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Art. I.—*Opŭit Kratkoi Istorii Ruskoi Literaturŭi, &c. A Sketch of Russian Literature*. By Nicholas Ivanovich Grech[[1]](#footnote-1), 8vo. St. Petersburg, 1822.

N

OTWITHSTANDING her geographical position, Russia continued, for many centuries, an extra-European power;— even her immense territory did not render her an object of interest to the western continent, by which she seems to have been regarded as beyond the pale of civilization. At the present day, her literature is but imperfectly known to her immediate neighbours, and still less in this country;—yet a language spoken by nearly forty millions of people, containing upwards of eighty thousand printed works, may reasonably be supposed to deserve some attention, anti to possess some treasures for the reward of the diligent student. The mass of the population is confessedly in a state of semi-barbarism, and the majority of the publications which issue from the Russian press merely translations,—(it has, in fact, naturalized almost every production of eminence, belonging to the literature of other countries;) yet, after making all deductions, there still remains enough to excite considerable interest. We have now lying on our table a catalogue of Glazunovis circulating library at St. Petersburg, which contains five thousand eight hundred and sixty-six different works in the various branches of literature anti science; and, among the number, we observe many translations from Byron, Moore, and Scott[[2]](#footnote-2)

Had any one, half a century ago, inquired whether the Germans possessed a literature, be would probably have been told, either that ‘High-Dutch’ was the most barbarous and dissonant of modern idioms, utterly incapable of eloquent or elegant expression; or that their only writers were dull commentators, and in sufferable pedants—for the very idea of German poetry was an absurdity. Our conclusions on Russian are about as accurate we meet with misspelt, ugly-looking names, which we at once declare to be unpronounceable, arid then affirm that the language is a most miserable jargon. Before, therefore, we proceed to say any thing of the writers of Russia, it may be as well to satisfy our readers on the character of the language itself,—its powers and capabilities. No tongue, with which we are acquainted, combines, in a greater degree, the qualities which render language agreeable in itself, and a

comprehensive interpreter of thought. It is sonorous, varied, harmonious; equally adapted to the terrible and the pathetic, the gay and the plaintive; the sublime and the familiar; exceedingly rich and copious, abounding in synonym, and susceptible of bold and

significant combinations, it is enabled, moreover, to render, by different forms of the same primitive word, those delicate in *nuances* and shades of expression, which otherwise demand adjunct terms,—a circumstance highly favourable not only to precision, but to condensation and rapidity. In fact, it is often necessary to employ five or six words in English to convey the meaning of two in Russian. As a vehicle for poetry, it is, perhaps, superior to most modern European languages, from its numerous polysyllabic words, its great variety of accent, and its abundant store of poetic terms. Some writers have pretended to find a striking analogy between the Latin and the Russian; but we have never been able to detect any similitude except in a few solitary instances. In the names of familiar objects, and the verbs used to express ordinary actions, there is not the slightest resemblance; nor do we think it would be possible for any one to find a single sentence in which he could make out the sense of two words, merely by being acquainted with Latin. There is, however, one peculiarity common to both languages, namely, the want of the articles. This may be considered as a defect; yet, in reading Russian, we have rarely found difficulty or perplexity, as the demonstrative pronoun is generally used to supply the deficiency in those cases where it would occasion ambiguity. Of the successive changes which the language has undergone, of the influence of the Mongol dialect during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, of earlier literary records and monuments, we shall not here attempt to speak.

Nicholas Grech, the author of the work at the head of our article, is an intelligent and industrious writer, and editor of the Sŭin Otéchestva (Son of the Country), and two other popular journals. He was born at St, Petersburg, August 7th, 1787, and originally designed for the legal profession, but, following his inclinations, he abandoned this career, and applied himself exclusively to literary pursuits. In 1817, he was appointed one of the librarians of the Imperial Public Library, at St. Petersburg, and shortly afterwards travelled for the benefit of his health, when he visited France, Germany, and Switzerland. In France he became acquainted with the Lancasterian system of education, which, on his returti, he introduced into the Central Military School: he also published a work on this subject, in 1819. Many pleasing extracts from his travels have been published, though they have not yet been given in an entire and separate form. His other performances are numerous, but none are equal in importance or utility to his ‘Sketch of Russian Literature;’ which, although it can be considered only as the basis for a larger and more comprehensive history, is exceedingly valuable, and forms a very appropriate companion to Bouterwek anti Eichhorn. Its arrangement is such as to render it exceedingly useful for reference, being divided into sections or eras, each containing,—first, a slight general view of the political state of the country, of its civilization, literature, &c., and secondly, a series of biographical notices of the writers, in chronological order. The last and most important period,—that of Alexander, or from Karamzin’s appearance on the literary horizon to the year 1821 comprises a number of authors who are still living; but many others have since distinguished themselves, of whom no account is here given.

In Russia, as in our own country, the earliest writers were chroniclers and ecclesiastical annalists: among the former the name of the monk Nestor who flourished in the latter part of the tenth and the commencement. of the eleventh century) holds a distinguished place. A few years later appeared a poem, recording the military exploits of Igor against the Poles, written in the popular language of that period, a fragment of which was discovered in 1796, by Count Musin-Pushkin, and published at Moscow, in 1800. Historical and moral tales borrowed from the Greek, with traditional narratives and ballads, constituted for several ages all the literature of Russia. With the dynasty of Romanov commences the modern history of Russian literature. On this event a new impulse was given to the government towns and fortresses were erected in Siberia; commerce was extended, manufactures were established; public schools were founded; the clergy brought with them from the Universities of Italy and Poland a taste for polite learning; and in 1682, an Academy was founded at Moscow, for the study of theology, philosophy, rhetoric, and the liberal sciences. Literature, however, cannot be said to have flourished even in the reign of Peter the Great; and, notwithstanding his extensive patronage, he lived not to behold the seed which he had sown spring up and luxuriate. The language, too, was inundated at that time by a number of foreign words; while tile style employed in composition was vague and unsettled, nor was there any model of sufficient authority to serve as a standard. The Metropolitan of Novgorod, Theophanes Prokopovitch (1681–1736), is almost the only writer of the period who distinguished himself by the force of his compositions; and some specimens of his sacred oratory, notwithstanding their blemishes, deserve to be considered models. of commanding eloquence and powerful thought. Prince Antioch. Dmitrievich Kantemir, the next who deserves to be mentioned, was an individual of rare and truly estimable qualities, not more distinguished by the splendour of his birth, than by his devoted attachment to literature and the sciences. A soldier,—for he accompanied his father, the Hospodar of Moldavia, in a campaign against Persia, in 1722;—a diplomatist, in which quality he visited loth our own country and France; a courtier, high in favour with his sovereign,— he, nevertheless, preferred to all these titles those of philosopher and poet. In an exceedingly interesting sketch, entitled ‘An Evening with Kantemir,’ Batiushkov has given a conversation between the Prince, Montesquieu, and an Abbé. The two latter surprize the ambassador in his study, where they find him surrounded by his papers. At first they imagine him occupied with official business, but are informed, to their astonishment, that he is writing verses—terses in the language of the Scythians and Hyperboreans)! The following reply, made by Kantemir, to the remarks of the French philosopher, touching the unpropitious influence of the climate of Russia, may serve to refute some of the prejudice; even yet entertained, on that subject.

‘I was born at Constantinople, of a family, whose ancestors, at one time, sat on the throne of the eastern empire: Greek blood, therefore, still runs in my veins, and I love, with unfeigned attachment, the azure skies and ever-verdant olive groves of the South. In my youth I travelled with my father, the inseparable companion and loyal friend of Peter the Great, and visited the extensive vales of Russia, from the Dnieper to the Caucasus,—from the Caspian sea to the banks of the glorious Moskva. I know both the country and its inhabitants: the hut of the peasant and the lordly tower of the boyar are equally familiar to me. Instructed by the precepts of my father, who was one of the most enlightened men in Europe, trained up from my earliest years in the school of philosophy and experience, associating continually, in the closest intercourse, with strangers of all nations, it was impossible that I should retain any barbarous prejudices, and I accustomed myself to contemplate my country with the eye of an impartial observer. At Versailles, in the cabinet of your sovereign, in the presence of his ministers, I am the representative of the monarch of a great people; but here among friends, and conversing with one of the most eminent geniuses of Europe, I consider it my duty to speak unreservedly, preferring rather to be accused of ignorance, than of either prejudice or insincerity. This then is my answer: you know what Peter accomplished for Russia; he created his subjects—no, he only developed their mental powers, and eradicated the disorder which had so long oppressed them—popular ignorance; and under his guidance, the Russians soon showed that talents are a universal property, confined to no particular race or climate. Ere fifteen years had elapsed, that illustrious monarch beheld the fruits of his own labours and those of his co-operators: all the arts which are auxiliary to warfare and military science attained to perfection during his reign. Our victories announced to the rest of Europe that we had artillery, fleets, engineers, expert and active seamen. What more could you expect of as within so short a space?—intellectual treasures—the fruits of science, the productions of the fine arts, eloquence and poetry? Grant us but, time and favourable circumstances, and you shall he compelled to admit that we are not destitute of the higher powers of mind. You contend that the influence of climate is paramount. I admit that it is considerable, yet this influence (as you yourself have observed in your own admirable book) is considerably modified and weakened by the form of government, and by the state of morals and of society. Our climate itself, too, is exceedingly varied. Speaking of our country, strangers imagine *Muscovy* to be covered with perpetual snows,—to be inhabited by savages. They do not consider the vast extent of Russia; they forget that, at the very time that the inhabitant of the frozen shores of the White Sea is chasing the marten, the more fortunate occupier of the banks of the Volga is reaping his fertile harvest, Even the northern regions arc not so full of horrors, for they produce all that the cultivator or their fields finds requisite for his wants. The plough is the foundation of society,—the link which unites its members together, the support of the laws; and what district is there throughout all Russia where this instrument leaves not its beneficent traces? The progress of civilization will change the face of the country, and, I may venture to say, will transform Russia into one of the most enlightened empires in Europe. When Tacitus described Germany, did he imagine that elegant cities and splendid capitals would rise up on the site of its gloomy forests, or that the light of intellect would diffuse its rays from the recesses of Pannonia and Noricium? Certainly not: but the illustrious Peter, wielding in his single hand the destiny of millions, consoled himself with the sublime idea that the tree of science would, sooner or later, flourish on the banks of the Neva, and bring forth fruits to enrich, not only his own people, but those of other nations. You, President, are a constant. observer of the political world—its phases and revolutions: in the ruins of past ages, in the ashes of haughty Rome and the once beautiful Greece you have detected the cause of the changes which we now behold, and have learned to predict the future. You cannot but know, therefore, that the progress of civilization insensibly alters institution and forms of government; nay, you have already perceived these changes in Russia. Time destroys and re models,—spoils and perfects every thing. In the course of a few centuries, or perhaps within a shorter period, favouring Providence may send to us some bold mind that will complete the grand idea conceived by Peter; and at his creative voice, the empire which is the most extensive on the globe, will become illustrious as the guardian of laws, and of the freedom founded on them morals, which give stability to laws,—in one word, of civilization, Delightful, inspiring hopes! In time ye will be fulfilled! The benefactor of my family,— the benefactor of Russia, reposes in the tomb; but his spirit, that great, that generous spirit, bath not deserted the land of his erection; it still remains to inspire it with fresh life and energy. Methinks I constantly her him exclaim to his countrymen, “Advance in the career which have opened for you, nor stop till you shall have reached the goal to which I have directed you.”’—*Batiushkov*, vol, i. p. 65.

Unfortunately, Kantemir formed his style of versification on French models; if his satires possessed no merits independent of form, they would no longer be perused with pleasure; but they display a force and spirit worthy of the pupil of Horace and Juvenal, and a truth and vigour of colouring which will preserve them from oblivion. He appears to have been an acute observer, rind an able delineator, of character and manners; and even though his style must. be allowed to be somewhat antiquated (and his versification still more so), yet it is exceedingly graphic. While he attacks the vices and foibles of his countrymen with the impartiality of a philosopher, he heightens the force of his satire by many little touches, which are the more keen as they appear casual and unstudied. The first of the eight satires, which we possess from his pen, which is one of his best, was composed in his twentieth Tear. In this production of early talent, he holds up to merited ridicule those who, prejudiced in favour of old customs and opinions, merely for their venerable age regard every attempt

at improvement as a dangerous innovation. To some of our own sagacious alarmists of the present day, we might apply the Horatian sentence:—‘Mutato nomine, de te fabula narretur.’

“Science begets a sad ungodly train.

Of heresies, and of opinions vain;-

Fur who the most himself on reason prides,

Is most injurious; boldly he derides,

With scoffing lips, what our forefathers taught,—

Such are the mischiefs that by books are wrought.”

So maudlin Criton o’er his bottle cries,

And deems the world already far too wise.

“Our children now no longer, as of yore,

Believe in all their Ares believed before;

tut, judging for themselves, reform their creed

Question implicit faith, their bibles read.

Of all, forsooth, they must the reason know,

As if of error aught could ever grow

Within our church; and then this race impure

Our priests neglect, and even quass[[3]](#footnote-3) abjure;

Their trust no more in holy tapers place,

Nor fast-days heed, so void are they or grace!

Nay, some are found so filled with devilish spite,

Of priests to power they dare to doubt the right;

And riches deem superfluous to them

Who wealth as hurtful to the soul condemn.”’

His philosophical reflections—his comparisons and allusions, are always apposite anal pleasing—even sometimes humorous thus, in the same satire, the following is put into the mouth of a drunkard:—

When mortals ride across the blue profound;

And stars arc sparkling seen upon the ground;—

When mountain streams with liquid fire shall burn;

And long-past ages once again return

When monks, in Lent, shall on dry biscuit dine,

Then will I pore o’er look,—abjuring wine!’

Kantemir died at Paris, on the 1st of March, 1744, in his thirty-eighth year, leaving, besides his satires, translations of some of Horace’s Epistles, of Fontenelle’s Plurality of Worlds, and various manuscript works, among which was a translation of Montesquieu’s Persian Letters, &c.[[4]](#footnote-4)

We proceed now to Lornonosov, who has been compared, not unaptly, to the splendour of the Aurora Borealis, whose fantastic coruscations illuminate the polar regions. Lomonosov is a brilliant example, proving that real genius will burst through every obstacle, and defy the counteracting influences of climate, and all the enthralling circumstances of life. Neither the blue skies and rich vales of Greece, nor the sunny plains of Italy, could have yielded him nobler inspiration than has the wild storm on the shores of the White Sea. Few poets are more sublime; still fewer have displayed such universality of power: for poetry was but one of the talents possessed by this richly-gifted mind. The stores of history, criticism, oratory, chemistry, mineralogy, natural philosophy, astronomy, were, in turn, increased by this enthusiastic student. In poetry, too, he displayed equal variety, there being scarcely any form of composition of which he has not left specimens. It has been beautifully and eloquently observed by one of his countrymen, that what Peter was to the politics of Russia, Lomonosov was to its literature: he found his native language rude and unpolished, and imparted to it harmony and symmetry, remoulded it, gave it new laws, banished its barbarisms, breathed into it a fresh spirit, and transmitted it as an eloquent vehicle of thought to his successors[[5]](#footnote-5).

Contemporary with Lomonosov was Sumarokov, (1718–1777,) one among the few poets of Russia whose names were known to foreigners. His productions, which are exceedingly numerous, and no less varied, (for he composed tragedies, comedies, operas, odes, fables, satires, eclogues, elegies, sonnets, epigrams, and madrigals, besides a paraphrase of the Psalms of David in ten books, and some orations,) are now altogether neglected. He scarcely ever rose above mediocrity, and is only remembered for haying first introduced the regular drama. Yet even in this respect his title to the gratitude of posterity is very questionable, since, by adopting the frigid, declamatory tone of the French stage, and employing rhymed Alexandrines, he set a vicious example, which has unfortunately met with but too many followers. Even the tragedies of Ozerov, admirable as they are in other respects, and notwithstanding the sublimity, the pathos, and the rich poetic colouring they display, lose much of their beauty in consequence of this faulty system of versification.

Comedy was far more fortunate in falling into the hands of Von Vizin, who in his *Nedorosl* (the Minor) and *Brigadir*, presented his countrymen with two pieces, which deserve to be ranked us models, for liveliness of dialogue and humour, for spirited sketches of national character, and happy touches of satire. His style as a prose-writer (with all its faults) was yet superior to that of his contemporaries. Departing from his example, succeeding writers have generally given the dialogue of their comedies in rhyme; another proof of the poisonous influence of French literature on that of Russia, Prince Shakovsky, one of the most popular comic authors of the present day, has written most of his pieces in verse; and Griboiedov, in his Gore ot Uma, a production worthy of the pen of Von Vizin himself, has also fallen into the same pernicious system. The absurdities are follies which Von Vizin ridiculed with so much humour, no longer exist in society; yet his comedies will continue to be read with delight, as valuable pictures of the manners of that age whose portraiture they have so admirably drawn.

On surveying the literature of the reign of Catherine, if we consider that regular poetical composition was still in its infancy, we must be surprised at the number of eminent names which present themselves to our notice, and that, within so short a space, almost every form of composition should have been attempted, and, in many instances, with success. Among what may be regarded as the classical names of this period, those of Petrov, Bogdanovich, Kheraskov, Khemnitzer, Von Vizin, Derzhavin, and Kapnist are conspicuous. Petrov, who, we may remark, *en passant*, visited England in 1772, distinguished himself in lyrical poetry, and chaunted the victories of the Rusiaii arms over those of the Turks.

‘The odes of Petrov,’ to borrow the words of his countryman, Merzliakov, ‘are full of beauties, and distinguish themselves from similar effusions of other poets, by energy and condensity of thought:— Petrov is a philosopher-bard. Perhaps he might be placed on a level with Lomonosov, were it not that his style is more harsh and rugged; but he abounds in transcendent imagery traced with a pen of tire Ills style, however, is not always rugged, since there are entire odes, the versification of which is flowing and harmonious.’

The year 1778 was marked in the annals of Russian poetry, by the appearance of Bogdanovich’s ‘Dushenka,’ a beautiful production, in which the author transferred into his native tongue the elegant mythological fable of Psyche. The performance has been executed with a light, sportive, and graceful pen. It ought not, however, to be concealed that, beautiful as this composition is, there are passages where the style approaches too nearly to the level of prose, and others which tend too directly to the French school. It seems to us, indeed, somewhat savouring of anachronism, when be makes Dushenka amuse herself in the solitude of her enchanted palace with such authors as Moliere, Voltaire, and Rousseau! But, notwithstanding such blemishes, this brilliant little poem will ever charm by the melody of its versification, its gay luxuriant pictures, its sprightliness, and adherence to nature. For a biographical notice of the author, we must refer our readers to Mr. Bowring’s[[6]](#footnote-6) volume of Russian poetry, where they will find a translation of a short memoir the composition of Karamsin.

The same year which enriched the Russian Literature with Dushenka, was rendered remarkable by the appearance of another work of decided talent and originality; we mean the Fables of Khemnitzer. They are distinguished for great simplicity, and a propriety of style, which renders them models of this species of composition. Khemnitzer may be regarded as the first who opened a career to his countrymen, in which they have since exerted themselves so successfully, particularly Dmitriev, Krilov, and lzmailov; for what his predecessor Sumarakov had attempted in this way, is so inferior as hardly to deserve notice, although his fables were so fashionable that the public neglected the productions of Khemnitzer; nor did the latter live to see that justice accorded to his merits, which his genius has since exacted from his countrymen. At no very distant date after Bogdanovich’s classico-poetical legend, the epic muse visited the region of the once barbarous Sarmatia, or, to speak less metaphorically, Kheraslcov produced his ‘Rossiada.’ Selecting for his subject a grand national event, and one of the most important and decisive epochs in the annals of his country, he was more fortunate than most writers of modern date, who have aspired at epic dignity. Independently, too, of its historical interest, the destruction of Kazan, the seat of the Tatar dominion, by Ivan Vassilivich II., (who thus crushed for ever the power of those formidable oppressors of Russia,) presented ample scope for a grand poetical picture. To admit that Kheraskov has not executed a work which answers in every respect to the character of the epopée, is but to confess that he has not completely succeeded in the highest species of composition. Nevertheless, his plan is well conceived, his machinery is both appropriate and ably managed, his poem is full of incident and interest, and many of the scenes and episodes abound with forcible description. The visit of Sumbeka, the Tatar Queen, to the Forest of Tombs, is depicted with great power, and the whole Canto abounds with images of awful, grandeur, The conflagration of the forest anti sepulchres of the Tatar chiefs would form a fine subject fat the pencil of Mr. Martin. An analysis of this poem will be found in M. Dupré de Saint-Maure’s ‘Anthologie.’ The execution of the ‘Rossiada,’ however, is by no means equal to the nature of the subject, or to its general design: rarely does the author rise to the dignity of the epic, and his style is most unequal—sometimes tame, frequently bombastic. Nevertheless, the ‘Rossiada’ is, on the whole, a remarkable, though not a masterly performance; and when we consider the number of Kheraskov’s productions. that, besides his Vladimir,’ in sixteen cantos, and other poems of considerable length, he wrote several tragedies, odes, and other compositions, we must at least wonder at his industry and versatility of power. Kheraskov died Sept. 27, 1807, aged seventy-four.

Of Derzhavin, whom we shall next mention, it is almost impossible to speak too highly. His is, indeed, the mens divinior; his strains are full of sublimity and inspiration, His powers, and those of his great predecessor, Lomonosov, are thus characterized by Merzliakov:—

‘Lomonosov always follows his subject; Derzhavin directs it according to to his own will. The flight of the former is lofty and steady, but the latter flashes suddenly like lightning, and then disappears from his astonished reader. We may compare the one to a noble river flowing majestically between its banks; the other to a waterfall, such as he himself has depicted, dashing its impetuous stream amidst rocks, unrestrained in its course, nrd lending an air of wildness to nature. The style of Lomonosov is more pure and exact, more cautious and uniform; that of Derzhavin is more brilliant, more varied, more luxuriant: he elevates the soul, and makes us constantly feel the sublimity of his genius.’

Kapnist, the friend and relation of Derzhavin, was also a lyrical poet of no mean powers, who, though he be not comparable to the latter for force and originality, yet occasionally surpasses him both in the purity of his language and in harmony of numbers. Horace was his principal model, though he never descended to a servile imitation of the Bard of Venusia.

Meanwhile, Kniazhnin, (1742–1791,) the successor and relative of Sumarokov, followed in the career of that dramatist, but he failed to emancipate tragedy from the galling trammels of French rules: in fact, many of his pieces are little more than imitations from the writers of the Gallic capital. His style, however, is far more noble and pure than that of Sutnarokov and his comedies, although inferior to those of Von Vizin, deserve to be

ranked in the next degree. Maikov is briefly noticed by Grech, as being a successful writer of burlesque poetry, of which he gave his countrymen the first example in his Enraged Bacchus, a comic poem, in five cantos; and in another m three cantos entitled *Igrok Lombera*, or the Ombre Player. Besides these, he wrote two tragedies, and some odes, epistles, and fables, all of which, however, are inferior productions. Bobrov, whose literary career extends from 1784 to 1807, the year previous to his death, was a poet gifted with considerable powers of imagination; and his lyrical epic, (as he himself designates it,) the Khersonida, or Summer’s Day in the Tauridan Peninsula, contains many beautiful descriptions of the scenery of the Chersonesus, interspersed with narratives and episodes, and is distinguished both by its richness of colouring, and the depth and varied expression of the sentiments. It is written, for the most part, in blank—or literally, in *white verse*; but there are many passages in which the author has employed rhyme. Speaking of Bobrov, Mr. Bowring says, his Khersonida, an oriental epic poem, *is not so good as Latia Rookh, but very good notwithstanding*.’ This is to us so passing strange, that had he not given in his Anthology some extracts from the poem itself; we should really have imagined that he could never have seen it; for it is no more an epic than either Thomson’s Seasons or Darwin’s Botanic Garden. ‘Neither can we understand at all wherefore he should allude, in the man¬ner he does, to Moore’s beautiful succession of poetical narratives, as if there were the least resemblance either in subject or general form between the English and Russian poems. The Khersonida is in fact, a description of the scenery of the Taurida during a summer day’s excursion—as the title itself indicates; and the author, uniting the talents of naturalist, painter, and poet, describes the productions, both animal and vegetable, of that romantic district; depicts the vivid character of its landscape, its lovely vales, ouri its magnificent mountains, among which the lofty Chatir-Dagh is the principal feature. These passages are relieved by lyrical flights of great beauty; by digressions on the ancient history of the Taurida; and by various episodical eclogues among the latter, that of Iphigenia is highly dramatic, and ,possesses great beauty. The poem abounds, too, in strains of pure morality, and fervent religious feeling; and, altogether, is one of the most original and interesting productions of its kind with which we are acquainted in any language. The author was well versed in English literature, and has caught the spirit of our poets.

The songs of Nelidinsky Meletzsky are both replete with feeling:c1 tenderness, and adorned by elegant simplicity of style. With him ends the list of the principal writers belonging to the age of Catherine; and they certainly relied, no mall honour on the dawning literature of their country, so brilliantly ushered by the bright herald of their poetry, Lorrionosov. A public, however, was yet wanting, capable of appreciating genius, and, by its liberal patronage, of ripening it into full and vigorous maturity. This patronage wished-for consummation the unfortunate reign of Paul was not calculated to produce. That gloomy period, happily, was of short duration, and to the honour of his successor be it said, that among his first cares was the instruction of his people. For this purpose the empire was divided into six circles; in each was founded an university, with a gymnasium in every city throughout each circle, and a school in every town and village. Several lyceums, moreover, with other institutions, were opened during the latter portion of Alexander’s reign. For the enumeration of the various scientific and literary societies which then successively arose, we have neither space nor leisure; but we hasten to present our readers with a condensed view of the progress of literature, in the words of Grech.

‘At the close of the eighteenth century, Russian prose began to be cultivated both in the didactic ul familiar style, at Moscow, where the language itself is spoken with the greatest purity and correctness. At the very time that all felt the deficiencies of the prevailing style, and when many were endeavouring to improve it, and to rescue it from vulgarity, on the one hand, and from rhetorical pomp and stiff-ness, on the other,—appeared Karamzin. In his “Moscow Journal,” the Russian public possessed, what had so long been a desideratum,—a light, agreeable, and correct style, elegance of expression, and a construction at once clear in itself, and conformable to the genius of the language. It was a style which satisfied every one, especially the rising generation of writers; mid if there were any, who expressed their disapprobation, they were those only who were bigoted to precedent. Karamzin very properly adopted the French and English construction in preference to the lengthy and involved Latin and German periods, after which Russian prose had hitherto been moulded; for it appeared to him that, although his native idiom might avail itself or the freedom of the ancient tongues, in poetry, and the higher species of oratory, yet in the didactic style, in narrative, and conversation, it ought to adopt popular forms of expression, and to follow the logical arrangement which prevails in the modern European languages. His chief coadjutors in this career were Muraviev and Podshivalov. But the brilliant success or Kararnzin raised up a host of imitators, who were more injurious to him than even his opponents, since they copied only his weaknesses, and exaggerated his defects, They introduced a multitude of gallicisms, frequently printing French sentences in Russian characters, and thus the language was tilled with expressions and idioms foreign to its nature. At this juncture, Shishkov’s[[7]](#footnote-7) work on the “New and Old Style,” made its appearance (1802), in which he very forcibly attacked the absurd mologisms with which the writers of the day corrupted the language, while they pretended to imitate Karamzin. It must, however, be confessed that, notwithstanding the general justness of his remarks, the worthy critic was sometimes carried too far by his excessive zeal. The result of this contention was two distinct styles, that of the Moscow party, which took Kararnzin for its model, and that of their St. Petersburg opponents, who, adopting new terms, adhered to the former mode of construction. The dispute was long carried on, though now, indeed, a pacification has succeeded; a style, formed after that of Karamzin, but freed from those blemishes with which the imitators of that great writer sought to disfigure it, having become the standard of Russian prose. Slavonic idioms, the expressions and phraseology of Sumarokov, barbarous and arbitrary words, have been banished, together with the monstrous conceits of Trediaskovsky and his school; and the torch with which, in the middle of the eighteenth century, Lomonosov lighted up the before gloomy fane of our literature, again shines brightly. The style of the “History of Russia” is an example of pure Russian idiom, whilst it is lucid, noble, and full of beauty. All that we now want in our prose is an elegant style of dialogue for the superior class of comedy.

While Karamsin undertook the task of remodelling Russian prose, Dmitriev began to employ Russian verse for familiar narrative and didactic subjects. His tales, fables, satires, and songs, show the possibility of engrafting on our poetical language the easy lightness and ingenious turns of expression that characterize the French writers; and the correctness and polish of his diction justly excited general admiration.

‘These changes, which were manifested in the reign of Catherine, were confirmed in that of Alexander,—a new and brilliant epoch for the language of Russia. Dignity, energy, and force of colouring strike us in the tragedies of Ozerov; tenderness and feeling in the poetry of Zhukovsky; elegiac plaintiveness, depth of thought, and pictorial power, in the compositions of Batiushkov; whilst simplicity, truth of expression, and ingenuity are conspicuous in the fables of Krilov. The versification adopted by Lomnnosov and Derzhavin prevailed till the commencement of the nineteenth century. In 1801, Vostokov attempted Sapphics and other metres of the ancients; but the Russian ear, accustomed to iambics and choriambics, did not relish this novelty. In the mean while, intelligent writers, well acquainted with both ancient and modern literature, perceived that, in transferring the productions of the former into our tongue, we ought to borrow their metres; and in 1813, Gnædich was the first to make the experiment in his translation of Homer in hexameters. This attempt, encouraged by sound criticism, obtained success, and notwithstanding the opposition of those who were bigoted to the former system, others introduced the Greek metres; and Zhukovsky and Voikov sanctioned by their labours the practice commenced by Gnædich.’

It is a fortunate circumstance for the literature of Russia, that the most classical of her prose-writers should have employed his pen upon a work of such extent, importance, and general interest as the history of his country; thereby transmitting to the writers of his own nation a chaste standard of style, engaging the attention of foreigners by this splendid

contribution to the general history of Europe. The greater portion of it has already been translated into German, French, and Italian, but with little fidelity or taste. Before Kararnzin, the annals of Russia had been illustrated with some industry, but little judgment; nor was there any work of classical eminence on the subject: he, however, undertook to arrange and combine the heterogeneous materials,—a task which he accomplished with the taste of a Robertson, and the acuteness of a Voltaire. The prejudice which had hitherto existed among his countrymen against their own writers, especially among the fairer sex, who considered it unfashionable to peruse the works of native authors, was removed, and the higher classes of Russia now begin to patronize arid cultivate its indigenous literature. Karamzin’s reputation as an historian has eclipsed his merits in other species of composition, though his powers, both as a poet and as a writer of tales, are such as to entitle him to distinction. Unfortunately, like Müller, the great historian of Switzerland, Karamzin did not live to complete his national work, but died on the 3rd of June, 1826, and thus within a few months followed his imperial patron, Alexander, to the grave.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Dmitriev has already been honourably mentioned in the extract which we have given from Grech. His popularity rests chiefly on his Tales and Fables, which, although not always original as to matter, are uniformly happy in expression, and rendered attractive by a novel and elegant dress. He did not, however, confine himself to playful and humorous subjects; and his Yermak, ail other lyrical pieces and songs, abound with beauties of a very high order. This poet is still living. The last edition of his works, with which we are acquainted, is the sixth: and it should be observed that this is corrected and ‘diminished’ an example of literary improvement which might be adopted without prejudice to their own fame, and with satisfaction to their readers, by many popular authors in other countries. This edition is, moreover, considerably improved by a very interesting critical memoir of this favourite writer; whilst in point of appearance, it is far superior to any of its predecessors. The latest production of this poet is a small volume, published anonymously, containing fifty-six apologues of four lines each, the thoughts in which are pure and elegant, and the language terse and laconical.

An elegant and affectionate tribute has been paid to the literary merits of Muraviev by his nephew Batiushkov. His prose writings, which were chiefly composed for the instruction of his imperial pupils, the Grand-dukes Alexander and Constantine, are no less admirable for the pure spirit of morality and benevolence which pervade them, than for their finished elegance of style and correct taste; and we are of opinion that a selection of essays from his works would, in the hands of an able translator, meet with success in this country; they would certainly be better worth transferring into our language than a very considerable portion of what we borrow from our neighbours. It is greatly to be regretted that Oskold, one of his most interesting compositions, is but a fragment in this narrative, the subject of which is the expedition of the northern hordes against Constantinople, he has sketched with a masterly hand, and with great powers of imagination, yet in strict accordance with historical truth, the savage manners of the barbarian chiefs who marched against the luxurious capital of the

eastern empire.

The muse of tragedy was invested by Ozerov with a dignity and eloquence of which no example is to be found in his predecessors. His productions are only four in number, (;di pus, Fingal, Demetrius Donskoi, and Polyxena, but they possess beauties of a high order. In the delineation of female character he is peculiarly successful; nor is he less happy in the local colouring and costume of his pieces, particularly in his Fingal, in which he has transferred the wild and gloomy pictures of Ossian to a congenial clime.

We have now to notice an author whose name may not be quite a stranger to many of our readers,—the fabulist Krilov. This writer is at once the most fertile and original of all his

countrymen, in a species of composition which they have cultivated with marked predilection and success. He has had the honour of having his fables imitated by various French and

Italian pens; yet, as might have been anticipated from the circumstances under which this collection was formed, (through the medium of a literal prose translation, and by writers unacquainted with the Russian language,) these versions are so far from giving any thing like a faithful copy of the peculiar spirit and tone of the originals,—of their racy, idiomatic expressions, and popular traits, that they are, in many instances, little more than vague paraphrases, which present the subject under a totally different aspect. Four comedies from his pen attest what Krilov might have accomplished for the drama; that he should not have so applied himself is a circumstance much to be regretted, although we certainly do not lament, with Grech, that he has employed prose for his dialogue in preference to verse.

Prince Demetrius Gorchakov has contributed a few comedies to the Russian stage, but has been more successful in that department of Poetry in which Kantemir distinguished himself. Zhukovsky and Batiushkov, who are usually mentioned together as the founders of a new School of Poetry, have imparted to the language a polish, and to Russian versification a variety and melody, which are not to be found in even the best of the earlier writers. The first, whose compositions belong decidedly to the romantic class, exhibits intensity of thought and feeling, combined with a mastery of language; it is this latter qualification which has enabled him to copy with such spirit and ease the poets of Germany and England, and to naturalize the characteristic beauties of the authors of the Jungfrau von Orleans, and Lalla Rookh. As far as regards the mechanism of versification, and the adaptation of rhythm to sentiment, he is unrivalled. His use style is terse, simple. and perspicuous, and, with that of Karamzin and Batiushkov, the easiest for a foreigner of any with which we are acquainted. Amongst his compositions of this kind, the Marina Roshtsha is deservedly popular, and is a tale worthy of being ranked with Karanizirt’s Lisa. In his notice of Zhukovsky, Mr. Bowring has fallen into a strange inadvertency respecting this piece; first, placing it amongst his poetical writings, and next, translating the title, Mary’s Goat, instead of Mary’s Grove. Zhukovsky’s two essays, on Krilov’s fables, and on Kantemir’s satires, are interesting pieces of criticism.

While Zhukovsky caught the spirit of the bards of the north,. Batiushkov infused into his strains the grace, delicacy, and refinement of the Italian muse. His ‘Dying Tasso’ is one of these productions which stamp at once the reputation of a poet.

As a writer of prose, he is no less admirable, for there is a charm and finished elegance in his style, that well accord with the refined criticism in his essays: amongst which, his ‘Visit to the Academy of Arts’ is exceedingly interesting, and written with great eloquence. After the foregoing names, we may justly place the author of ‘Ruslan and Liudmila.’ Whilst yet a youth, Pushkin exhibited in that delightful poem, in six cantos, powers of description, and a rapidity and brilliancy of narrative, which have obtained for him the appellation of the Northern Ariosto. In this production he transports us into the fabulous era of Russian history, rife with prodigies and enchantments, M. de St. Maure has given an episode from its first Canto, which will convey some (vague) idea of the sportive imagination of this admired poet; and we will here attempt to lay before our readers an outline of the fable.

Prince Vladimir, who, like our Arthur, or like Charlemagne, possesses in Russia a poetical as well as an historical existence; and whose name is connected with various legends and traditions of the times of chivalry, celebrates with great festivity the nuptials of his daughter, Liudmila, with the valiant Ruston. But on the bridal night, the princess is conveyed away by enchantment. In despair for her loss, and irritated against his son-in-law, Vladimir promises to bestow her on the knight. who will discover her abode, and effect her restoration. Ruslan, Rogdai, Farlaf, Ratmir, accordingly set out, on different routes, in quest of the ravished princess, An old hermit, whom Ruslan meets, informs him that the maiden has been abducted by the magician Chernomor, who is aided by the enchantress Naina, for whom he himself entertained a violent passion in her youth, but, on his rejecting her proffered love, after age had robbed her of her charms, the hag had leagued with Chernomor against him. There is something very exquisite in this part of the hermit’s narrative; and the contrast which he draws between the once blooming Naina and the deformed beldame is certainly not very complimentary to the fair sex. In the second Canto, we find Liudmila in the enchanted palace of Chernomor: this redoutable magician is a hump-backed dwarf, with a beard of most extraordinary length, which neither heightens his personal attractions, nor aids him in his amorous designs on the lady, for he entangles himself in it, and falls to the ground, when he is carried away by his attendants. Liudinila, in the mean while, not only laughs at the ridiculous figure her new suitor has made, but amuses herself with his cap which she finds on the ground, and discovers, that, by turning the hihiner part in front, she has the power of rendering herself invisible, and that she can thus elude her persecutor. The poet here suddenly breaks off, and returns to Ruslan, who, continuing his search, encounters his rival Rogdai, whom he slays. After this he passes through a forest, and arrives at a valley which hears evidence of having been the scene of dreadful carnage, on which he exclaims—

‘Oh! dread memorials that remain

Of bloody feuds—what hand bath strewed

With bleaching bones this desert plain?

Whose charger trampled o’er the slain,

With reckless hoof, in gore imbrued,

At the dark hour of fatal strife?

Who fell with honour here?—for life

Who faultered forth his fruitless prayer,

Or east to Heaven his sours despair?

Why art thou silent now,—o’ergrown,

O battle field, with envious weeds,

Burying alike the victor’s fame

And of the vanquished host the shame?

Alas! perchance, unsung, unknown

I too may fall;—as theirs, my deeds

By time effaced. I too may lie

Unmark’d in death’s obscurity,

Without one bard to wake the string,

Of Ruslan’s deeds zInd name to sing:

The succeeding description of the field, covered with the skeletons of horses and warriors, with the fragments of their trappings, and armours,—sculls in helmets, and swords still grasped by fleshless hands, is powerfully conceived.

Ruslan’s next adventure is with a gigantic enchanted head, of tremendous size, which, on being vanquished, informs the knight that he was the brother of Chernomor, who treacherously cut of his head with a magic sword which he had discovered was destined to be the death of them both. By his necromantic arts, the dwarf caused the head to retain its vital powers, and compelled it to guard the weapon which he had not sufficient strength to carry away, and which ‘now becomes Ruslan’s prize. Ratmir, in the meanwhile, arrives at. a castle inhabited not by either sorcerer or giant, but by enchantresses equally potent, though less dreadful. As he approaches their abode he hears an invitation, and entering, the ktight is not disposed to reject these solicitations, and meets with such a reception as to cause him to forget the errand on which he was engaged, The invitation runs somewhat in the following manner:—

‘The breeze blows chilly from the stream,

And darkness veils the west;

’Tis late, young stranger—rest thee here,

And be to-night our guest.

Our hours devoted are to joy;

The banquet waits thee here

Then enter, stranger, and partake

Our revelry and cheer.

Till morning dawns thy cup we’ll fill;

And morn our mirth shall view;

Come, wanderer,—come, our home is thine;

Here friends are fair and true.

’Tis dark without, but bright within;

Our halls are gaily drest;

Here beauty, love, and pleasure dwell;—

Young stranger, be our guest.’

Fenced by her cap of invisibility, Liudmila defies the power of Chernomor, till the wily enchanter, assuming the shape of her bridegroom, tempts her to show herself. She is now within his power, but age has deprived him of the means of enjoying his conquest. At this moment, which, it should be observed, is rather freely described, the horn of Ruslan is heard. He forces his Way into the sorcerer’s castle, and a fierce encounter ensues, ill which the knight lays hold of his adversary’s beard, to slay him; but, springing up into the air, Chernomor drags his assailant after him. Ruslan, however, spite of his perilous situation, clings to him with wonderful presence of mind. All the enchanter’s attempts to shake him off are as fruitless as those of Crofton Croker’s admirable favourite, and our own friend Daniel O’Rourke, to rid himself of his eagle charger—and alight again in his native Ireland—without hurt or damage. To copy the words of the poem—

‘They fly over flood,

They fly over wood,

They fly over bill,

Over ocean they fly

Through the fields of the sky,

And, soaring on high,

Their course pursue still.’

At length, Chernomor is obliged to come to terms, and descends front his aerial journey, with his unwelcome burthen; but as soon as they have alighted, Ruston cuts of his beard and makes him his prisoner. He then finds Liudmila, but she is cast into an enchanted sleep, from which he learns she will not awake, except in the presence of her father; he, therefore, places her before him on his steed, and, with Chernomor behind him, he sets out for Kiev. On his way he meets with Ratmir, who is leading a pastoral life with the mistress whom he has selected, and, in the spirit of Falstaff, he soliloquizes on honour, abjuring hard knocks, bloody wounds, and the bubble reputation. Shortly afterwards, how ever, he sees his third rival Farlaf, who, aided by the witch Naina, stabs him while sleeping, and carries off Liudmila. In this desperate plight, when his hero is fairly dead, the poet has recourse to a *Deus ex machinâ*, in the person of Ruslan’s friend the hermit, who is also no mean adept in the arts of magic, and who succeeds in restoring him to life, by means of some charmed water, and further bestows upon him a talismanic ring, which will awaken Liudmila from her trance. Ruslan then pursues his way to Kiev, where he finds Vladimir in despair, every effort to read the princess to life having proved fruitless. But the ring instantly dispels the charm, and no further obstacle remains to the happiness of the lovers. Such is a brief outline of this romance, which is related with a grace and felicity which would do credit to the author of the ‘Bridal of Triermain.’ We have dwelt upon it at some length, as it is one of the most celebrated productions of the later literature of Russia.

Pushkin’s ‘Prisoner of the Caucasus,’ although a sketch, exhibits perhaps still higher powers, and delineates with an energy, which frequently reminds us of Byron in his ‘Corsair,’ the wild scenery and the bandit manners or the robber-hordes of that district, relieved by softer pictures, full of pathos and passion. This poetical tale opens with the following sketch

‘Seated in many an idle group

At their thresholds, in the village,

A rude and bold Cherkassian troop,

The sons of Caucasus, discourse

Of skirmish, battle, rapine, pillage,

And many an act of fraud, or force:

Recounting all their warlike deeds,

They loudly praise their nettled steeds;

For, every joy half-savage man

May know, was felt by that wild clan,—

Deep peril’s charm mid fierce delight;

The hot pursuit,—the rapid flight;

The wily Uzden’s[[9]](#footnote-9) stratagem

The foe to seize—in toils to hem,

The ’*shaska*’s lightning stroke, the hail

Of whizzing arrows—nought may quail

Their during souls; their need the hiss

Snatched in the black-eyed captive’s kiss.’

To this succeeded his ‘Fountain of Bakhchisarai,’ which, for eloquent poetry and depth of feeling, is even superior. Among the other points of this poet’s resemblance to Byron may be mentioned his facility of composition, and variety of subjects; his ‘Eugenius Onægin,’ which, like ‘Beppo,’ is designed as a satire on the follies of the fashionable world, is not only curious as a picture of the manners of the higher classes in Russia at the present day, but also attractive for the touches of loftier poetry, and the warmth of feeling which it occasionally displays. Like ‘Don Juan,’ this production has been published piecemeal, and is not, we believe yet completed, so that we cannot judge sufficiently of the plan to express any opinion on its merits.

Two new poems from Pushkin’s pen, published last year at Moscow, have been received with most unequivocal approbation. The first and longest, entitled ‘Tsigane,’ (the Gypsies,) such an opinion. The scenes, however, are ably sketched, and in many parts vigorously touched. The other poem, the ‘Razboiniki,’ (Robbers,) is wholly devoid of incident; it being little more than a banditti scene, where

‘As ravens at their carcase feast

Of mangled flesh, around the glare

Of midnight fires, on Volga’s bank,

The robber-horde have made their lair,

Of race, of language, and of rank

A medley strange, from hut, from cell,

From prison foul, and dungeon dank,

All flock, in freedom here to dwell,

And lawless live. The swarthy Jew,

The rude Calmuck, and those whom nurse

The steppe and wild; the gypsey crew,

To wandering born, to toil averse;

Bashkiretz fierce, and red-haired Finn,

Here mingling, form a savage kin,

Whom danger, daring, rapine, blood,

Have linked in crime’s dire brotherhood.’

In this gang, whose members are so discordant in tribe, but so congenial in their habits, is a newly-arrived associate, who relates his adventures,—how he tempted his brother to embrace a bandit life; their murder of an aged traveller; their incarceration and escape from prison, and the remorse and death of his companion,

This narrative, which certainly displays much poetic feeling, constitutes the substance of the poem.

Pushkin has also produced another little poetical story, entitled ‘Vadim, a Novogorodian Tale’ yet, after all, this apparent fertility is rather a matter of regret than congratulation, for instead of sending forth so many slight compositions, we should be better pleased to find him applying his talents to some work of varied and sustained interest, worthy his powers, and redeeming the promise of excellence given in his Ruslan and Liudmila. The example of Pushkin, and his success, appear to have given a degree of vogue to this species of composition, in the same manner as the author of Waverley has been the means of setting our novelists writing historical romances. Besides those by Rilæev and Kozlov, which we shall presently notice, we may here mention the poetical narratives or Povæsti of Orsan and Leila., by Obodovsky, and Ala by Yazikov. The latter is also author of a poem similar in its title to one by Pushkin, namely, the Robbers; a taste which, we may presume, is to be ascribed to Lord Byron’s Corsair. A poetical tale, entitled the ‘Deev and the Peri,’ by a young author, named Podolinsky, has recently appeared, and is spoken of by some of the Rusin Journals as a production of very superior merit. We have not yet seen it, but shall probably take an early opportunity of examining it, and laying an account of its beauties before our readers.

If he had no other title to the gratitude pr al admiration of his countrymen than as the masterly translator of the ‘Iliad,’ Gnædich would deserve to be spoken of as the ablest of the modern poets but even as an original writer he possesses very high claims. His. ‘Birth of Homer,’ a poem in two cantos, is no less remarkable for its ingenious and tasteful fiction, than for its spirited execution mid his idyl of the ‘Fishermen’ may be compared, for its simplicity and nature, to those of Theocritus. In the Allegories of Theodore Glinka, morality assumes the attractive garb of fiction; whilst, in his poems, breathes a nobleness of feeling which addresses itself persuasively to the heart. Glinka has likewise published ‘Letters of aOfficer,’ ‘Letters to a Friend on various Subjects,’ with some other works of minor importance.

In speaking of Von Visin, we have already alluded to Shakovsky, one of the cleverest—certainly the most prolific, of the living dramatists of Russia. There is no species of dramatic composition, from tragedy to the vaudeville, to which he has not, in turn, applied himself. In the former, however, he is mostly a translator or imitator of French dramatists: it is in his comedies and smaller pieces that he shows himself an original and able writer. His *Pustodomŭi*, for which we have no equivalent term in our language, although certainly not for want of the class of persons whom it designates—namely, people who neglect their domestic affairs, is an amusing and lively picture of the embarrassments in which a fashionable wife wild speculating husband have involved themselves,—she, by her extravagance—he, by his excellent schemes for the improvement of his estates, all of which, admirable as they are, serve only to accelerate his ruin. Yet we should, perhaps, give the preference, for novelty of subject, for dramatic effect, for humour and satire, to his *Svoya Semya*; or, as it may he translated, the Savich Family. The plot is simple, but with sufficient incident to keep alive the attention of the spectator; and the scenes, in the second act, where Natasha accommodates herself to the foibles of her husband’s aunts, the thrifty Phecla, and the romantic *Raisa Sarishna*, is wrought up in a manner highly comical. What renders the excellence of this piece the more extraordinary is, that it was written in a hurry, expressly for the benefit of

Madame Valberlihov, who played the part of *Natasha*,—a character admirably calculated to display the actress’s versatility of talent. In his haste, the author obtained the assistance of Grihoiedov and Khmelnitzky; the former of whom wrote about half the second act, and the latter the scene in which *Maximus*, the pedantic uncle, examines *Natasha*, as to her proficiency in the sciences. Both the preceding pieces are in verse; Shakovsky has, however, produced several pieces in prose; and of these none has obtained greater reputation than a. little farce, in one act, entitled *Novoi Stern*, or the Modern Sterne, which very pleasantly ridicules the sickly ultra-sentimentalism, which at one time threatened to inundate Russian literature with mawkish nonsense, affecting to be à-la. Sterne, or à-la Werther. To a foreigner, the comic writers are by no means the easiest to understand, as they abound with colloquial idioms, and proverbial expressions. Of Shakovsky’s numerous operas and vaudevilles, we do not profess to know any thing beyond their titles; but his two romantic dramas, *Kerim Ghire*i, and *Naina*, exhibit him to very great advantage. Each piece is founded on one of Pushkin’s poems: the former on his ‘Fountain of Bakhehisarai;’ the latter on an episode in the first canto of ‘Ruskin and Liudmila.’ This trilogue, as the author entitles *Naina*, (it being divided into three parts, each of which has its separate title, viz.: the shepherd, the hero, and the enchanter,) is rather a fanciful dialoguised poem or masque, than a piece adapted for representation. It is written in various metres, and partly in rhyme, partly in blank verse. The character of *Taváls*, the lover of the coy Naina, who is also the principal personage of the drama, is ably marked, and possesses many novel traits. The speech in which he declares his resolution of abandoning a pastoral life, and of proving to his mistress, by his bravery, that he is not unworthy of her love, is spirited, and marked by several poetical touches.

We shall here attempt a version of it, availing ourselves of the loose structure of the rhythm of the original:—

‘A Lithuanian sire ’twas taught the maid

All to despise, save those of warrior race,

As of her love unworthy. But ’tis well!

And Taváls shall not, therefore, meet her scorn.

Henceforth to flock mid crook he bids adieu;

His hand well nerved, and armed with the glaive

his warlike sires once wore, shall earn her love

In distant lands. Lithuania, the Russ,

Or Novgorod shall see him in their ranks;

So shall or death be earnest of his passion,

Or war-earned booty purchase him her smile.

A shepherd dreads not the fierce combat’s strife!

No longer here I waste my days: my cot,

My pipe, my herds, farewell!—mine now no more

No more this arm van guard ye from the wolf.

Taváls departs; but not his country’s foes

To meet, or in the field her rights defend:—

A stranger, in a stranger’s cause, he serves.’

Taváls returns home victorious, yet his mistress continues inexorable, and he is about to rid himself of a life now hateful to him, but his intention is frustrated by an enchanted bird flying away with his sword, and immediately after, the necromancer, Budantin, appears, and endeavours to console him by exposing the folly of his grief for a capricious girl, and proposes to him to apply himself to the study of the occult sciences, as the most efficacious remedy for love. He accepts the proposal, and we afterwards find him transformed from a disconsolate lover into a very philosophic recluse. As, however, even philosophers are not utterly inaccessible either to ennui or curiosity, he is prompted by the latter to summon one of his subject spirits, that he may give him information of Naina. Although we have dwelt so long on this production, we cannot resist presenting our readers with the satirical and sarcastic reply of his emissary

*Taváls*. Spirit! what news?

*Spirit*. Whence, my goad master?

*Taváls*. From all the world!

*Spirit*. Then all the world is mad—in different guise

Of common sense, alas! a common dearth,

But harvest rich of thriving self-conceit.

All against theft inveigh, yet pillage all

From folly’s stores. Your grave men and discreet

At blockheads rail, while blockheads, in their turn,

Daringly lead discretion by the nose

And empty fools in all things interfere,

And fools still greater to support them find.

Rich men would be wise, did not base flatterers

Uprear them from their cradles to be fools.

Men rail at law—and lawyers thrive the better;

Abuse the sex, and yet the fools will wive.

There’s mischief in the world—aind women, too,—

Effect and cause—so that is nothing new.

Children, ’tis said, are wiser than their sires,

Their sires, grown sober, think their children mad;

Old-fashioned prudence lags behind the age,

And deems the world turns hack from good to bad;

New-fangled wit as usual plays the sage,—

Would all correct in wisdom’s spite,

Would all correct;—but still, in wisdom `s spite,

The world, good master, ‘a not reformed quite.’

Shakovsky is an industrious and zealous labourer in that department of literature to which he has applied himself so successfully; and his excellent Essay on the Drama shows him to be a judicious critic, and really anxious for the advancement of the Russian stage.

We have no space to return to Ozerov, or to enter into a critical analysis of his pieces; but there is another tragic writer, Krĭukovsky, who must not be entirely passed over in silence, although he owes his reputation to a single production—his ‘Pozharsky;’ which was probably as much indebted for its brilliant success to its subject, and to the patriotic sentiments with which it abounds, as to its poetical beauties and the elegance of its versification. The names of Pozharsky and Minin are dear to Russia; and the heroism which they displayed at a crisis when their country was on the point of becoming subjugated by Poland, is one of the most brilliant traits in its annals. The piece itself, which is only in three acts, is almost destitute of action or incident, but it breathes a spirit of generous attachment to liberty, devotedness to the cause of independence. It is rather singular, as this piece was brought out in 1807, that it seems almost to have predicted an event which was so soon afterwards to astonish all Europe,—we mean the conflagration of Moscow. In his reply to the traitor Zarutsky, who insidiously advises pacific measures on the part of the inhabitants of Moscow, as being unable to cope with the superior force of the Poles, Pozharsky indignantly replies—

‘Think’st thou that Russia deems her blood ill spent,

When freely poured for liberty and honour?

Or that she e’er will purchase lire to breathe

In servile shame?— No! rather shall this hand

Give yonder swelling domes and haughty towers

A prey to flames; and may the blaze consume

Their golden crests, unsullied as their name;

So be those fires our beacon lights of freedom;—

So may our children learn their country holds

Dearer her fame, than aught of good beside’

Among the more recent writers who are not included in Grech’s book, we may mention Bulgarin, Bestuzliev, Rikeev, Bronevsky, Buriatinsky, Kozlov, and Shæpushkin. The first of these, a Pole by birth, may be regarded as one of the most industrious literary characters in Russia. He is the editor of the ‘Sævernie Archiv,’ and the coadjutor of Grech, in his ‘Son of the Country.’ His ‘Recollections of Spain,’ in which he, gives a particular account of the siege of Zaragoza, is an interesting contribution towards the history of the Peninsular war, as the author was an eye-witness of the scenes which he describes. This little volume or it contains no more than one hundred and eighty pages) would, if translated, probably meet with success here; notwithstanding the numerous narratives of the kind which have been already given to the public. As a writer of satire, Bulgarin is lively and humorous, although his pictures are sometimes overcharged, and the ridicule too grotesque, at least so it appears to us. Bestuzhev and Rilæev, editors of the ‘Polar Star,’ (the first literary pocket-book which appeared in Russia,) and both men of considerable talent, were implicated in the conspiracy at St. Petersburg, the latter was among those who expiated their offences on the scaffold, while the former was sentenced to perpetual banishment and to hard labour in Siberia. The reviews of the literary productions, which appeared in each volume of that publication, were from the pen of Bestuzhev.[[10]](#footnote-10) Rilæev has illustrated the annals of his country in his a series

of historical ballads or pictures, full of interest and spirit; and in another poem, entitled ‘Voinarovsky,’ he has described, with a powerful pen, the wild scenery of the Ukraine and Siberia. This latter production, which was published at Moscow in 1825, cannot be referred to any particular class of composition, being merely an insulated historical sketch, the hero of which is the nephew of Mazeppa, the Hetman of the Ukraine, whose name has been recorded by Voltaire, in his Charles XII., and still more interestingly by Byron. On the treacherous revolt of the Hetman from his allegiance to Peter the Great, Voinarovsky went over to Charles, and linked his fortunes with those of the Swedish monarch, by whom he was sent on a mission to the Porte, to excite that power against Russia. Succeeding to immense wealth after the death of Ins uncle, he quitted Turkey, and resided for some time at Vienna, and other German courts, where the elegance of his mariners, his personal attractions, and his magnificence, secured him general favour, and obtained for him the somewhat ambiguous friendship of the celebrated Countess. Konigsmarck. At length he was arrested at Hamburgh, at the instigation of the Russian resident, on which he voluntarily surrendered himself to Peter, and was banished to Yakutsk. Several years afterwards he was seen there by the historian Miller, when the latter visited. Siberia, (from 1723 to 1743,) being sent thither by the Russian government for the purpose of studying the geography, antiquities, and history of that country. It is to Miller that the exile relates his misfortunes; this narrative forms the principal portion of the poem,

The biographical notices of Mazeppa and Voinarovsky, prefixed to this poem, and the notes attached to it, are full of deep interest, particularly the account given of the historian Miller. This intelligent writer and worthy man was born in Westphalia, in 1705, and being invited to Russia in 1730, was appointed to a professorship of history and geography in the Academy of Sciences, which, although instituted by Peter, was not opened until the reign of his successor. In 1747, he was made imperial historiographer, the duties of which office he discharged both zealously and ably; and his Sammlung Russischer Geschichte contains abundant information relative to the geography and history of the empire. It is to him, too, that Russia was indebted for its first literary journal, commenced in 1755. Miller terminated his long and useful life in 1783.

Bronevsky’s ‘Letters of a Sea Officer’ delight equally by their captivating style, and the interesting descriptions which they contain of the coasts of the Mediterranean. Bariatinsky is a young poet, who may he ranked as a powerful rival of Pushkin; his compositions are marked by beauty and propriety of diction, by the melody of the verse, by depth of thought, and by eloquent effusions of feeling rid passion: alternately sportive or serious, gay or pathetic, he always fascinates his reader. Kozlov is likewise gifted with no ordinary talents: deprived both of sight and of the use of his limbs, poetry is the charm of his existence; and it would seem that his corporeal infirmities tend only to concentrate the energies of his mind, arid enable him to express its emotions with increased vigour. His Chernetz, or Monk, breathes a considerable portion of the spirit of Byron, whom he appears to have taken for his model in this production. Yet Kozlov is not one of the *servum pecus* of imitators; and if there be some incidental traits of resemblance between his poem and the Giæour, they only, show how similar circumstances may be displayed by congenial minds. An artist is not to be taxed with plagiarism because he selects for his pencil a subject that has already been treated; and it would be equal injustice to accuse Kozlov of being a copyist. Delightful as his Chernetz is—fraught with touches of exquisite sensibility—and vividly as it depicts the intensity of passion, the horrors of remorse, and the soothings of repentance, we cannot stop to analyse its plan, or to expatiate on its beauties. Yet we must say a few words respecting his Epistle to Zhukovsky, which is attached to the preceding poem. In this production the blind bard presents us with a biographical sketch, full of interest and pathos; and we are but too feelingly reminded that, in describing his own personal misfortunes, the poet speaks not the language of fiction, but of truth. We here find the poetry of nature of the affections—of the heart. It is a piece which, once perused, can never be forgotten what, for instance, can he more tenderly pathetic than the passage where, speaking of his approaching blindness—an affliction which smote him when he had hardly attained the age of thirty—he exclaims that the last objects on which his dimmed eyes were wont to gaze, and which they dreaded so much to lose in that darkness, in which they were about to be quenched, were not the charms of nature—the beaming sun and, the gay fields,—but the countenances of those so dear to his heart—of his wife and his children? Affliction made Kozlov a poet, and it has imparted to his strains an interest that powerfully affects the soul, and which would be insupportable were we not consoled by the pious resignation of the poet himself, who thus expresses himself—at least as far as we are able to render the beauty of the original:

‘Is nought then left us?—must e’en hope expire?

Say, and is all life’s toilsome passage trod?

Behold above our heads yon worlds of fire—

Above those worlds, their Maker—and our God!’

Since this poem appeared, Kozlov has published a translation of Byron’s Bride of Abydos and a small poetical romance founded on the history of the unfortunate Natalia Dolgoruki, whose name it bears.

The peasant Shlæpushkin, a humble fisherman, and a self-taught bard, has, in a volume of poetry, published about two years since, exhibited may pleasing sketches of rural life and occupations. His subjects are, for the most part, taken from nature, from his own domestic circle, and from real incidents, on which he has founded some amusing narratives. He was first encouraged to venture before the public as an author by Svinin, the editor or the Otechestvennia Zapiski, who, in the number for June, 1825, has given an interesting account of a visit to this village poet. Shlæpushkin has likewise signalized himself by his talent in another art, in which he is equally self-instructed, and has shown, by many cleverly-painted portraits, that he employs his pencil as ably as his pen.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Another peasant-bard, who has lately enlisted under the banner of the muses, is Sakhanov. Most of the productions of this young candidate for poetic fame have hitherto consisted of fables, and if we may be allowed to judge from the few specimens of his composition which we have seen, we should say that they exhibit much ingenuity of invention.

Paul Ynrevich Lvov, who died June 11, 1825, in his fifty-sixth year, was the author of several historical narratives rind tales, among which his ‘Mstislav I., Grand-duke of Novogorod,’ is considered a masterpiece; and so highly was Derzhavin delighted with it, that he intended to have put it into verse, had he not been prevented by his increasing infirmities. But Lvov’s most considerable work is his ‘Russian Temple of Fame,’ consisting of a series of historical portraits, from the time of Gostomisl to the accession of the house of Romanzov. A considerable degree of elegance and an enthusiastic spirit of patriotism pervade all his compositions of this class.

On subjects connected with topography, Paul Svinin, the editor of the journal to which we have just referred, in speaking of Shlæpushkin, is a writer of great merit. His style is fluent and animated—his descriptions picturesque, and his remarks intelligent, and evincing great taste. He has, given an account of an archæological tour, made by him through the southern provinces of Russia, in 1825, in perusing which we only regret its brevity, and that he did not enter more into detail; for, to a foreigner, unacquainted with the places themselves, his observations frequently appear little more than notes, and memoranda for a larger work; and it is to be hoped that be will at some future time give to the public a more complete narrative of this antiquarian excursion. Svinin has likewise written a comedy, of which some scenes are given in the *Ruskaia Talia*.

We might very easily extend this list, but at present could find room for no more than a mere catalogue of names; find even now we have not only been compelled to restrict ourselves in our remarks and quotations, but also to omit entirely several names, for the absence of which we have to reproach ourselves. We had intended to say something of the journals and pocket-books; and if the number and variety of these may be considered as any evidence of the literary taste of a nation, Russia must be allowed to rank highly. As in Germany, many of the journals are conducted by writers of the first eminence; for instance, Karamzin, Krilov, Izmailov, mid other distinguished characters in the republic of letters, have at various times edited periodicals. Very few prose writers have been noticed by us, even in the department of belles lettres neither have we said any thing of the various interesting and important accounts of voyages and travels which are to be found in the Russian language, some of which have already engaged the attention of German and French translators, through whom they have been transmitted to the general liternturu of Europe. This has recently been the case with Timkol, sky’s Travels to China, or rather or a portion of that work; Muraviev Apostol’s classical letters on Taurida have been noticed in an. English publication;

and Golovnin’s Voyage round the World will probably find its way into our language.

Like its capital, the literature of Russia offers no imposing monuments consecrated by time—no reminiscences of past glory; yet, although its existence may be said to be of yesterday, it possesses much to attract, and to reward the labour of those who will take the trouble of becoming acquainted with it. And even this brief notice, imperfect and unsatisfactory as we feel it to he, may yet serve to show that at present it is by no means barren of interest whilst for the future it is full of hope and promise.

Taken from:

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=jWEJAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA505&dq=foreign+review+and+contemporary+miscellany+1828+volume+2&hl=en&sa=X&ei=WX7WU5LCA4G6O7rrgfgO&ved=0CCQQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=Sea%20officer&f=false

1. It may be proper to observe that we have chosen invariably to represent the Rugsian character *cherv*, by *ch*, which, whether at the beginning or end or a syllable, must be pronounced like our soft *ch* in *chair*, which, such: rejecting the *t*, as superfluous, We, therefore, do not write Gretch, but Grech„ The character *khœr*, on the contrary, or hard *ch*, we have expressed by *kh*, thus avoiding all possibility of mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Foreign names are frequently so metamorphosed in Russian, that it is difficult to recognize them; for instance, Moore is rendered Mur; Rousseau, Russo, so that unless the name be already known, there is great danger of spelling it incorrectly, in *translating* it from the Russian characters; for who would decipher in such words as Gero, Gerd, Kuper. Vulet. the names of Hereau, Heard, Cooper, and Woollett? Some or the titles of ‘Valter Skott’s’ novels have undergone a change, the Fugitive being substituted for that of Waverley, and the Puritans for Old Mortality, [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quass, the use of which is now confined to the lower orders, was formerly the national beverage of the Russians; consequently, not to admire it, or to hint that champagne might be better, must have been, in the estimation of the personage here described by the poet, as highly culpable—as the abominable Englishman questioning the orthodoxy of roast beef, [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Life of Kantemir, accompanied with observations on his Satires, has been written by Barkov, who also translated the Satires of Horace and Phædrus’s Fables. Barkov died in 1768. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. A public monument to Lomonosov to be erected at Archarigel. The person employed for this work is Mafiosi a sculptor of great celebrity, and certainly one of the bect artists Russia has yet produced. According to the model designed by him, the poet will be represented standing on the northern hemisphere of a terrestrial globe, with his foot near the pole. Beside him will be a winged genius, supporting a lyre, whose chords the inspired bard is striking, while his eyes are raised towards heaven. Martos also executed the monument of Minin and Pozharaky, in the *Krasnaya Plotshtshad*, at Moscow; and that of the Duke de Richelieu, at Odessa. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. To this gentleman belongs the merit of having been the first to introduce the bards of Russia to the notice or English readers. M,Dupré de Saint-Maure ha performed a similar service for his own countrymen, by his ‘Anthologie Russe,’ in which will be found much information, both critical and biographical; and in Germany, Borg has published ‘Poetischen Erzeugnissen der Russen.’ These publications, and the ‘Fatales Russes de M. Krilov, imitées, en vers Francais et Italiens, publiées par M. le Comic d’Orloff; with an introduction by Lemontey, and a preface in Italian by Salfi, will suffice to give some idea of the treasures of the Russian muse. We must add, however that neither St. Maure, nor the paraphrases of Krilov. givee the colouring or tone of their respective originals. The only coincidence of subject in the ‘Anthologies’ of Bowring and Dupré is ‘Derzhavin’s Ode on the Death of Meeshtshersky,’ anti a comparison of the two will prove amusing, for it is difficult to trace any resemblance, the Frenchman having obliterated every trait of originality, and rendered his performance a mere tissue of common-places, devoid of all poetical expression. To the above, however, let us not forget to add M. Balbi, who, in his excellent Introduction to the Atlas Ethnographique,’ (an account of which will also be found in this Number of our Journal,) gives, in ch. 8, a good notice of the progress of Russian Literature. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. \*Of Shishkov, a very fine portrait has lately been published in this country, engraved by Mr. T. Wright, from a painting by his brother-in-law, Mr. Dawe, of St. Petersburg. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This history appears to be continued by Von Bludov. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. A Cherkassian prince or commander. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The notices of Rogsinte authors, in an article in the first number of the ‘Westminster Reiew,’ are principally an abridgment of Bestuzhev’s ‘Glance at Ancient arid Modern Literature of Russia’ in the volume for 1823; but in one instance, the Reviewer has made a very strange blunder, creating a writer who never existed. ‘A Siberian bard,’ says he, the blind Eros has published a popular volume of jocose poetry.’ We were not a little puzzled in attempting to make out who this Eros could be, till, on reading Bestuzhev’s article, the enigma was explained. The passage in the original stands thus: ‘Pancratius Sumarokov is distinguished by the sportive freedom of his verses, which, although not always smooth, are always full of thought. His ‘Blind Eros’ (Love blinded by Folly) is a proof that the frosts of Siberia did not chill his mirthful imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Krapivnikov is another self-formed artist and auto-didact portrait-painter, who is said to display considerable talent. Some account of hint is to be found in Karstkov’s Ruskii Pustŭinnik (Hermit in Russia), a work which, although not equal to some of the tribe of modern ‘Hermits,’ is nevertheless interesting, for the insight which it gives into Russian manners and society. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)