

A History of BOHEMIAN LITERATURE

BY

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FOREWORD TO NEW IMPRESSION

It has given me great pleasure that a new impression of my *History of Bohemian Literature* should have been required. I am, I think, justified in believing that the British public now takes a certain though still limited interest in the literature and language of my country. I am also perhaps not wrong in thinking that the origin of the struggles in the Austro-Hungarian empire—almost entirely attributable as it is to racial and linguistic discord—has become better understood in England. As I show in my book, the revival of Bohemian literature was largely responsible for the movement in favour of Bohemian autonomy; and the early leaders of the Bohemian movement in the nineteenth century were mostly literary men. I am justified, therefore, in claiming a certain political importance for this book. The new impression on the whole differs little from the former one, and in revising the book I noticed with pleasure how few printer's errors required correction—a somewhat astonishing fact if we consider how difficult the spelling of Slavic words is. I have added considerably to the last pages of the book, which deal mainly with writers who are now alive. This part of the subject had been previously somewhat neglected, as I originally intended to omit all mention of living authors.

LÜTZOW.

ŽAMPACH,
October 26, 1906.

PREFACE

WITH the approval of Mr. Gosse, I have written this short History of Bohemian Literature according to a plan that differs considerably from that of certain earlier volumes in this Series. The works of Modern English, French, Italian, and even of Ancient Greek and Spanish writers, will be known to many readers of the volumes that deal with them. Bohemian literature, on the other hand, is absolutely unknown in Western Europe, and a large amount of space has therefore been devoted to translated quotations from Bohemian writers. Many of these unknown works have great interest and value.

Bohemian literature, as we possess it, is to a certain extent disappointing and unsatisfactory. In consequence of the wholesale destruction of everything written in Bohemian that continued during more than a century, countless Bohemian books, many of which are known to have been valuable, have disappeared.

Many forms of literature are scarcely represented in Bohemian. No dramatic works worthy of notice exist before the present century. Poetry also is valuable only in the earliest period and in the present century.

Bohemian literature is so closely connected with Bohemian history, that without some knowledge of the latter it is often difficult to understand the references to historical events which must necessarily be found in a

history of Bohemian literature. Though I have sometimes explained such references by notes, I could not do this to any great extent without trespassing on the domain of history. Those who wish to turn their attention to the dramatic history of Bohemia will find their best guide up to the year 1526 in Palacký, whose monumental *History of Bohemia* was published in German as well as in Bohemian. Though no continuous narrative on the same plan brings Bohemian history down to the year 1620, Gindely, Tieftrunk, and Rezek have written extensively, in German as well as in Bohemian, on the last years of Bohemian independence. Professor Tomek has in his short *Geschichte Böhmens* given an outline of the history of the country from the earliest ages up to the present day. I have in my *Bohemia: an Historical Sketch*, endeavoured to give a brief account of the history of Bohemia from an early period to the year 1620, written in accordance with the requirements of non-Bohemian readers.

Bohemian writers have divided the literature of their country into three periods. The first extends from the earliest time to the days of Hus; the second from Hus to the battle of the White Mountain; the third from that battle to the present day. Chaps. I. and II. of this book deal with the first; Chaps. III., IV., V., and VI. with the second; and Chap. VII. with the third period.

Like the history, the literature also of Bohemia is, particularly in the most interesting periods, a record of incessant religious struggles. I am thoroughly conscious of the fact that an account of these struggles is a most difficult task, that the writer

“Incedit per ignes
Suppositos cineri doloso.”

I can only express my conscientious belief that I have delineated these religious controversies in accordance with the writings of the most accredited authorities.

I have only been able to allude incidentally to some of the materials that I have used while writing this book. I have, however, principally relied on a prolonged study of the works of the Bohemian writers with whom my work deals. It is at least the privilege of a critic of so little known a literature as that of Bohemia that he is not confronted by an enormous amount of anciently accumulated criticism. In one or two cases where I felt uncertain, I have had the privilege of receiving advice from Professor Josef Kalousek, of the Bohemian University of Prague, and from Mr. Adolphus Patera, head-librarian of the Bohemian Museum in that town. I have entirely limited my remarks to the works of those Bohemian writers who have general interest, or are at least characteristic of their time. Very many names contained in the histories of Bohemian literature written in the national language have therefore been omitted.

LÜTZOW.

ZAMPACH,

New Year's Day, 1899.

INTRODUCTION

THE Slavic language, a branch of the great Aryan family of speech, was originally one. It gradually divided itself into various dialects, a certain number of which have become written languages. According to the generally accepted division, the existent Slavic languages are divided into three great classes—the North-Eastern, Southern, and Western groups. The last-named group consists of the Bohemian and Polish languages and the almost extinct dialect of the Lusatians in Prussia and Saxony.

The Bohemian language is spoken in a large and continuous part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, comprising the greater part of Bohemia and Moravia, part of Silesia, a small portion of the Archduchy of Austria, and extensive districts in Northern Hungary. There are considerable numbers of Bohemians beyond the borders of this continuous territory, in Lower Austria (particularly in Vienna), in Prussian Silesia (where their homes adjoin those of the Bohemians in Austrian Silesia), in Russia (particularly in Volhynia), and in the United States of America.

According to the most authentic statistics, the Bohemian language is spoken by about 7,930,000 people. Of these, 7,650,000 live in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, 70,000 in Prussia, 60,000 in Russia, and 150,000 in the United States of America. Minor Bohemian colonies, such as

that in London, do not require special notice : the native language also often disappears here after one or two generations.

The Slavonic inhabitants of Northern Hungary, identical with the Bohemians as regards their race, have in the present century developed a written language somewhat different from that of Bohemia. If we therefore deduct them from the total, we come to the result that the Bohemian language is spoken by about 5,750,000 people.

EDITOR'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION

THE vast progress made in all departments of literary scholarship, and the minuteness with which knowledge is now subdivided, threaten to leave the general reader bewildered at the diversity and bulk of what is presented to him. The exact historian of literature concentrates his attention on so narrow a field that he cannot be expected to appeal to a wide class; those who study what he writes are, or must in some measure grow to be, his fellow-specialists. But the more precisely each little area is surveyed in detail, the more necessary does it become for us to return at frequent intervals to an inspection of the general scheme of which each topographical study is but a fragment magnified. It has seemed that of late the minute treatment of a multitude of intellectual phenomena has a little tended to obscure the general movement of literature in each race or country. In a crowd of handbooks, each of high authority in itself, the general trend of influence or thread of evolution may be lost.

The absence of any collection of summaries of the literature of the world has led the Publisher and the Editor of the present series to believe that a succession of attractive volumes, dealing each with the history of

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literature in a single country, would be not less welcome than novel. The Editor has had the good fortune to interest in this project a number of scholars whose names guarantee a rare combination of exact knowledge with the power of graceful composition. He has the pleasure of being able to announce that this interest has taken a practical shape, and that already there is being prepared for the press a considerable series of volumes, most of them composed by men pre-eminently recognised for their competence in each special branch of the subject. If there are one or two names less generally familiar to the public than the rest, the Editor confidently predicts that the perusal of their volumes will more than justify his invitation to them to contribute. Great care will be taken to preserve uniformity of form and disposition, so as to make the volumes convenient for purposes of comparison, and so as to enable the literatures themselves to be studied in proper correlation.

In preparing these books, the first aim will be to make them exactly consistent with all the latest discoveries of fact; and the second, to ensure that they are agreeable to read. It is hoped that they will be accurate enough to be used in the class-room, and yet pleasant enough and picturesque enough to be studied by those who seek nothing from their books but enjoyment. An effort will be made to recall the history of literature from the company of sciences which have somewhat unduly borne her down—from philology, in particular, and from political history. These have their interesting and valuable influence upon literature, but she is independent of them, and is strong enough to be self-reliant.

EDITOR'S GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Hence, important as are the linguistic origins of each literature, and delightful as it may be to linger over the birth of language, little notice will here be taken of what are purely philological curiosities. We shall tread the ground rapidly until we reach the point where the infant language begins to be employed in saying something characteristic and eloquent. On the other hand, a great point will be made, it is hoped, by dwelling on the actions, the counter-influences, of literatures on one another in the course of their evolution, and by noting what appear to be the causes which have led to a revival here and to a decline there. In short, we shall neglect no indication of change or development in an adult literature, and our endeavour will be to make each volume a well-proportioned biography of the intellectual life of a race, treated as a single entity. Literature will be interpreted as the most perfect utterance of the ripest thought by the finest minds, and to the classics of each country rather than to its oddities and rather than to its obsolete features will particular attention be directed.

EDMUND GOSSE.

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A HISTORY OF BOHEMIAN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST BOHEMIAN POETRY

IF it were possible to compare the greatest literature of the world with that of a small and little-known country, it might be said that the "Question of the Manuscripts" is the necessary beginning of every account of Bohemian literature, just as the "Homeric Question" must form the commencement of every work on the literature of Greece. The "Question of the Manuscripts" turns on the genuineness of two documents which first became known at the beginning of the present century, and were supposed to be the most ancient writings in the Bohemian language. These manuscripts have from the first attracted great notice, and they gave a great impulse to the revival of Bohemian literature in the present century. The Manuscript of Königinhof is also by no means devoid of poetical merit, and these documents will therefore always have to be mentioned, even should it be finally proved that both were forgeries.

The manuscript that was first discovered is the so-called *Rukopis Kralodvorsky* or Manuscript of König-

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inhof.¹ It was stated that this document had been found by Venceslas Hanka (afterwards librarian of the Bohemian Museum) in the tower of the deanery church of Königinhof, or Kralové Dvur, on September 16, 1817. It was further declared that Hanka's attention had first been attracted to the manuscript by Borč, chaplain at Königinhof, who was previously aware of its existence. The discovery at Königinhof immediately created great sensation even in countries very distant from Bohemia, a circumstance all the more worthy of note as Bohemia was then even more unknown than it now is. Goethe was greatly interested in the new discovery, to which he frequently refers in his writings, and he himself published a translation, or rather adaptation, of the *Kytice* (Nosegay), one of the lyrical poems of the Manuscript of Königinhof. Numerous translations of these poems into English,² German, Polish, Russian, Italian, and other languages soon appeared, and the interest was of course yet far greater in Bohemia itself, where they became the recognised models for the Bohemian writers who were then beginning to revive the national language.

Though some doubts as to the genuineness of the manuscript were expressed from the moment of its appearance, yet the majority of the Bohemian learned men, including such authorities as Palacký and Šafařík, firmly maintained its ancient origin. Within the last twenty years a change has taken place. Perhaps the majority of the Bohemian philologists of the present day believe

¹ Königinhof is a small town in North-Eastern Bohemia.

² Some of the poems of the Manuscript of Königinhof were translated into English many years ago by the late Sir John Bowring, whose knowledge of the Bohemian language was, however, very slight. The late Rev. A. H. Wratislaw published in 1852 an English translation of the Manuscripts of Königinhof and Grüneberg.

the manuscript to be a forgery, that is to say, that it was written at the beginning of the present century. Its genuineness has been attacked from the palæographic point of view; it has been attempted to prove anachronisms in the manuscript; and it has been asserted that it contains verbal formations unknown to the early Bohemian language. A chemical examination of the manuscript has, however, proved that it differs in no way from authentic Bohemian manuscripts of the fourteenth century, and it can therefore now be affirmed that the Manuscript of Königinhof cannot be attacked from the point of view of palæography.¹ The defenders of the manuscript have been less successful in their endeavours to disprove the statement that it contains anachronisms, which could not have been committed by a writer of the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The almost complete darkness which surrounds the condition of the Slavonic race in very early times renders it very difficult to form a judgment on many of the disputed points. The defenders of the manuscript also lay stress on its similarity to undoubtedly genuine collections of early Bohemian writings, such as those known as the Manuscript of Königgrätz and that of St. Vitus. It is true that the contents of these collections differ somewhat from those of the manuscript, and are mainly of a religious character.

As regards the philological test, it is certain that the manuscript contains some verbal formations of which no other example can be found in the scanty remains of early Bohemian writings that have been preserved. On the other hand, in consequence of the very scantiness of these remains, a *Ἀπαξ Λεγόμενον* does not necessarily

¹ My authority for this statement is Mr. Adolphus Patera, chief librarian of the Bohemian Museum at Prague, and one of the greatest living authorities on Bohemian palæography.

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prove the falsehood of the document in which we find it. The defenders of the manuscript have shown great ingenuity in proving that many of the locutions, unknown to ancient Bohemian, may be traced to the Moravian dialect, which at all times has differed somewhat from the language of Bohemia. They therefore maintain that the poems of the manuscript originated not in Bohemia itself, but in the sister-land, Moravia.

If the falsehood of the manuscript be admitted, the question arises, Who was the falsifier? who at the beginning of the present century, when the Bohemian language was at its lowest level, had a sufficient knowledge of that language to have written these poems? Hanka, of whom it is natural to think, has left us verses of his own so vastly inferior to some of the poems contained in the manuscript, that it is almost impossible to believe him to have been its author.¹

Whatever may be the final result of the discussion, the Manuscript of Königinhof will always remain one of the curiosities of literature. The first part of the manuscript consists of six ballads, if we may thus describe them, five of which deal with warlike events; the first,² which describes a battle between the Bohemians and the Germans, has a distinctly heathen character. The sixth ballad contains a description of a tournament, and is one of those pieces in which the opponents of the genuineness of the manuscript think that they have discovered anachronisms. The second part of the manuscript con-

¹ Though the controversy concerning the MS. of Königinhof or Králove Dvur still continues, and its genuineness still finds believers, hardly any Bohemian scholars now believe in the authenticity of the MS. Strong and increasing evidence tends to the supposition that the poems are a work of Wenceslas Hanka.

² I follow the classification of Dr. Jireček's edition (1879); recent writers have divided the contents of the manuscript somewhat differently.

sists of eight shorter songs. Some of them are by no means devoid of poetic merit, but they have a somewhat sentimental manner, which makes them appear rather modern to the reader. The adversaries of the manuscript have not been slow in noting this circumstance. I shall only translate one of the short poems of the manuscript, entitled "The Cuckoo":—

*"In the fields there stands an oak-tree,
On the oak-tree a cuckoo calls:
He ever calls, he laments
That spring does not last for ever.
How could the wheat ripen in the fields
If spring lasted for ever?
How could the apples ripen in the garden
If summer lasted for ever?
Would not the ears of corn freeze in the stack
If autumn lasted for ever?
Would not the maiden be mournful
If her solitude lasted for ever?"*

In view of the uncertainty concerning the authenticity of the Manuscript of Königinhof, it is obviously impossible to assign a date to it. The writers who believe in its genuine character hold that the poems were transcribed and collected in their present shape at the end of the thirteenth or the beginning of the fourteenth century, but that some of them are of far higher antiquity. The distinctly heathen character of one of these poems renders this certain, of course, if only we can dismiss the supposition of a modern falsification.

The second ancient Bohemian manuscript that was supposed to have been discovered at the beginning of the present century is that of Zelená Hora or Grüneberg, which is generally mentioned in connection with the Manuscript of Königinhof, and is printed together with it

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in most editions. It has now been proved that the Manuscript of Grüneberg is a falsification dating from the present century, and its genuineness is now no longer maintained by any scholars, though a natural patriotic feeling has rendered it painful to many to admit that this manuscript, which was attributed to the ninth century, and described as "the most ancient document in Bohemian, and indeed in all Slavonic literature," is nothing but a fraudulent imposture.

It is proverbially easy to be wise *post eventum*, that is, in this case, after the fact of a forgery is recognised, but it is difficult to repress very natural surprise that the mysterious manner in which the Manuscript of Grüneberg first became known did not create greater suspicion than was actually the case. The manuscript was (in 1818) sent anonymously by post to Francis Count Kolovrat-Liebsteinsky, then high burgrave (or governor) of Bohemia. That nobleman had shortly before published an appeal to the Bohemians in favour of the National or Bohemian Museum, of which he was one of the founders, and which had as principal object the preservation of the relics of Bohemian antiquity. It was not until many years later that John Kovár, steward on Count Colloredo's estate of Grüneberg, declared that he had found the manuscript in an outlying room of the castle of Grüneberg; he further stated that he had believed his master, Count Colloredo, to have been so thoroughly German in his feelings that he would have destroyed the manuscript had it been shown to him. It is difficult for others than Bohemians to realise the absurdity of such a statement. The strictly absolutist government of Austria during the first half of the present century inexorably suppressed all public demonstrations