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Friday, January 8, 1892.

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR ROBERT BIDDULPH, G.C.M.G., C.B.,
R.A., Director-General of Military Education, in the Chair.

THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE.

By EDWARD A. CAZALET, Esq.

PART I.

Précis.

I MUST first of all solicit indulgence for imperfect diction and inevitable omissions. Although an Englishman and a British subject, I was born and partly educated in Russia, and spoke Russian before knowing English.

Experience suggests that the popular notion which attributes special aptitude to the Slav race for acquiring languages is exaggerated. The fact is that the gymnastics of the tongue, if the expression may be used, which a child of any nationality undergoes when beginning with Russian, is sufficient to make other languages comparatively easy. Besides that, Russians, Poles, &c., give more attention than others to the study of modern languages, and therefore they know them better.

It is a truism, which bears repetition, that languages being merely a medium through which to acquire knowledge, it is all-important that they should be taught in early childhood, when they can be easily picked up, and not in later years when time is required for more important studies.

Between English and Russian, which at first appear to have nothing in common, there exists a remarkable inherent similarity or affinity in the construction of phrases. This may be proved by the simple fact that, if you translate word for word from English into Russian or *vice versa*, your translation, with all its defects, will be comprehensible and sometimes even good, but, if you try the same experiment with any other two languages, the result, as a rule, will seldom be satisfactory. Besides that, an Englishman pronounces Russian better than a Frenchman or German.

Before the Crimean war English people were more popular in Russia than other foreigners, and why should not the revival of this good feeling be encouraged?

As a man of peace, my heartfelt wish is that there should not only be a cordial, but a growing good understanding between two great

empires and nations, and I have often thought that this might to some extent be promoted by a more widespread and intimate knowledge of the Russian language and literature in this country.

To study Russian merely in order to act as an interpreter is scarcely sufficient for the ambition of an intelligent student, and to keep up even that knowledge practice is required, as every thoughtful gentleman who has lived any time in Russia will confirm.

But how is this desirable practice to be obtained?

A Russian "Literary Society and Debating Club," founded in London, should become the common ground for the interchange of useful knowledge, and for the acquisition and improvement of written, and most especially *oral*, Russian, which is so difficult to acquire and to maintain without constant practice and intercourse.

May the following imperfect sketch excite a little interest as regards Russian books. A desire to read them in the original and to converse with Russians in their own tongue might, perhaps, be the next step in the right direction.

Russian, *i. e.*, Slavonian, in common with all Slav tongues, forms a part of the vast family of Indo-European languages. To this group belong the languages of the ancient Indians (*Zend*), Persians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, and Lithuanians. They all originally came from Central Asia, where they formed one people and spoke one tongue, whose characteristics have been preserved in the ancient written language of the Hindus—the Sanskrit.

All Slavs who in times long past migrated from Asia (Iran) to the shores of the Middle and Lower Danube were supposed to consist of one people and to speak the same language. Later on, in consequence of various circumstances and conditions, they became subdivided into various tribes and dialects. The learned Chek Shafarick counted twelve of these dialects, but later authorities reduced them to seven or eight.

At the present time, all Slav dialects are divided into two branches, the South-Eastern and the Western. Roughly speaking, the former, for the most part, adopted the religion and civilization of the Greek Orthodox Church, while the latter were under the influence of Rome.

The origin and formation of the Russian language appears logical. Slavonian was the basis; Greek words expressed what had reference to religion and Byzantine civilization; Scandinavian, Latin, and Polish had a passing influence; the Mongolian bondage gave Tatar words, dealing with matters of ordinary life, apparel, &c.; Peter the Great introduced many foreign words with the arts and sciences which he adopted from Western Europe; Germany supplied the vocabulary for civil and military administration; France furnished the parlance of polite society, while England and Holland gave naval and business terms.

"For flexibility of construction Russian is probably unsurpassed, and for poetry it is beauty itself, being hard and soft in the same proportion. It admits of all rhythmical measure, besides affording every imaginable facility for rhyme.

"A distinctive feature of this copious and flexible tongue is that the purely Russian race from the White Sea to the Black, from Poland to the farthest confines of Siberia, speak with an inborn grammatical correctness perfectly delightful to ears which care for such niceties."

Russians of all classes are, as a rule, musical, and have a good ear, which may partly be the secret of correct enunciation.

Little or Malo Russian is, perhaps, the only really distinct dialect of importance. "Barbarous idioms are inconsiderable when contrasted with those met with in all countries of Europe." No h's are dropped, and there is no nasal intonation.

(A translation from Lermontoff's "Angel," by Mr. Pollen, of the Indian Civil Service, and the original Russian verses were here read.)

Russian literature begins with so-called "old time stories" or *bilini*, which were not written, but only sung by minstrels.

These legendary ballads describe military leaders and even saints of the Church under mythological aspects.

Next came tales or *skazki*, which were also oral, and have a sort of cadence, but they are mostly in unrhymed lines.

The origin of Russian spiritual life and thought is, however, bound up with Constantinople, the Greek Byzantium. It was with that place that for 1,000 years war was constantly waged, and it was from there came the first dawn of civilization and the Christian religion.

The first rulers of Russia were Scandinavian Vikings, *i.e.*, Norman adventurers, of a race called Varago-Rus, who must have invaded and conquered the country. They gave it the name of Rus, afterwards Russia. But, according to time-honoured tradition, these Norman princes were invited by the leading citizens of Novgorod in 862, the invitation being couched in the following words to Rurik and his two brothers: "Our land is large and fertile, but there is no order—come and govern us."

Olga, the widow of one of Rurik's descendants, accepted Christianity from the Greek Patriarch at Byzantium, in 957. Her son, Sviatoslav, rejected Christianity, but his son, Vladimir the Saint, married Anne, the sister of the Greek Emperors Basilus and Constantine, and introduced the Christian faith, by first baptizing his army near the present site of Sebastopol, and afterwards by forcing the inhabitants of Kiev and Novgorod to be christened wholesale in the rivers.

The first *written manuscript* is said to be a copy of the Gospels, written at Novgorod in 1056. It was copied from the original Slavonic translation, which the monks Saints Cyril and Methodius had made from the Greek Testament.

Sermons appeared, composed in imitation of the Greek Byzantine preachers, who had transmitted to Russia their florid style, through the medium of Bulgarian and Servian translations.

Polemics, and abuse of the Latins, estranged Russia from Western Europe.

To the 11th century is ascribed the Chronicle of Nestor and other narratives compiled by monks, which served as materials for history.

Vladimir Manomakh's (1113—1125) "Pouchenic" or "Book of Instruction," describes Slavonic life before the Mongols conquered Russia.

"Slovo o polku Egorové," a poem in prose, deprecates internal warfare among the numerous petty autocrats, and relates Egor's campaign against the Polvozi in 1185.

"Zadonstchina" is the victorious march of Dmitry Donskoi against the Tatars.

The temporary subversion of Russia by the Mongols or Tatars greatly retarded civilization.

Book learning is transferred from Kiev to Moscow about the 16th century.

The printing press is established at Moscow, in 1564, by Ivan the Terrible. His correspondence with Prince Kurbski is curious.

In 1581 the first complete version of the Bible in Slavonic appears.

"Domostroi," by the monk Sylvester, initiates us into the cruelty and tyranny of domestic life.

In the 17th century, Kubasov, Katoshikin, Krizhanich, and Simeon Poltzki were the most prominent writers.

Before Peter the Great, the Academy, later the University, of Kiev was the only centre of higher education. He introduced the vernacular instead of the Church language. The first newspaper, "The St. Petersburg Gazette," appeared in 1703.

Before Catherine II the most prominent authors were:—

Prince Kantemir, who translated Horace, and composed satires.

Lomonosov, a fisherman's son, advanced science, wrote odes, and formed the language, &c.

Tatischev tried to write a "Russian History from the most Ancient Times;" Trediakovski composed an epic, "Telemakhida."

Sumarokov, Kniajnin, and Heraskov (the first actor was Volkov, who founded a theatre) were prolific writers. Hemnitzer was the earliest fabulist.

In Catherine II's reign, Derjavin, the poet, and Von Vizin, a writer of comedies, were most prominent. Catherine, herself, composed dramas, operas, and satires, also criticisms on Free Masonry and Theosophy.

Karamzin wrote a history of Russia down to Michel Romanoff, the ancestor of the present dynasty. He wrote popular tales in an easy, flowing style.

Gnedich's translation of the "Iliad" is correct, but heavy.

Ozeroff's tragedies and Dmitrieff's fables are also worth mentioning.

Krilov is one of the greatest fabulists of any country. (Some translations of his fables, and Gogol's opinion of him, were read out.)

Zukovski was an elegant poet, who translated Schiller, Tom Moore, &c. He was the tutor of the late Czar Alexander II.

Alexander Pushkin (1799—1837) was the most national and greatest poet. "Eugene Onegin," "Captain's Daughter," "Boris

Godounov," &c., were his most prominent works. He was killed in a duel by a Frenchman.

Lermontov (1814—1841) was another heaven-born poet.

His "Demon," a poem, and "Hero of our Time," a novel descriptive of the Caucasus, are masterpieces. He was also killed in a duel when only 27 years of age.

Relev wrote poems of a political character. "Voinarovski," the nephew of Mazeppa and an exile in Siberia, is the hero of one of his poems.

Relev was one of the leaders in the revolution against Nicholas I in 1825.

Bilinsky was a critic of sagacity, who first understood the genius of Pushkin and Gogol.

Alexander Greboedov wrote "Gore ot ouma," *i.e.*, Grief from wit, a satirical comedy about Moscow aristocratic society. It is terse and "familiar as household words." He was murdered at Teheran, where he was Ambassador, in 1829.

Nicholas Gogol (1809—1852), was a most original author, who wrote "Dead Souls," a novel, and "Revizor," a comedy satirizing bribery and trickery of "chinovniks." "Taras Boulba" is a poetical novel of Cossack life. He is said to have contemplated writing a history of Little Russia, his native land, but it was not realized.

As the origin and the history of the Cossacks are not generally known, perhaps the following outline may be of interest.

Russian chronicles first mention the word *Kazak* in the reign of Vassily Temnoi (the Blind) in 1444.

In Turkish *Kazak* means a robber, but in Tatar merely an armed man. It was the name given to irregular troops employed on the frontier in the Ukraine, in Southern Russia, principally to watch the movements of the Tatars.

Besides these, another class of Cossacks was formed of Russian and other runaways, who wanted to lead a free-booters' life in the steppes.

They elected chiefs called Hetmans (Atamani), robbed the caravans and river barges of Poland and Russia, and attacked the Tatars and nomadic tribes.

In the 16th century they occupied the southern steppes of the Ukraine and were divided into two principal branches: the Cossacks of the Don and those of the Dnieper (or Malo-Russian).

The former consisted mostly of Russians, and the latter of Lithuanians and Poles.

The Kings of Poland saw the importance of utilizing these Cossacks as a barrier against the Tatars, and therefore endeavoured to divide them into disciplined regiments. The head Hetman was confirmed, if not nominated, by the King of Poland, but the latter did not practically exercise much real authority over the Cossack chief.

The so-called Zaporogian Cossacks (*za porogami*, *i.e.*, beyond the rapids or cataracts of the Dnieper) submitted to no foreign power, and were the nucleus—the heart and soul—of the real Cossacks.

Below Kiev the Dnieper runs through wild and desolate steppes. Its waters, pent up between high banks, rush over black rocks, forming cataracts or *porogi*. Lower down the river becomes wide, the current sluggish, the shores low and flat, numerous islands lie hidden by high rushes, offering a safe and secluded retreat, because, on account of shallow water, they can only be approached in very small boats or canoes.

Here was the nest and cradle of the Zaporogian Cossacks, and the spot where they hid their booty. They formed a kind of brotherhood and were guided by quaint and most original laws. The headquarters were situated on one of the islands and were called *Setch*, having the appearance of a fortified camp.

The *Vetch*, or *Radi*, was a sort of governing body in which the supreme power was vested. It elected the principal, or *Koshevoi Ataman*, who exercised unlimited power over the army in time of war.

They lived in wigwams, made of branches of trees, but had messes in common. Every new comer was accepted, provided he belonged to the Orthodox Church, and he was free to go or to remain as long as he pleased. Cossacks were supposed to be unmarried, and women were not allowed in the *setch*, under pain of death.

Sometimes these adventurers floated down the Dnieper in their boats, called *chaiki*, or sea-gulls, to the Black Sea, and looted Turkish villages.

The Sultan threatened the King of Poland with reprisals. Fortresses were, therefore, erected by the Poles near the cataracts, and endeavours were made to convert the Cossacks to Roman Catholicism. These measures led, however, to continued warfare, which ended in the apparent pacification of the Cossacks, but in reality sowed the seeds of the fierce struggle between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches in South-Eastern Russia, which undermined Poland, and finally led to its downfall.

In the 17th century, there was a whole network of the Cossack system, not only in the Ukraine, but extending all over Southern Russia and embracing the lands about the Rivers Don, Jaik, Oural, and even Siberia.

Their depredations could not be checked, and were only partially diminished by the formation of two parties in the Cossack population of the Don: those who had houses, and those who had nothing. The former wanted peace and quiet, but the latter, whose ranks were daily increasing by fugitives and deserters from all parts of Russia, thirsted for robbery and war against the Government.

Their desire to have an able leader was realized in the person of one Stepan (or Stenka) Razin, a common Cossack of great energy and daring. He conquered several towns on the Volga, pushed on to the Caspian Sea, penetrated into Persia, whence he returned laden with loot and prisoners.

Many Zaporogians joined the men of the Don, seized ships on the Volga, took the town of Saratoff, and were joined by the country population, as Razin pretended that the Czarevich Alexis (who was

already dead) and the Patriarch Nikon (who had been deposed) were with him, that he would maintain the Old Church books, and rob the rich to assist the poor.

The rebellion spread far and wide. Ultimately, Razin was defeated by Prince Bariatinsky's regular army. Razin ran away to the Don, but was handed over to the Government by the Hetman Jakovleff. Astrakhan was the last resort held by the rebels.

A short time before these events, the Zaporogian and other Cossacks, under the command of their Ataman Bogdan Hmelnitzki, also a common Cossack, who had sworn enmity to the Polish nobility, led by Prince Vishnevetzki, raised fire and brand, and, aided by the Tatar Khan of the Crimea, defeated the Polish armies in several engagements. But, on meeting with reverses, Hmelnitzki addressed himself to Russia for assistance, which finally resulted in Little Russia and the Cossacks being incorporated with Russia and turned into a barrier against Poland.

In Peter the Great's time the Hetman Mazeppa revolted and joined Charles XII, but was defeated at Pultava.

In Catherine II's reign another Cossack, who could neither read nor write, by name Emelian Pugacheff, on the Aik, near the Oural, gave himself out to be Peter III, whose death was disbelieved in remote regions of the Empire. Preaching war against the Empress and the nobility, who, he said, prevented his doing good to poor people, and promising assistance to the labouring classes, this daring robber raised an immense rebellion, conquered many towns, and, after having defeated several Generals, was at last taken prisoner and brought in an iron cage, like a wild beast, to Moscow, where he was hung, drawn, and quartered. This mutiny is well described by Pushkin in "The Captain's Daughter," and in his notes on the history of Pugacheff's revolt.

The Zaporogian Cossacks were dispersed, but many others near the Black Sea, in the Caucasus, &c., were formed, more on the basis of ordinary troops.

A certain amount of self-government was left to the Cossacks of the Don, the Heir Apparent to the Russian throne bearing the title of their honorary Hetman; but of late years, the land of the Don, like other portions of the Empire, is reduced to the same denominator as the other governments of Russia. So much for the Cossacks.

In by-gone days, songs about Cossack heroes formed a rough literature of its own in the Malo-Russian language, or rather dialect.
