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Hins, E.

DOES THE OPINION THAT ROMANCE LANGUAGES DERIVED FROM LATIN  
HAVE AN HISTORIC BASE ?  
(L'opinion que les langues romanes dérivent du Latin a-t-elle un fondement historique?)

Translated from French

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## **Does the opinion that Romance languages derived from Latin have an historic base?**

(L'opinion que les langues romanes dérivent du Latin a-t-elle un fondement historique?)

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If there is one fact generally admitted by all linguists, it is the Latin origin of the Romance languages. Numerous and admirable works have given this hypothesis a semblance of certainty which makes its contradiction difficult, almost rash. However, these works only enable a conclusion to be drawn regarding the *relationships* and not the *filiation*.

What makes us hesitate to accept this thesis as proven is the evidence which we see around us of the tenacity with which peoples and even the smallest fractions of people maintain the usage of their idiom under the most unfavorable circumstances. In countries where education is the most widespread, the local provincial patois subsists next to the official language which the schools propagate. I will not dwell upon this point which will be found amply developed in a work on the origin of the Romance language which I expect to publish shortly. Here I propose merely to examine whether the accepted opinion rests upon a genuine historic foundation.

I will relate the arguments of Diez and Littré, the acknowledge leaders of the German and French schools; I will add those of M. Brachet, who has done so much for the popularization of historic studies on language, and of M. Gidel, whose *Histoire de la littérature française*, besides being excellent, is universally widely read.

Let us first explain the opinion of the scholars:

For Diez, the opinion that all the peoples of Romance language abandoned their original idiom in order to speak Latin is a fact so incontestable that, in his great work, he does not believe there is any need to explain the whys and wherefores and refers us to authors who have discussed the matter before him. He begins thus:

"Six Romance languages draw our attention, either by their grammatical originality, or by their literary importance: two to the East, Italian and Walachian; two to the South-West, Spanish and Portuguese; two to the North-West, Provençal and French. *All have in the Latin their first and principal source*".

Littré, in his introduction to *Histoire de la langue française*, says: "... As for the French language and in general the Romance languages, we know the origin, since *they*

*superseded Latin, without interruption or break".*

M. Gidel, to whom we will return, develops in great length Littré's thesis.

It is M. Brachet who presents the most far-fetched thesis. Indeed, we read in his *Grammaire historique*: "*Less than one century after the conquest, Latin was spoken in all Gaul*".

Is it possible that a people of several millions, spread out over a vast region, would abruptly discard its language as it would an old garment ? If we were to accept so extraordinary a fact, it would be on nothing less than strong historical evidence. Now, we believe we can affirm: 1. that it is impossible to explain when and how the Gauls could have come to know Latin; 2. that nothing proves that the Bretons or any other congeneric people had been the ancestors of the French.

## I

Here is how M. Brachet explains us the process of assimilation:

"The great secret of Roman policy rests, as everyone knows, on the perfection of its method of colonization. Whenever a province was conquered, two means were used to conserve it; the military means consisted of surrounding the conquered portion with legions placed along the frontier; once the conquered country had been isolated in this way from any exterior influence, a vigorous administration was set up in the interior which soon crushed local resistance; the language and religion of the conquerors was imposed on the conquered, the recalcitrants were exterminated or transported, to be replaced by colonists and freemen from Rome. Thanks to this violent and skilful method, the merging of the conquerors and conquered was completed in a brief period, and less than one century after the conquest, Latin was spoken in all Gaul".

The reader will have smiled, no doubt, at the *military means*. It is not the influence of the Germans which the Romans feared for the Gauls, but really their depredations. If their only aim was to crush the spirit of the populations, they would have dispersed their troops in the interior garrisons. Instead of this, they kept their legions on the Rhine so that Gaul could enjoy this *pax romana* in which comforts were to greatly contribute to maintaining the conquered peoples in obeisance.

*On imposait aux vaincus la langue et la religion des vainqueurs.* With respect to religious matters, it will be admitted that this is at least a strange assertion. Polytheism did not, nor could not be a persecutor. The reason why some oriental cults were proscribed at Rome was because of the orgies they gave pretext to. With near exception, which most certainly cannot be regarded as an act of intolerance, the Roman Pantheon was open to all the divinities. With respect to this trait one recalls Alexander Severus who, having heard of the God of the Christians, introduced Jesus Christ into the sanctuary of his divinities. Today everybody knows that the persecutions directed against the Christians were prompted by purely political considerations. Those tolerant polytheists, who accepted all the gods, did not understand why it was forbidden on certain solemn occasions, to offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire.

Massacres, such as those of which M. Brachet speaks, really took place in Judaea, but

nothing of like nature occurred in Gaul. The acts of cruelty which had accompanied the conquest by Caesar had not been renewed, and during the hundred years which followed the annexation of Gaul and during which it is claimed that it became completely romanized, there was no uprising there which could have provoked a war of extermination. The revolts of Florus at Trier and of Sacrovir at Autun were stifled too quickly to have been followed by reprisals on the entire nation.

It is not by such violent measures that the Romans established their Empire. It is known with what skill, once the campaign was completed, they treated the vanquished, allowing them to retain their local administration, the usage of their language in official local reports (as is proved, among others, by the *Iguvian Tables*), while taking the precaution of scattering Roman colonies here and there. It is thanks to this organization that Hannibal, in spite of his march through Italy, could not stir up defections other than those from the recently subdued Capua and Gauls.

But one should not be over-anxious to count on the colonies with regard to Gaul. Romanist scholars speak a lot about Roman settlers: well, where would they have been brought from? One knows of the gradual disappearance of free farmers in Italy at the height of the Republic. The evil had only worsened under the Empire and it drew from Pliny the Elder this cry of distress, an intensified echo of an exclamation which had resounded a long time before him: "*Verum confitentibus latifundia perdidere Italiam: Jam vero et provincias !*"

Is it, by chance, this people of Rome who would have quit its pleasures and its gratuitous living (*panem et circenses*) in order to colonize Gaul? And what settlers would these parasites have made? As to the rest of Italy, the workers were largely slaves who did not have anything Roman or Italian.

But let us come back to the Roman administration at the time of the Empire. The manner in which it set about being the conqueror, in order to obliterate the nationalities, was to break up the links between different parts of the same people, to place each commune in isolation against the Empire. So communal autonomy was left with the vanquished and nothing else. The central power did not intervene in the affairs of the commune, and, so long as the taxes were paid, it was allowed to live as it pleased.

So the national spirit was destroyed and, as a result, any serious insurrection was made impossible, but also no living member was added to the Empire; all political and military force was concentrated more and more in the upper administration; the provinces could not offer any resistance to the invaders. This isolation of the communes is the secret of Rome's domination; it is also the explanation of its fall.

But if such a regime stifled any idea of a great fatherland, it favored the restricted fatherland and parochialism, and was eminently suitable for localizing the customs and idioms. It could be maintained with reason that under such a regime it would not have been possible for a language to develop which should have been accepted by all, with the patois relegated to second rank; for, with the existing languages, this system could have no other effect but to accentuate the local differences of the same dialect. It is very far removed from this to pretend here that it would have conduced all the Gauls to speak Latin.

And who would have been the teachers of the Gallic people in the study of the Latin language? Here, we see that a dissidence has arisen. Littré, and, after him, M. Gidel, relate the origins of French to classical Latin. Here is how M. Gidel expresses himself:

"It was the custom of the Romans, says Saint Augustine, to impose their language on all the nations which were under the yoke of their Empire. Tacitus shows us Agricola multiplying the schools in the conquered half of Britain".

The passage from Tacitus does not carry the meaning which M. Gidel gives it: "Jam vero principum filios liberalibus artibus erudire, et ingenia Britannorum studios. Gallorum anteferre, ut qui modo linguam romanam abnuegant, eloquentiam concupiscerent" (*Ann.*, 21).

This *principum filios* clearly show us that this influence of the Latin language was exerted only on the highest social strata.

The numerous quotations by which M. Gidel establishes at what pitch Latin literature was extolled in Gaul are not more conclusive. Yes, this country had furnished, in great number, writers, rhetoricians, jurists and advocates; but what does this prove for the mass of the population? Show us the numerous elementary schools where the millions of men could have learned the new language! And furthermore, would that have been enough? Do we not see, very nearly everywhere, the patois subsisting next to the official languages, even in places where the entire population passes through the schools?

How did literary Latin become French?

"The more delicate an instrument, the more it risks breaking up in the hands of those who handle it. The refinement of the Latin language destined it to the loss which little by little it suffered. It was bound by rules too difficult to be always observed. Its scholarly construction, its ingenious modifications, its case-endings, must little by little break up, become confused and finally disappear".

Then M. Gidel shows us literary and official Latin becoming more and more barbaric, cases, genders, teeming with more and more errors. etc.

Does this not prove that one is dealing with a school language? Would not the confusion, then the collapse of the official imperial world betray itself in its language which would grow weaker under the assaults of the popular Gallic language penetrating more and more into the administrative and literary world? That is the peculiarity of these languages which I will call artificial, that they collapse at the same time as the domination which had imposed them: such are the only linguistic cataclysms possible. It is just as with certain imported vegetable and animal species which we see disappear as soon as man is no longer there to protect them against the encroachment of indigenous fauna and flora. But in order to make these latter disappear, a geological or climatic transformation is necessary which requires many centuries to be effected.

As to the excessive refinement of Latin, it must not be overly exaggerated. No doubt, literary languages do assume forms, all the more affected as they move further away from the language of the people: the German construction is a case in point after the

Latin construction, while the Greek language, which remained in communion with the people, is very much more natural. But we must not imagine that even the Romans learned to speak in rounded and sonorous sentences, with *esse videatur* at the end of a phrase of twenty lines, as in Cicero. This is no more the usual Latin construction than the phrases in Bossuet, and Chateaubriand are indispensable to the French style. Just look at Caesar, at Cicero himself in his letters, at Tacitus, leaving aside the obscurity resulting from his excessive conciseness, a defect peculiar to the author and not to the language.

Case endings are of secondary importance, after skilful construction; this is an idea which is often encountered among the French, that the Barbarians could not grasp the Latin cases. One sees that these writers consider the cases to be particularly difficult; for the French who do not have them, say; but let them betake themselves among people who have them, and they will see that the most illiterate peasants, the small children, effortlessly make use of all these cases which with so much difficulty are learned in the class-room. Now, once the cases had been learned by the Barbarians, their use should not have presented difficulties for the subsequent generations.

If French, at the moment when it appears as a literary language, is in process of dropping the cases, there is no need, in order to account for this fact, to resort to the explanations cited earlier. Languages go from analysis to synthesis and vice-versa. Everybody knows that personal endings of verbs are from ancient pronouns, as case endings are from ancient prepositions. As long as these suffixes harbour for those who use them the memory of the relation which had induced their creation, as long as they preserve a certain independence, they are subject to analysis; when they are completely merged with the word to which they were affixed, it is said that there is synthesis. In course of time, it is forgotten that the ending indicates this or that relation, or there is a wish to specify it further, and the preposition reappears next to the case, the pronoun next to the personal ending. It is in this transition stage that we see many of the languages. But among some peoples, the language logically arrives, on that score, at pure analysis, as English, for example, which has sacrificed both the personal flexional endings and the cases (except for one). French has remained halfway: it has abolished the cases, but has kept the personal endings, though somewhat toned down.

In order to come about, all these changes require the assistance of time and never take place as by the wave of a magic wand. Here, by way of argument, the Romanists make use of a fact which exactly proves how slowly these transformations come about. French appears to us, in the IXth century, with two cases only, and even then there are very many exceptions (let us add that we do not know how long it has been in this state up to then), and these cases do not disappear until the end of the IXth century.

The theory of MM. Littré and Gidel is not that of Diez, who has followed M. Brachet. This is how Diez expresses himself on this subject:

"Once the existence of a popular language (Latin) is admitted as a demonstrated fact by virtue of universal merit, a second no less unassailable fact must be recognized, that is the birth of the Romance languages from this popular language. In effect, the written language, which was founded upon the past and which was cultivated only by the upper classes and the writers, did not lend itself, by its very nature, to a further growth, whereas the popular idiom, much simpler, carried within itself the seed and

susceptibility for a development required by time and fresh needs. Therefore, when the Germanic invasion destroyed with the upper classes all the old civilization, aristocratic Latin died out of its own accord; popular Latin, particularly in the provinces, continued its course all the more rapidly, and ended by differing to a very great degree from the source from which it has sprung".

So Diez acknowledges that the literary language could not have penetrated into the people. And why does he come to a halt here on the road of rash suppositions while, on other points, he resolutely advances along it? It is because a very great number of words in Romance languages do not seem to have a classical derivation. One must thus resort to popular Latin taken from three sources:

1. The words which are found in the earlier authors in what has been called good Latinity, such as Plautus and the fragments from authors who preceded him; in the inscriptions; those which later authors have used, mentioning them as ancient.

Here I hasten to acknowledge that there is certainly reason to choose to study the kinship between words of this genus, because it is clear that the less Latin has been literarily elaborated, the more it should resemble ancient Gallic, with which it has a common origin.

2. The words employed by the so-called writers of the decline, when, according to our authors, popular Latin invaded classical Latin. We go, on that score, as far as the Carolingian texts. Should not these words be rather taken for words of the national language which were starting to creep into the official vocabulary by assuming a Latin mantle, with the result that these words, far from having formed the French, Italian or Spanish vocables, would have been formed by them?

3. Words invented by analogy, such as *aetaticum*, to explain *age*, which cannot be derived from *aetas*. All right, let it be *aetaticum* and its like, but if the Gauls deemed it fitting to arrange the Latin words in that way, would it not prove that by doing so they obeyed the spirit of their own language, and, once again, that it is here French which explains Latin?

But the important question above all is to know how and by whom would popular Latin have been imported into Gaul. Nowhere have I found an explanation for this, because I cannot accept as an explanation two scraps of phrases incidentally flung by M. Brachet in his *Grammaire historique*:

"But this Latin, which the settlers and soldiers imported into Gaul..." (p. 116).

Then:

"Imported in Gaul by the soldiers and settlers, vernacular Latin..."

And that is all!

But it is precisely here that lies the crux of the matter: we must be shown the legions of *Roman* soldiers camped on all points of the country, allowed to see the *Roman* settlers flocking in great numbers towards all points of Gaul before this rash assertion, that after

one century all Gaul spoke Latin, could be to some extent justified. It should indeed be known that nothing like that ever took place there, that the legions were on the frontiers and that it was not long before they were being recruited exclusively from among the barbarians, who at the very most could have taught the Gauls the command formulas in Latin.

Let us be shown after that the numerous colonies which have been spoken of. As we have shown earlier, it is not Italy, supposing it were Latin, which could have furnished them. And, furthermore, we would require settlers arriving with women and children, a migration, because without it, we know that the indigenous women would have raised the fruits of a bilingual union in their own idiom.

But neither soldiers, nor colonists, Latin or otherwise, were settled in Gaul during the century of which we speak, and if they had settlements there in the centuries which followed, they most certainly would have had nothing Latin in them.

Thus, for some, a few schools after the fashion of our universities, a small nucleus of scholars round which the educated class from the large towns gathered and a certain number of civil servants corresponding in Latin with the communes, was sufficient to teach, in one or two centuries, the Latin language to millions of Gauls, so that nothing, but absolutely nothing, remained of their original language. It is for centuries now that the official language of the Walloon provinces of Belgium has been literary French, that schools up to all levels have existed in great numbers, and for the last half century have been scattered everywhere, yet Walloon continues to be spoken everywhere. We choose Walloon as an example, but we could mention so many dialects and languages which subsist in France next to French.

Let them explain this strange contradiction if they can; as for us, we say that the second case is true to life, while the scholars have invented the first. We prefer to adhere to what life has taught us.

The explanation of others is still more peculiar: vernacular Latin was taught to the Gauls by the barbarian soldiers who were outside Gaul, and by settlers who never came there.

What necessity could have given birth to these strange theories? Why was it insisted that the Gauls take their language from Latin? That originated from a historical error which reigned supreme at the time when this theory was formed, and which was maintained for the sake of the cause when the theory came under attack.

It is the error which consisted in seeing the Bretons as Gauls who have preserved their language.

## II

One point on which all Romanists agree is that the Gauls, except for a part of the Aquitanians to which the same origin is given as to the Spaniards, were Bretons, or at least of common stock with them. Diez, after calling the Gauls Celts, makes them an equivalent of the Cymries. Littré, who first seems to hesitate, expresses himself to the same effect.

M. Brachet expresses himself thus:

"Driven back into Armorica by the conquering Romans, the Gallic language survived several centuries thanks to its isolation; this Celtic tradition was revived in the VIIth century by an immigration of Cymries chased out of Wales. The Bretons were as refractory to the Frankish conquest as they had been to the Roman conquest, and what is called today the Lower Breton dialect is nothing more but the heir to the Celtic language".

M. Gidel is of the same opinion and, in this connection, he expresses one of the strangest ideas: "It might be thought that the people of the countryside and towns would have preserved their national language despite the Roman influence; there was nothing of the kind. Doubtlessly, in Armorica and Biscay, Celtic and Basque resurfaced when the administrative pressure from Rome ceased, but this fact did not become general".

In order to justify such agreement, it must be proven that the Gauls were Cymries (under this term we include all the branches); yet nothing has been less demonstrated.

It most certainly will not be founded upon the fact that the Gauls have an identical name to the Welsh, because it is not really certain that this name which the Romans gave the Celts originates from the language of these latter. Again there are, it is true, the Galatians of Asia minor; but it has been pointed out with just reason that one must distrust deductions drawn from the names of peoples and places. The Prussians bear the name of the people which they conquered; the French, Normans, Bulgarians, that of the conquerors which they reabsorbed.

There is a passage from Tacitus which we will speak of again hereunder. Apart from that, nothing more remains, as proof, except the presence of the Bretons in a part of the Gallic territory. We also find the Germans in a part of ancient Gaul; but as for these, we know when they came, while in the case of the Bretons, there is uncertainty about their origin.

Nevertheless, doubts have been raised as to whether the Bretons inhabited Gaul at the time of Ceasar. M. Littré has explained, with much impartiality, the difficulties this problem presents. We write out here this passage, taken from *Etudes et Glanures*, in the chapter on Gallic Ethnology:

"There are, in a corner of France, in Lower Brittany, in Wales, in England, in the highlands of Scotland, in Ireland, there have been until recently in Cornwall and on the Isle of Man, populations which have lost their autonomy within greater nationalities, but which, all, have remained distinct both from the Romans and from the Germans. Neither Latin in Gaul, nor Saxon in England and Ireland, absorbed them Lower Breton, Cymric Gaelic and Irish have nothing in common with Latin or German, but yet are linked together by close affinities and are merely dialects of a common language which has been called Celtic, presuming that these fragments of peoples, scattered and confined, belong to the great tribe which, at the time of the appearance of the Romans, occupied Gaul, Britain and Ireland. *Celtic* (or Gallic of the Greeks and Romans) *remaining available, a very plausible appropriation was found in these isolated but tenacious dialects* which seemed ever to protest against the Latin or Germanic victory. The identification thus made is, as we shall see, good and valid; however, if it only depends upon what has just been said, it does not make allowances for the impossibility of

connecting Cymric and Gaelic to the other languages of Europe, if it only invokes the domicile of the people who speak them on the soil of the ancient Celts, the proof will be sooner negative than positive, and any negative argument involves some doubt and dispute.

"Indeed, the historical complications are numerous and varied, and here is one which cannot be passed over in silence: it is contested that the inhabitants of Lower Brittany came from Gaul. The fact is that at the time of the downfall of the Roman Empire, and when Great Britain ceased to belong to it, the Britons in great numbers crossed over from the island to the Continent and settled down in Armorica. They certainly imported their name there; but did they also import their language?"

Now here is Littré's response to the question he has set himself:

"If we knew from incontestable documents that the Romans, having for a long time waged war against the indigenous population of the Gauls, would have pushed back into a corner of the territory those which they could not subjugate, we would know at the same time that the small tribes pushed back in this manner, remnants of the main people, would retain their idiom as an authentic sample of the common idiom. But it was not so in Gaul; since the Romans at a stroke occupied the entire expanse, there was no tribe pushed back and, as a result, preserved. The hypothetical case I have just traced the main features had its complete reality in Great Britain; *the Romans did not hold her long enough in order to latinize her*, and, departing, they handed it back into the hands of the natives, who then regained their autonomy. The Germans did not leave it with them long; what happened there did not happen in any Roman country: the German language prevailed, and the Britons drew back little by little up to the parts which they still hold. The consanguinity is unbroken : from the Britons of Wales and Cornwall, it goes back to the Britons who were invaded by the Saxons and Angles, and who had been the Britons of the Romans and before the Romans. But, if that shows that the Celtic languages of England are really dialects of the language which used to be spoken in Britain, how can anything be concluded from this about the Gauls ? It is here that an important text from Tacitus should be inserted: "The language of the Britons and that of the Gauls, he says, only differ slightly (*Sermo haud multum diversus*, AGRIC., 12)". Thus, Gallic, bordering closely on Briton, which, itself, is nothing more but the ancient form of the Celtic dialects of England, belongs to the same family of languages".

We see, from the words which we have underscored in the passage from Littré: "*Celtic* (that is to say Gallic) *remaining available*", that if it has been decided that Breton is the ancient Gallic language, it is because it had been decided *a priori* that the present Gallic language, French, originated from Latin: in this way ancestors were found for the Cymries and at the same time a language for the ancient Gauls, for whom some language or other had to be found, once it was denied that they spoke what their descendants speak now.

Littré cannot but recognize that the argument is not conclusive; it is not even certain, according to him, that the Breton.

s now in Gaul were there at the time of the Romans; but, after all these concessions, he triumphs with the following argument: the Britons of Wales and Cornwall are the remnants, driven back by the conquerors, of the ancient population of Great Britain at the time of the Romans. Now, a passage from the Agriicola of Tacitus, informs us that

the inhabitants of Great Britain spoke the same language as did those of Gaul; therefore, these latter were Cymries (I make use of this name, reserving the term "Celts" for the Gauls and other peoples of the same race).

Here the entire thesis boils down to a single point; the corner-stone of all this vast scientific edifice is a passage from Tacitus: it is not much. To begin with, let us see whether this passage carries the information attributed to it, we will start the quotation a few lines higher up than Littré:

"Ceterum Britanniam qui mortales initio coluerint, indigenae an advecti, ut inter barbaros parum compertum. Habitus corporum varii, atque ex eo argumenta. Namque rutilae Caledoniam habitantium comae, magni artus germanicam originem asseverant. Silurum colorati vultus, torti plerumque crines, et posita contra Hispania, Hiberos veteres trajecisse easque sedes habitasse fidem faciunt. Proximi Gallis et simites sunt seu durante originis vi, seu procurrentibus in diversa terris positio coeli corporibus habitum dedit. In universum tamen aestimanti Gallos vicinam insulam occupasse credibile est. Eorum sacra deprehendas, superstitionum persuasione; *sermo haud multum diversus...*"

It can be seen that the words quoted by Littré could really only refer to the insular proximi gallis, because this *credibile est* is not very positive.

The general meaning appears quite clear to us. The population of Great Britain is of half Germanic and half Gallic origin. There are furthermore the Silures who used to inhabit Wales. Who were the Silures? Is not the *torti crines* significant, and do not the Bretons again tear at their hair?

So those were the Gallic populations of today, already back at that time. As to the Iberian origin, we are justified in ignoring it, since it is only brought about by a geographic error of the ancients. These, as one also knows from their maps, committed topographic errors which today appear to us surprising, but which are quite easily explained by the inadequacy of their methods: for Tacitus, as for Caesar Ireland was on the side of Spain, which would not be very far.

Let us now see whether Caesar will not provide us with some explanations. We find in Book V, 12, of the Gallic war:

"Britanniae pars interior ab iis incolitur, quos natos in insula ipsa memoria proditum dicunt: maritima pars ab iis, qui praedae ac belli inferendi causa ex Belgis transierant; qui omnes fere iis nominibus civitatum appellantur, quibus orti civitatibus pervenerunt et bello illato ibi remanserunt atque agros colere ceperunt".

And further on,

"Ex his omnibus longe sunt humanissimi qui cantium quaeregio est maritima omnis, neque multum a Gallia differunt consuetudine. Interiores plerique frumenta non serunt, sed lacte et carne vivunt, pellibusque sunt vestiti".

Thus, near the shores, civilized peoples came from Gaul; in the interior, an almost savage, autochthonous population. It is most certainly not about these latter that Tacitus

could have said that their customs differ but from those of the Gauls. Are we not justified in asserting that the Silures of Tacitus are the interiores of Caesar, and that the Cymries had already been driven back when the Romans came into contact with the population of Great Britain?

We think it is here that we have reason to doubt what is asserted so categorically, namely that, at the time of the Romans, England was inhabited by the race which today is pushed back in Wales and Ireland.

At this point we ought to raise the question of the origin of English, which would not be departing from our subject because the crux of the matter lies in England.

We find ourselves confronted with a thesis analogous to that of the origin of French, with this difference that, with regard to English, it is French which plays the role of Latin:

"The Romans" says Littré, "did not occupy Great Britain long enough to latinize it". This indeed is an astonishing fact, because, according to Littré, they were dealing with that very race so ready to abandon its own language for that of the conquerors. Thus, they are not the Celts who, according to M. Brachet, after a century, had been completely latinized in Gaul. And what had happened to those schools of Agricola of which M. Gidel speaks with such enthusiasm?

It is at this point that Latin has been rejected as unnecessary. Have we not French to explain how the language is half Romance? And who accomplished this of quasi-francization of the English population? It was William the Conqueror with some hundreds of nobles and some thousands of French soldiers. In this new thesis, as incredible as the preceding, the soldiers were sufficient and it was believed that it could have happened without the settlers. This time, it is not the Celts-Cymries that have been operated upon, Littré admitting that they had been driven back but the Germans who would have replaced them.

In order to explain how a handful of conquerors could, this time, not change the language (the plain fact is this: English is only half Romance), but to deeply modify it, it must be added that, up to the XIVth century, French was the official language and that, during these three centuries, the English nobility sent their children to be educated in France.

But we well know how little the doings of the upper classes influence the masses. If one wishes additional proof, one should consider what happened in Russia where, since Peter the Great, foreign languages were held in high honour to the detriment of the national language. Up to these last thirty years, the education of the young nobility was entrusted to French or German tutors, preferable French. French was the language of the Court and the aristocracy. It is only since the reign of Alexander II that education started to be given in the national language.

And, nevertheless, the Russian nation has preserved its language intact, and if it has adopted foreign words, in very small number (we are not speaking of the literary language), it is simply to designate objects imported from abroad.

Singular destiny the one of the language in Great Britain. In the introduction to his *Histoire de la langue française* (p. XVI), Littré expresses himself thus:

"Among the Britons of Great Britain (here it is not a question of their being driven back), the Germanic element triumphed, expelling Latin which had made only a single appearance there, and Celtic, which was indigenous".

And further on, page XXIX:

So it is that, on another ground, and later, after Celtic had perished in England through the efforts of the Germans, and the Germanic idiom had been in turn relegated to a status of inferiority by the French conquest of William of Normandy, *the civilizing vitality inherent to the nation* revived these disjointed and confused elements, and produced, from the XIVth onwards, a new literary language, English, which was to hold so distinguished a status among others".

What is this *civilizing vitality* of a nation which had successively abandoned two languages (even three counting Latin), which then suddenly switched over from French, still recently used in all its purity, to a new language in the middle of the XIVth century? And from where would this language have sprung? And why was it not a French patois or a corrupt patois, which, as in the case of Latin in Gaul, would have succeeded literary French?

Let us return to what is properly the realm of fiction. As always we quote Littré (Introduction, p. XVI):

In the beginning, Latin was spoken in only a small part of Italy, but little by little it expelled Greek in the South, Etruscan in the Center, Gallic in the North, and it became the only language".

We know that in addition to Etruria, the Etruscans occupied Umbria, the plain of the Po, and Campania, and that moreover their influence extended up to Latium; that beyond Etruria, they did not form the mass of the population; this is what clearly demonstrates how easily they vanished from Italian Gaul and Campania; but in Etruria itself, did they form a compact population? We could doubt this, because we see, at the time of its kings, under Servius and the two Tarquins, Rome enter in the Etruscan confederation, at a time when only a small segment of its aristocracy (the *Luceres*) belonged to that nationality. And yet, under Tarquinius Superbus, Rome had been, in its turn, the capital of the confederation.

Diez quotes Niebuhr :

" At the time of Sylla the old Etruscan nation also perished together with its science and its literature; the nobles who had lead the movement fell to the sword; military colonies were established in the great towns; the Latin language alone became dominant, and the majority of the nation, stripped of all landed property, languished in misery under the foreign masters, whose oppression extinguished all national sentiments in the heart of the degraded people, and there was no desire left other than that of becoming entirely Romans".

Always the same theory: a people cease to exist when the dominant class disappears; it loses its language when the literary idiom is replaced by another. Degraded or not, peoples who change masters no less preserve their customs and language. What do the changes which occur in the literary and political domain matter to those who have always been on the outside?

Magna Graecia was peopled by Greeks, we are told; but was not Marseilles, Phocian though it was at its foundation, largely Gallic? It is truly remarkable that this part of Italy, which again became Greek for six centuries from Justinian onwards, then was successively Norman, Saracen, French and Spanish, no less happened to develop its Italian dialect just like the other provinces.

Would it not be more simple to think that the Italiots formed the substratum of the population of all Italy and that they continued to exist under all the dominions which succeeded one another, allowing the conquerors to pass on, and surviving thanks to their number and their tenacity?

All the authors we have cited are in agreement as far as acknowledging that the Iberians, the original inhabitants of Spain, were no other than the Basques. Diez, initially (Vol. I, p. 83), seems to say the opposite:

"The first inhabitants of Spain were the Iberians who perhaps were a Celtic race, but became separated from the common race at an early period".

Consequently, one is greatly astonished to encounter, lines further: "This original language of Spain still lives among the Basques, as has been observed by Humboldt".

The Spaniards do not seem to be hard pressed to become Romanized as some people seem to say, as is witnessed, two passages quoted by Diez :

"Similes enim sunt dii, si ea nobis objiciunt, quorum neque scientiam, neque explanationem habeamus, tanquam si Poeni aut Hispani senatu nostro sine interprete loquerentur" (Cicero, De divinatione, 11, 64).

And Tacitus, speaking about a man from the Termetini tribe put to torture: "Voce magna, sermoni patrio, frustra se interrogari clamavit" (Annals, IV, 4s).

That is where the Spaniards were after three centuries of Roman conquest; up to the barbarian invasions, latinization thus had no more than three centuries to be wrought. Then, after the short-lived rule of the Alani, the Suevi and the Vandals, the Visigoths governed Spain for three centuries. Finally, from the VIIIth to the XVth century, the Arabs were settled in Spain not in small groups but in hundreds of thousands. Well, these Spaniards, so treacherous to the Basque language, were faithful to the Latin language, save for the North, a phenomenon all the more astonishing as this part of the country escaped the Arab influence. M. Gidel tells us, as whole explanation, that the Basque resurfaced but he does not inform us about place where it was hiding during the Roman domination (1).

Now the Basque is a language which can be linked neither with the Aryan group, nor with the Semitic group, nor with any group, which is asserted by Bopp in his Grammaire comparée.

So it can be concluded that Spanish is further from Basque than any civilized language of Europe, Asia and Africa.

If one adds that, of all the Aryan languages, Breton and its congeners are the ones which show the least resemblance to French, in every respect, one will acknowledge that strange things happened in the domain of Romance languages and among the peoples who speak them.

Eugene HINS

(1) M. Hins' arguments support the reservations I have always had on the subject of Iberian theory. There is nothing which proves either that Basque has been spoken a great deal outside its present domain or that the ancient language of the Iberians is related to Basque: I do not consider the etymologies of W. von Humboldt and his continuators as proof.

(Julien VINSON)