THE FIRST RUSSIAN PRINTER—IVAN FEDOROFF.

At the time when Western Europe had already enjoyed the benefits of book printing for about a hundred years, presses were only just beginning to be established in Moscow. The reason for such a state of civilisation was to be found in the ignorance of society, comprehending in this term clergy, boyars, and part of the military.

The throwing off of the Tartar yoke, the marriage of Ivan III. with Sophia Paleologue, the invitation into Russia of many foreign scholars and artists, and, in general, the extension of Russian intercourse with foreign powers, could not but assist in the awakening of the national consciousness. It naturally appeared first of all in cultivated society, which, however, was one-sided in construction and was exclusively occupied with church questions, especially after the exposure and tracing out of the Jewish heresies. For the space of half a century later, the illiteracy and bad morals of the clergy served as an inexhaustible fountain of evil. Ignorant copyists, by their errors, aroused disputes and heresies, so much the more that to the transcribed books they added much of their own. Thus, in the life of the reverend Evrosim it was said that only a double hallelujah is correct, and in the life of the reverend Fedorite it is affirmed that one should make the sign of the cross with two fingers. Even the highest dignitaries of the church were entangled in this chaos, which fact is proved for instance by the Nomocanon* of the metropolite Makarii, in which are quoted extracts from the book of Enoch the Righteous, or the sermons of the Metropolitan Daniel, which refer to the life of the above-named Fedorite. Besides this, the question was complicated by the vicious life of the monastic body and by the dispute concerning the government of the monastery possessions; one of the monastic parties said that this was contrary to the monastic vow, the other endeavoured to refute its opponents with dialectic subtleties and invectives, while both sides unceremoniously exposed the abuses concealed by the monastery walls.

The representatives of the first party were the monk, Vassian Kossoi (Prince Patrikiëff), and Maxime the Greek, a monk from Mount Athos, who had received instruction in Florence and Venice; and at the head of the second party stood Joseph Volotskoï. To Maxime was intrusted the correction of the books of the Church. He was horrified at the multitude of errors which had crept into the manuscripts and the enormous number of apocryphal books, in consequence of which his activity acquired a pre-eminently polemical tendency, whilst he also touched upon social questions, rising up against the extortion, luxury, and injustice of the boyars. Naturally, these convictions did not please his opponents, and they, profiting by the circumstance that the grand prince, Vassili Ivanovitch, did not please his opponents, and they, profiting by the circumstance that the grand prince, Vassili Ivanovitch,

* Book of Church Laws.

Monument at Moscow to Ivan Fedoroff, the First Russian Printer.
had cooled towards Maxime, because the latter had lifted his voice against his divorce from Solomonia, accused the learned Greek before the Synod of heresy, on the pretext of certain inexactnesses in the translations, and the unhappy Maxime was despatched to the Volokolamski monastery, under the command of his enemies, and subsequently was removed to the Troitza-Sergievski monastery.

In this way the correction of the books was suspended, but the influence of Maxime did not disappear. He comprehended the utility of book printing, was personally acquainted with the famous printer, Aldus Manutius, and had brought with him to Russia books printed in Venice. After his arrival in Russia, in a short time, he acquired the esteem of the monk Vassian, Prince Courbski, Zinovii Otenski, and several other prominent, active men, who with pride styled themselves his scholars. It is probable that they supported his idea of the indispensability of establishing a printing press. To convince Ivan the Terrible of this did not present any special difficulty, because he saw the impossibility of correcting manuscripts, the number of which so rapidly increased in consequence of the strengthening thirst for reading, that, in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, a society of scribes was formed, who copied for sale every kind of production. Notwithstanding this, when Ivan IV., after subjugating the Kingdom of Kazan, conceived the idea of providing the churches, again established there, with books for sacred worship, those suitable for use were found to be very few, although the Tsar ordered that all the manuscripts of church books should be bought up at the fairs. It is true that many were collected, but the greater number were mutilated by the copyists.

This circumstance gave a final impulse to the decision of Ivan the Terrible to establish a printing press, to which probably also the circumstance that in Cracow, ecclesiastical Slav publications had already begun to appear in the year 1491, and then soon after the closing of this press, in the beginning of the sixteenth century, in Venice, contributed not a little; consequently, one can only wonder why the predecessors of Ivan IV. had not earlier established presses. The only explanation of this neglect presents itself in the superabundant attraction of foreign affairs and the absence, about the grand princes, of people who would have understood the significance of the invention of Gutenberg. The chronicles speak of the hire, in Lubeck, in the year 1493, of the famous book printer Bartholomew, although he was evidently engaged only for the translation of German writings received by the Russian embassy. After that, proof is met with of the invitation to Russia from abroad of printers, in the year 1548, and of the sending to Ivan IV., in the year 1552, by the Danish King, Christian, of Hans Wissenheim, skilled in printing affairs, with a proposition to the Tsar to accept Protestantism; which, naturally, was declined, but, in the following year, the Terrible, with the benediction of the Metropolite Makarii, ordered the preparation of a printing press.

For the construction of a house for the press, which subsequently received the name of “printing court,” was chosen a place in the Nikolski-street, but the building was erected slowly, notwithstanding that the Tsar did not spare expense; only in April, 1563, was it possible to prepare for composition; and as the affair was then new, and as, besides, it was necessary to work with hand presses, the printing of the “Acts of the Apostles
and Synodal Epistles with the Epistles of the Apostle Paul”—the first book published in Moscow, was barely finished by the first of March, 1564.

At the head of Russian printing affairs at that time, stood Ivan Fedoroff, deacon of the Kremlevski Church of Nicholaï Gustounski, a learned man, acquainted not only with the technical part of book printing, but understanding also how to cut matrices and to found type. Where he learned this art is not positively known, but there is ground for inferring that he borrowed his knowledge from the Italians, as he found himself in friendly relations with Italian master workmen who had settled in Moscow, or, it may be, as some persons suppose, that he had already travelled in Italy, which theory is supported, among other proofs, by noting that all the terms used in printing were borrowed from the Italian. As assistant to Fedoroff was appointed Master Peter Timofeïeff Mstislavetz, the biographical information concerning whom is also very scanty. Besides him, mention is also made in the chronicles of Marushi Nefedieff, but he evidently belonged to the number of compositors and, in general, played a secondary part in this affair.

The first books issued were reproductions of manuscripts; they were adorned with arabesque initial letters and vignettes. At the beginning and in the middle of them were introduced lines printed in vermilion. In the epilogue was signified in whose reign, by whose permission and with whose aid the book was printed, and thereupon followed an address to the readers with a petition to pardon the errors noticed and to correct them.

In the year 1565 Fedoroff and Mstislavetz printed a "Book of Hours," and soon after this they were obliged to fly from Moscow, accused of heresy and of plotting the corruption of books; this persecution must be ascribed on one side to envy, and on the other to the infringement upon the interests of a numerous class of copyists and of persons protecting them, equally with the intrigues of the party inimical to Maxime, the Greek, although the latter had died long before. Courbski was abroad, hiding from the anger of the Tsar, and hence the first Russian book-printers agreed to leave Russia, as they could not rely on the protection of the Terrible. That the hand of fanaticism was hidden in this affair is proved by the burning of the "printing court," set on fire by malicious persons, possibly with the end of destroying Fedoroff and Mstislavetz.

In Lithuania, on the estate of the hetman Khodkevitch, Zabloudova, they found a refuge, and here they printed, in the year 1569, a "Gospel," and in the following year Mstislavetz went to Wilna, where he established a press which continued in existence about sixty years. Ivan Fedoroff remained still some time with the hetman, and issued from the press a "Psalter" with a "Book of Hours"; but soon Khodkevitch, grown feeble and ill, ceased to interest himself in this matter, and ordered the work to stop. Then Fedoroff left the estate presented to him by the hetman, in order, as he wrote, not to hide in the earth the talent given to him by God, and repaired to Lvoff in spite of the raging pestilence. His residence in this city yielded little profit, because the majority of the inhabitants behaved towards him with indifference, and only in 1574 was he able to print an "Apostle," the edition of which was distributed in a most insignificant number of copies, because Fedoroff suffered to such a degree from want that in five years he was compelled to mortgage all his printing apparatus and books for 411 Polish florins. However, in the following year his position improved; he was invited by Prince Constantine Ostrozhski to place himself at the head of an extensive printing establishment. Here Ivan Fedoroff printed in the year 1580 the "New Testament" and the "Psalter," and then the first edition of the Bible. In the following year the second edition of it was issued, remarkable for beauty and elegance of execution, although not free from mistakes which Prince Constantine explained by the lack of good assistants.

A disagreement between the printer and his patron, of which, however, exact accounts do not exist, obliged Fedoroff to return to Lvoff, where he lived for two years in extreme poverty, and died on the 4th of December (Russian style), 1583. His body was buried in the cemetery of the Church of St. Onofrius, and his grave, covered with a simple slab, is distinguished from the others only by the inscription, "Muscovite printer, who, by his care, revived feeble printing."

As for what concerns Moscow, this flight of her first printers suspended matters only for a short time, and we see that in the year 1568 a Psalter was already printed by Andronike Nevezhia, and in ten years after this the printing of books was commenced in the Alexandrovski suburb, the favourite place of residence of Ivan IV. Nevertheless printing dislodged the art of the copyists very slowly, and only obtained a decided victory over it in the reign of Catharine II.

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The Rebinding of First Editions.

The value set upon original editions of an author's works is too well known to need comment here, but out of it has grown a custom of preserving not merely the book in its entire form, without a cutting except at the head, but the advertisements and the original covers. On some of these old covers, mostly of cloth, it would appear a waste of time to take any pains for their preservation; nevertheless, no matter how old or worn, or stained they may be, they are part of the proof of the genuineness of the edition, and as such are now very generally preserved and bound up with the book, usually at the end.

To do this, the cloth cover is stripped from the boards, and the superfluous pieces of board and paper lining removed from the sides and back by gently damping the adhering particles on the under side of the cover till they are loosened and easily cleared away. The cover is then trimmed round with a sharp knife to bring it within the area of the size of the pages, mounted on paper as nearly as possible like the colour of the book, and sewn on with the end sheet.