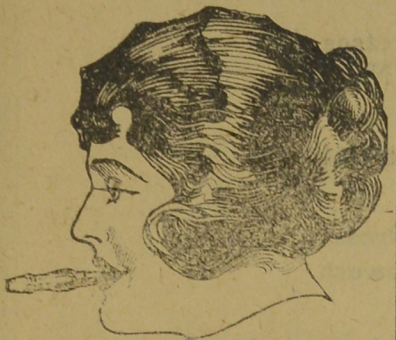


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ORIGIN OF BASQUES, PECULIAR  
 PEOPLE IN THE PYRENEES  
 IS A MYSTERY OF THE AGES

In the north of Spain, where the Cantabrian ranges and the Pyrenees rim the Bay of Biscay, lives a peculiar people. Even its land is different from Spain's. The air is temperate and moist. Mountains are clad in forests of oak and pine. Fields of high grass bring to the vales a honeyed redolence.

The peaks are massed on green plateaus above the sea, like low stretches of the Alps brought to the Spanish coast. The land is spotted with stone towns. The houses are gabled, the narrow streets are cobbled, there is a note of sober canniness and of seclusion. These are the towns of the Basque, says Waldo Frank in the North American Review.

When the Romans made a province of Iberia the Basque lived unconcerned. When the Moslem swept north in the eighth century the Basque withdrew into the mountains and withstood him. When the Visigoth came down through the passes of the Pyrenees the Basque stood aside and let him go. When Roland, with the troop of Charlemagne followed the Visigoth the Basque beat him at Roncevaux.

When finally the kings of Castile, having cleared the Moor and the Jew from Spain, turned back to subdue the Basque, he submitted only as a vassal bowing the head to a more powerful alien. By decree Ferdinand VI ennobled all the Basques of the province of Vizcaya. Already, in 1200, the entire population of the province of Guipuzcoa had been declared hidalgos.

Possess No History. An indelible people! The Basques seem even to be a race in an exploded, archaic fashion; a race by blood. Spaniards, Chinese, Frenchmen, Jews are races by culture. But the Basques appear to have had no culture. Their language was unwritten. They possessed no history, no social records. They had no underlying base of ethics or of religion. If they possessed a culture it was almost biologic. It persisted in blood, instinct rather than conscious concept. A certain haleness of self-sufficiency, a certain gusto for aloofness, kept them intact and unique in a land which for 3000 years was a turmoil of invasions.

And yet in their survival they have not become tragic or heroic. Nothing could be further from the Basque than such other peculiar peoples as the Armenian or Jew. The Basques had no separate books, no separate God. Very early they accepted Catholicity. This did not make them merge with their Catholic neighbors, because their instincts were differently attuned. Spain is a world of tragedy, of mystic ideals, of fanatical devotions. The Basque nature is concrete, light, practical, canny. The Spanish genius is that of confrontation with all that it encounters; this is the genius of tragedy. But the Basque evades, and this is the comic genius. The Basque supplies the relief of comedy in the tragedy of Spain.

Who they were originally is not clear; doubtless early dwellers in the peninsula—part of the people whom the Phoenicians found when they first skirted Spain before the days of Tarshish. Their music suggests kinship with the Celt, but this may well be due to the neighborhood of the Celts who named the Spanish province of Galicia. Their music also suggests kin-

ship with the Berbers—the Riffians of Morocco. Their language is inscrutably alone. It bears no relation with any of the family tongues of Babel. But whoever they were originally, this they have kept on being. Their blood in the small towns remains unmixed, and their head unmixed also. While through the ages Spain has drunk in the torrest of ideas—Roman, Moslem, Christian, Jewish—and bent to the tragic task of fusing Africa, Asia, Europe and America into a single Spain, the Basque has been simply himself. This is why he brings so light a touch. He is light of content. His virtues are simplicity, conservatism and great power of non-absorption. The Basque language paints this well. It contains no word for "God", no word for "spirit". This was a people rooted to the earth, which kept to its pastures and farm yards. Not alone had the Basque mind not reached metaphysics and religion when the tongue was formed; even common concepts were beyond it.

There is a Basque word for dog, pig, lizard, cow. But there is none for animals. There is a Basque word for oak, pine, chestnut. But there is none for tree. A most excellently defended, anti-Platonic people! Their mountain courage warded them free of many floods of races. And their heads kept them clear of Spanish metaphysics. Concepts of God, time, substance, are drains upon the business of life. And for the interims, there is the singing of songs there is the gathering in eights to dance the bland aurescu.

The towns of the Basque express them. The little Guipuzcoan village lies between the mountains and the sea. The mountains slope into a level field with cattle growing fat in the lush grasses. The field rolls to a precipitous edge of rock which falls a thousand feet into the Bay of Biscay. The beach is a couch with sand as smooth and white as the heart of a sea shell. Through the town a road runs west and east upon the sea wall, girdling the Basque villages of the north of Spain. On the one side of the road the Bay of Biscay—blue as a bluebell; upon the other the precipice which you can clamber by stone hewn steps that lead to an Alpine verdance of pasture and dingle.

Dance and Song. The streets of the town are massive. The houses look as if builded for a siege. But they are not forbidding; they are too sure of themselves. They are smiling, even; though they are dense and strong. On the rounded stones of the narrow streets moves a mellow race in immemorial gesture of traffic and trade. Like the houses, these men and women face the world in sober colors. But their eyes are large, and here one reads peace; the lips have the fret of a smile, and there is laughter tingling the swift cadence of their talk.

At night they gather in the Plaza, lined with cafes, and while the old ones drink, the young ones dance. Their dance is a pleasant casual exercise—not far from the usual way of walk and work. It is a hopping and bobbing of couples, a weaving of bodily life and bodily sense into the already existent pattern of their social ease. That is why they dance in the public squares, while the old ones gossip.

Every Sunday morning as the sun tips over the hill three men—one with a drum, two with dulcinea or chistu (a shrill metallic pipe which bears much resemblance to the pipe of the African Berber)—march through the silent streets, through every street and alley of the town, incessantly playing, so that no Vasco, good or bad, shall oversleep the mass.

This music thrills in the morning like the cool sun filaments in dawn. It has the dogged, filigree cadence of a Scottish bagpipe. It is more resolved, however, shriller, less fluid, and its notational dimensions are wider. The tune of the chistu interweaves with the plang of drum and makes the houses smile and dance a bit ere they are quite awake.

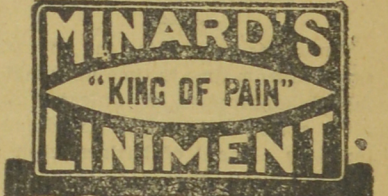


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LONDON, ONT.  
 FIRE FIGHTERS  
 WON TROPHY

Montreal, Que., June 19—The fire fighting team of the London Ontario shops, champion team of the Central region of the Canadian National Railways, carried off the system trophy yesterday afternoon at the Point St. Charles shops and with it the distinction of being the quickest and smartest fire fighting unit on the whole system. The system champion under Chief Lewis had no easy run to their new title and honors having to meet the champions of the other regions in open competition, the other teams being from Battle Creek, Michigan, Moncton, New Brunswick, and Transcona, Manitoba. The tests set out for

the competing teams yesterday consisted of three district movements. The first move was to run one hundred yards and lay out and connect two hundred feet of hose breaking a paper disc with the water. Move number two was to run out an additional fifty feet of hose and then break the disc again with the water. The third move was to replace the third length of hose counting from the hydrant and break the disc. The winning London team went through all the three movements in one minute and thirteen seconds. The second in thirteen and two fifth seconds while twenty-three and three fifth seconds was taken for the third. The Moncton, N. B. team finished in third place.