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Командный конкурс эссе

**“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.
Time for Equal Opportunities”**

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

«Англия в описании русских путешественников 18–19 веков»



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Group essay contest

“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World. Time for Equal Opportunities”

Research work (essay)

“England as described by Russian travelers of the 18th–19th centuries”



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Theses

Objective and unbiased ideas about other nations are a necessary condition for maintaining peace between peoples.

The brightest strokes on the canvas depicting foggy Albion were applied by the Russian people who visited this country and wrote travel notes and essays.

The judgments of famous writers, thinkers and masters of the word had a huge impact on public opinion and the formation of ideas about the British.

The image of England drawn by the observers from Russia was very complex and contradictory.

Many explained the reason for economic success of England by the properties of the English character.

The first thing that determined the character of the locals was the strict organization of daily life.

The root of honesty and decency of men of business Russian writers saw in their sincere religiosity.

The addiction of the British to the products of their country developed the enterprise and diligence of the people, gave England its power and wealth.

Among other indispensable features typical of people in England have also been mentioned coldness, restraint in expressing their feelings and especially taciturnity.

The sullen, heavy temper of the British was often associated with the rough nature of their entertainment and games.

The amazing energy and enterprise of its citizens eventually brought wealth and prosperity to the whole country.

There is also a tradition in Russian literature and the press to portray the British as cranks.

The mosaic of the marked features of the English character is combined, however, into a fairly complete portrait of a typical Englishman.

Interest and respect for British culture remain to this day.

“I went up to the English shore with cheerful amazement, I left it with sad love.”
A.S. Khomyakov

Now that our planet has become cramped, like a large communal apartment, and at the same time fragile, there is no more important task than the preservation of peace between peoples; the necessary conditions for this are objective and unbiased ideas about other nations as well as getting rid of prejudices. In the end, a positive image of a country contributes to establishing contacts with it, while a negative one turns out to be an obstacle to mutual understanding and rapprochement.

England, with its amazing economic success, the originality of the state system and its culture, has always aroused interest. Information about this country has been accumulated in Russia for many centuries in the course of long lasting trade, political and cultural relations. Although the press of that time played a significant role in coining the image of England and the British, the brightest strokes on the canvas depicting foggy Albion were applied by the Russian people who visited this country and wrote travel notes and essays.

Unfortunately, the custom of traveling abroad was not widespread in tsarist Russia. Those who could afford to go on a long journey chose continental Europe for entertainment (France), treatment (Germany) or acquaintance with arts (Italy). The development of relations between Russia and England was largely facilitated by the stay of the Russian tsar Peter I in London in 1698, where he studied shipbuilding. During the 18th century, the number of Russian people who wanted to absorb the innovative experience and adopt the best practices of the country gradually increased. As a result, England became mostly desired by professionals (diplomats, officials, scientists, industrialists, etc.), who went there on business and only a few of them left their observations.

Nevertheless, among the visitors there were also “tourists” who found themselves in England without a specific purpose, just out of curiosity and to get

acquainted with the country. The most valuable for us are the judgments of famous writers, thinkers and wordsmiths who not only described what they saw, but compared, analyzed, generalized and drew conclusions. Firstly, their point of view on what they witnessed was based on reality, but the facts were transformed and interpreted creatively. Secondly, their literature works, as a rule, were addressed to a wide range of readers, and, therefore, they made a huge impact on public opinion and the formation of general, possibly stereotypical ideas about the British some of which have survived and are widespread even in our days.

Travel literature as a special genre in Russia appeared quite late. Its appearance is usually associated with the name of N.M. Karamzin. Even though he also sometimes fell under the spell of established stereotypes, and many travelers subsequently repeated them, his sketches differ in amazing accuracy. Karamzin's "Letters" were a huge success and had a strong and lasting influence on the development of the travel genre.

Some renowned writers and publicists such as P.I. Sumarokov, N.I. Grech, A.A. Korsakov, A.I. Koshelev, A.I. Turgenev, A.I. Herzen, A.S.Khomyakov, F.M. Dostoevsky and many others left vivid and detailed written testimonies of their experiences, which formed the basis of this essay. It is quite possible that some of the notes suffered from a superficial knowledge of England; the authors often limited themselves to a mere description of what they encountered. Here we explore the image of England through the eyes of Russian travelers, its features that they paid attention to, without questioning the reliabilities of their conclusions. Their repetition of the same facts and "commonplaces" allows us to distinguish (more or less clearly) the general idea of the country and its nation that existed in Russia. It is these views on various aspects of the English reality of the 18th and 19th centuries that began to prevail in Russia for many decades to come.

As a result, the image of England drawn by the visitors from Russia turned out to be very complex and contradictory. The main discrepancies among observers probably existed in the assessment of the political system. Some saw the kingdom as a dangerous enemy and rival, while others considered the state and legal system of England to be the main example to follow (Pic. 1). At the same time, everyone emphasized a lively public life: the presence of democratic freedoms, publicity and a strong opinion of the people. Foreigners were surprised that, despite the “public spirit”, the British were distinguished by extreme individualism in their private lives, a reverent attitude to the family hearth as a symbol of personal independence.

Another characteristic feature of the then ideas about England is the confidence in its unheard-of, enormous wealth. What did the Russians see as the “English secret” to which they attributed its origin? There were those who emphasized the huge role of the state, some others saw the source of English power in trade, but many explained the reason for economic success by the properties of the English character.

The first thing that caught Russian travellers’ eye and that, as it seemed to them, determined the character of the locals, was the strict organization of daily life. The English “ability to put everything in order” was most clearly manifested in the arrangement of the house (Pic. 2), where every thing had its place and extraordinary cleanliness reigned. The word “comfort”, which came to Russia from England, has long been associated with this country.

Our writers also emphasized the unusual neatness of the British which was explained by the fact that there a person was traditionally met “by clothes”. Decent clothing manifested “respectability”, testified to belonging to the circle of “gentlemen” the outward sign of whom was compliance with the dress code and rules of conduct adopted in the so-called “society” (Pic. 3). In Russian consciousness, though, a gentleman was associated with the observance of certain moral norms as “honor is revered by the British above all.” Most

business transactions were concluded by word of mouth, violation of which threatened loss of reputation and ruin. The root of honesty and decency of men of business Russian writers saw in sincere religiosity of the British. This is how the image of a positive Englishman was formed with his high moral qualities, loyalty to his word (“the word of a gentleman”), his religiosity and attachment to his family.

One of the most common and favorite epithets awarded to an English lord is “proud”. The origin of this pride was seen in an extremely highly developed sense of patriotism. The authors of the notes emphasized the deepest respect for “good old times”, strict observance of tradition, careful preservation of monuments of the past. According to onlookers, the addiction of the British to the products of their country developed the enterprise and diligence of the people, gave England its power and wealth. However, there were also those who saw snobbery in English pride, the idea of the innate superiority of the “arrogant Britons” over all other nations.

Among other indispensable features typical of people in England have also been mentioned coldness, restraint in expressing their feelings and especially taciturnity that has become proverbial and the subject of numerous anecdotes. Some authors associated silence of the islanders with profundity and qualities such as endurance, calmness and self-control in a moment of danger, firmness of character and constancy, while others interpreted it as unfriendliness, lack of elementary attentiveness and courtesy. The taciturnity of the British was looked upon as an inability to have fun or even prudery. Most Russians believed that in the English society boredom and coercion reigned.

The gloomy character of the British, according to many Russian eyewitnesses, was reflected in the view of London, which they imagined to be dark and dull. Travellers claimed that the atmosphere of despondency envelops a foreigner in the English capital from the very first minute. “Endless rains and fogs” together with clouds of coal smoke gave rise to the national English

disease – “spleen”, or severe melancholy. The sullen, heavy temper of the British was often associated with the rough nature of their entertainment and games, such as cockfighting, horse racing and boxing. The rudeness of English taste was also seen in the predilection of the English to start betting on any occasion.

The most vital and typical feature of England’s inhabitants for Russian observers, though, was their “practicality”. The amazing energy and enterprise of its citizens eventually brought wealth and prosperity to the whole country. Indefatigability, diligence and intelligence of the English were associated with their ability to allocate time and money. Unfortunately, the rationalism and business acumen of the residents of England gave rise to a strong belief that they are not able to create or perceive works of genuine art. Of course, this did not correspond to reality, but such categorical judgments (occasionally accompanied by reservations) finally led to a persistent “stereotype”, even prejudice.

There is also a tradition in Russian literature and the press to portray the British as cranks. The propensity for strange deeds and inexplicable (for a Russian person) antics was considered almost a characteristic feature of this people. Oddities were noticed in the emphasized fidelity to age-old traditions (solemn rituals, provincial life), in the passion for hunting, in the addiction to club life (Pic. 4), etc. Bright accents in the creation of the portrait of the “eccentric” may have been added by the peculiarities of English humor, which, due to its originality, was not always understandable to foreigners.

The mosaic of the marked traits of the English character was combined, however, into a fairly complete portrait of a typical Englishman, which was constantly supplemented and detailed. Travelers’ notes played a huge role in creating a complex and multifaceted image of the country. Their impressions became the assets of public opinion in Russia, acquired typical features, integrating into the overall picture of England, both with light and dark sides, but in general a positive image of the overseas has been developed. England

became a symbol of the whole West that was often cited as an example when discussing purely Russian problems.

Interest and respect for British culture remain to this day, as evidenced by the constantly published books about England and the British, which gives us hope that our peoples will overcome mutual prejudices and will be able to communicate and look at each other with benevolence.

Illustrations:

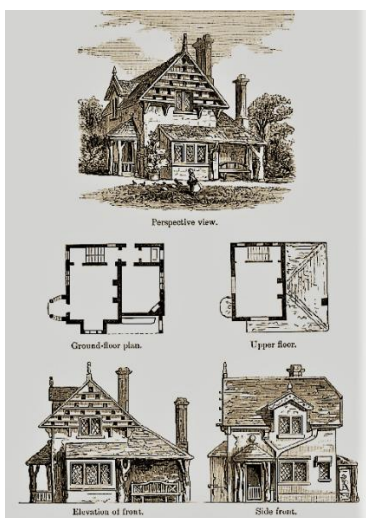
Picture 1:



The Parliament building.

<http://900igr.net/kartinka/obschestvoznanie/sravnitelnyj-analiz-istorii-anglijskogo-parlamenta-i-gosudarstvennoj-dumy-rossii-236998/sravnitelnyj-analiz-istorii-anglijskogo-parlamenta-i-gosudarstvennoj-7.html>

Picture 2:



An example of a house from the 19th century English catalog

<https://zen.yandex.ru/media/chronotope/angliia-xix-veka-v-kakih-domah-jil-srednij-klass-20-foto-5d9c68bb028d6800ae11588b>

Picture 3:



Gentlemen in the XIX century.

<https://kulturologia.ru/blogs/290320/45940/>

Picture 4:



Joseph Highmore - A Club of Gentlemen. 1730

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Joseph_Highmore_-_A_Club_of_Gentlemen_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

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