

ARTICLE VIII.

SCHELER'S DICTIONARY OF FRENCH ETYMOLOGY.¹

BY REV. B. SEARS, PRESIDENT OF BROWN UNIVERSITY, PROVIDENCE, R. I.

WHAT Bopp and his school have done for etymology in the Sanscrit, the Grimms in the German, and Diez in the Romance languages, has given a new impulse to etymological studies, and led to many new discoveries and exploded many traditional errors. The older etymologists were so fanciful that no wonder a lively French writer said that in etymology *les consonens sont peu de choses et les voyales rien du tout*. By the older English and French writers on the subject, stories to explain the origin of words were fabricated with a facility equalled only by the credulity with which they were received. Of those tales of pure fiction in regard to the origin of English words it has been ascertained that, in nearly nine-tenths of the cases mentioned, the word was in use long before the occasion which is said to have given origin to it. The great majority of these anecdotes which even now disgrace our English literature are so clumsy that we can hardly account for the currency they have gained.

It is a fact to which even so good a scholar as Marsh has given too little attention, while he has studied the history of individual words so carefully, that there are well established laws by which words undergo certain changes in passing from one language to another, so that an etymology is no longer to be adopted on account of any external resemblances, but on account of changes which can be proved to be organic by referring to whole classes of words in which the same letters are represented by certain corresponding letters in another language. Thus the initial *f* in Latin is represented by *h* in Spanish, as in *faba*, *haba*; *facere*, *hacer*; *filius*, *hijo*; *forma*, *horma*; *fumus*, *humo*. The *c* before *a* in Latin, passes into *ch* in French, as in *caballus*, *cheval*; *camera*, *chambre*; *canis*, *chien*; *causa*, *chose*; *castellum*, *chateau*. The English and French insert the letter *b* after *m*, as in *numerus*, *number*; *camera*, *chambre*; *Schlummer* (German), *slumber*; *D.ium*, *thumb*; *Lamm*, *lamb*. The diphthong *oi* in French takes the place of short *i* before a single consonant in Latin, as in *bibere*, *boir*, *digitus*, *doigt*; *fides*, *foi*; *minus*, *moins*; *niger*, *noir*; *via*, *voie*. The *o* of the Latin is changed into the diphthong *eu* (*oeu*) in French, as in *hora*, *heure*; *nodus*, *noeud*; *solus*, *seul*; *ploro*, *pleure*; *nepotem*, *neveu*; *ovum*, *oeuf*; *bovem*, *boeuf*; *populus*, *peuple*; *cor*, *coeur*. The *l* in Latin words is represented by *u* in French as in *collum*, *cou*; *bellus* (*beal*) *beau* (*bealté*, *beauté*);

¹ *Dictionnaire d'Etymologie Française d'après les Résultats de la Science Moderne*, par Auguste Scheler, Doct. en Philosophie et Lettres, Bibliothécaire du Roi des Belges. Bruxelles et Paris: 1862.

castellum, chateau; falco, faucon; delphinus, dauphin; talpa, taupe; alba, aube; alter, autre; altus, haut; psalmus, psalme; saltus, saut. Now while appearances in single words are no safe guide in etymology, and while an exact history of each word, if it could be traced, would be the most satisfactory, general analogies, supported by whole classes of words, are quite sufficient to establish a derivation, even without historical proof, which must of necessity be limited to a few cases. It is this new method which has rendered the study of etymology in recent times so prolific and trustworthy.

On this account the grammars of Bopp, Grimm, and Diez, which give the laws of the changes which cognate letters undergo in passing from one language to another, are more instructive by far than etymological dictionaries can be. In the former, words and constituent parts of words are classified; in the latter they cannot be, neither can etymological principles be discussed. Still it is a great convenience to find the results of etymological investigations briefly presented in an alphabetical order. For such reference the new edition of Schwenck's *Wörterbuch in Beziehung auf Abstammung* for the German, Scheler for the French, and Wedgwood for the English are highly valuable. There is, however, in them and in all similar books, one feature that is unsatisfactory. The greater part of the book, that is, nearly every long article, is taken up with dissertations on words of unknown or very doubtful etymology. The writers tell what they know of words of clear etymology in a few lines, but are very diffuse where they know little or nothing. This evil arises from the supposed necessity of inserting nearly the whole vocabulary of a language. Such a vocabulary is made up of four classes of words: 1st, those whose etymology is obvious and certain,—fortunately a large class of words; 2d, those which can be traced with great clearness through organic changes to their originals in other languages, and this is the most instructive part of all works on the subject; 3d, those whose derivation is highly probable, though not certain, which furnish a pleasant and useful entertainment for literary men; 4th, those whose origin is unknown. It is this last class, which by opening an illimitable field of conjecture, has made many etymologists run mad, and drawn down upon themselves and the subject of their studies the ridicule of the world.

To the first of these classes in French belong such words as *bon, mal, nom, livre, mer, clair, faim, pain, mère, frère, tout, ami, pas, ris, cerf, digne, fenêtre, ciel, fils, couronne*, whose Latin origin is recognized at once. The changes of form are nearly all subject to rule. A word always retains its accented syllable. Of unaccented syllables, the final syllable is the one most commonly dropped. If the vowel *a* of the Latin is changed, it usually becomes *e* or *ai* in French; *e* and *i* are changed into *oi*; *ae* into *ie*; *u* into *ou*; *b* into *v*; *v* into *f*.

The second class contains words whose derivation is just as certain as the first, though not so obvious, owing to the various disguises under which they appear. Thus, at first sight it might not appear that *peindre* comes from

pungere; but when we observe that joindre comes from jungere; oindre, from unger; ceindre, from cingere; peindre, from pingere; astreindre from as tringere; feindre, from fingere; plaindre, from plangere, we perceive that there is a law by which *d* takes the place of *g*. So taire might not at once be recognized as coming from tacere, on account of the *i* in the one and the *c* in the other, till the uniformity should be observed which appears in noire, nocere; luire, lucere; conduire, conducere; reduire, reducirere; traduire, transducere; plaie, placere; faire, facere; dire, dicere; cuire, coquere.

The omission of the *c* is observable also in the following words, influenced by the same regard to euphony, viz. point, punctus; saint, sanctus; plaint, planctus; fait, factum; teint, tinctus, toit, tectum; lit, lectus; conduit, conductus; confit, confectus; conflit, confictus. For a similar reason the *g* is often dropped, as in froid, frigidus; doit, digitus; roide, rigidus; frêle (frail), fragilis; reine, regina, seine, segina. On the other hand the letter *g* is introduced into several words in place of *v* and some other letters, as in sauge, salvia; deluge, diluvium; cage, cavea; niege, nivem (nix); rage, rabies, serge, serica; manger, manducare; venger, vindicare; piège, pedica; voyage, viaticum; sauvage, silvaticum; rouge, rubeus; tige, tibia; sergent, serviens.

To facilitate the utterance of words beginning with *sp*, *sc*, *st*, the vowel *e* is prefixed to the following words, all from the Old French; scribere, écrire (O. F. escrire); scala, échelle (O. F. eschelle); species, espece; sperare, esperer; spiritus, esprit; stomachus, estomac; stabulum, étable (O. F. estable); strictus, étroit (O. F. estroit, compare districtus, detroit); sponsus, époux, (O. F. espoux); speculum, espiegle; spissus, epais (O. F. espais); spongia, éponge (O. F. esponge); scaffaldus (Low Latin), échafaud; schola, école (O. F. escolle); scutum, écu, (O. F. escu); scutella, écuelle (O. F. escuelle); sparsus, épars; spatula, epaule (O. F. espaulle); spatha, épée (O. F. espee); spicus, épi (O. F. espi); spiculum, épice (O. F. espice); spinula, (diminutive of spina), épingle, (O. F. espingle); spatium, espace; stabilire, établir; stagium (Low Latin), étage; stannum, étain; stagnum, étang (O. F. estang); status, état (O. F. estat); aestas, été (O. F. esté); standardum? (Low Latin), étendard (O. F. estandard); scriptorium, écritoire.

In many French words *v* takes the place of *b* and *p* of the corresponding Latin words, as in devoir, debere; féve, faba; prouver, probare; avoir, habere; cheval and cavale, caballus; sevre, faber; livrer, liberare; couvrir, cubare; livre, liber; levre, lebrum; recevoir, recipere; recouvrer, recuperare; pauvre, pauper; poivre, piper; savoir, sapere; saveur, sapor; savon, sapo; cuivre, cuprum; chevre, capillus; lievre, lepus (leporis); oeuvre, opus, operis; rave, rapa; rive, ripa.

Examples enough have been given, we trust, to show that etymologies supported by such extensive analogies, even when the words have nearly lost their resemblance in form, are by no means conjectural, but, on the contrary, have an authority which nothing can resist. Even in those cases

in which but slight vestiges of the original word are preserved, there are means of tracing the connection that remove all reasonable grounds of doubt. If words were corrupted first in oral intercourse, the accented syllables and the principal consonants were generally retained, while both the vowels and the consonants of unaccented syllables were more frequently dropped or changed. When letters were changed, it was under the influence of phonetic laws, limiting the change to cognate sounds. By means of the Romanic languages, which are descended from the Latin, namely, the Romance, the Wallachian, the Italian, French (Old French in this case), Spanish and Portuguese, we can generally fill the chasm between the Latin and the present French, or restore the links which connect the old form and the new one, however dissimilar they may now appear. We will present a few examples, placing these connecting links in a parenthesis: *eleemosyna* (*almosna, almosne*), *aumone*; *avunculus* (*eoncle*), *oncle*; *consobrinus* (*cusdrin, cousin*), *cousin*; *asinus* (*asne*), *âne*; *angelus* (*angele*), *ange*; *episcopus* (*vescovo, evesque*), *évêque*; *anima* (*anime, anme*), *âme*; *civitas* (*civitatem, ciptat*), *cité*; *apostolus* (*apostole, apostle*), *apôtre*; *insula* (*isola, isla, isle*), *île*; *laxus* (*lasc, lasche*), *lâche*; *tepidus* (*tepede, tede*), *tiède*; *supra* (*supr*), *sûr*; *vitellus* (*vedel, veel*), *veau*; *ecclesia* (*iglesia*), *eglise, catena* (*chaêne*), *chaîne*; *vivenda* (*vivanda, vianda*), *viande*; *hibernum* (*hivern*), *hiver*; *cingula* (*singla, cengle*), *sangle*; *cadentia* (*cadenza, cheance*), *chance*; *causa* (*cosa*), *chose*; *fatuus* (*fado*), *fade*; *dorsum* (*dossum*), *dos*; *antecessores* (*ancessors, ancestres*), *ancêtres*; *bracchium* (*braccio brazo*), *bras*. In these cases also, where the intermediate forms can be traced, the etymologist stands on solid ground. It is the great merit of Diez, in his Grammar of the Romanic Languages, to have cleared up this matter in a masterly manner.

We now come to the part which anecdotes play in etymology. We are glad to see that the old story about the word "cabal," from the initials of Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington, and Lauderdale, is not even mentioned by Wedgwood in his new Dictionary of English Etymology. Scheler quotes the dictionary of Minot as containing the French word *cabale* many years before this alleged origin of it in English.

In like manner the old and untenable derivation of the word "diaper," from d'Ypres, in Flanders, as being the original place of the manufacture, is abandoned both by Scheler and Wedgwood, and is traced to a much earlier date than to the flourishing period of Flemish manufactures.

Of the origin of *fiacre* it is said by Scheler that the person who introduced this kind of coach lived at the sign of St. Fiacre, in Paris and hence the name.

Filigraane (*filigree*) is so called from *filum* a thread, and *granum*, grain, because the Italians who first brought the fabric to France, wove in rounded and flattened grains with the threads of gold and silver in the ornamental work.

Lombards, money-lenders from Italy, were known in Paris as early as

1200. Matthew Paris says that usury was a vice introduced from Italy, referring to the Lombards who were publicly licensed, for which they paid a tax. Lombard-houses are well known in England, as is Lombard street in London.

Silhouette was not the inventor of the dark profile which bears his name; but he was a very unsuccessful minister of finance, which made him a subject of contempt and raillery in Paris, and he was hence the emblem of what was sad or unsuccessful, and thus gave name to this kind of portrait. So says Sismondi.

Renard did not originally mean a fox, for which *volp* was the proper word in old French, but was a personal poetical name, from Reginbart, used in that satirical work "Reynard the Fox."

The derivation of *baionnette* from Bayonne is allowed to stand, although some doubt is intimated about its originating at the siege in 1665.

For the word *bonnet*, *boneta* is found in the Romance language, and *boneta* in Spanish and Portuguese. Caseneuve is quoted as saying: "It was a kind of cloth used in making hats and head-dresses, and has given its name to the article made from it, just as the word *castor*, has done." Wedgewood does not notice this etymology, and gives one even more doubtful.

Isabelle, meaning a yellow dun color, is said to have originated thus: a princess of this name, a daughter of Philip II. of Spain, say some, made a vow, when her husband was besieging a town, that she would not change her garment till the town surrendered. The siege lasted three months, and the garment received the tint in question. Our grave critic says: *En attendant les preuves diplomatiques de cette etymologie, je rapporte l'historiette pour ce qu'elle vaut; "si non è vero, è ben trovato"!*

Lambin, a tedious person, is said to be derived from the celebrated philologist of that name (*Lambinus*) who lived in the sixteenth century, on account of the tediousness of his commentaries. It is to be feared that the lively Parisians take the justice of this application upon trust. Without denying the truth of the etymology, our author humanely says: *J'aime à douter de la justesse de cette hypothèse.*

Under the word *laquais* we have, among other things, the following: "Menage thinks he has found a recipe for this word by prolonging the Latin *verna* into *vernula*, then into *vernulacus*, then into *vernulacaius*. Here he stops to take breath. Then, with courage, he takes hold of *vernulacaius* and divides it into two parts; the first is put in abeyance, and the second is made a *laquais*!" This is about equal to Wedgewood's article on the word "to abet."