the four Basque priests died by the bedsides of the sick and lowly, when the yellow fever came to Buenos Aires in 1871.

Yes, the Basques specialize in coöperatively helpful charity. When the first Associated Charities was founded in the New World, the Benevolent Society of Buenos Aires, on January 2nd, 1823, the vice-president, one of the two secretaries, and five of the nine members of the executive committee were Basque ladies ; and the president's mother was a Basque lady. It is high time to talk of the noble army of mothers, sisters and wives that have sallied forth from Euscaria, from the Viceroy's lady stepping down from her sedan chair in Lima or entering Bogotá in state, to Juana, or Isabela, whose husband was but a private soldier in the armies of His Most Catholic Majesty. I asked my washerwoman the other day if she were a Spaniard. "No, Señor ; I am from the Kingdom of Navarre." And the Spanish part of the Kingdom of Navarre, whence good old Manuela came, had ceased to be a separate political entity exactly four hundred years ago.

You cannot have a language nowadays without a literature. We meet with the traces of a Basque language first of all very nearly one thousand years ago, in A.D. 980. In 1881 the Spanish Jesuit scholar,

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Fita, discovered a twelfth-century manuscript containing eighteen Basque words; and the first Basque book was printed in 1545. In 1571 the translation of the Protestant Bible into Basque was ordered by Jeanne d'Albret; it was printed at La Rochelle. Not very long after we have the first American epic poem—the "Araucana of Alonso de Ercilla"—which was written by a Basque. Now open your Cotton Mather's "Magnalia" and read of the wonder-working providences of the Almighty in New England, or of Michael Wigglesworth's sweetly cheering words on the eternal damnation of infants in his "Day of Doom," and tell me if there is anything in the "Araucania" like that. It is dully and drily written in spots, I will admit; but we have flashes of quaint beauty throughout. The Basque Pedro de Ona's little sonnet of 1602, to the oldest American university, that of the most flourishing university of San Marcos, is like some of those old leather-backed chairs you can still buy in Cuzco or in the Bolivian highlands; it has a fragrance of prettiness with a shimmer of natural affection:—

Sweet Fountain of Pure Water, so pure that
thou chantest Victory before the Sun; with which
the plants of this Antarctic Vale are bathed with
Dew, and Sprinkl'd over with Freshness; Thou,
who raisest thyself to the Sublime Regions, where
thy drops are holy Stars who by themselves change
obscurity to Light,—

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Doubt not indeed, that from the waters clear,
Of all thy Doctrines, and thine Healthy Rule,
The Farthest Nations shall take Note and Hear ;
Since thou a Mark, a Philip too doth know ;
Which thine unconquerable strength to show
Are pictured as two Lions on thy Scroll.

This has not as much swing, perhaps, as some of Echevarria's Argentine poems, where he tells of the now vanished *gauchos*, or cowboys, of the pampas and plains,—

Bold Quiroga compelling,
To stay his rebelling,
Throughout the glad morning whilst forward they stray.

Now the language itself of these people of the mountainous northeastern corner of Spain is quite worth while. Take the root *Egui*, the truth or justice : Señor Leguia is president of Peru, while Dr. Eguiguren is chief justice thereof ; Dr. Eguiara is a prominent Mexican physician ; and Minister Belaustegui introduced physical training into the Argentine schools. Many Basques have tree-names, just as the Japanese have : *Yanagi*, the Willow, is a Japanese surname ; and we have *Salazar* and *Sarasate*, which mean the Willow in Basque. There is no general word for animal or tree in Basque ; because it is not a selfish language at all ; every animal or tree has its own name. Thus, *Lizarr* is the Ash-tree ; *Lizarr-aga* the Ash-wood ; *Zumarr*, the Elm (as in Zumarraga, etc.) ; *Ur* is the Water.

A great many Basque words begin in *Ur*. Let us analyze a word with *Ur* in the middle of it,—a four-

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story word with a garret and cellar,—like Asta-buruaga, for instance. *Asta*, or *Astur*, is the Mountain-water; *Buru* is the Head; and I really forget what *Aga* does mean. To come to land again, *Erria* or *Erri* is the Land; *Salaverri*, the Willow-land; *Echeverria*, the House and Land, etc. Look at the Belasco Theatre. What does Belasco mean? *Belia* or *Velia* is the Raven. *Belasco* or *Velasco* is the Son of the Raven. *Ochoa* or *Otsoa*, as the old spelling is, is the Wolf. They borrow and annex words, too; look at Mendiburu; *Mendi* is the Latin *Mons*, with the beautiful Basque *Buru* attached. And so we could go on all night if necessary; but who really cares to learn to read Basque, if the Spanish is printed in the opposite column? They all tell us that nobody can learn this language; His Satanic Majesty tried to, and really couldn't; but that is what the jealous people from the rest of Spain say.

“Urquidi and Urquiza stay; while noble in his pain
Urduna soothes the bloody wound that pains Urdinarrain;
The good Ellauri is gone; and jocund, gone the strain
That hung above our weary heads, like as the summer rain
Gathers and threatens ere descends, sprinkling with fertile
spray
The meadow and the valley green, that clothe our Uruguay,
They turn triumphant to the toil, that beckons them before,
And holds them with their holy hope, that hears our Hus
piaur.”