

LITERARY CORRESPONDENCE

I.

FRANCE.—THE INTELLECTUAL AWAKENING OF THE LANGUE D'OC.

I HAVE never seen mentioned in your periodical publications the *Revue des Pyrénées*; and perhaps I should never have heard of the periodical myself if I had not been in this interesting old city, and if my eye had not chanced on the title of one of the articles of a recent number advertised in a local journal. “Un Ariégeois sénateur des Etats-Unis d’Amérique : Pierre Soulé” was the title that attracted my attention and caused me to procure a copy, which I have found interesting in more ways than one.

The publication is a well-printed quarterly of 150 pages, and has completed some time since the second year of its existence. Its full title is as follows : *Revue des Pyrénées et de la France meridionale, Organe de l'Association Pyrénéenne et de l'union des Sociétés Savantes du Midi*. The founders of the periodical are the late JULIEN SACAZE, a savant much venerated in these parts, and Dr. F. GARRIGOU, its present editor.

The Association Pyrénéenne, of which, as we have just seen, the *Revue* is the organ, is an active and significant organisation. Here are some of its aims. While it recognises the greatness of the Capital, Paris, it advocates decentralisation, by “showing that workers living in the provinces are as capable as others, though enjoying less support and funds, to aid in the building up of the great scientific edifice of France.” The importance and boldness of this

declaration can scarcely be appreciated by those who have not breathed for some time the excessively monopolistic atmosphere of the French capital, which has been so baneful to so many national interests. The Association would also act as a means of union between the various learned societies of the South, the Midi, and thus render it possible to organise an annual Congress "for the discussion and defense of the grand scientific, industrial, and commercial questions which concern Southern France."

Here we see brought out still more precisely that rivalry between the South and North, characteristic of most nations, and which presents such curious aspects in the past and present history of France.

I never weary of quietly noting, while in the South, the delightful contempt which the *méridionaux* show for their Parisian fellow countrymen. The other day at dinner, for instance, I heard a learned professor of one of the Southern Universities defending the Southern accent and preferring it to "the Parisian accent," as he put it. But I would need pages of your space to develop this line of thought. Suffice it to say here that the Association Pyrénéenne and its organ the *Revue des Pyrénées* intend to prove, and have succeeded in proving, if we may judge by this number of the *Revue* and by the account of the proceedings of the first Congress of the Association, placed at the head of the number, that there are creditable savants and sound learning outside of the walls of Victor Hugo's "Ville Lumière."

Another object of the Association would be dear to Castelar's heart. I give it in full: "To remove morally the grand Pyreneean curtain and to offer the hand of friendship to a nation justly proud of its past, whose interests touch our own, and which has the right, because of the illustrious sons of Catalonia, Aragon, and Navarre, to take part in an intellectual and Pyreneean association based on science." This is a paraphrase of Louis XIV's famous remark concerning the Pyrenees, when he placed his grandson on the throne of Spain. Nor can one be surprised at the strong affection which binds Southern France to the Iberian peninsula. The grand mountains, the "Pyreneean curtain," which separate the two countries, are always in sight, their snow-capped peaks glittering in the sun; the various *patois*, especially the dialect of Pau, resemble the Span-

ish more than they do the French tongue; Spanish money is foisted on you at the shops, and picturesque Spanish mountaineers lend a peculiar charm to the country fairs, while the nation is ever on the eve of a pronunciamiento, destined to give to Spain the republican institutions of France.

But to return to PIERRE SOULÉ who is the cause and starting point of this letter. Commandant Trespaillé's eulogistic biographical sketch is of slight interest to American readers, who can find elsewhere a fuller and more exact account of the brilliant but rather disappointing career of the once famous Franco-Louisiana statesman. M. Trespaillé's reference to "Old Hickory" as "the immortal Jackson," his statement that the American people is full of prejudices against the French race, his metamorphosing New Hampshire's only President into Pierre Francklin, and some other similar slips can be overlooked, for this essay offers a striking example of the dominant idea of the *Revue*, the Association and patriotic Southerners generally,—the glorification of the great men and great actions of the sunny South, the "Midi ensoleillé."

And I must admit, foreigner though I am, that I share much of this enthusiasm for persons and things meridional, and especially for the latter. What a land this is for historical and archæological study! Take this number of the *Revue des Pyrénées*, for instance; it is full of it. Here, for example, are the titles of three of the papers read at the first Congress of the Association Pyrénéenne, to which Congress I referred above: "The Domitian Road from Narbonne to Perpignan," "The Third Century School of Sculpture in Southern Gaul," and "The Roman Road from Narbonne to Carcassonne." There are several articles in the *Revue* about the University of Toulouse, which is stated to be the oldest in France after that of Paris, having been founded in 1229, more than two hundred and fifty years before the discovery of America. The law school even antedates 1229 and its foundation is lost in the obscurity of the early centuries of the Christian era. Another article begins the publication of a list of the professors at the law school. The first recorded name dates from 1251. When one finds such themes as these on every hand, Rome, Gaul, the Middle Ages, and feudalism become almost living

realities. And how inexhaustibly rich Languedoc is in these reminders of the distant past.

And the patois or dialects of this part of France are not the least ancient and interesting subjects for study. Wonder is often expressed that the English of America differs so slightly from the English of England, with three thousand miles of ocean separating the two countries. The wonder increases when you find that here in Languedoc the same patois differs in some particulars from town to town. Let me first mention some big differences and then touch upon some minor ones. If you take the train which leaves Toulouse at about half past eleven in the morning, you will arrive at Pau at half past four. During these five hours on a pretty slow train you have passed from one patois to another. The lower classes of Toulouse cannot understand the lower classes of Pau. And if you continue in the same train, at about half past eight you reach Mauléon, in the French Basque Provinces, where the populace of neither Toulouse nor Pau could carry on a conversation with the populace of Mauléon. Thus a nine hours' ride of about 175 miles on an accommodation train carries you through a region where French is the vernacular of the educated classes and is the official language, but where the great mass of the population is divided into three groups, each speaking a different dialect.

The modifications which the same patois undergoes in neighboring localities is not less curious though of course not so radical. Roughly speaking it may be said that the same patois is spoken from Montpellier to Bordeaux and from Toulouse well up into the centre of France, which embraces the region where prevailed the *Langue d'oc* from which the present patois is derived. But, while a peasant could make himself understood throughout this wide territory, his ear would often be perplexed by more than one strange word and phrase. I was once told on the Riviera that the patois of Menton differed considerably from that of Nice and that this was particularly the case before the construction of the Corniche road and the railway, when a denizen of the former place could reach the latter city only by doubling Cape Martin under sail. I do not know how true this statement is, but I believe it to be correct, after a superficial study

on these same lines which I have just made in the Department of the Tarn, one of the most isolated portions of Upper Languedoc. I find that the patois of towns as near together, as are New York, Newark, Patterson, Nyack and Tarrytown, for example, differs, not, perhaps, in its construction but in its vocabulary. Let me give some examples. Thus, potato, which is *truffet* at Cordes, becomes *truffo* at Castres. *Patano*, the word employed in the South East end of the Department is also heard at Castres, but never at Cordes, which is in the North West end of the Department, Castres being about in the centre. Dog is *cagnot* and *có* at Cordes, and *gous* at Castres. (At Montpellier, in a contiguous Department it is *tschi*, while at Pau they say *can*, which approaches very near the Latin.) Pig is *pourcel* at Castres and *tessou* at Cordes. Broom *engranicro* at Castres and *balatso* at Cordes. I have also noted the following difference between the Tarn patois and that of Pau. The *f* of the former always becomes an aspirated *h* in the latter. Thus, *femo*, woman (Castres) is *henno* at Pau; *fourco*, pitchfork (Castres) *hourco* (Pau); *foun* fountain (Castres) *houn* (Pau).

A comparison of this patois with the French as regards the spelling of geographical names reveals a fact that would somewhat dampen the ardor of our friend Colonel Shephard, of New York, in his effort to force the gazeteers to give geographical names as they are written in the countries where they are found. One might have thought that such near neighbors as the Langue d'oil and the Langue d'oc would have come to some rational understanding on this point and that the Ile-de-France would have accepted the spelling of Languedoc. But not so. The towns and rivers of this part of France look as different in French and patois printed pages and sound as differently when pronounced by educated and peasant mouths, as do the towns and rivers of Italy when seen in Italian and English books or when spoken by Americans and Italians. Thus Toulouso became Toulouse; Castros, Castres; Dourgno, Dourgne; Carcassouno, Carcassonne; Narbouno, Narbonne; Billofranco, Villefranche; Labaou, Lavaur; Bibiers, Viviers; Boou, Vour; Abrayrou, Aveyron; Cordos, Cordes, etc.

These patois, these dialects of the old Langue d'oc, are awakening

just now increasing interest in the literary circles of the Midi, for it is only within recent years that the French has appeared to threaten their extinction. The spread of the railroad system and especially the wide development of the primary school since the advent of the Third Republic, are dealing deadly blows at these popular dialects. But they are still far from moribund. I have frequently been told that even to-day one stumbles now and then on old peasants living up in the isolated Black Mountain, a spur of the Cévennes, and which divides Upper from Lower Languedoc, who cling to *oc*, although *obe* or *ope*, or the French *oui* and *si*, are the common affirmative particles of the patois.

It has often happened to me when taking a constitutional to ask my way and discover that I am addressing a person who neither understands nor speaks French, though, as a rule, all peasants understand French and the vast majority can speak the language too, but after a rather sorry fashion. A foreigner finds at least one comfort in all this: in Languedoc he uses the national tongue more correctly than thousands of native born Frenchmen! Nor is the knowledge of patois confined to the peasantry or the working classes of the towns. The *bourgeoisie*, with exceedingly rare exceptions, are quite at home in it, and the children of the nobility often prattle with their peasant nurse more easily in patois than in the polished speech of their parents. During a political campaign, it is a very common thing for a would-be deputy to address country voters in their familiar dialect, thereby gaining the favor not alone of the *felibres*; while, during this same period of electoral excitement, the local papers publish almost daily editorials written in patois. In hundreds of rural churches the short sermon after early mass is preached in patois, and many a time I have found myself turning with surprise when I heard French spoken in the streets of Languedocian towns of considerable size.

There was a time when the government and the ruling classes of Languedoc itself strove to eradicate these dialects and to substitute French for them. The aim was a patriotic one; greater national unity, it was believed, would thus be secured. But that period has gone by, and at present there is a strong tendency to preserve from destruction these linguistic souvenirs of a rapidly fading past. What

the enthusiastic *félibres* would do for Provençal, they and their disciples and imitators in Languedoc would do for the dialects of South Western France. At the Congrès d'Etudes Languedociennes, held recently at Montpellier, one of the members proposed that the French language should be taught in the primary schools through the medium of the langue d'oc. The suggestion is not so chimerical as it appears to be at first blush, for one of the greatest and never-ending difficulties of the country schoolmaster in this part of France is to teach his scholars the three R's by means of the French, which is a foreign tongue to ninety-nine out of a hundred of them. One is not surprised, therefore, to find that one of the resolutions passed by this same Congress takes up the plan proposed in the paper just referred to, and declares in favor of "the utilisation of the langue d'oc for teaching French in the primary schools."

At a recent sitting of the General Council of the Bordeaux University a resolution was passed calling for the creation of a chair of "Southern languages." In explanation of this term, the *Gironde*, the leading Bordeaux newspaper, says: "Besides giving instruction in Spanish, one of the labors of the professor would be to teach our South Western dialects in which the most important historical documents of this part of the country were drawn up during several centuries." The editor then goes on to say: "If the State does not feel able to found this chair, will not some private individual come forward and imitate the example of James E. Clark, who recently established at Worcester, Mass., a university endowed with a capital of \$12,500,000?"

Speaking of primary schools reminds me of a curious fact which has frequently attracted my attention in Languedoc this winter. In no other part of France perhaps was it so common for a town to grow up around a castle; for this region was terribly harried by the Wars of Religion, and the poor peasants were forced to seek the protection of some lord. In order to render them more impregnable, these castles were generally built on some high hill. So now one sees on every hand decaying hamlets surrounding ruined castles left almost deserted on the very crown of some pyramidal mount, while the busy town of to-day has descended to the more accessible base

of the hill. But since the advent of the Third Republic and the grand impetus given to primary instruction, these abandoned castles have taken a new lease of life, and been converted into school buildings. The other day during an hour's drive in Upper Languedoc I saw two of these old useless feudal piles consecrated to popular nineteenth century education. What a train of reflections is thus suggested! Within the very same walls where some proud ignorant seignior once lorded it over his humble vassals, the descendants of these serfs, still speaking the tongue of their oppressed ancestors, but enjoying all the liberties then usurped by their masters, are now being instructed in branches of knowledge of which the feudal knight had scarcely an inkling. What a revolution was that of '89!

THEODORE STANTON.