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Studying the Russians

IF not wider knowledge at least, a new variety is to be one of the intellectual results of the war. Geography and language have come into greater prominence. National aspirations and temperaments are being studied. A better knowledge is growing of other nations' methods and aims of life. The Russian people have been little known to Canadians. Russian writers complain that Britons have not sought information about them in the right method, that while we have some Russian literature translated into English, we do not know those books which describe real Russian people, especially the works of Gogol, who is represented as the Russian Dickens. Few works of characteristic Russian poets have been translated into English. One critic expresses the complaint in this way: The British do not take their ideas of Russia from Russian literature, etc., but from English fiction.

The Russo-Japanese war did stir up an English interest in Russian affairs, and from the war correspondents of that campaign considerable information as to the people was presented to English readers. Their observations are now of special interest regarding the army, which is aiding in the suppression of Prussian auto-cracy. Mr. Maurice Baring, who represented the Morning Post in that campaign, gives his opinion that the Russian private soldier seemed to afford the finest fighting material conceivable. In the first place he is indifferent to death; in the second place he will fight as long as he is told to do so. He will endure any amount of hardships and privations naturally and without complaining. It is often said that the Russian soldier is admirable on the defensive, and when qualities of endurance are needed, but that he is no good on the offensive. But Mr. Baring considered this is a catch word which has no foundation in fact, the truth being that the Russian soldiers will go anywhere and do anything, only that the amount of dash of which he will be capable will depend on the amount of dash with which he is led.

"If I were asked my main impression as to the Russian army," writes Mr. Baring, "I should answer that the army was good, but the system was bad. Which is equivalent to saying what a Russian officer said to me—namely, that the Russian people were good fellows, but the Government, i.e., the bureaucracy, was damnable. . . . The same idea appears to be occurring to the whole Russian nation at this moment." And it has been a factor in material improvement in the Russian army in the ten years elapsed since the Japanese war.

MR. BARING also thought there was a lack of generals, which, however, had been felt by many nations at many and various epochs, ancient and modern, from the days of Xerxes to the days of MacMahon and Kruger—a lack which is by no means a Russian idiosyncrasy.

Russians, he concluded, were infinitely superior to Japanese in cavalry, but the country was unsuited for the use of this army. Superiority was also with the Russians in accuracy of artillery fire and actual quality of their guns. Special praise was given to the Siberian batteries whose officers were highly instructed and exceedingly capable.

Russian military authorities had considered the South African war too small an affair to observe carefully. Hence they did not profit from its lessons. They have profited by their own war with Japan, and the new Russian army is a far better implement than that which the Japanese defeated. It is bound to be more aggressive. The soldier did not understand why he was fighting in China, what had Manchuria to do with Russia? But the same soldier now certainly understands why he is fighting against Germans on Russian soil. An English officer who watched the Manchurian campaign, expressed the opinion that you could do anything with Russian soldiers if you could kindle their amour propre, and, that once done, they would be more formidable in attack than on the defensive.



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