

**A RUSSIAN
SCHOOLBOY**

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A Russian schoolboy by Serge Aksakoff

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SERGE AKSAKOFF

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SCHOOLBOY**

A RUSSIAN SCHOOLBOY

UNIFORM WITH THIS VOLUME

YEARS OF CHILDHOOD

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and

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By **SERGE AKSAKOFF**

Translated from the Russian by

J. D. DUFF

Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge

LONDON: EDWARD ARNOLD

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1917

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TO
P. W. D.
AND
M. G. D.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THESE recollections of school and college were published by Aksákoff in 1856, when he was in his sixty-fifth year. He called them merely *Recollections*: he did not then know that he would record other and still earlier memories in the book called *Years of Childhood*.

A Russian Schoolboy, the title chosen for this translation, is not a misnomer: when Aksákoff left Kazán in the spring of 1807, he was still a boy of fifteen, though his school had been promoted by imperial decree to the dignity of a university. As a student he wore a sword with his uniform, but little change took place in his occupations. His university studies are remarkable: he learnt no Greek, no Latin, no Mathematics, and very little Science—hardly anything but Russian and French; and even to these he seems to have given less time than to acting plays in the winter and collecting butterflies in spring and summer; fishing and shooting were reserved for the vacation. If our universities adopted such a pleasant curriculum, would they produce writers like Aksákoff?

This is the third and last volume of these Memoirs, the right order being: (1) *A Russian Gentleman*; (2) *Years of Childhood*; (3) *A Russian Schoolboy*. But the first and third of these were published together by Aksákoff in 1856, and the second followed in 1858; he died on April 30, 1859.

He himself did not use in this work the pseudonyms

which he kept up throughout the other two. Hence in this part of the translation Aksákoff and Aksákovo appear, not Bagróff and Bagróvo; but, to save confusion to the reader, three names—those of Alexyéi Stepánitch, Sófya Nikoláyevna, and Praskóvya Ivánovna—are here retained, though they are all pseudonyms and were temporarily discarded by their author.

The Appendix, as it describes an episode of college life, forms a natural part of this volume. It was the last thing that Aksákoff wrote, and was not printed till six months after his death. He had suffered much from disease, but his artistic faculty was not dimmed nor his temper embittered: he never wrote anything more vivid, more characteristic, more charming.

This translation has been made from the Moscow edition of 1900. I know of no previous translation of the original into any language.

I have now done what I meant to do, by translating the whole of these Memoirs into English. Whether I shall in future translate more of Aksákoff, I do not know. I can myself read with pleasure all that he wrote—except his verse translation of Laharpe's French translation of the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles. But it will not hurt his reputation, if he is known to English readers by his best work only. What they cannot realise is the inimitable purity and simplicity, the *lactea ubertas*, of his Russian style.

Aksákoff is his own best critic: he wrote to a friend on April 10, 1856—

“The success of my life has surprised me. You know that my vanity was never excessive, and it remains what it was, in spite of all the praise, sometimes extravagant to folly, which has reached me in print or in letters or