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PREFACE.

The present work is founded on an essay, which appeared in the *Biblical Repository* for April and July, 1834, then conducted by the undersigned. The essay was received with favour by the public; and awakened an interest in many minds, as laying open a new field of information, hitherto almost inaccessible to the English reader. A few copies were printed separately for private distribution. Some of these were sent to literary men in Europe; and several scholars of high name among those acquainted with Slavic literature, expressed their approval of the work. Since that time, and even of late, inquiries have repeatedly been made, by scholars and by public libraries in Europe, for copies of that little treatise; which, of course, it was impossible to satisfy.

These circumstances, together with the fact, that in these years public attention has been more prominently directed to the character and prospects of the Slavic nations, have induced the author to recast the work; and to lay it anew before the public, corrected, enlarged, and continued to the present time; as a brief contribution to our knowledge of the intellectual character and condition of those nations, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

[pg.vi]

In its present shape, the work may be said to supply, in a certain degree, a deficiency in English literature. It is true, that the literature of the Russians, Poles, Bohemians, and some others, is treated of under the appropriate heads in the *Encyclopædia Americana*, in articles translated from the German *Conversations-Lexicon*, though not in their latest form. The *Foreign Quarterly Review* also contains articles of value on the like topics, scattered throughout its volumes. Dr. Bowering, in the prefaces to some of his *Specimens of Slavic Poetry*, has given short notices of a similar kind. The Biblical literature of the Old Slavic and Russian has been well exhibited by Dr. Henderson^[1]; while an outline of Russian literature in general is presented in the work of Otto^[2]. Valuable information respecting the South-western Slavi is contained in the recent work of Sir J.G. Wilkinson.^[3] But beyond this meagre enumeration, the English reader will find few sources of information at his command upon these topics. All

these, too, are only sketches of separate *parts* of one great whole; of which in its full extent, both as a whole and in the intimate relation of its parts, no general view is known to exist in the English language.

Yet the subject in itself is not without a high interest and importance; relating, as it does, to the languages and literature of a population amounting to nearly or quite seventy millions, or more than three times as great as that of the United States. These topics embrace, of course, the history of mental cultivation among the Slavic nations from its earliest dawn; their intellectual development; the progress of man among them as a thinking, sentient, social being, acting and acted upon in his various relations to other minds. [pg.vi] They relate, indeed, to the history of intellectual culture in one of its largest geographical and ethnological divisions.

In this connection it is a matter of no small interest, to mark the influence which Christianity has exercised upon the language and literature of these various nations. It is to the introduction and progress of Christianity, that they owe their written language; and to the versions of the Scriptures into their own dialects are they indebted, not only for their moral and religious culture, but also for the cultivation and, in a great degree, the existence of their national literature. The same influence Christianity is even now exerting upon the hitherto unwritten languages of the American forest, of the islands of the Pacific, of the burning coasts of Africa, of the mountains of Kurdistan; and with the prospect of results still wider and more propitious. Indeed, wherever we learn the fact, whether in earlier or more recent times, that a language, previously regarded as barbarous, and existing only as oral, has been reclaimed and reduced to writing, and made the vehicle of communicating fixed thought and permanent instruction, there it has ever been *Christianity* and *Missionary Enterprise* which have produced these results. It is greatly to the honour of Protestant Missions, that their efforts have always been directed to introduce the Scriptures and the worship of God to the masses of the people in their own native tongue. In this way they have every where contributed to awaken the intellectual, as well as the moral life of nations.

The present work has been prepared with great care; and with the aid of the latest and best sources of information, so far as they were accessible. The author, however, would be the last to desire, that any one should regard the volume as comprising a full or [pg.viii] complete history of the literature of the seven or eight Slavic nations. Scholars familiar with the subject, and especially intelligent Russian, Polish, or Bohemian readers, will doubtless discover in it deficiencies and errors. Limited to the resources of a private library,—for the public libraries of the United States and of Great Britain have as yet accumulated little or nothing in the Slavic department,—and without the privilege of personal intercourse with others acquainted with Slavic literary matters, the author desires to be distinctly understood, as aiming only to present a *sketch*, an *outline*,—a work which may fill its appropriate place, until it shall be supplanted by something more perfect.

The preceding remarks have reference especially to the first *three* Parts of the volume. In the *fourth* Part, containing a Sketch of the Popular Poetry of the Slavic nations, the author is perhaps still more at home; and the reader, it may be hoped, will receive gratification from the views and specimens there presented. Similar views, and a few of the same specimens, were given in an article from the same pen, in the North American Review for July, 1836.

In conclusion, it may not be inappropriate to remark, that circumstances have combined to secure to the author some qualifications for the preparation of a work of this kind, which are not common to writers in the English language. A residence of several years in early life in Russia, first in the southern provinces, and afterwards at St. Petersburg, presented opportunity for a personal acquaintance with the language and literature of that country. At a later period, this gave occasion and afforded aid for an extensive study of the Servian dialect and its budding literature; the results of which were given to the public in a German translation of the very remarkable popular songs and ballads of that country^[4]. [pg.ix] The field was new: but certainly that can be regarded as no barren soil, nor that as a fruitless labour, which at once drew the attention, and secured to the translator the friendship and correspondence, of scholars like Goethe, von Humboldt; J. Grimm, Savigny, G. Ritter, Kopitar, and others. Similar researches were subsequently extended into the popular

poetry of the Teutonic and other nations; a portion of the results of which have likewise been given to the public^[5].

I may venture to commend this volume to the good will and kind forbearance of the reader, in view of the difficulties which must ever press upon the writer of such a work. The enterprising publisher has done his part well; and I would join him in the hope, that the book may prove an acceptable offering to the public.

E. ROBINSON.

NEW-YORK, April 10, 1850.

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On the Orthography and Pronunciation of Slavic proper names, see the note on p. 151; also the note under the letter V in the Index.

[pg.1]

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

INTRODUCTION

The earliest history of the Slavic nations is involved in a darkness, which all the investigations of diligent and sagacious modern historians and philologists have not been able to clear up. The analogy between their language and the Sanscrit, seems to indicate their origin from India; but to ascertain the time at which they first entered Europe, is now no longer possible. Probably this event took place seven or eight centuries before the Christian era, on account of the over-population of the regions on the Ganges.^[6] Herodotus mentions a people which he called *Krovyzi*, who lived on the Ister. There is even [pg.2] now a tribe in Russia, whose name at least is almost the same.^[7] Strabo, Pomponius Mela, Pliny, Tacitus, and several other classical and a few oriental writers, allude to the Slavic nations occasionally. But the first distinct intelligence we have of them, is not older than the middle of the sixth century.^[8] At this period we see them traversing the Danube in large multitudes, and settling on both the banks of that river. From that time they appear frequently in the accounts of the Byzantine historians, under the different appellations of the *Slavi*, *Sarmatae*,^[9] *Antae*, *Vandales*, *Veneti*, and *Vendes*, mostly as involved in the wars of the two Roman empires, sometimes as allies, sometimes as conquerors; oftener, notwithstanding their acknowledged valour and courage, as vassals; but chiefly as emigrants and colonists, thrust out of their own countries by the pressing forward of the more warlike German or Teutonic tribes. Only the first of the above mentioned names is decidedly of Slavic origin;^[10][pg.3] the second is ambiguous; and the last four are later and purely geographical, having been transferred to Slavic nations from those who had previously occupied the territory where the Romans first became acquainted with them.

It results from the very nature of this information, that we cannot expect to get from it any satisfactory knowledge of their political state or the degree of their civilization. In general, they appear as a peaceful, industrious, hospitable people, obedient to their chiefs, and religious in their habits. Wherever they established themselves, they began to cultivate the earth, and to trade in the productions of

the country. There are also early traces of their fondness for music and poetry; and some circumstances, of which we shall speak in the sequel, seem to justify the supposition of a very early cultivation of the language.

All the knowledge we have respecting the ancient history of the Slavic race, as we have seen, is gathered from foreign authors; the earliest of their own historians did not write before[pg.4] the second half of the eleventh century.^[11] At this time the Slavic nations were already in possession, partly as masters, partly as servants, of the whole vast extent of territory, which they now occupy; and if we assume that at the present time about seventy or eighty millions speak the Slavic language in its different dialects, we must calculate that at the above mentioned period, and in the course of the next following centuries, before the Slavic was by degrees supplanted in the German-Slavic provinces by the German idiom, the number of those who called that language their mother tongue was at least the fifth part greater. Schlözer observes, that, with the exception of the Arabians, no nation on the globe had extended themselves so far. In the South, the Adriatic, the range of the Balkan, and the Euxine, are their frontiers; the coasts of the Icy Ocean are their limits in the North; their still greater extent in an Eastern and Western direction reaches from Kamtschatka and the Russian islands of the Pacific, where many of their vestiges are to be found among scattered tribes, as far as to the Baltic and along the banks of the rivers Elbe, Muhr, and Raab, again to the Adriatic. It is this immense extent, which adds greatly to the difficulties of a general survey of the different relations and connections of nations, broken up into so many parts. The *history of the language* is our object, not the history of the people; we therefore give of statistic and political notices only so much, as seems to be requisite for the illustration of our subject.

The earliest data for the history of the civilization of the Slavic race, we find in their mythology; and here their oriental[pg.5] origin again appears. The antithesis of a good and evil principle is met with among most of their tribes; and as even at the present time in some Slavic dialects every thing good, beautiful, praiseworthy, is to them synonymous with the purity of the white colour, they call the good Spirit *Bielo Bôg*, the white god; the evil Spirit *Tcherno Bôg*, the black god. The *Div* of the old Russians seem to be likewise akin to

the *Dev* of the Hindoo; the goddess of life, *Shiva*, of the Polabae, to the Indian *Shiva*; as the names of the Slavic personification of death, *Morjana*, *Morena*, *Marzana*, evidently stand in connection with the Indian word for death, *Marana*. Strabo describes some of the idols of the Rugians, in which we meet again the whole significant symbolization of the East. The custom prevalent among many Slavic nations, of females burning themselves with the corpses of their husbands, seems also to have been brought from India to Europe.

There are, however, other features of their mythology which belong to them exclusively, and which remind us rather of the sprightly and poetical imagination of the Greeks. We allude to their mode of attributing life to the inanimate objects of nature, rocks, brooks and trees; of peopling with supernatural beings the woods which surrounded them, the mountains between which they lived. The *Rusalki* of the Russians, the *Vila* of the southern Slavic nations, the *Leshie* of several other tribes, nymphs, naiads, and satyrs, are still to be found in many popular tales and songs. If, however, we have compared them to the poetical gods of the Greeks, we must not forget to add, that their character has less resemblance to these gods, (who indeed appear only as ordinary men with higher powers, more violent passions, and less limited lives.) than it has to the northern Elf; and the German Nix and mountain Spirit—without heart and soul themselves, but always intermeddling with intrusive curiosity in human affairs, however void of real interest in them; [pg.6] revengeful towards the most trifling offence or the least neglect; and beneficent only to favourites arbitrarily chosen.^[12]

The earliest historians mention the Slavi as divided into several tribes and as speaking different dialects. There are no very ancient remains of their language, except those words or phrases, which we find scattered through the works of foreign writers; and these mostly perverted by their want of knowledge. Besides these we have the names of places, of festivals, partly still existing, and of some dignitaries, *Knes*, *Zupan*, etc. There are, indeed, among the popular songs of the Bohemians, Servians, Russians, and several other tribes, many which are evidently derived from the pagan period; but as they have been preserved only by tradition, we must of course assume, that their diction, has been changed almost in the same proportion as the language of common life. Hence, national songs, before they

have been fixed by letters, are always to be considered as much safer proofs for the genius than for the language of a people.

It is, however, probable that at least *one* Slavic idiom was cultivated to a certain degree in very ancient times; for from the single circumstance, that Cyril's translation of the Bible, written in the middle of the ninth century, bears the stamp of uncommon perfection in its forms, and of great copiousness, it is sufficiently evident, that the language must have been the means of expression for thinking men several centuries before. There is, indeed, no doubt that the state of the language, as it appears in that translation, required no short interval of preparation.

[pg.7]The first attempts to convert portions of the Slavic race to Christianity were probably made before the seventh century; but it was only at the beginning of the ninth that their partial success became of importance to their language and literature. It is true, that by the last investigations of the late great Slavist, B. Kopitar, the fact has been ascertained, that a portion of the Slavic race was already in possession of an alphabet *before* Cyril;^[13] but as this fact appears to have had no further result, we must still consider the ninth century and Cyril's translation of the Gospels as the beginning of their literary history, the dawn at least of a brighter day.

Before we enter upon our examination of the different branches, we must not neglect to direct the attention of the reader to the whole great trunk, which in the most ancient times appears to have ramified into two principal stems.

A boundless confusion indeed reigns in the classification of the Slavic nations among the earlier historians and philologists. It was the learned Dobrovsky of Prague, who first brought light into this chaos, and established a classification, founded on a deep and thorough examination of all the different dialects, and acknowledged by the equally great authority of Kopitar. Adelung, in his *Mithridates*,^[14] has adopted it. The specific names, however, Antes and Slavi, which Adelung applies to the great divisions, and which were first used by Jornandes, are arbitrary, and less distinct than those adopted by Dobrovsky, Kopitar, and Schaffarik; who divide all Slavic nations, according to certain philological affinities and differences, into the *North-Western* and *South-Eastern* Stems.^[15]