

THE POLISH LANGUAGE.

The Polish language has always been a great stumbling-block to Englishmen: its conglomeration of consonants, and (supposed) harshness, have become a by-word among us, and the cause of a great deal of misdirected waggishness. The very names even of the leading authors who have written in Polish are unknown. Perhaps we must consider a native a prejudiced writer on such subject, but if we wish for a vigorous defense of the language, let us listen to the eloquent words of Casimir Brodzinski, himself a poet of no mean order. "Let," he says, "the Poles smile with manly pride when the inhabitants of the banks of the Tiber or Seine call his language rude; let him hear with keen satisfaction and the dignity of a Judge the stranger who painfully struggles with the Polish pronunciation, like a Sybarite trying to lift an old Roman coat of armor, or when he struggles to articulate the language of men with the weak accent of children. While courage shall not perish in our nation, while our manners shall not have become degraded, let us not disavow this manly roughness of our language. It has also its harmony, its melody, but it is the murmur of an oak of 500 years, and not the plaintive and feeble cry of a reed, swayed by every wind." When a tablet was affixed on the house at Rome in which Mickiewicz had lodged, what condescending explanations were vouchsafed by the newspapers! The fact that such a man had existed—a man whom Goethe had considered one of the greatest of modern poets—was, indeed, a discovery. But how many Englishmen had ever heard of him or of such writers as Niemcewicz, Slowacki and Zaleski? Does a person unacquainted with Polish wish to understand what Poland has accomplished in the way of literature, he must turn to the colorless version of Sir John Bowring, published nearly 60 years ago. The saying "Hois Polonais," falsely ascribed by the French romancer to Kościusko, might with truth be written upon the records of European literature, as far as the sympathy of the Western scholars has been elicited for the writers of this truly unfortunate country. The voice of Poland is not yet, however, silent, and a language still spoken by nearly 10,000,000 probably has a future. Perhaps, after all, the Pole has more to dread from the German than from his brother Slavonians. Polish is being faster eliminated from the Grand Duchy of Posen than from Galicia and Russian Poland. It is not recognized as an official language in the former country any more than in the territories appropriated by the "Moskals," but the Germans alone have been guilty of the insolence and bad taste of changing the names of many Polish towns and villages, which had become historical, into such monstrosities as Bismarcksdorf, Weissenbaden and Sedan.—*Westminster Review*.