

HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN FLEET DURING THE REIGN OF PETER THE GREAT

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History of the Russian fleet during the reign of Peter the Great by Cyprian A. G. Bridge

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CYPRIAN A. G. BRIDGE

**HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN
FLEET DURING THE REIGN
OF PETER THE GREAT**

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THE RUSSIAN FLEET
UNDER
PETER THE GREAT

47668

HISTORY
OF
The Russian Fleet (2)



DURING THE REIGN OF

PETER THE GREAT

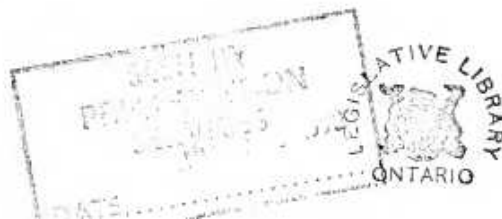
BY
A CONTEMPORARY ENGLISHMAN
(1724)

EDITED BY
VICE-ADMIRAL CYPRIAN A. G. BRIDGE, K.C.B.

47668



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INTRODUCTION

THE MS., of which the present edition—it is believed—is the first that has been printed in English, has already been published in Russian. It was translated by Count E. Poutiatine, whose property it is, and issued about two years ago. A review of the translation will be found in the 'Proceedings (No. 19) of the Anglo-Russian Literary Society,' written by the President, Mr. E. A. Cazalet, to whose courtesy the Navy Records Society owes the possibility of making it accessible to English readers. The title given to his work by the author is slightly misleading. It is really a history of Peter the Great's Baltic fleet. It does not deal with the naval transactions of an earlier part of Peter's reign, in the Sea of Azof and the Black Sea, but makes only passing allusions to them. In its present form the MS. seems to be a copy, by a clerk or professional copyist, in a style of writing common in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, of the author's original MS. There are a few apparently contemporary corrections,¹ in a somewhat rugged hand, much more

¹ Most, if not all, of the corrections are just those likely to be found necessary in the work of a copyist. Generally they are

likely to be that of a sea officer of the time than the regular one in which the work has reached us. There is one interpolation of considerable length (two MS. pages), which also seems in its present form to be the work of a copyist, whose handwriting differs a little from that of the transcriber of the greater part of the book, principally in the shape of certain letters and in being rather clearer. As a whole, however, the writing leaves little to be desired in the matter of clearness.

The literary style of the work resembles that of a log-book, so much so, indeed, that it is reasonable to assume that it was 'written up' as the events which it records occurred. It was completed in 1724—at page 67 of the MS. the author mentions 'the present year, 1724'—and thus its story ends a few months before the date of Peter the Great's death. Though the author describes himself merely as 'A Contemporary Englishman,' it is probable, or indeed nearly certain, that he was an officer in Peter's navy. His familiarity, not only with the proceedings of the fleet and of individual ships, but also

omissions made good, and are to be found on the following pages as numbered in the MS. itself: Pp. 2, 5, 11, 44, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 67, 68; and smaller ones on MS. pp. 10, 13, 15, 16, 26, 27, 31, 36; and three on p. 71. The corrections on MS. pp. 11 (omission rectified), 16 (number of guns), 26 (ditto), 27 ('Revell' [*sic*] added), 36 ('in line of battle' inserted), and 71 (two dates of dismissal, a name, and a date of death), are in a different hand, probably that of the author himself. The last correction on this page includes the date '1724,' and was, perhaps, added after the copying out of the original MS. had been completed.

The lower part of the leaf containing MS. pages 23, 24 has been cut off and a slip of paper pasted on in its place. In binding the MS. the margins of several leaves have been cut away, a word at the end of a line being mutilated here and there.

with minor incidents in the inner life of the body whose history he was writing, cannot be satisfactorily explained on any other supposition. He had, in an eminent degree, the gift of caution, of which a good specimen will be seen in his allusion to the campaign of devastation on the coast of Sweden in 1719. In the concluding portion of his work, where he discusses generally what may be called the naval position of Russia, he speaks with less reserve; perhaps because the earlier portion was written year by year whilst he was in the Russian service, when his MSS. would not have been secure against unfriendly inspection, whilst the rest was probably committed to paper after he had returned to his own country. Owing to his caution and to his persistent reticence about himself, it is impossible to identify him from internal evidence. The title—indeed the fact of there being a formal title to the book—would make it appear likely that it was composed with the deliberate intention of publishing it. The English reading public was interested in the Russia of the day. Nevertheless, the work is not one which would have been likely to entertain many readers. It had, as it still has, its value. That value, however, is of a technical and, so to speak, official character. Its comparative brevity and its contents would go far to justify us in awarding it a place in a particular class of 'Reports.' It is just the sort of document which a British subject, who had been employed in the naval or military service of a foreign state, might be expected to prepare for submission to his own Government on his return home. There is, however, no external evidence