

Book Club Announces Autumn Selections

NEW YORK Autumn selections were announced here by the Pro-Farwell Book Club

For children under 10 "Bibi the Baker's Horse," illustrated in water color, has been chosen for girls 10 to 14 "Andria" by Hilda Van Stockum, and for boys 10 to 14 "The Hh of Little Miracles" by Valenti Angelo

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Basque and the Regional Languages

Some weeks ago I was saying that Franz Werfel was not only a poet and novelist but also a scholar versed in the literature of several languages. It surprised me accordingly to find this statement in his "Song of Bernadette." The people of Lourdes rarely speak French. They speak their own dialect which is akin to Basque.

I return to that statement and to display a knowledge which seems to have escaped a much more learned man, but because an explanation of what those regional languages are in their origin and especially in their influence past and present, on the Catholic population of their home-lands should, I think be of interest to the Catholic reader.

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largest city in northern Spain is an example. The majority of its inhabitants are not Basques at all. This also accounts for the fact that Bilbao and to a less extent other "big towns" became hotbeds of Socialism and Communism in the past sixty years. And this again explains much of what happened during the late Revolution and civil war.

Navarra, which constitutes a separate Province in the north Basque of the four. It has preserved better the language and traditions. It has been entirely free from immigration. It is the most Catholic province of Spain. In no part of the world have I seen such manifestation of integral Catholic life not even in Ireland, as I have seen in Navarra, and especially in its capital, the city of Pamplona. That is probably the chief reason why Navarra is so admired in our current literature on Spain.

The ignorance of Spain's past and present shown in that literature for the past decade is enough to drive one frantic. Before the fall of the Monarchy the Basques were described by such writers as ignorant priest-ridden feudal medieval and the rest of the "Liberal" vocabulary. Then when the civil war came, a small party calling themselves Basque nationalists became at once great and enlightened patriots. They had never been able to elect even one deputy in Navarra. By swapping votes and seats with the Communists in the big towns of the other prov-

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ORIGIN MYSTERIOUS

The origin of the Basque language and of the Basque people is a mystery. Now for the first time, learned philologists have tried to solve the problem. But today it is as far from solution as when they began to write. Very probably it never will be solved for there is little hope that further study will reveal any information that has not already been brought to light by these learned men.

The reason for this hopelessness is twofold. The Basque language has no literature; there is no authentic history of the Basque people earlier than the sixteenth century. Of course it was known that a peculiar people living up there in the north of Spain had been successively conquered by the Romans, the Visigoths, the Moors and Charlemagne, but what was their origin or where they got their distinct language was not known. The question does not seem to have interested the successive invaders.

When the great Cardinal Ximenes founded the University of Alcala (Campus of the Romans) now at Madrid, he had some of his professors apply themselves to a study of these questions. The result was meagre. Unlike other districts of Europe, Basqueland gave up no inscriptions or monuments. As for literature, all they found was a number of songs and stories handed down by oral tradition from generation to generation. It is worth noting that the University of Alcala was the first in Europe to devote special attention to those studies which are today called "Research." The polygot Bible Bible Complutensis is an example.

Humboldt's theory of the origin of the Basques seems today to be the most favored by the savants. He thought that the Basques are descendants of the original inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula. This theory, however, has its difficulties, especially of the language. The original Iberi are supposed to have been Celts, and the Basques of today show a remarkable similarity to the Celts in character. But their language shows no similarity to any known Celtic language.

CONSOLING TO STUDENTS

If the youth in our high schools and colleges find Latin and Greek a trying study, I can offer them a little consoling thought. They can be thankful that it is not Basque they have to study. Prince Lucien Bonaparte, author of the most comprehensive Basque grammar, wrote "The Basque language must be placed morphologically between the Finnic and languages of North America. Its general alphabet is very complicated. It counts 13 simple vowels and six diphthong vowels, 33 consonants and six aspirated consonants." The difference in sound between a simple consonant and the same consonant when aspirated is seen in the different sounds of th in the English words "this" and "throw." But this is not an essay in philology. So let us get to the main question.

The entire Basque population of Spain is about half a million. There are 150,000 Basques in France, in Gasconne. A colony of these have kept pretty much to themselves in New Orleans. They inhabit the three Spanish provinces of Biscaya, Alava and Guipuzcoa, the three so-called "Basque Provinces." "In these three Provinces," says Salvador Madariaga in his book "Spain," "the language is dying out. It is not spoken in any of the big towns." This is not because the true Basques gave up the language. It is due to immigration from other parts of Spain and this again is due to industrialism. Bilbao, the