

Carpeta 11.15.

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A BASQUE VERSION OF GENESIS AND PART OF
EXODUS IN THE LIBRARY OF SHIRBURN
CASTLE, OXFORDSHIRE.

Jesus College, Oxford: Jan. 9, 1893.

During a short stay last summer in the Basses Pyrénées, not far from the Basque district of Labourd, I became aware of a widespread curiosity among Basque scholars to learn something about the MSS. in their language belonging to Lord Macclesfield, and of an equally widespread desire that the contents should, if possible, be published. The curiosity had been whetted and the desire for publication increased by some valuable notes by Prof. Rhys which appeared in the ACADEMY of September 13, 1894, followed by a letter from the late Prince L-L. Bonaparte in the ACADEMY of November 8 of the same year.

M. Vinson, in his standard work *Essai d'une Bibliographie de la Langue Basque*, gives a description of the MSS. founded on the information afforded by the ACADEMY, but he has fallen into some mistakes which it is necessary to correct. M. Vinson states that the MSS. are three in number, viz. :—

1. A fragment of a Basque translation of the Old Testament.
2. A Basque Grammar.
3. A Latin-Basque Dictionary.

Of the last two he gives a brief but accurate account, though he does not state that the dictionary is incomplete, containing only the letters A, B, and part of C. But his description of the first is not satisfactory or even intelligible. He begins by giving Prof. Rhys's description of the MS., stating with perfect accuracy that it is written on 131 leaves of large paper (*papier d'écolier*). Almost immediately after this, it is somewhat mystifying to read, "la traduction de la Bible forme deux beaux petits volumes reliés par Greathead." The cause of the discrepancy is not difficult to point out. There is in the Library at Shirburn Castle, besides the original MS., a transcript made in 1807 by the Rev. Samuel Greathead, F.S.A. Prof. Rhys had described the original MS., and said nothing of the transcript. Prince L-L. Bonaparte had described the transcript, and said nothing of the MS. Both descriptions are correct, but M. Vinson erred in combining them into one narrative. In justice to M. Vinson, I may say that this is the only instance I have observed in his book where information obtained by correspondence is not given intelligibly. In a similar way he has to depend on correspondents for his description of the three copies of Liçarrague's New Testament known to exist in England. I have carefully examined these three copies—in the British Museum, in the Library of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and in the Bodleian—and I find the descriptions given in the *Bibliographie* quite full and accurate.

On December 13 last, by the kind permission of the Earl of Macclesfield, I was able to visit his Library. I was fortunate enough to secure the co-operation of the Rev. Andrew Clark, Fellow of Lincoln College and one of the Curators of the Bodleian, whose skill and experience in dealing with MSS. of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are well known. To him all technical details in what follows are due.

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(1) The original MS. of the Old Testament Translation is a folio volume of 138 leaves, $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length by 8 in breadth. It bears the press mark North Library I. f. iii. There is no author's name or date; but the writing is evidently by the same hand as the Grammar and Dictionary, the former of which contains, on its first page, "Gramaire Cantabrique faite par Pierre D'Urte Min. du St. Evangile, natif de St. Jean de Luz de la Province de Labour," &c. The rest of this quaint inscription is given by Prof. Rhys, and may, perhaps, be reprinted in the ACADEMY if a letter should be hereafter admitted describing the Grammar and Dictionary. The volume with which I am now dealing contains a translation of the whole of Genesis, but ends abruptly (on folio 131) in the middle of the sixth verse of Exodus xxii. The remaining pages are blank. It is written on both sides of the leaf, in double column, in a bold plain hand (date *circa* 1700). The divisions of words at the end of a line are very frequent and quite arbitrary, as is also the spelling, the same word being variously spelled even in one line. The headings of the chapters begin with a large capital letter, sometimes ornamented with a flourish. Proper names begin, sometimes with a small, sometimes with a capital letter. The folios were originally numbered at the right-hand top corner, but some of the numbers have been cut off. The volume is richly bound in morocco with an elaborate gilt border, and on the front are stamped the arms of the Earl of Macclesfield. The binding, though magnificent, is to be regretted, as the binder thought more about producing a handsome volume than of preserving the MS. in its integrity. He has, therefore, not scrupled to cut away the margins, and has even occasionally clipped off the end (which everyone knows is the most important part) of a Basque word. But, on the whole, the MS. is in beautiful condition, and is a treasure of which any library may well be proud.

(2) The transcript of the above MS. is in two small volumes, each of 92 leaves, (with the press marks, North Library, I. g 15 and I g 16); the first volume contains the whole of Genesis; the second contains Exodus up to chapter xxii. 6, and a dissertation of 22 pages on Basque grammar, which seems to be drawn chiefly from D'Urte's dictionary; the size of the volumes is $7\frac{1}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches. As has been stated above, the transcript was made by Samuel Greatheed, to whom the Basque MSS. (with the exception of the Grammar) were lent by the fourth Earl of Macclesfield in 1807. M. Vinson's phrase "deux petits volumes reliés par Greatheed" is misleading, as it implies that the transcriber was also a bookbinder, whereas the volumes are only ordinary note-books with red leather covers. The worth of the transcript is intrinsic. True to his name, the writer makes few mistakes, and seems to have possessed a knowledge of the Basque language; this fact might be inferred from the accuracy of the copy, even if there were not the positive evidence of the dissertation.

The transcript was made before the MS. was bound, and is, therefore, invaluable to the

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copyist, where anything in the original is lost or obscure. It may be asked why, as so excellent a transcript exists, any further copy should be made. The answer to this question is that even if these volumes could be entrusted to the tender mercies of a printing-office, they do not seem quite suitable for the purpose: the writing (which is minute and clear) is on both sides of the paper, there are scarcely any divisions between the verses, while the headings of the chapters and the lists of contents are not written in their proper places, but as notes, often at the bottom of the page. The original MS. has characteristics, which should be reproduced as far as possible in print.

Such is a full description of the Old Testament MS. and its transcript. A few points remain to be discussed, such as how these MSS. came to England and to the library they adorn, by whom they were written, from what version of the Bible the translation was made, and how it shall be published. It is not known how or when the MSS. came to England, but it is supposed that the writer sought refuge in this country from religious persecution; that he was a Protestant his own description of himself implies. The MSS. were bequeathed to the second Earl of Macclesfield in 1749 (with a valuable library containing scientific, mathematical, and Welsh MSS.) by William Jones, F.R.S., father of the celebrated orientalist of the same name. They seem to have been in the possession of antiquaries such as Ed. Brown, Ed. Llwyd, and Moses Williams before William Jones acquired them.

M. Vinson has taken great pains to find out the history of Pierre D'Urte; he has explored the municipal records of St. Jean de Luz (where the name seems to have been common in the seventeenth century), and has selected a person who appears as sponsor at a baptism in 1669. He is very probably right, but on all these points more information is to be desired.

Prince L.-L. Bonaparte expressed an opinion that this fragment was translated from the Geneva Bible (in French), which Liçarrague used for his New Testament. This opinion is based partly on the *a priori* improbability of a Protestant making use of the Vulgate, and partly on internal evidence. It is confirmed by a curious mistranslation, which I have observed. In Genesis xii. 10, our A. V. runs thus, "and there was a *famine* in the land." The Basque translation has the extraordinary rendering, "Bagnan *Emaztebat* ethorri içan çen herrira"; "now there came a *woman* to the land." Am I wrong in inferring that this mistake (which would doubtless have been corrected on revision) arose from the similarity in old French Bibles between the words '*famine*' and '*femme*'?"

The next question is, how far would this translation be now intelligible to the people for whom it was made. On this point Prince L.-L. Bonaparte, who knew thoroughly the Basque language and people, observed that the dialect "differs from the archaic dialect of Liçarrague, and is almost the same as that now in use at St. Jean de Luz." To this I would add that the archaisms, such as they are, affect the spelling rather than the diction of the translation. If the Prince is right, this version will be intelligible to every Basque-speaking peasant in the Labourd.

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This encourages me to hope that the Bible Society may be persuaded to undertake the publication of the MS. In doing so, the Society would not only be publishing a literary curiosity, but would be offering to the Basque people a fragment of a noble gift designed for them about two hundred years ago. For this people the Society has hitherto done very little. So far as I can ascertain, it has published only one portion of the Old Testament in Basque—the Book of Ruth—in the Souletin dialect) which is now out of print, no copy being left even in the Society's Library! This fact seems to prove that the work reached the readers for whom it was intended; for it is hardly conceivable that this little book should have been bought up, like Liçarrague's New Testaments and Haraneder's Gospels, only to be destroyed. Whether the whole Bible was ever translated into Basque before the present century is a disputed question. The only edition known to exist was published in 1859 by Captain Duvoisin, at the expense of Prince L-L. Bonaparte. Very few copies were printed, and the book is now extremely rare; it would no doubt have been reprinted and distributed by those who are responsible for the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, if it had been thought fit for the purpose. The excuse for the neglect of this duty is the existence of so many dialects among the Basques. It is satisfactory to learn that this difficulty is decreasing, and likely to decrease. Owing to increased facilities of travelling and intercourse, the dialects are becoming mutually more intelligible; so that the festival, which has hitherto been celebrated annually by two or three or four provinces at various centres, was last year held at St. Jean de Luz by the seven united provinces, under the comprehensive motto "Zazpiak Bat."†

But to return to the question of the Old Testament fragment, it is manifestly desirable that it should be published without delay. If no English or Basque Society will undertake the task, some other means must be devised. I am now making a copy in duplicate, so that, if desirable, it may be printed simultaneously here and in France. But it would be best that it should be published in England—if possible, at Oxford, in order that proofs may be readily corrected by the original manuscript. It would be possible here to have a careful and independent collation of the proofs, which would secure a greater degree of accuracy than could be attained by any individual elsewhere.

It only remains to acknowledge with gratitude the courtesy of the noble owner of the MSS., who has always afforded every facility to enquirers, and on this occasion has willingly deposited the Old Testament MS. and the transcript in the Bodleian Library.

LLEWELYN THOMAS.

* Other peculiarities of translation confirming the Prince's opinion have been observed since the above was written.

† See an interesting article on "A Basque Festival" by the Rev. Wentworth Webster in the November number of the *Anglican Church Magazine*.

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