

SLAV AND CELT.

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It has been long recognized that language is not a final test of race; that is, of race in the anthropological sense. It must be remembered, however, that in current usage the word "race" is not employed to indicate the primitive long-heads, short-heads and round-heads of strict anthropology, about which many modern educated people know and care next to nothing, but rather to denote what should be properly defined as "tribal groups," which subsequently developed into "nationalities," and then into political "nations." Such primitive tribal "races" were originally nothing more than groups of families fortuitously speaking the same language or kindred dialects, who were forced together for purposes of mutual protection, or for the purpose of conquest over weaker and richer peoples. Such a tribal nucleus was the beginning of every modern nation-group. It is, therefore, quite obvious that a "pure" race, that is, a race originating from and maintaining a single strain can not be in existence at the present time. In order to determine national trend development, the student of group characteristics must, therefore, refer to environment and the common interests bred by common speech, rather than to skull-shape or other bodily peculiarities which often vary in individuals of one and the same family.

Mutual comprehensibility and the possession of a common hereditary trend are the two most important features of such influential environment. The peoples now termed "Slavs" and "Celts" must consequently be classified each within their own group from the point of view of their respective speech-groups (= influence-groups), and may be studied still more closely by a comparison of the traditions which have given rise to their mental and spiritual characteristics.

It is the thesis of this paper to set forth how Slavs and Celts, although speaking widely varying branches of the Indo-European linguistic family, are nonetheless strikingly similar to each other in habits of mind and expression.

The Slav, in spite of his prominence in the great war, is even yet but little understood by the West. In fact, the majority of Americans do not even know who these people are, nor whence they come. The Slavonic family is essentially a linguistic division. Indeed, the very word "Slav" probably means 'he who can speak intelligibly' from the same root as *slovo* 'word,' in distinction from non-Slavs, who are known as *njemcy* 'dumb ones,' i.e., unintelligible speakers, a term originally applied by Slavs to all foreigners, but now exclusively to the Germans. The derivation of "Slav" from *slava* 'glory' is unimportant, as *slava* itself is probably but a variant of the *slov-slav*-root meaning 'speak, proclaim.' The Slavonic tribes are much more numerous to-day than their congeners the modern Celts.

There are six linguistic divisions of Slavonic speaking nationalities, viz., Russians, who are subdivided into Great Russians, White Russians and Ukrainians (Little Russians); Poles (with Kashubians); Slovaks, who extend across the entire northern border of what was Hungary, from the Ukrainian language-line on the east to the Bohemian border on the west; Bohemians (Czechs) embracing also the Moravian population to the south of them, both tribes speaking a distinctly western Slavonic idiom; Serbs and Croats on the south, who differ only in that they write their common speech, the Serbs in the Cyrillic (Russian) and the Croats in the Latin alphabet; and finally the Bulgarians who speak a simplified form of Slavonic and whose dialects extend, not only through political Bulgaria, but also through a large part of Macedonia. To the Serbo-Croats must be added the Montenegrins and also the Slovenes, inhabiting the district just behind Trieste, and, strangely enough, the little linguistic island of Wends in Saxony and Prussia, who, although separated by centuries of isolation from their southern Slavonic cousins, still use a distinctly Serbo-Slavonic form of speech (Sorbian).

These then are the Slavs, and it will at once be observed that

the distinction between them and also their common bond is one of *language* and not of *race*. It may be predicated that language really carries with it a well-marked aura of influence which permeates a people to the very marrow. While language is in one sense merely a vehicle of expression, it also aids thought and directs trends of mind. It would be difficult otherwise to explain the striking similarity of these various Slavonic nationalities to one another, because they come racially from many stocks.

For example, the Bulgarians are really Huns, whose parent tribe in the latter days of the Byzantine empire, swept across southern Russia like a storm and either drove out or dominated the Serbo-Slavs of the Balkan peninsula. The invaders soon lost their original speech and adopted a modified and corrupted form of the local Slavonic idiom which has since developed into the modern Bulgarian language. The Bulgarian is the *enfant terrible* among these nations, selfishly bound up in his own tribe and hating bitterly his neighbors, the Serbs and Croats. The Bulgarian is to this day in his trends and habit of thought, in short, in all but his speech, more of a Hun than a Slav. The Serbs and Croats are also of fairly mixed race, although they are chiefly descended from original Slavonic speaking tribes which came from the north into the Balkans in the sixth Christian century. This clan has always been a strong warrior nation distinguished by its love of reasonable freedom. The Bohemians and Moravians have a very strong Germanic admixture of blood, for which reason they are politically the most stable-minded of the entire family. The Hungarian Slovaks cannot boast of a pure Slavonic speaking origin, as they became mixed in early times with Tatar¹ (Turkic) tribes and more recently with their Finno-Ugric Magyar neighbors and former overlords, a double admixture which has given to the Slovak the low forehead and broad features suggestive of non-Indo-European origin. These Slovaks are essentially a laboring class, highly industrious, but rather addicted to drink.

The Poles assert that they are the only pure Slavonic stock, but even among them appears the blond Scandinavian and North

¹ Cf. J. D. Prince, "Tartar Material in Old Russian," *Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc.*, 1919, pp. 74-88.

German type left by the ravages of the Thirty Years War. The Poles possess the most extremely individualized character of all the Slavs. In other words, among them tribal feeling has developed into a real national patriotism which was at first not evident in their history. Welded together into a great European power by the early Jagiello princess of Lithuanian origin, the Poles, as soon as the Jagiello line died out, began unwittingly to plot their own ruin by insisting in their parliament on the principle of the unanimous vote for all measures (*liberum veto*), so that a single member might veto a bill, or even demand an immediate adjournment, which the rest of the Diet was powerless to prevent. During the past century, however, during which this gallant and individualistic nation passed through an ordeal of fire at the hands of Germans, Russians and Austrians, a much deeper spirit of inherent solidarity has shown itself among them, and this, it is to be hoped, may weld Poland once more by internal force into as strong a European influence as she became under the external pressure of the Lithuanian Jagiellos. Strange to say, until recent times, the Poles, unlike their congeners, have never felt the pressing need of a spiritually united Slavia. Naturally hating the Russians, despising the more prosaic Czechs and Slovaks, and ignoring the Serbs and Croatians, the Pole has remained, and is unfortunately inclined to remain, splendidly aloof from his Slavonic brethren. In spite of this wilful isolation, Polish characteristics do not differ fundamentally from those of the other Slavs. Finally in this connection, the Serbs and Croatians constitute a strong race, of mixed stock, it is true, but of genuine Slavonic spirit. Touched by Turkish on the east and south and by Magyar on the north and west, this people through centuries of darkness and oppression by Turks, Magyars and Austrian Germans have retained the spirit seen in all Slavia.

The only Celtic tongued peoples extant to-day are the Gaelic speaking Irish, Manks and Highland Scotch and their distant linguistic cousins of Armorican speech, the Welsh and the Bretons of France. The allied Armorican Cornish disappeared as a living language about 1789.² These tribes are mutually incomprehensible when using Celtic, for the Gaelic dialects of Ireland and Scotland

² H. Jenner, "Handbook of the Cornish Language," London, 1904, p. 21.

and the scanty remnant of Gaelic in Man,³ although mutually similar to the philologist, are, when spoken, far apart from one another phonetically, while the Armorican idioms, Welsh and Breton, are not only almost incomprehensible to each other, but are divided by a great phonetic and morphological gulf from the Gaelic branch. So here we have people to whom the rule of similarity of language just expounded for the Slav would seem not to apply, and yet these tribes are all strikingly alike in thought and trend of mind, and it is especially noticeable that among the Celts who have lost their original tongues, such as the central French and mid-European Germans, this spirit has practically disappeared. The rule for Slavs and Celts is really the same, although obscured, for in ancient days, the Gaelic Celts of Ireland, Scotland and Man were mutually intelligible, as their educated classes still are, and even the Armorican, whose tongue was once the idiom of all southern Britain, drew from the same linguistic fountain-head as did the Gaels. The fact that the influence still lasts is due to the extreme traditionalism of the Celt who has clung to his ancient tendencies handed down to him in early oral literatures, varying to-day in language, but similar in thought and trend.

What then is the common Slavo-Celtic spirit which seems to connect these two geographically remote Indo-European branches? What force underlies the folk-literature of Slav and Celt alike, inspiring both Slavonic and Celtic music and poetry, with a common fire, showing similar trends in the thought of both peoples, and moulding the individual disposition along closely similar lines?

The underlying similarity seems to be twofold; viz., (*a*) temperamental discontent, and (*b*) morbid joy in sorrow.

(*a*) The most important point in common is perhaps the quality of longing, a passionate desire for the unattainable, which, when reached, shall give perfect joy, in other words, a spirit of res'less quest. Thus, the Slavonic religious ideals, demanding intensive, often absurd personal sacrifices, long fasts or arduous pilgrimages

³ There is hardly a score of people to-day in Man who can converse in Manx. When the writer was in Man in 1897, a Mr. Cashell of Port Erin was almost the only person who could talk Manx fluently. He told me that at that time there were about twenty-five people who had a thorough knowledge of the language.

made under circumstances of enforced privation, similar to the self-inflicted tortures of the Hindu devotees, may be compared with the Celtic fasts and semi-monastic ideals. Mysticism in general is a common bond between the Slav and Celt. Slav and Celt alike seem careless of their success or even survival, so strong is the impelling discontent with the present world. Renan wrote of the unending quest of the Celt the following words which apply equally well to the Slav: "This race desires the infinite, it thirsts for it, and pursues it at all costs, beyond the tomb—beyond Hell itself."⁴ The Celtic legend of the quest of the Holy Grail, the mysterious chalice of the Last Supper which was regarded as a physical link between Man and God should be mentioned here. It is highly significant that the Celtic Grail-cup could be found only by a physically sex-pure man, an idea which gave the world the later character of Sir Galahad, unknown in the earlier Grail accounts, a man who "never felt the kiss of love, nor maiden's hand in his."⁵ This conception of the necessity of absolute sex-purity exists so strongly among the Slavs that an entire sect, the Russian *Skopcy* have devoted themselves to this ideal by an ordinance requiring voluntary sterilization, which is still rigidly observed. The Celts, apparently, have not been guilty of such a caricature, although some of their ancient monks may have resorted to this method of ensuring continence. The Slavs seem to have nothing so definite in their lore as the quest of the Grail, which the Celts not only sought, but actually found.

(b) Accomplishment is not a necessary adjunct to Slavonic "success" and this principle constitutes the second point of resemblance between the Slavonic and Celtic characteristics; a morbid delight in sorrow and especially in failure.

The first thing which strikes the student of modern Russian literature is that scarcely a tale emphasizes the qualities which make for success in the formation of human character. Hardly anywhere in these productions do we find the hero battling his way through difficulties to an eventual success due to his own efforts. Stephen

⁴ Cf. "The Celt and the World," by Shane Leslie, N. Y., 1917. The entire work deals with the character of the Celt.

⁵ Cf. "King Arthur in History and Legend," W. Lewis Jones, Cambridge University Press, 1911, p. 107.

Graham in his recent work on this point ("The Way of Martha and the Way of Mary," London, 1915) is certainly correct in emphasizing the prevalence of this Russian "Gospel of Incompetence." It would seem as if public sympathy has been at all times, but more especially of recent years, with the unsuccessful, rather than with the successful, hero. Even in the old Russian literature, as exemplified in the "Tale of the Armament of Igor" (1185 A.D.), we find a glorification of the defeat of this prince by the Tatar hordes of the Pólovtsy. That there was, however, a healthier tone in Old Russian is evident from such a work as *Zadonščina*, where the great victory of Dimitri Donskói over the Tatar chieftain Mamai is well sung. Of late years, particularly in the Russian literature of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this same tendency is chiefly conspicuous by its absence. This Russian morbid pleasure in failure is seen also among the other Slavs, although to a less marked extent, as exemplified in such Polish songs as *Nasze skiby nasze lany* or the beautiful Czech dirge *Havliček* and also in many Serbo-Croatian poems of the sadder style.

The Celts, especially the Irish and Scotch, are remarkable for their delight in a "lost cause" which is expressed in such well-known songs as "Patrick Sarsfield" or the "Wearing of the Green" and the many Jacobite ditties of Scotland. It should be noted, however, that many songs of this style breathe a spirit of defiance or at least of obstinacy which always implies remote hope. No such implication of hope is usual in the corresponding Slavonic poetry. The Celtic morbid pleasure in death and its appurtenances such as funerals and wakes is well recognized. Wakes, known as *pominki* in Russian, are observed all over Slavia in much the same manner as among the Celts. From the purely literary point of view, it is a matter of regret that modern Welsh poetical productions have nearly all been case-hardened by the stereotyped soul-deadening form of the twenty-four meters, a system which inclines to sacrifice everything to alliteration and rhyme. The modern Welsh people have been very largely denaturalized as Celts, so far as their power of expression is concerned, by the rigid forms of Protestantism prevalent in Wales which have tinged the whole of recent Welsh literature with a dull conventionalism, thus driving out almost

entirely the spirit of ancient Welsh poetry. In spite of this fact, the Welsh and Bretons still love grief as much as any Irishman, but differ widely from the Irish Celt in lacking humor, a lack which is shared by the gloomy temper of the Scotch Gaels. The Slav, on the other hand, does not lack humor entirely,—witness such modern wits as the exquisite Russian Czechov and the Polish authoress Eugenia Zmijevska, but this quality is commonly regarded as an evidence of lightmindedness and absence of mental poise. The vast mass of Slavs are temperamental extremists, either bathed in a delicious gloom, or else given over for brief periods to slapstick wit and mad dances which, very temporarily, draw the sad Slav out of his habitual introspection. A perfect parallel to these ebullitions may be seen in the wild riot of Irish, Scotch and Breton jigs and reels, a form of music not much countenanced at present by the artificially sobered Welsh.

Old Slavonic literature⁶ is full of tales of mythical heroes who performed deeds of daring and feats of supernatural strength, strongly reminiscent of the Irish Finn McCoul. Such hero-tales are of course common to all the Indo-European peoples and are not a point of particular resemblance between Slavs and Celts.

It is interesting that both the easternmost and westernmost divisions of the peoples who speak Indo-European still retain the ancient strain of unworldliness and mysticism which so noticeably characterizes the religious devotees of the nations who still use the oriental forms of Indo-European. The stern practicality of the Teuton which has spread abroad through all the Germanic speaking lands and appears in a special form among the Latin speaking Franks is bounded east and west by a cloud of "unreal" thinkers who turn with delight to pessimism and reject success as a mere material benefit. Upon neither the Slav nor the Celt has the sun of success ever risen, because both Slav and Celt condemn success. There was a brief period, while Russia was an empire outwardly mighty under largely Germanic direction but rotten at the core with Slavonic apathy, when it appeared as if there might have been an intellectual union between Russia and the lesser Slavonic peoples.

⁶ Cf. I. Porfirieff, "History of Russian Literature" (in Russian), Part I, pp. 49 ff.

This was in fact fostered by the Pan-Slavonic movement which sought to teach the non-Russian Slavs to look to Petrograd and Moscow for their national *stimuli*. What might have come of such a movement no one can judge to-day, for with disaster the Russian character crumbled and the great mass of unthinking sheeplike peasantry fell into the hands of those who profess equality but practise coöperative slavery, while the lesser Slavonic peoples have been left to their own devices under the Allied plan of self-determination. It would be rash to prophesy the future of these newly formed states of Poland, Czecho-Slovakia and Serbo-Croatia. Poland alone has a great tradition upon which to build and her people may have developed, as indicated above, a spirit of sufficient solidarity to insure their national life.

Judging the future by the past, however, it would seem as if the Slavs would again⁷ be compelled eventually to seek the guiding hand of the stranger, for Slavs and Celts have ever been politically impossible when left to themselves. The temperamental discontent just discussed, common to both peoples, has made them supremely jealous and consequently litigious and fractious in all matters of government. Their tendency is to refuse obedience to leaders of their own nationality and to break up into small partisan groups. Among Russians especially debate is difficult. The Irish "Kilkenny Cats" are as Slavonic as they are Celtic! The fact is that Slavs and Celts are both Oriental. When Sergius N. Syromiatnikoff hinted that Russia had made her great error in turning westward instead of eastward for her ultimate culture, he was fundamentally right.⁸ The same idea was frequently expressed by Dostoievsky,

⁷ The early Slavs of Russia is summoned the Scandinavian hero Rurik (Hrörekr) and his brothers to rule over them, as they confessed that they could not govern themselves. From the Rurik family were descended the princes of Russia during the first historical period. The Russians have always required force, both under the Kingdom of Moscovy, the most notable figure of which was Ivan the Terrible, and under the subsequent Empire. The present Bolshevik government is one of open force, drafting the people to work at the point of the bayonets of the admirably disciplined and organized "Red" army.

⁸ Sergius Nikolayevich Syromiatnikoff, "Experiments in Russian Thought" (in Russian), Book I, St. Petersburg, 1901. This work is a most interesting exposition of the eastward trend in Russian thought. It has unfortunately not been translated.

particularly in his "Journal of a Writer," the last number of which, January, 1881, contains a most elaborate plea for the Asiatic expansion of Russia in preference to a distinctly western trend. Slavs and Celts are Oriental character-types in Europe requiring the strong hand of western administration to guide them to efficiency. Their thought-basis is from the East and they have never been thoroughly westernized. Full of individual kindliness and charm, lacking the qualities which make for that worldly success which both peoples in general despise, these eastern and western European tribes, if rightly controlled and guided, should be a welcome counter-balance to the too rigid materialism of the Germanic peoples and the cold selfishness of the tribes of the Latin dispersion.



Prince, John Dyneley. 1920. "Slav and Celt." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society held at Philadelphia for promoting useful knowledge* 59(220), 184–193.

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