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The Australian Esperantist

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Dr. L. L. ZAMENHOF, Author of Esperanto.
(15 Dec., 1859 - 14 April, 1917)

LAZAR LUDOVIK ZAMENHOF

(On the occasion of the centenary of his birth)

by

Professor G. WARINGHIEN (Paris)

1. His Family.

He came from a Jewish family believed to have been expelled from Spain in 1492, which emigrated at the beginning of the 19th century from Bavaria (possibly from the village of Samhof) to Tykotsin in Russian Poland where Mordecai Marcus Zamenhof was born on the 27th January, 1837. The latter, like his father before him, became a private tutor of German and French. But he had greater ambitions. In the industrial town of Bialystok to which he had migrated, he became a pioneer in the educational movement whose aims were to terminate Jewish ritual isolation and encourage Jews to participate in modern cultural activities. In addition, he planned for himself a government career which he achieved, in spite of his Jewish origin, thanks to his iron will. To further his plans, he moved in December, 1873, to Warsaw, the capital, where he was soon nominated German master in the "realgymnasium" grammar school. He crowned this promotion by being chosen government censor for Hebrew and Yiddish publications in Warsaw in 1788. He was a pedantic man, scrupulous, severe and careful. In addition to his official duties, he still found time to supervise the studies of some pupils who boarded with him. He had eight children of his own to whom he gave a middle class education. Of his four sons, three became doctors of medicine and one a pharmacist, almost the only intellectual careers then open to Jews in Russia.

2. His Career.

The eldest son had been born in Byalistok on the 15th December, 1859, and was given the Hebrew name of El'azar, reproduced in Russian documents as Lazar. Following the usual practice, a second Christian name was added with the same initial letter—Ludovik. Between 1869 and 1873 the boy was a pupil at the "real" grammar school in Byalistok and from December 1873 to July 1879 he was at the Philological High School in Warsaw. After studying for two years at the Medical Faculty in Moscow and for four years at that in Warsaw, he received his medical diploma; but, as he was too susceptible to the sufferings of the sick and the dying, he decided, after practising for a short while, to take up the special branch of opthalmology, and went to Vienna in 1886 to study it thoroughly. He married in 1887 and, for the next ten years, first in Warsaw, then in Kherson, Grodno and other places, endeavoured to build up a practice large enough to support his family. At the beginning of 1898 he settled for good in the Warsaw ghetto where he was to practise until his death on the 14th April, 1917. This medical career, although it was followed conscientiously and devotedly, brought him more worry than profit. The poverty of his clients meant that every day he had to see thirty or forty of them and then only received sufficient money to secure a modest existence for his family (he had three children). In any case, his practice formed only a subsidiary part of his activities.

3. His Character.

The young Zamenhof was very intelligent and very hardworking, always top in his classes, and all his school friends predicted a brilliant and successful future for him. He had a special gift for languages. He spoke three with ease (Russian, Polish and German), and three he could read fluently (Latin, Hebrew and French), without mentioning Yiddish, a dialect which he studied

for two years and for which he completed a detailed grammar. He had a cursory and more theoretical knowledge of English, Italian and several other languages. But he always looked on Russian as his own tongue (it was only in Russian and Esperanto that he ever wrote any poetry) and he thought of Lithuania as his native country (probably because he had passed his happiest holidays in Vejseje).

This knowledge of many languages was only the natural reflection of the circumstances in which he lived. These could not do other than influence such a sensitive boy's thinking, especially when combined with the ineradicable traces of Hebrew mysticism and his inherited belief in the missionary task of his people. Living from childhood in the midst of a mixed population (the inhabitants of Byalistok in 1897 were 66% Jews, 18% Poles, 8% Russians, 6% Germans, and 2% White Russians); belonging to a race which could express itself only in a dead language or in an adopted one and which, scattered amongst the nations, could not enjoy the rights which other nationalities had; educated to believe the enlightened principle that all men are brothers with equal rights, his innate idealism inspired in him an abiding vision of the unity of mankind in harmony and equality. And, because of his natural gift for languages, such a vision quickly became identical with the vision of a universal language which, non-national and neutral, would allow all groups of people to understand one another better.

4. His First Attempts.

Zamenhof was already seriously considering this vision while still at school. With the natural development of his ideas, unconsciously retracing the path of many previous Utopian visionaries, the boy thought first of reviving the already defunct language of Latin, then of a language entirely unrelated to any existing language, whose words would be formed from mathematical series of all the pronounceable combinations of letters (a, aa, ab, ac . . ., ba, ca, da, etc.). But, and here is where his genius showed itself, he put each new system he thought of to a thorough practical test and, when he had realised its deficiencies, he courageously looked for something else instead of blindly and obstinately plodding down a blind alley as those interested in international language had always done before him. His studies of English taught him that the rich conjugations and declinations of ancient and Slavic languages were not at all necessary. A thorough examination of Russian and German showed him how a wise choice of suitable affixes could reduce the size of the vocabulary. Polish and German revealed to him the existence of a treasury of internationally known roots ready for the using. German and French proved the usefulness of the definite article which the Slavic languages did not have. From everything he studied he drew some fruitful lesson for his beloved project and, during his 1878 vacation, he finished the draft of his language under the name of "Lingwe Uniwersala" — a grammar, a dictionary, some translations and even original verses in the new language. But what the sixth-form schoolboy thought was a finished product, presented only the first of the steps which were to lead him to Esperanto.

Little has been preserved of these early forms of Esperanto. Only two are known to us in any detail, that of the high school project of 1878, and that of the new project developed during the vacations of 1881 and 1882 by the Warsaw student. The earlier one shows the young linguist paying particular attention to the international nature of roots and endings (plural in -s, infinitive -are, etc.) and to the simplicity of the grammar (no cases). In the later project, we notice that, on trying out his language further and speaking it, he had become conscious of other requirements, in particular, the need for beauty of sound (and from then on he gave up the international -s plural ending) and for clarity of meaning (and from then on he adopted an accusative case); but, as often happens, he pushed his search

for ease in speech to the other extreme, deciding, for example, to have only one syllable in all frequently used roots; as a result of which this form of his language contained many unacceptable mutilations which made it almost impossible to understand at first sight. Between the years of 1882 and 1885 he evidently felt he had gone too far, and he tried to find a compromise solution which would satisfy, if only partially, all the demands of a language designed for all men and all possible purposes. In 1885, the year in which he received his doctorate, he had already stabilized Esperanto as we know it today in vocabulary and grammar. The two years which passed in the vain search for a publisher before he finally decided to publish his work himself on the 26th July, 1887, showed him the difficulties he could expect in its propagation. He relinquished the imperfect tense (ending in -es) and several suffixes which did not seem absolutely necessary. He was conscious of the essential requirement that the language should appear as simple as possible.

5. The Birth of Esperanto.

With four booklets in Russian, Polish, French and German respectively and under the pseudonym "Dr. Esperanto" (a name later transferred to the language itself) he set out his project of an "international language" for the criticism of experts, promising that, in a year's time, he would perfect it in accordance with any improvements suggested. He sent these booklets to many European newspapers, magazines and societies. He advertised by notices in Russian and Polish periodicals. Using, with her approval, his bride's dowry, he launched a whole series of books in the years 1888 and 1889, among them the "Dua Libro" (Second Book), "Aldono al la Dua Libro" (Supplement to the Second Book), "La Neĝa Blovado" ("The Snowstorm" by Pushkin) and "La Gefratoj" ("Die Geschwister" by Goethe) which were, respectively, a short story and a comedy translated into Esperanto by A. Grabowski. They also included translations of the "Dua Libro" and the "Aldono", an intermediate German - Esperanto dictionary, a large Russian-Esperanto dictionary, text-books in English and Swedish, "Princino Mary" ("Princess Mary," a story by Lermontov translated from Russian into Esperanto by E. von Wahl), and an address book of students of the new language. He also provided the money necessary for publishing the publicity material of L. Einstein in Germany and of H. Philips in America. At the end of 1889 he had exhausted his capital as a result of this great activity in print and also because of the sacrifice of a large sum of money which he paid away in order to protect his father from the rancour of a Moscow censor. From that time on, although he remained the prime mover of the movement until 1905, propaganda depended for material on the first enthusiasts and their financial resources.

What did the new language seem like as then presented? Three characteristics struck the observer immediately. (1) It was, in its choice of roots and affixes, drawn mainly from Romance and Germanic languages, but really international and easily intelligible to educated persons. (2) All its roots were unvarying, all its grammatical distinctions were expressed by detachable phonetic elements, and its words consisted only of the combination of these roots and these elements, so that the complete language, grammar as well as vocabulary, could be found in the dictionary and understood even by a person who had never learnt it. (3) This language, although composed of particles from national languages, was fully independent and had its own individuality.

6. Zamenhof as a Linguist.

The second part of Zamenhof's activity for the International Language lasted from 1905 to his death in 1917. It was made possible by the spare time granted to him as a result of the increased profits of his publications and especially the royalties on his contributions to "La Revuo" ("The Review") which had been brought into being by the firm of

Hachette in Paris, thanks to the influence of Charles Bourlet. It took mainly three forms: writings on linguistic matters, translations and ideological essays.

The author's prudence and tolerance are particularly noticeable in his works on linguistic questions. Zamenhof provided only the minimum, a grammar of sixteen rules and a vocabulary of 917 roots, to begin with, "leaving all else to unrestricted gradual elaboration". He always avoided adding new rules to this primitive basic structure, he was afraid of any definition which might become a fetter. On almost every page of his "Lingvaj Respondoj" ("Linguistic Replies," collected in book form in 1912) there is found the same attitude: "Only usage will gradually elaborate definite rules . . . The time has not yet come for us to be pedantic . . . We must not try to make our language too exact, as that would mean fettering ourselves . . . On occasions where a little liberty does us no harm, why should we tie ourselves down needlessly?" etc., etc.

But this toleration whose aim was to make the development of Esperanto a really collective undertaking was only possible because the basic structure of the language was firmly established and unshakable. This he achieved by procuring a character of inviolacy for the three works, "Plena Gramatiko," "Ekzercaro" and "Universala Vortaro," which he collected together in 1905 under the title of "Fundamento de Esperanto" ("Foundations of Esperanto"). So that any language may grow and develop normally, there must be some powerful force of inertia in it which preserves the permanence and stability of the main elements of the language in a convenient manner. Without this essential condition mutual understanding breaks down. In national languages, the tradition of centuries acts as this force of inertia. In Esperanto, where such a tradition did not exist, Zamenhof replaced it by the "Fundamento" with its character of inviolacy. This linguistic taboo was, next to the actual creation of Esperanto, the most ingenious inspiration of its author. It guaranteed that the language would have the power to develop without risk so that the reader of the recently published Anthology of Original Esperanto Poetry, 1887-1957, experiences no difficulty whatever in understanding the poem he is reading, no matter when it was written.

7. Zamenhof as a Translator.

His translations represent the most extensive and important part of the works of Zamenhof. His first translation (Dickens' *The Battle of Life*), although it was published in serial form in 1891, did not have a great influence, as it was published in book form only in 1911. But the second one (Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), which he published in 1894 and republished in 1902 in Paris, enjoyed an unparalleled influence and was more effective in spreading knowledge of the language than all the most ingenious theoretical exhortations. His retort to the criticisms of those who wanted to "improve" the language was to prove in a brilliant manner how suitable Esperanto was even for literary tasks. He took up this fruitful occupation again only after the establishment of "La Revuo", for which he undertook the systematic translation of important literary works. There thus appeared one after another: Gogol's *Government Inspector* (1907), *Ecclesiastes* from the Bible (1907), Moliere's *George Dandin* (1908), Goethe's *Iphigenia* (1908), Schiller's *The Robbers* (1908), *Psalms* from the Bible (1908), Heine's *The Rabbi of Bacharach* (1909), Aleichem's *High School* (1909), Eliza Orzesko's *Martha* (1910), *Esperanto Proverbs* (1910), and the five books *Genesis* (1911), *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, (1912), *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy* (1914) from the Bible.

At his death Zamenhof left, in manuscript form, the complete translation of Andersen's *Fairy Tales* (three volumes being later published at intervals between 1923 and 1932) and the whole of the *Old Testament* (published in 1926 by the British and Foreign Bible Society, London).

One can marvel at the number and extent of these translations, particularly in the years 1907-1909. Pro-

bably some of them were already to hand; but the speed of his translation remains extraordinary. Remembering that he could work only in the evenings after a long and tiring day, one may well ask how he managed to produce, for example, the verse translation of "Iphigenia" in the course of four months (March to June, 1908). Of course, such a speed was not without its drawbacks, but it also had its advantages. The translations kept a vigorous flowing style without any flavour of the study. And their value was particularly great for the evolution of the language. They effectively proved to all those that said otherwise that Esperanto could serve as a language for the untrammelled expression of all the works of genius in the world's literature. They contributed to the enrichment of the language's vocabulary as the translator was compelled to reproduce the occasionally subtle shades of meanings in the masterpieces of literature. They helped the development of style by forcing the writer to endeavour in one way or another to translate those expressions which every language must possess. They helped the progress of Esperanto to increasing elasticity and flexibility, for ever reminding the writer that "our language must serve not only for documents and contracts but also for life". Finally, they stabilized and established idiomatic expressions, presenting an enormous quantity of word forms and compounds, phrases, metaphors and proverbs, a common treasury of ready-made turns of speech which lexicographers have collected into their dictionaries and which writers use for the greater unity and cohesion of the language. One would not exaggerate the role of Zamenhof's translations if one were to say that, without them, Esperanto would not really be a fact: it would be the pale ghost of a theory like other projects. With his grammatical writings and dictionaries Zamenhof had built the skeleton of the language. By his persistent translation work he clothed that skeleton with vigorous sanguine flesh. The soul can be looked for in his original writings.

8. Zamenhof as a Thinker.

The growth of the movement and the enterprise of several Frenchmen, among them Michaux and Bourlet, brought about in Boulogne in 1905, for the first time in human history, a congress of people of different nationalities who could speak the same language and feel themselves equally entitled to speak it. It was for Zamenhof an opportunity to insist on the moral and social value of this human achievement. The next year, in Geneva, he expressed to the congress his profound conviction that the International Language was, above all, a means of drawing people closer to one another and exalting that humanity, that universal brotherhood, which seemed to him the only form of creed acceptable to all peoples and all churches. In this way he provided the language with a unifying and sustaining ideology. If today, more than forty years after the death of Zamenhof, the Esperanto movement can still arouse so much admirable devotion, attachment and even self-sacrifice, this is due to the genius of its initiator who knew that there is no great and fruitful human activity without some internal warmth of feeling, without some heart-stirring ideal. So, year after year, from 1905 to 1912, he roused the assembled congress to think of all the great questions, all the great problems, which life had set before this unprecedented social linguistic movement, and the high aims to which it must aspire. The collection of these congress speeches (arranged in Japan by Tasku Sasaki and Juntaro Iwshita in 1932) is stirring and elevating reading, one of those few works which honour mankind.

But, with time, this role of mentor seemed to him so important that he decided, in 1912, to leave the destiny of Esperanto in the hands of its by then well proven Language Committee and devote himself to purely ideological activity. He attempted by various improved schemes (Hillelism, Homaranism) to find a common ground for agreement between all sincere believers, whether they belonged to a church or organized re-

ligion or whether they were free-thinkers. He studied the terrible problem of racialism in a remarkable "Memoir for the Congress of Races" (1911) in which he demonstrated that the main cause of racial hatred was the mutual distrust brought forth by difference of language and religion. In 1914 he wanted to use the occasion of the Universal Esperanto Congress in Paris for the purpose of convening a "Congress of Neutral Religion" there which would define the principles of a purely spiritual religion in accordance with the teachings of the last prophet of his race: **"Neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem . . . but in spirit and in truth."** In 1915, in the midst of the storms of the first world war, he wrote an important "Appeal to Diplomats", warning them that the chief cause of every war had always been "the rule of one set of people over others" and that their principal duty at any future peace treaty was to guarantee to all races equality and liberty in the countries where they lived, as that was the only way of bringing about fraternity.

Such were the last efforts of this great heart which, throughout his life, truly beat only for the good of mankind and the coming of the rule of peace.

9. Zamenhof as a Man.

Zamenhof was short in stature, with a short brownish grey beard and a prematurely bald head. He wore glasses to correct his short sight. He was not an orator and mispronounced the sibilant consonants. He smoked a great deal, mainly cigarettes. From about the year 1900 he began to suffer from cardiac weakness and circulatory failure in his feet. Therefore, when his income permitted it, he visited German spas: Bad-Reinerz (1906, 1909), Bad Nauheim (1907), Bad Kissingen (1911), Bad Salzbrunn (1912), Bad Neuenahr (1913).

He was, like his father, pedantically tidy in everyday life, innocent in business matters, shy in public, averse to all official ceremonies. Naturally modest and peaceable, he tried to calm down any discord around him and never showed any resentment towards those who hurt his feelings. He was one of those rare men who have played an important international role and yet have nothing to fear from the publication of their entire correspondence: it reveals only his innate courtesy and his high sense of justice.

But the most important traits of his character were the willingness with which he sacrificed everything for his ideals and the patient stubbornness with which he pushed aside all the obstacles which stood in the way of their realization. He drew both this willingness and this patience from the truly immeasurable store of love which urged him to devote all the strength of his mind and body to bringing all the aid he could to a humanity which had become both physically and morally blind.

—Translated from Esperanto by Edward Ockey (London).

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(Honorary Director: Prof. Ivo Lapenna, 77 Grassmere Av., Wembley, Middlesex.)

AUSTRALIAN ORGANIZATIONS

Esperanto groups affiliated with the Australian Esperanto Association are:

Brisbane Esperanto Society—
President: Mr. S. L. Parry, Ford Street, Albion, N.2, Brisbane (Qld.). Tel. M 6097.

Sydney Esperanto Society—
Secretary: Miss P. Ferguson, 26 Edgeware Road, Enmore, N.S.W. Tel. BU 4181, LA 2225.

Canberra Esperanto Club—
President: Dr. Ross Robbins, 4 Wild Street, Griffith, Canberra, A.C.T.

Melbourne Esperanto Club—
Box 2122T, Elizabeth Street P.O., Melbourne. Tel. JA 3483, LF 1678, JM 1215.

Hobart Esperanto Group—
President: Mr. M. Leereveld, 41 New Town Road, Hobart, Tas.

Esperanto League of Western Aust.—
Secretary: Mrs. G. Pollard, 45 Second Avenue, Riverton, W.A. Tel. 64-2339.

12th AUSTRALIAN ESPERANTO CONGRESS

Hobart, Tasmania, 3rd-9th January, 1960. Secretary: Mrs. W. D. Shankley, 43 Victoria Esplanade, Bellerive, Tasmania.

Fourth List of Congress Members:

43. Mr. P. Henri (Hobart)
44. Mr. Michael Williams (Hobart)
45. Mr. James Darling (Hobart)
46. Mr. Tom Teniswood (Hobart)
47. "Melburnano"
48. Miss Beth Lewis (Brisbane, Qld.)
49. Miss Geraldine Lorimer (Hobart)
50. Miss Judith Erp (Hobart)
51. Miss H. Crane (Hobart)
52. Mr. Robert Lawson (Hobart)
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55. Mr. F. G. Wall (Earlston, Vic.)
56. Mr. Ralph Trott (Hobart).
57. Mr. Robert Trott (Hobart)
58. Miss Janet Wright (Hobart)
59. Mr. Graham Roberts (Hobart)
60. Miss Sally Luttrell (Hobart)

Stop Press **Stop Press**

ESPERANTO FOR FRIENDS' SCHOOL

The Friends' School, Hobart, has decided to introduce Esperanto as a language course in the senior school.

The headmaster (Mr. W. N. Oats) made the announcement at the school speech night recently.

He said it provided a sound basic training in language structure, not only for those who would be studying languages for Schools Board and matriculation, but for those who now gave up a language in despair after a year's fruitless effort.

In its vocabulary and grammar it made for a better grasp of the fundamentals of English grammar.

By its regularity of structure it gave a learner confidence to write and speak the language much earlier than he did at present with the more complicated national languages.

It opened up a means of communicating with children in other lands who did not speak English.

Ultimately, he said, as an auxiliary language, Esperanto might well become the instrument of true international understanding and co-operation.

Mr. Oats said he had asked the Schools Board for recognition of Esperanto as an optional one-point subject.

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