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# Latin Language in History

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LATIN LANGUAGE IN HISTORY.

(ROSE MACNEAL, CLASS OF '95.)

The story of the Rise and Fall of Rome and that of the subsequent birth and growth of the new nationalities is one of absorbing interest to the student of history. Language being the true image of the degree of civilization attained by a nation, there can be no better picture of a time, than a careful description of the language used during the successive periods.

Each of the three periods of Roman history is marked by a change in the Latin language. I. The early formation, and distinction of the race, in which we have the archaic. II. The growth of the Romans, culminating with the genius of the Golden Age, in which we see (a) the literary Latin so even in its development, and so remarkable for its purity, strength and systematic harmony; and (b) the popular Latin of business life. For during this time, there was the incoming of strange tribes bringing new languages in, and the populating of annexed provinces, carrying the Roman speech abroad. The speech of these unsettled peoples retained the form of the archaic, modified to suit the changing needs of the people in the different portions of the large area covered. Meanwhile, the educated men



of Rome were writing and were preserving by logical rules, a language free from colloquial errors, and unyielding to any variations. This became the language of literary people and the forum. There was no attempt to give it to the mass of the people, and lingua urbana and lingua rustica drifted farther and farther apart. Finally lingua rustica was ridiculed in the capital, and lingua urbana was unintelligible to any but the educated. So, for the great days of the Empire, we have this dual means of intercourse, the literary Latin and the popular Latin. III. When the Roman world had fallen, we see, springing forth from the ruins, new and vigorous languages, the base of the Romance languages, which at present are used by two-thirds of the world. The popular Latin, which is the foundation of these new tongues, was modified by the nations with which it came in contact and proved by its wonderful resemblance to the old archaic, that a living, spoken language, without rules, is of greater duration than a most exact one kept for any other purposes than those of daily life.

- I. The question, Who were the Latins, has been answered very indefinitely. Philologists have divided the early peoples of the peninsula into three groups, (a) the Iapygians, (b) the



Etruscans, and (c) the Italians. Information concerning the first two is very meagre, but it suffices to show that there must have lived in the peninsula races different from the third, the Italian family. These Italians were divided into the Latins and Umbro-Sabellians. The Latins survived, either driving farther away the Sabellians, or completely absorbing them. Inscriptions, bearing the date of the spreading of the Latins out of Latium are of the same archaic Latin used hundreds of years later; so it is a very pretty theory, that this was originally the language of the Sabellians. It drifted southward, and being easier of pronunciation than the harsher notes of the north, became the spoken language of the country.

II. For this second period, where is the internal division of the language, we find a great number of the works of classical Latin carefully preserved; but of the language of the people there are no monuments. In histories we read about the language of the Romans being imposed in their colonizing, and a study of the places where this popularized Latin went gives a true estimate of the extent of Latin dominion. On the other hand, the later development of these countries makes clear a great deal concerning the old spoken tongue of the Latins.

Plautus (224 B. C.) is the most complete author of first



literary Latin. He is strongly archaic, and a comparison with Cicero makes the difference at once felt. Not that the one would have been unintelligible to the other, but the Greek influence is conspicuous in Cicero; yet in Plautus there is perceived the difference between a colloquial language, and the artificial tongue of literature. From the second century B.C. there is an unbroken line of literary works, showing by its form the political and literary customs; giving in its references glimpses of life among the inhabitants of the Roman country.

Up to 80 B.C. there is Ennius, the father of Latin poetry, Terence and his efforts at refinement, Pacuvius and Accius, writers of early tragedy, with Lucilius, the father of satire. After 80 B.C. came the Golden Age, with its eloquent Cicero, concise Caesar and philosophical Sallust. Later, during the days of the Empire, we have the poet Virgil and his companion Horace, with Ovid and the practical historian, Livy. A decline followed and never again was Latin literature so fruitful of masterly productions. But evidence of the existence of the written language is carried on through the Claudian period, through the rules of Hadrian and Flavian.

In great contrast to this richness in remains of the lin- x



gua urbana, now a dead language, is the utter lack of anything written in the lingua rustica. With the destruction of Virgil, Livy or Cicero pure literary Latin would have been gone, while popular Latin has its continual existence as the foundation of the Romance languages, as an influence in both the English and the German.

III. Other countries conquered the Roman Empire but they took her language,--Rome conquered other countries and they received her language. Studying the internal history of the old Latin tongue, it becomes the history of different peoples using one language; studying the external development, it is the change of one language to suit the needs of several peoples.

At the time of the invasions of Italy we see the former taking place. With impressive waves of sound, some historians pour barbarians over the Empire, sweeping away Rome; others seeing traces of Rome about, have brought forth facts hidden away in books, and tell us our civilization owes all to Rome, and that the Germans were but an interruption. It is true that during this time the Latin law and language stood firm, but received new strength from the adopters, and were perpetuated by the force of numbers drawn from the Teutons. But be-



fore the invasions the arrival of the provincials had spread the popular Latin. By 206 B.C. we see in Italy the most diverse kinds of population, all yielding to Roman civilization. There were stronger reasons for this than those of mere association. It was forbidden for business to be transacted in any other language than the Latin, so the people coming into the Peninsula from the East and across the Mediterranean were compelled to conform to the requirements of the language. Under Sulla, the rule became most rigorous, so that Latinism was decidedly in the ascendency. At the same time we see the Peninsula swarming from the Alps to Sicilian straits with Greeks, Jews and Assyrians. The decline of Roman greatness had begun in the Peninsula itself, when the invasions came. The Goths had no destroying influence on the language, but instead served by their dispersion to carry Latin words into places which would not otherwise have received them. For two hundred years the Goths held sway over the country of the Romans, but Theodoric, their great ruler, was most anxious to conform to the Latin customs and language. We hear of his delivering an address in Rome, in very good Latin. Under the influence of the sunny skies this man of the North became imbued with the de-



sire to revive learning, and encouraged Boethius and Cassiodorus. Their language was not that of the people, although many popular phrases crept into their works. Yet in some of the dialogues of the works of the time, we can see the strong, stern tongue of Cicero and Vergil melting into "The melodious accents of Dante and Boccaccio"; and it is not the language of a new people, but the old archaic Latin, that so many years before had become the speech of the people. Two hundred years more, and the Ostrogoths are fallen; they seem to fade away from this part of the country; but their dispersion served to spread the Roman ideas that they had so quickly acquired. There followed the period of the Longobardi; but while they stamped themselves on the art and industry of the time, they made no noticeable change in the speech. Latin was used in business and in the church; we have no records of their intercourse; but reasoning from the former course of conquering people, historians infer that the Longobardi bent to the established customs. In the eighth century the Iron crown of Lombardy was given to the Franks. Strong as were these Teutons they could not shake themselves free from a power that had once governed the world. Yet with their radical differ-



ences, great numbers, and young strength, they could not disappear as did the nations in earlier days, when the power of Rome was stronger and to be a Roman citizen was the highest honor possible. There can not be a more striking example of the way the Latins and Teutons ran along side by side than that furnished by names of months and days of the week. January, March, July, August, all carry their suggestions of Roman ideas and heroes. The Teutons were not able to impose their popular titles of Wolf-monat, Lenet-monat, etc. But we have the Teutonic Woden for Wednesday, banishing the Dies Mercurii; Thor, Teuton God of Thunder displaced the Roman Jupiter with his Dies Joris, while Frea has robbed the Roman Venus of her Dies Veneris. Rome knew she could Romanize her barbarians, so she welcomed them cordially. She had filled their country with schools and with them her language. Upon this northern country, Rome had stamped her influence more than upon southern Italy itself.

In the south, lingua romana, as the spoken language came to be called, remained the head, and if the barbarians had not come, modern Italian might have been purely archaic Latin. Genuine Italian, however, is not the combination of vulgar



Latin or Latina rustica, with other languages, but the development of it alone by other tribes. It is invariable because of the purity of the Latin origin, and thus we have the students of Dante easily able to read the old inscriptions of Latina rustica. This language of Dante continues to be the modern speech; while in the countries where popular Latin was adopted, and not gradually acquired by means of natural fusion and requirements of intercourse, we have, as people get farther away from the Latin, greater variations. Thus arises the fact that we have old French and new French, also the old and new dialects of Spain, while Italian is uniform. In direct contrast to pure Italian we have the Gallo-Italic, a self-explanatory name. It is a modification of the old vulgar Latin of the early settlers of Gaul, to suit the needs of the invading Franks. Moving westward, this dialect was gradually adopted, forming the vocabulary, but modified as to form, by other tribes, making finally the French; while the Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Roumanian came from the pure lingua romana, adopted from southern Italy in the early centuries.

Parallel with the internal growth of the Latin language, was the development in the provinces. There the same general



plan may be traced, imposition of the language in the prosperous days of the mother country; the acceptance and utilization of it, when countries began to be independent, or fell to the lot of other influences.

Before the great days of the Empire the entire world to a Roman consisted of Rome and her fourteen provinces. These were trans-Alpine Gaul, Macedonia, Italian Gaul, Greece, Sicily, Sardinia and Corsica, Pontus, Cilicia, Syria, Crete, Cyrene, Africa and Belgia. Rome's plan of colonization was to make them absolutely dependent; every accused provincial was bound to appear in Rome to defend himself; the accusation and defense must be in Latin. The colonies, especially in the West, showed a great eagerness to become Roman. In the East and in Africa the old influence was so strong that the Roman influence was but transient, and imposition of language became nothing more; while the West was not only more willing, but they had not the numbers of free tribes to fall back upon for reinforcement of national customs as the Romans so persistently drove them farther West.

Spain was the earliest of the colonies in the trans-marine land. Romans fought first in Lusitania. Caesar carried the



206 B.C.

strife to Brigantium. Between the death of Caesar and the rule of Augustus as emperor, there was continual warfare there. This kept a permanent garrison of soldiers speaking the Latina rustica. Gades was the first town out of Italy to adopt Roman law and speech. Carturia soon became a province, the first outside of Italy, with a Roman population. It owed its existence to a multitude of children with Roman soldiers for fathers and camp slaves for mothers. The children became slaves de jure, Italians de facto. This grew to be a completely Latin colony. Thus in southern Spain Romans grew with the natives, either absorbing or usurping them. Many Spanish cities now begged admission to Roman "burgher-union", taking the Roman language and assuming the customs of the capital. Next followed the middle interior, headed by Hispalis (Seville), Corduba (Cordova). In Lusitania (Portugal) were Olisipo (Lisbon), Pax Julia (Beja). In the imperial period the language of the indigenous population nowhere appears so as to be recognizable. It was probably the language of that race, who this day occupy the mountains of Biscay and Navarre. Inscriptions found on coins throughout the peninsula lead to this belief; but after the conquests of Caesar, the Iberians disappear.



This readily explains the great similarity between Spanish and archaic Latin. Before the imperial period the Spanish had to solicit the right to make Latin the language of business. Under the imperial rule this no longer held good, and when Augustus died lingua romana prevailed. Under Vespasian the native language was restricted, "de jure", to private intercourse. That it persisted is proved only by the Basques in the mountains, and these peoples may not be Spanish at all, but Celts who came in from a different direction. The existence of old coins is accounted for by the similarity of Celtic dialect.

There are in Spain three varieties of the romana rustica, much more distinctly marked than in Italy. This special development of the vulgar Latin and formation of three linguistic types is because of peculiar political circumstances, and not because of interference of other native languages. When the Mohammedans conquered most of Spain, they drove the Latin speaking Christians to the Pyrenees. From the ninth century until the last of the fifteenth, Spain was occupied in reconquering her former territory, and the Latin was slowly driven back to the Saracen part of the country. The Arabian invasion had



but a superficial effect, as it never mixed with the Latin dialects. Two of these- Portuguese and Castilian, are not so different from vulgar Latin as Italian itself. They have modifications coming from changes that would naturally arise from the dispersion of the same peoples over a large area, not those arising from contact with others; but Catalan shows association with tribes of southern France who speak the Provençal; and it was from southern France that the people who speak Catalan drifted back, after the retreat of the Saracens.

This Provençal is used to comprehend Romanic speech in the south of France. Contrary to what took place in the north, no strong local language raised itself and as late as the latter middle ages, this language was called Lenga Romana. Latin orthography was employed until the thirteenth century, and Latin literature alone was used.

Castilian is spoken in the south and center of Spain, that section which was earliest and most completely romanized and from which arose the Spanish-Latin authors. Portuguese, generally speaking, is farther removed from direct resemblance to Latin than Castilian. It has changed its form more, but it has preserved the Latin vocabulary. The old inhabitants of



Lusitania being more removed from travel and intercourse, dropped forms which were an inconvenience, and for the same reason missed additions to the vocabulary that came to the South and East.

Nearly contemporary with the colonizing of the Spanish country was the attempt in the Danubian Lands. Here effects were not so permanent; first, because of the Slavic people, whose tendencies were not toward assimilation, and secondly, because they were so near to the warlike Germans, that it made it more dangerous than profitable. Among these lands there lived a people superior to their neighbors in intellectual training. They were the Daci. It was not until about 200 B.C. that they came in direct contact with Romans. Domitian in vain attempted to subjugate them, but this was not accomplished until 102 A.D., under Trajan. He conquered them, demanding complete subserviance. A large bridge was erected, giving Romans continual access to the country. In 107 he reconquered them and exterminated old natives, repopulating with neighboring wild tribes and Roman soldiery. The extension of Roman power was not carried so far as might have been expected by the conquest of Dacia. The Danube remained the boundary, and Rome,



270 A.D.

becoming of the opinion that Dacia was more of a menace than a help, withdrew, under Aurelian, Roman soldiers, and migration from Rome to Dacia ceased for the time. Modern Roumania is roughly estimated the same as Trajan's Dacia, but the cause of Roman predominance in language and customs is a matter of great dispute. Rou - Turkish for Ro-showit is plainly descended from Rome by some means. Some Roumanians affirm the descent is from the few scattered remains of Trajan's Romans. Later investigations lead to the belief that Trajan removed all Romans from Dacia; and the absence of mention of Romans during the Gothic and other invasions strengthens the belief. Many relics point to the fact that there must have been well-established Romans in Dacia in the fourth and fifth centuries. Other things show a strong Roman influence during the time of Justinian; but the present extension of the eastern branch of Latin people found in the plains of Roumania is due to a colonizing movement from the Alpine regions, which began in the twelfth century.

The language is a strange mixture of Slavic and Latin.

Words connected with the Christian religion are purely Roman, either showing a Romanizing influence of the christian revival in the twelfth century, or the earlier efforts of the primitive



Christianity, that cared as much for barbarian countries as for Rome itself. Political terms are Slavic, an evidence that the Roman element is not the forced one of the early conquest, while most words of domestic life and kinship are unmistakably Latin. Not more than one-fifth of the vocabulary is Latin, yet this one-fifth furnishes the words of common use. The people have a great pride in their boast of ancient Roman descent, and with the recent accession of independence came the dream of entirely recovering Trajan's Dacia and establishing more firmly, their claim to ancient Latin descent. This is giving rise to great uneasiness in Hungary, because of the Roumanian wish to annex all of Roumanian speaking Hungary to Roumania and to establish an independent country, where the inhabitants will be united in interests because of their Latin blood. But antiquity of lineage does not seem to be able to compensate Hungary for the loss of a most profitable part of her territory, and she will not release it without a struggle.

In 51 B.C. Caesar invaded Gaul. Long before that time, Rome was in communication with neighboring countries. It is to the terrible wars of Caesar, however, that are attributed the triumph of Roman literature and language. So complete was



this conquest that after the days of the Empire Gaul was more Latin than Rome itself. Many of the emperors were from Gaul, and the prominent writers came from Gallic districts. Among them were Catullus, Cato and Virgil, all renowned for the freshness of their imagination and sweetness of expression, while the rules of the Gallic emperors were of very high character. For five successive centuries the Latinizing process continued. The same general plan as in other countries was pursued, only the enforcement was more thorough. During this time the Germans were making continual raids, and in the fifth century the Franks established themselves, and effected the most surprising change in customs and manners. But by this fifth century the Latin had completely supplanted the Celtic. The Celts yielded their vocabulary without a struggle, lazily attaching their native forms where it suited their convenience. Going westward, they took this illogical dialect with them. This explains the appearance of Celtic forms in French words. The Romans were not entirely driven out from Frankish territory until the first of the eighth century, and even then the Roman influence remained. Neustria was Roman and many of the conflicts against Roman power succeeded in nothing more than the returning of Frankish conquerors with Roman ideas.



In the adoption of Gallo-Roman as the base of French we see Gallic influence in the adoption of a single case, the Gallic use of an article made by shortening ille, Celtic counting by scores the double negative, and many other changes. The Latin is noticed in the vocabulary, three-fourths of the words being from the vulgar Latin. When one division of Franks began the use of the Gallo-Roman they called their division of it Francisca, the teutonic frankish. This division of popular Latin changed more rapidly than any other, so that French was the first dialect recognized as a distinct language. Among the Grisons, a colony in the Alps, and in one part of Sardinia, there is spoken a dialect of greatest resemblance to the old archaic tongue of Italy. The former was in earlier days the most used of the passes from Italy to Gaul; while the latter was densely populated with granary merchants from Rome. The German is usurping the Latin of the Grisons, while the Latin colony of Sardinia is giving away to the language of southern Italy.

In Britain occurred the same thing, driving of the Celts westward, the people disappearing from modern England, except in Wales and Cumberland. Ancient Roman rule here is very sim-



43 B.C.  
to  
409 A.D.

ilar to that of Dacia. It found Britain too far away to be profitable, and so gave it up; but its rule there familiarized the people with Latin. Gildas spoke in the Latin of the common people, concerning public questions. But the English does not show an analytical growth with a foundation of Latin, as do the Romance languages. It took many words, especially those connected with Christianity. These were brought by the early missionaries. The old dialects of England afford many earlier specimens, but in England Latin is an influence, not a foundation. The Saxon of Alfred was adopted as the language of literature, and many translations from Latin were made in it. Hence our Latin is the former classical. (English--equestrian from Latin equus. French--cheval from the Latin caballus.) The Latins left many geographical names,--York, Chester, Derbyshire, etc. It is through the Norman conquest we get our words of low Latin origin.

The only Latin to be found in the German, is that which came from the Gothic. The high middle German is strongly influenced by the old Gothic. The oldest work in this language is Ulfila's translation of the Bible, given to a people who knew many phrases of the vulgar Latin. Later writers wrote



much on the Latin models, and Luther made many translations from Latin hymns, but this was no influence in the growth of the language. Classical Latin was strictly preserved in the Universities, it being the language of the classroom, until the beginning of the present century. Just before the Renaissance the writing was done in the Latin language, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries scholars themselves began to express sentiment in the native language, that it might reach the heart of the people.

Latin in  
church and  
law.

France is noted for the long continuance of the classical language for formal purposes. This may be attributed to two influences, that of the church and that of the law. The crude forms of the young language could not express the ideas of theology and philosophy, so it was done in Latin. As the ecclesiastics were the only ones with the leisure and education, it was their business to do the studying and writing. In the early history of the country the missionaries gave the gospel to the new countries in the vulgar Latin of their comprehension. This indeed helped to increase the number of Latin-speaking people. Afterwards the ecclesiastics became the only educated men of the time and shut themselves away from the people, studying and preserving



the classics. In the dark ages the ecclesiastical Latin declined. The people, not able to understand the religion preached to them, lost interest. But the Renaissance revived learning, and gave it to the people. Interest revived, and many words were adopted into the younger tongues from the old classical Latin, to express ideas for which they had no equivalent.

In Italy the ecclesiastics held on to the classical Latin most tenaciously. Not until the thirteenth century was any other used, and there are records of Latin sermons delivered in the sixteenth century. Since the Roman clergy supplied Western Europe with church officers, Latin continued the sole language of theology and ecclesiastical diplomacy until after the sixteenth century, and now wherever there is a Catholic altar the old Latin language is used for the liturgy.

It was in law that there came the greatest appreciation of the speech of the educated Romans. With its possibilities of clearness, the new nationalities gladly accepted the Latin for their legal transactions, so requiring an interpreter, who came from the clergy, thus giving the papacy more power. Not until 842 do we have record of any legal document in the lan-



guage of the Franks. Those enjoying the privileges of our later civilization, owe a double debt to Latin; to the classical, which by its strength, purity and exactness, preserves the works of antiquity from the changes of dialect; to the lingua populi, for the virtue of being the foundation for the analytical languages of three-fourths of the globe.



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