

THE STORY OF THE
RUTHENIANS

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—BY—

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A Typical Ruthenian Home



Ruthenian Women just from the Old Land

THE STORY OF THE RUTHENIANS

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1. Who are the Ruthenians?

Ten or fifteen years ago the problem of the races in Canada was very simple. There were two leading races—the English speaking and the French, but, in the last few years, many other races have been coming forward to share with us the bounties of our wonderful country.

The most important class of these foreign peoples who have recently come among us are the immigrants of Slavonic races from Eastern Austria and from Russia: most numerous among these are the people popularly called the Galicians. Some of our country folks have supposed that they must be the same people to whom Paul wrote his famous epistle, and so they call them "Galatians". This notion, however, is a mistake; they come not from Galatia in Asia Minor, but from the Austrian Province of Galicia, which lies on the borders of Russia. Thus immigrants may be either Poles, or Germans, or Ruthenians, or Jews—all coming from Galicia. Galicia is only the name of the Province they happened to inhabit.

Now, of these Galician immigrants to Canada the most numerous apparently are the Ruthenians their number is estimated to be nearing the quarter million mark. The name "Ruthenian" is a modification of the word "Russian". The Russian nation is divided into three great groups; the Great Russians, the White Russians and the Little Russians. The Ruthenians are the Little Russians. Most of them live in the Ukraine, in Russia, but there are a few millions of them in Austria and a million or more scattered in the United States, Canada and Brazil; their total number is thirty millions. They are in truth the original Russians, they gave their name to Russia; they were the first to become civilized, but incessant wars and internal dissensions crushed their efforts at progress, and for centuries their

nationality has been kept in darkness by the Poles on one side, and the Great Russians on the other.



Prince Vladimir of Kiev.

II. Christianity Among the Ruthenians.

Christianity was introduced among the Ruthenians as far back as the close of the tenth century, during the reign of the famous Prince Vladimir of Kiev. Many stories are told about Vladimir and his acceptance of Christianity. It is said that he sent a delegation around to various countries to examine the different forms of religion and report which was best. The delegates

were most impressed by the service in the great church of St. Sophia in Byzantium, (now Constantinople), where, they said they heard angels singing in the choir. Vladimir, having decided to accept Christianity as represented by the Greek church, had priests and bishops brought from Byzantium, and the people were marched into the river and were baptised wholesale.

Such was the beginning of Christianity among the Ruthenians, and for centuries they remained true to the Greek Orthodox Church of Russia and the East, but, somewhere in the thirteenth century, Galicia was lost to Russia and passed under the control of Poland. From that time to this an unceasing campaign of proselytising has been carried on amongst them to bring them over to the Roman Catholic Church.

About the year 1595 a number of Ruthenian bishops who resented the exactions of the Eastern Metropolitans and Patriarchs, and the democratic organizations of church brotherhoods, secretly made an agreement with Rome, by which they were to acknowledge the authority of the Pope, but were to keep the Greek ritual and customs, including the marriage of the priests. Thus began the UN!AT church, Greek in its form of worship, but open always to, and dominated by, Roman Catholic influence and suggestions, and treated as a temporary half way house between the Greek Church and the Roman. Rome was successful in spite of strenuous opposition of a large number of Ruthenian people and clergy who resented the Romish rule.

By strange happenings in the destiny of Poland, this country was, in later years, divided up among Prussia, Austria and Russia. Galicia passed into the hands of Roman Catholic Austria, and the rest of the Ukraine to Greek Orthodox Russia. While under Polish rule in the Ukraine, strenuous efforts were made to bring the people over to Rome. No sooner had the Ukraine passed under the control of Russia than the people were with even less ceremony herded back into the Orthodox fold.

III. Ruthenians in America.

The beginning of Ruthenian immigration to the United States dates back about half a century, although it was only twenty years ago, or thereabouts, that the first representatives of the race began to make their appearance in Canada.

The religious history of the Ruthenians in America has been a very checkered one. The Roman Church, of course, asserted its claim on the people in virtue of the Union with Rome. But the people claimed the rights which this Union gave them, especially the rights of having married priests. This the Roman church has refused to allow. Further, the Roman Catholic authorities have insisted on bringing the Ruthenian priests under the authority of the local Bishops who were usually either French or Irish. This has caused some trouble. Then, the Roman Catholic Church regularly demanded the title of the church property to be made over to the Bishop, but the people in the United States and Canada, getting infected with democratic ideas, quite frequently refused this.

These are only a few of the numerous sources of friction which have disposed the Ruthenians on this continent to break away from the Roman Union, and either go over to the Orthodox Church of Russia or to form independent bodies, or even to listen favourably to Protestant teaching. It may be said that liberal and Protestant ideas are spreading among them very rapidly, but it must be remembered that there is a vast gap between our ways of thinking and theirs, and, that, on the whole, we must look forward to a long task of love and patience before we can bring these vast masses of people into true and living sympathy with our ideals and aspirations.

IV. Canadian Ruthenians and the Presbyterian Church.

In Canada one of the outstanding results of the Ruthenian resentment of Rome rule and the influence of our democratic institutions is the very important and influential movement represented by the so-called Independent Greek

Church of Canada. This movement for the last ten years has been assisted and fostered by the Presbyterian Church. Leading men from among the Ruthenians had repeatedly been approaching our Home Mission authorities in Winnipeg, asking for advice and help. Finally an understanding was reached between the two churches, on the basis of which Presbyterian help was given to the Greek body, while the Indepen-



A Protestant Ruthenian Family in Saskatchewan

dent Greek Church was to teach Protestant doctrine but might keep the Greek Forms of worship so far as these were not inconsistent with Protestant teaching.

The relations of the two Churches were much handicapped by the fact that none of our men knew much Ruthenian, and few of the Ruthenians knew much English. Then, of course, it was hard to know sometimes the character of the men who offered themselves for service. But, in spite of these difficulties, the new movement has shown marvellous vitality and exerted a vast influence throughout the Ruthenian communities. The Independent Greek missionaries have preached, often at the risk of their lives—many times have they been threatened with death. Only a few months ago one of them, a man of most excellent character and ability, was horribly murdered by religious fanatics and his wife and family left destitute. Since then, several others have received threatening letters. The Protestants of Canada have no idea of what these men have done and suffered in our cause. But as far as we are concerned, the work has been done almost in silence, for these missionaries spoke a foreign language, and amongst us they were dumb perforce.

But what of the future of this movement? At the start the wish of many of the Presbyterian leaders was that this Independent Church should continue independent, and ultimately become a self-supporting Ruthenian Church. Then, of course, there arose the questions: How long shall we require to assist them? Will they not soon be able to stand alone?

Owing to the fact that there were few interpreters between the nationalities, suspicions arose. Some of our Presbyterians began to ask why we were paying good Presbyterian dollars to help the service of another church, a very ritualistic church at that. Then, too, owing to the absence of interpreters doubt arose as to the sort of doctrine these men were teaching. Who should tell us? We had only the word of one or two of them who could speak English.

But let us look at the matter on the other hand from the standpoint of the missionary of the Independent Greek Church. He was told at the start that the Presbyterian Church would give

him a salary of \$40 a month as a colporteur, but that he would be expected to get part of his income from the field, and it was hinted that, after a while, it would be expected that his Church would be able to stand alone without Presbyterian assistance.

Very good. Please remember that the Ruthenians expect their priests to be married and our Independent Greek man must not sacrifice the principal advantage he has over the unmarried Jesuit priests who are upholding the standard of Rome. So he takes with him a wife. He needs a horse and some other things. For this he gets an advance to be deducted from his salary afterwards. He perhaps manages to rent a house in some Galician farmer's back yard, and thus, in poverty, without resources, sometimes with little previous education, without books, without guidance, he is expected to labor, and this among a people who have been accustomed to see their clergy rich, powerful and respected.

If he is in a settlement already favorably disposed to Protestant ideas, this problem is easier perhaps. He may be able to reform the ritual without much complaint, but, in many places, any great change in the form of service will lead to hostility and withdrawal of support. Here, of course, the matter of human sympathy comes in. The old father or grandmother wants to confess and receive the comfort of absolution. The poor old creatures cannot understand the new arguments, for their brains are long since stereotyped, so the Independent Greek Priest must treat them as kindly as he can; but, with the young people, he can explain things more fully, gradually opening their eyes to the original meaning of the Gospel.

But, if the missionary is in a hostile atmosphere, it may be Romanist, it may be atheist, it may be Russian Orthodox, his position is likely to be very unpleasant, for the Ruthenians still being rather primitive, and unenlightened in their ideas, sometimes resort to the most vigorous ways of vanquishing their opponents, and they find much difficulty in distinguishing between a man's views and the

man himself. If they do not like the minister's opinions they are very apt to dislike the minister.

But how about the matter of support? We must remember that these people are used to a State-supported Church, they are not educated to paying very large contributions voluntarily. But aside from the support received through tithes or Church funds, the Catholic priest derives a large part of his revenue in fees for saying masses, performing baptism, blessing the bread, and such things. Now, if the Independent Priest tells the people that blessing the bread is all nonsense, he gets no more fees for blessing the bread. If he tells them that masses do not help the souls of the dead, another part of the priest's revenue is gone. In short every movement towards Protestantism that he makes makes his livelihood, for the time being at least, the more uncertain and precarious.

When we consider these facts, we have good reason to admire these men for the heroic way in which they have steadily kept leading their people toward the fuller light. Their teaching is now thoroughly Protestant and Evangelical. It is no mild, cringing, apologetical Protestantism either, but has a boldness and fierceness worthy of Knox or Luther. In fact some of our good brethren would probably think that our friends' zeal would be better of a little constraining guidance at times. But then, we are ourselves some centuries removed from the time of the stern reformation struggle and have forgotten how our ancestors used to feel.

But now is the critical time for the Ruthenian people. A quarter of a million of them here are trembling in the balances. A hundred wild notions are in their brains. Their minds are moved hither and thither as the autumn leaves in the changing winds. The doctrines of materialistic socialism and atheism are running rampant among them. On the other side the Roman Church is pouring in men and money in the endeavour to regain its hold. The Orthodox Church of Russia has its representatives. All

over the country groups of radicals and independents with various motives, leaning either to Protestantism or to socialism are developing missionary energy.

Many of these have got the Congregationalist notion of absolute freedom of the local congregation from outside control, hence these are disposed to resent Presbyterian influence just as they would the influences of other churches. But, unfortunately, some of these movements are in the hands of unscrupulous men who wish to lead loose lives and to have ministers who will prophesy smooth things.

On the whole, the condition is precisely parallel to the condition of affairs in China at the present time. It is the breaking up of the old while the new is struggling to be born.

Amidst it all the Independent Greek Ministers are feeling lonely and discouraged. They feel, almost without exception, that their present position is untenable. There is no standing ground for them between the old Catholic position and the thorough-going Protestantism. Practically all of them want to come over to the Presbyterian Church. As it is they have been giving some of the best years of their lives to this hard and dangerous task. Amid the present conditions self-support from among the people is out of the question, and will be for some years to come except in a very few localities. Who would think of sending Protestant missionaries to the Catholic populations of South America and expect them to begin by asking the people for support? The case is no different here, except that we have a very large proportion of the people favorably disposed and willing to listen to what we have to say. Some will subscribe fairly liberally for church buildings, and so on. Others will not put their names down but will give a dollar or two privately. These, like thousands of others, have been scared away from us by the stories industriously circulated among them, that if the Presbyterians once get their names, they will soon come and take their farms away from them, or make them pay annual tithes, or some other terrible thing. But

surely everybody knows how difficult it is to get even English or Scotch people who have been used to a State-church to pay very much for the pastor's support.

In the present wild religious unrest among the Ruthenians, it is imperative that our representative should be secure from financial worry, and should be able to live in a way to command the respect of the people. In spite of all our talk about the beauty of self-denial, the plain truth is that our own people are too apt to look down on a shabby minister, and it is no different with the Ruthenians.

We have already spent a good deal of money on this work. We cannot afford to drop it. Of course, if we had had things all our own way, and there had been no competing advisers, things would have been very much nicer from our standpoint. But it is hardly the Presbyterian way to drop a thing just because it proves to be a little bit difficult. We praise the heroism of our early missionaries in India and China who toiled for years with hardly any visible fruit for their labours. Why should we fail our friends of the Independent Greek Church who have already opened the Gospel to thousands? These men have been fighting our battles for years, living in constant financial worries, often surrounded by enemies who denounce them fiercely as traitors to their religion and nationality, and hirelings of the Presbyterian Church. They are ridiculed for calling themselves Independents when they are really dependent on the bounty of the Presbyterians. And these things hurt. They do not want to be hirelings. They say if we must fight the battles of Presbyterianism, then let us call ourselves Presbyterians, and let us know that the Presbyterian Church is really going to be with us to the end.

And surely our Church cannot abandon either the men or the work without undying disgrace. For Canadian Protestantism to permit it to be abandoned at this stage would be incredible folly. That vast body of Ruthenians in the hands of a scheming hierarchy would be a menace to the liberty of every Canadian. If we do our duty from now on, that danger will surely be escaped.