

SECTION II.

THE BASQUE PROVINCES.

ALAVA; VIZCAYA; GUIPUZCOA.

History—Fueros—Nobility—Fives Courts—Casas Solares—Agriculture—Customs—Language.

Las Provincias Vascongadas consist of the three united provinces of Alava, Vizcaya, and Guipuzcoa. Vizcaya, the largest, contains about 106 square leagues; Guipuzcoa, the smallest, only 52, but it is the most densely peopled, and at the rate of 2000 inhabitants to the square league; Alava, containing about 180 square leagues, lies between Guipuzcoa and Navarre. These provinces, forming the mountainous triangle of the N.W. of the Peninsula, constituted the *Cantabria* of the ancients, a name derived by some from *Kent-Aber*, which they interpret the "Corner of the Water." This corner of the land, like our Wales, is the home of the remnant of the indigenes or aboriginal inhabitants, who never have been expelled or subdued;* thus the character of an unadulterated primitive race, an ethnological fossil, remains, strongly marked in language and nationality. These highlanders, bred on metal-pregnant mountains, and nursed amid storms in a cradle indomitable as themselves, in a country difficult to take and not much worth the taking, have always known how to forge their iron into arms, and to wield them in defence of their independence; and what sword equals that moulded from the ploughshare? This *sufficiency in self* is the meaning which *Señor Perochegui* reads in the Basque name, a word derived by him from *Bayascogara*, "somos bastantes." A sense of separate weakness has taught these provinces the secret of *union*. This federal association is expressed in their national symbol of three hands joined together, with the motto "*Iruvac Bat*," which is equivalent to the tria juncta in uno of the Bath order of our *united* kingdoms. The armorial shield is "argent, the tree of Guernica vert, two wolves gules, with an orle of eight crosses or."

The Basques have been less successful in resisting invasions by sea, for they were partly overcome about the year 870 by a fair-haired Northman, named *Zuria*, an adventurer either from Norway or Scotland; and to this foreign admixture their fair complexions and immemorial representative government have been traced. These provinces, when the descendants of the Goths began to gain ground on the Moorish invaders, formed themselves into a confederation of small detached tribes or republics, placed under a nominal Lord or *Señor*, until at length, in the 14th century, Nuño, the 19th Lord, died, leaving two daughters, one of whom having married Juan of Aragon, Pedro the Cruel seized the opportunity, put her husband to death, and annexed the *Lordship* (*el Señorío*) to the crown of Castile. Soon afterwards he ceded it to the Black Prince, in reward for his assistance at Navarrete; however, private instructions were given to the Basques not to allow the *foreigner* to take possession, which he never did. Although incorporated with the Castilian monarchy, these pro-

* The Goths could not subdue these rebellious highlanders, although Recared, as San Isidoro tells us, used especially to send his troops there to keep his soldiers' hands in fighting condition—*quasi in pælestri ludo* (Chron. Era 585).