

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

**WITH FIRE
& SWORD**



HISTORICAL NOVEL

Henryk Sienkiewicz

**With Fire & Sword
(Historical Novel)**

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INTRODUCTION.

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The history of the origin and career of the two Slav States, Poland and Russia, is interesting not merely because it contains a vast number of surprising scenes and marvellous pictures of life, not merely because it gives us a kaleidoscope as it were of the acts of men, but because these acts in all their variety fall into groups which may be referred each to its proper source and origin, and each group contains facts that concern the most serious problems of history and political development.

The history of these two States should be studied as one, or rather as two parts of one history, if we are to discover and grasp the meaning of either part fully. When studied as a whole, this history gives us the life story of the greater portion of the Slav race placed between two hostile forces,-- the Germans on the west, the Mongols and Tartars on the east.

The advance of the Germans on the Slav tribes and later on Poland presents, perhaps, the best example in history of the methods of European civilization. The entire Baltic coast from Lubeck eastward was converted to Christianity by the Germans at the point of the sword. The duty of rescuing these people from the errors of paganism formed the moral pretext for conquering them and taking their lands. The warrior was accompanied by the missionary, followed by the political colonist. The people of the country deprived of their lands were reduced to slavery; and if any escaped this lot,

they were men from the higher classes who joined the conqueror in the capacity of assistant oppressors. The work was long and doubtful. The Germans made many failures, for their management was often very bad. The Slavs west of the Oder were stubborn, and under good leadership might have been invincible; but the leadership did not come, and to the Germans at last came the Hohenzollerns.

For the serious student there is no richer field of labor than the history of Poland and the Slavs of the Baltic, which is inseparable from the history of Mark Brandenburg and the two military orders, the Teutonic Knights and the Knights of the Sword.

The conquest of Russia by the Mongols, the subjection of Europeans to Asiatics,--not Asiatics of the south, but warriors from cold regions led by men of genius; for such were Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and the lieutenants sent to the west,--was an affair of incomparably greater magnitude than the German wars on the Baltic.

The physical grip of the Mongol on Russia was irresistible. There was nothing for the Russian princes to do but submit if they wished to preserve their people from dissolution. They had to bow down to every whim of the conqueror; suffer indignity, insult, death,--that is, death of individuals. The Russians endured for a long time without apparent result. But they were studying their conquerors, mastering their policy; and they mastered it so well that finally the Prince of Moscow made use of the Mongols to complete the union of eastern Russia and reduce all the provincial princes of the country, his own relatives, to the position of ordinary landholders subject to himself.

The difference between the Poles and Russians seems to be this,--that the Russians saw through the policy of their enemies, and then overcame them; while the Poles either did not understand the Germans, or if they did, did not overcome them, though they had the power.

This Slav history is interesting to the man of science, it is interesting also to the practical statesman, because there is no country in the Eastern hemisphere whose future may be considered outside of Russian influence, no country whose weal or woe may not become connected in some way with Russia. At the same time there are no states studied by so few and misunderstood by so many as the former Commonwealth of Poland,--whose people, brave and brilliant but politically unsuccessful, have received more sympathy than any other within the circle of civilization,--and Russia, whose people in strength of character and intellectual gifts are certainly among the first of the Aryan race, though many men have felt free to describe them in terms exceptionally harsh and frequently unjust.

The leading elements of this history on its western side are Poland, the Catholic Church, Germany; on the eastern side they are Russia, Eastern Orthodoxy, Northern Asia.

Now let us see what this western history was. In the middle of the ninth century Slav tribes of various denominations occupied the entire Baltic coast west of the Vistula; a line drawn from Lubeck to the Elbe, ascending the river to Magdeburg, thence to the western ridge of the Bohemian mountains, and passing on in a somewhat irregular course, leaving Carinthia and Styria on the east, gives the boundary between the Germans and the Slavs at

that period. Very nearly in the centre of the territory north of Bohemia and the Carpathians lived one of a number of Slav tribes, the Polyane (or men of the plain), who occupied the region afterwards called Great Poland by the Poles, and now called South Prussia by the Germans. In this Great Poland political life among the Northwestern Slavs began in the second half of the ninth century. About the middle of the tenth, Mechislav (Mieczislav), the ruler, received Christianity, and the modest title of Count of the German Empire. Boleslav the Brave, his son and successor, extended his territory to the upper Elbe, from which region its boundary line passed through or near Berlin, whence it followed the Oder to the sea. Before his death, in 1025, Boleslav wished to be anointed king by the Pope. The ceremony was denied him, therefore he had it performed by bishops at home. About a century later the western boundary was pushed forward by Boleslav Wry-mouth (1132-1139) to a point on the Baltic about half-way between Stettin and Lubeck. This was the greatest extension of Poland to the west. Between this line and the Elbe were Slav tribes; but the region had already become marches (marches) where the intrusive Germans were struggling for the lands and persons of the Slavs.

The eastern boundary of Poland at this period served also as the western boundary of Russia from the head-waters of the western branch of the river San in the Carpathian Mountains at a point west of Premysl (in the Galicia of today) to Brest-Litovsk, from which point the Russian boundary continued toward the northeast till it reached the sea, leaving Pskoff considerably and Yurieff (now Dorpat)

slightly to the east,--that is, on Russian territory. Between Russia, north of Brest-Litovsk and Poland, was the irregular triangle composing the lands of Lithuanian and Finnish tribes. From the upper San the Russian boundary southward coincided with the Carpathians, including the territory between the Pruth to its mouth and the Carpathians. This boundary between Poland and Russia, established at that period, corresponds as nearly as possible with the line of demarcation between the two peoples at the present day.

During the two centuries following 1139, Poland continued to lose on the west and the north, and that process was fairly begun through which the Germans finally excluded the Poles from the sea, and turned the cradle of Poland into South Prussia, the name which it bears to-day.

At the end of the fourteenth century a step was taken by the Poles through which it was hoped to win in other places far more than had been lost on the west. Poland turned now to the east; but by leaving her historical basis on the Baltic, by deserting her political birthplace, the only ground where she had a genuine mission, Poland entered upon a career which was certain to end in destruction, unless she could win the Russian power by agreement, or bend it by conquest, and then strengthened by this power, turn back and redeem the lost lands of Pomerania and Prussia.

The first step in the new career was an alliance with Yagello (Yahailo) of Lithuania, from which much was hoped. This event begins a new era in Polish history; to this event we must now give attention, for it was the first in a long series which ended in the great outburst described in this

book,--the revolt of the Russians against the Commonwealth.

To reach the motives of this famous agreement between the Lithuanian prince and the nobles and clergy of Poland,--for these two estates had become the only power in the land,--we must turn to Russia.

Lithuania of itself was small, and a prince of that country, if it stood alone, would have received scant attention from Poland; but the Lithuanian Grand Prince was ruler over all the lands of western Russia as well as those of his own people.

What was Russia?

The definite appearance of Russia in history dates from 862, when Rurik came to Novgorod, invited by the people to rule over them. Oleg, the successor of this prince, transferred his capital from Novgorod to Kieff on the Dnieper, which remained the chief city and capital for two centuries and a half. Rurik's great-grandson, Vladimir, introduced Christianity into Russia at the end of the tenth century. During his long reign and that of his son Yaroslav the Lawgiver, the boundary was fixed between Russia and Poland through the places described above, and coincided very nearly with the watershed dividing the two river-systems of the Dnieper and the Vistula, and serves to this day as the boundary between the Russian and Polish languages and the Eastern and Catholic churches.

In 1157 Kieff ceased to be the seat of the Grand Prince, the capital of Russia. A new centre of activity and government was founded in the north,--first at Suzdal, and then at Vladimir, to be transferred later to Moscow.

In 1240 the conquest of Russia by the Tartars was complete. Half a million or more of armed Asiatics had swept over the land, destroying everything where they went. A part of this multitude advanced through Poland, and were stopped in Silesia and Moravia only by the combined efforts of central Europe. The Tartar dominion lasted about two hundred and fifty years (1240-1490), and during this period great changes took place. Russia before the Tartar conquest was a large country, whose western boundary was the eastern boundary of Poland; liberated Russia was a comparatively small country, with its capital at Moscow, and having interposed between it and Poland a large state extending from the Baltic to the Black Sea,--a state which was composed of two thirds of that Russia which was ruled before the Tartar conquest by the descendants of Rurik; a state which included Little, Red, Black, and White Russia, more than two thirds of the best lands, and Kieff, with the majority of the historic towns of pre-Tartar Russia.

How was this state founded?

This state was the Lithuanian Russian,--Litva í Rus (Lithuania and Russia), as it is called by the Russians,--and it rose in the following manner. In the irregular triangle on the Baltic, between Russia and Poland of the twelfth century, lived tribes of Finnish and Lithuanian stock, about a dozen in number. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries these were all conquered,--the Prussian Lithuanians from the Niemen to the Vistula, by the Teutonic Knights, aided by crusading adventurers from western Europe; the others, Lithuanian and Finnish, by the Knights of the Sword,--with the exception of two tribes, the Lithuanians proper, on the

upper waters of the Niemen and its tributaries, and the Jmuds or Samogitians on the right bank of the same river, lower down and between the Lithuanians and the sea. These two small tribes were destined through their princes--remarkable men in the fullest sense of the word--to play a great part in Russian and Polish history. It is needless to say much of the Lithuanians, who are better known to scholars than any people, perhaps, of similar numbers in Europe. The main interest in them at present is confined to their language, which, though very valuable to the philologist and beautiful in itself, has never been used in government or law, and has but one book considered as belonging to literature,--"The Four Seasons" by Donaleitis.

Though small, the Lithuanian country, ruled by a number of petty princes, was as much given to anarchy as larger aggregations of men. United for a time under Mindog by reason of pressure from outside, the Lithuanians rose first to prominence under Gedimin (1315-1340), who in a quarter of a century was able to substitute himself for the petty princes of western Russia and extend his power to the south of Kieff. Gedimin was followed by Olgerd, who with his uncle Keistut ruled till 1377; during which time the domains of the Lithuanian prince were extended to the Crimea, and included the whole basin of the Dnieper with its tributaries, together with the upper Dvina. Gedimin and Olgerd respected in all places the clergy of the Eastern Church, and thus acquired rule over a great extent of country with comparative ease and rapidity.

Olgerd, who had completed a great state, left it to his sons and his brother Keistut. Yagello (Yahailo), one of these

sons, had Keistut put to death; his brothers and cousins fled; Yagello became sole master. At this juncture the nobles and clergy of Poland effected an arrangement by which Yagello, on condition of becoming a Catholic, introducing the Catholic religion into Lithuania, and joining the state to Poland, was to marry the Queen Yadviga (the last survivor of the royal house) and be crowned king of Poland at Cracow. All these conditions were carried out, and with the reign of Yagello Polish history assumes an entirely new character.

With the establishment by Gedimin and Olgerd of the Lithuanian dynasty and its conquests, there were two Russias instead of one,--Western Russia, ruled by the house of Gedimin, and Eastern Russia, ruled by the house of Rurik. It had become the ambition of the Lithuanian princes to unite all Russia; it had long been the fixed purpose of the princes at Moscow to recover their ancient patrimony, the lands of Vladimir and Yaroslav; that is, all western Russia to the Polish frontier; consequently all the lands added by the Lithuanian princes to their little realm on the Niemen and its tributaries. This struggle between the two houses was very bitter, and more than once it seemed as though Moscow's day had come, and Vilna was to be the capital of reconstituted Russia.

When the question was at this stage, Yagello became King of Poland. The union, purely personal at first, became more intimate later on by means of the two elements of Polish influence, the Church and the nobility. Catholicism was made the religion of the Lithuanians at once; and twenty-seven years later, at Horodlo, it was settled that the Lithuanian Catholics of the higher classes should receive the

same privileges as the Polish nobility, with whom they were joined by means of heraldry,--a peculiar arrangement, through which a number of Lithuanian families received the arms of some Polish house, and became thus associated, as the original inhabitants of America are associated under the same *totem* by the process of adoption.

Without giving details, for which there is no space here, we state merely the meaning of all the details. Lithuania struggled persistently against anything more than a personal union, while Poland struggled just as persistently for a complete union; but no matter how the Lithuanians might gain at one time or another, the personal union under a king influenced by Polish ideas joined to the great weight of the clergy and nobility was too much for them, and the end of the whole struggle was that under Sigismund Augustus, the last of the Yagellon kings, a diet was held at Lublin in which a union between Poland and Lithuania was proclaimed against the protest of a large number of the Lithuanians who left the diet. The King, who was hereditary Grand Duke of Lithuania, and childless, made a present to Poland of his rights,--made Poland his heir. The petty nobility of Lithuania were placed on the same legal footing as the princes and men of great historic families. Lithuania was assimilated to Poland in institutions.

The northern part of West Russia was attached to Lithuania, and all southern Russia merged directly in Poland. If the work of this diet had been productive of concord, and therefore of strength, Poland might have established herself firmly by the sea and won the first place in eastern Europe; but the Commonwealth, either from choice or necessity,

was more occupied in struggling with Russians than in standing with firm foot on the Baltic. Sound statesmanship would have taught the Poles that for them it was a question of life and death to possess Pomerania and Prussia, and make the Oder at least their western boundary. They had the power to do that; they had the power to expel the two military orders from the coast; but they did not exert it,--a neglect which cost them dear in later times. Moscow would not have escaped the Poles had they been masters of the Baltic, and had they, instead of fighting with Cossacks and Russians, attached them to the Commonwealth by toleration and justice.

The whole internal policy of Poland from the coronation of Yagello to the reign of Vladislav IV. was to assimilate the nobility of Lithuania and Russia to that of Poland in political rights and in religious profession. The success was complete in the political sense, and practically so in the religious. The Polish nobility, who were in fact the state, possessed at the time of Yagello's coronation all the land, and owned the labor of the people; later on they ceased to pay taxes of any kind. It was a great bribe to the nobles of Lithuania and Russia to occupy the same position. The Lithuanians became Catholics at the accession of Yagello, or soon after; but in Russia, where all belonged to the Orthodox Church, the process was slow, even if sure. The princes Ostrorog and Dominik Zaslavski of this book were of Russian families which held their faith for a long time. The parents of Prince Yeremi Vishnyevetski were Orthodox, and his mother on her death-bed implored him to be true to the faith of his ancestors.

All had been done that could be done with the nobility; but the great mass of Russian people holding the same faith as the Russians of the East, whose capital was at Moscow, were not considered reliable; therefore a union of churches was effected, mainly through the formal initiative of the King Sigismund III. and a few ecclesiastics, but rejected by a great majority of the Russian clergy and people. This new or united church, which retained the Slav language with Eastern customs and liturgy, but recognized the supremacy of the Pope, was made the state church of Russia.

From this rose all the religious trouble.

The Russians, when Hmel'nitski appeared, were in the following condition: Their land was gone; the power of life and death over them resided in lords, either Poles or Polonized Russians, who generally gave this power to agents or tenants, not infrequently Jews. All justice, all administration, all power belonged to the lord or to whomsoever he delegated his authority; there was no appeal. A people with an active communal government of their own in former times were now reduced to complete slavery. Such was the Russian complaint on the material side. On the moral side it was that their masters were filching their faith from them. Having stripped them of everything in this life, they were trying to deprive them of life to come.

The outburst of popular rage against Poland was without example in history for intensity and volume, and this would have made the revolt remarkable whatever its motives or objects. But the Cossack war was of world-wide importance in view of the issues. The triumph of Poland would have

brought the utter subjection of the Cossacks and the people, with the extinction of Eastern Orthodoxy not only in Russia but in other lands; for the triumph of Poland would have left no place for Moscow on earth but a place of subjection. The triumph of the Cossacks would have brought a mixed government, with religious toleration and a king having means to curb the all-powerful nobles. This was what Hmelnitski sought; this was the dream of Ossolinski the Chancellor; this, if realized, might possibly have saved the Commonwealth, and made it a constitutional government instead of an association of irresponsible magnates.

It turned out that the Cossacks and the uprisen people were not a match for the Poles, and it was not in the interest of the Tartars to give the Cossacks the fruits of victory. It was the policy of the Tartars to bring the Poles into trouble and then rescue them; they wished the Poles to have the upper hand, but barely have it, and be in continual danger of losing it.

The battle of Berestechko, instead of giving peace to the Commonwealth, opened a new epoch of trouble. Hmelnitski, the ablest man in Europe at that time, could be conquered by nothing but death. Though beaten through the treachery of the Khan at Berestechko and perhaps also by treason in his own camp, he rallied, concluded the treaty of Bélaya Tserkoff, which reduced the Cossack army from forty to twelve thousand men, but left Hmelnitski hetman of the Zaporojians. That was the great mistake of the Poles; every success was for them a failure so long as Hmelnitski had a legal existence.

The Poles, though intellectual, sympathetic, brave, and gifted with high personal qualities that have made them many friends, have been always deficient in collective wisdom; and there is probably no more astonishing antithesis in Europe than the Poles as individuals and the Poles as a people.

After Berestechko the Poles entered the Ukraine as masters. Vishnyevetski went as the ruling spirit. To all appearance the time of his triumph had come; but one day after dinner he fell ill and died suddenly. The verdict of the Russian people was: The Almighty preserved him through every danger, saved him from every enemy, and by reason of the supreme wickedness of "Yarema," reserved him for his own holy and punishing hand.

The old order of things was restored in Russia,--landlords, garrisons, Jews; but now came the most striking event in the whole history.

Moldavia, the northern part of the present kingdom of Romania, was at that time a separate principality, owning the suzerainty of the Sultan. Formerly it had been a part of the Russian principality of Galich (Galicia), joined to Poland in the reign of Kazimir the Great, but connected, at the time of our story, with Turkey. The Poles had intimate relations with the country, and sought to bring it back. The Hospodar was Vassily Lupul, a man of fabulous wealth, according to report, and the father of two daughters, whose beauty was the wonder of eastern Europe. Prince Radzivil of Lithuania had married the elder; the younger, Domna (Domina) Rosanda, was sought in marriage by three men from Poland and by Timofei Hmelnitski, the son of Bogdan. The first of

the Poles was Dmitry Vishnyevetski; the second was Kalinovski, the aged hetman of the Crown, captured by Hmelnitski at Korsún, but now free and more ambitious than any man in the Commonwealth of half his age, which was then near seventy.

Lupul, who had consented to the marriage of his daughter with young Hmelnitski, preferred Vishnyevetski; whereupon Bogdan exclaimed, "We will send a hundred thousand best men with the bridegroom." Thirty-six thousand Cossacks and Tartars set out for Yassy, the residence of Lupul. Kalinovski, the Polish hetman, with twenty thousand men, barred the way to young Hmelnitski at Batog on the boundary. It was supposed that Timofei was attended by a party of only five thousand, and Kalinovski intended to finish a rival and destroy the son of an enemy at a blow. This delusion of the hetman was probably caused, but in every case confirmed, by a letter from Bogdan, in which he stated that his son, with some attendants, was on his way to marry the daughter of the Hospodar; that young men are hot-headed and given to quarrels, blood might be spilled; therefore he asked Kalinovski to withdraw and let the party pass.

This was precisely what Kalinovski would not do; he resolved to stop Timofei by force. The first day, five thousand Cossacks and Tartars, while passing to the west, were attacked by the Poles, who pursued them with cavalry. When a good distance from the camp, a courier rushed to the hetman with news of a general attack on the rear of the Polish army. The Poles returned in haste, pursued in their turn.

Young Hmelnitski had fallen upon a division of the army in the rear of the camp, and almost destroyed it. Darkness brought an end to the struggle. No eye was closed on either side that night. One half of the Polish army resolved to escape in spite of the hetman. At daybreak they were marching. "They shall not flee!" said Kalinovski "Stop them with cavalry; open on the cowards with cannon!" One part of the Polish army hurried to stop the other; there was a discharge of artillery; some of the fugitives rushed on, but most of them stopped. Then a second discharge of artillery, and a battle began. The Cossacks gazed on this wonderful scene; when their amazement had passed, they attacked the enemy, and indescribable slaughter began. It was impossible for the Poles to re-form or make effective defence. At this moment the army-servants, many of whom were Russians, set fire to the camp. Outnumbered and panic-stricken, thousands of Poles rushed into the Bug and were drowned. The Cossacks, with Berestechko in mind, showed mercy to no man; and of the whole army of twenty thousand, less than five hundred escaped. The peasants in all the country about killed the fugitives with scythes and clubs. Those who crossed the river were slaughtered on the other bank; among them was Samuel Kalinovski, son of the hetman. Then Kalinovski himself, seeing that all was lost cried, "I have no wish to live; I am ashamed to look on the sun of this morning!" and rushed to the thick of the fight. He perished; and a Nogai horseman raced over the field, while from his saddle-bow depended the head of the hetman with its white streaming hair. After the battle the body was

discovered; on it the portrait of Domna Rosanda and the letter of Bogdan.

Farther on, near the Bug, was a division of five thousand Germans under command of Marek Sobieski, the gifted chief who had fought at Zbaraj. Attacked in front by the Cossacks, they stood with manful persistence till Karach Murza, the Nogai commander, at the head of fourteen thousand men, descended upon them from the hills of Botog like a mighty rain from the clouds or a whirlwind of the desert, as the Ukraine chronicler phrases it. Split in the centre, torn through and through, the weapons dropped from their hands, they were ridden down and sabred by Nogais and Cossacks. Sobieski perished; Pshiyemski, commander of artillery, was killed.

A year later the Poles at Jvanyets were in greater straits than ever before. They were surrounded by Hmelnitski and the Khan so that no escape was possible; but they had more gold to give than had the Cossacks. They satisfied those in power, from the Khan downward, with gifts, and covenanted to let them plunder Russia and seize Russian captives during six weeks. On these conditions the Tartars deserted Hmelnitski, peace was concluded, and the Polish army and king were saved from captivity.

This was the last act of the Cossack-Tartar alliance. Hmelnitski now turned to Moscow; the Zaporojian army took the oath of allegiance to Alexis, father of Peter the Great. Lithuania and western Russia were overrun by the forces of Moscow and the Cossacks. The Swedes occupied Warsaw and Cracow. Karl Gustav, their king, became king of Poland. Yan Kazimir fled to Silesia.

Again the Polish king came back, but soon resigned, and ended his life in France.

The eastern bank of the Dnieper, with Kieff on the west, went to Russia; but it was not till the reign of Katherine II. that western Russia was united to the east, and Prussia and Austria received all the lands of Poland proper.

I feel constrained to ask kindly indulgence from the readers of this sketch. I am greatly afraid that it will seem indefinite and lacking in precision; but the field to be covered is so great that I wrote with two kinds of readers in view,--those who are already well acquainted with Slav history, and those who do not know this history yet, but who may be roused to examine it for themselves. I hope to give a sketch of this history in a future not too remote, with an account of the sources of original information; so that impartial students, as Americans are by position, may have some assistance in beginning a work of such commanding importance as the history of Poland and Russia.

Jeremiah Curtin.

Washington, D. C, April 4, 1890.

CHAPTER I.

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The year 1647 was that wonderful year in which manifold signs in the heavens and on the earth announced misfortunes of some kind and unusual events. Contemporary chroniclers relate that beginning with spring-time myriads of locusts swarmed from the Wilderness, destroying the grain and the grass; this was a forerunner of Tartar raids. In the summer there was a great eclipse of the sun, and soon after a comet appeared in the sky. In Warsaw a tomb was seen over the city, and a fiery cross in the clouds; fasts were held and alms given, for some men declared that a plague would come on the land and destroy the people. Finally, so mild a winter set in, that the oldest inhabitants could not remember the like of it. In the southern provinces ice did not confine the rivers, which, swollen by the daily melting of snows, left their courses and flooded the banks. Rainfalls were frequent. The steppe was drenched, and became an immense slough. The sun was so warm in the south that, wonder of wonders! in Bratslav and the Wilderness a green fleece covered the steppes and plains in the middle of December. The swarms in the beehives began to buzz and bustle; cattle were bellowing in the fields. Since such an order of things appeared altogether unnatural, all men in Russia who were waiting or looking for unusual events turned their excited minds and eyes especially to the Wilderness, from which rather than anywhere else danger might show itself.

At that time there was nothing unusual in the Wilderness,--no struggles there, nor encounters, beyond those of ordinary occurrence, and known only to the eagles, hawks, ravens, and beasts of the plain. For the Wilderness was of this character at that period. The last traces of settled life ended on the way to the south, at no great distance beyond Chigirin on the side of the Dnieper, and on the side of the Dniester not far from Uman; then forward to the bays and sea there was nothing but steppe after steppe, hemmed in by the two rivers as by a frame. At the bend of the Dnieper in the lower country beyond the Cataracts Cossack life was seething, but in the open plains no man dwelt; only along the shores were nestled here and there little fields, like islands in the sea. The land belonged in name to Poland, but it was an empty land, in which the Commonwealth permitted the Tartars to graze their herds; but since the Cossacks prevented this frequently, the field of pasture was a field of battle too.

How many struggles were fought in that region, how many people had laid down their lives there, no man had counted, no man remembered. Eagles, falcons, and ravens alone saw these; and whoever from a distance heard the sound of wings and the call of ravens, whoever beheld the whirl of birds circling over one place, knew that corpses or unburied bones were lying beneath. Men were hunted in the grass as wolves or wild goats. All who wished, engaged in this hunt. Fugitives from the law defended themselves in the wild steppes. The armed herdsman guarded his flock, the warrior sought adventure, the robber plunder, the Cossack a Tartar, the Tartar a Cossack. It happened that whole bands

guarded herds from troops of robbers. The steppe was both empty and filled, quiet and terrible, peaceable and full of ambushes; wild by reason of its wild plains, but wild, too, from the wild spirit of men.

At times a great war filled it. Then there flowed over it like waves Tartar chambuls, Cossack regiments, Polish or Wallachian companies. In the night-time the neighing of horses answered the howling of wolves, the voices of drums and brazen trumpets flew on to the island of Ovid and the sea, and along the black trail of Kutchman there seemed an inundation of men. The boundaries of the Commonwealth were guarded from Kamenyets to the Dnieper by outposts and stanitsas; and when the roads were about to swarm with people, it was known especially by the countless flocks of birds which, frightened by the Tartars, flew onward to the north. But the Tartar, if he slipped out from the Black Forest or crossed the Dniester from the Wallachian side, came by the southern provinces together with the birds.

That winter, however, the birds did not come with their uproar to the Commonwealth. It was stiller on the steppe than usual. At the moment when our narrative begins the sun was just setting, and its reddish rays threw light on a land entirely empty. On the northern rim of the Wilderness, along the Omelnik to its mouth, the sharpest eye could not discover a living soul, nor even a movement in the dark, dry, and withered steppe grass. The sun showed but half its shield from behind the horizon. The heavens became obscured, and then the steppe grew darker and darker by degrees. Near the left bank, on a small height resembling more a grave-mound than a hill, were the mere remnants of

a walled stanitsa which once upon a time had been built by Fedor Buchatski and then torn down by raids. A long shadow stretched from this ruin. In the distance gleamed the waters of the widespread Omelnik, which in that place turned toward the Dnieper. But the lights went out each moment in the heavens and on the earth. From the sky were heard the cries of storks in their flight to the sea; with this exception the stillness was unbroken by a sound.

Night came down upon the Wilderness, and with it the hour of ghosts. Cossacks on guard in the stanitsas related in those days that the shades of men who had fallen in sudden death and in sin used to rise up at night and carry on dances in which they were hindered neither by cross nor church. Also, when the wicks which showed the time of midnight began to burn out, prayers for the dead were offered throughout the stanitsas. It was said, too, that the shades of mounted men coursing through the waste barred the road to wayfarers, whining and begging them for a sign of the holy cross. Among these ghosts vampires also were met with, who pursued people with howls. A trained ear might distinguish at a distance the howls of a vampire from those of a wolf. Whole legions of shadows were also seen, which sometimes came so near the stanitsas that the sentries sounded the alarm. This was generally the harbinger of a great war.

The meeting of a single ghost foreboded no good, either; but it was not always necessarily of evil omen, for frequently a living man would appear before travellers and vanish like a shadow, and therefore might easily and often be taken for a ghost.

Night came quickly on the Omelnik, and there was nothing surprising in the fact that a figure, either a man or a ghost, made its appearance at the side of the deserted stanitsa. The moon coming out from behind the Dnieper whitened the waste, the tops of the thistles, and the distance of the steppe. Immediately there appeared lower down on the plain some other beings of the night. The flitting clouds hid the light of the moon from moment to moment; consequently those figures flashed up in the darkness at one instant, and the next they were blurred. At times they disappeared altogether, and seemed to melt in the shadow. Pushing on toward the height on which the first man was standing, they stole up quietly, carefully, slowly, halting at intervals.

There was something awe-exciting in their movements, as there was in all that steppe which was so calm in appearance. The wind at times blew from the Dnieper, causing a mournful rustle among the dried thistles, which bent and trembled as in fear. At last the figures vanished in the shadow of the ruins. In the uncertain light of that hour nothing could be seen save the single horseman on the height.

But the rustle arrested his attention. Approaching the edge of the mound, he began to look carefully into the steppe. At that moment the wind stopped, the rustling ceased; there was perfect rest.

Suddenly a piercing whistle was heard; mingled voices began to shout in terrible confusion, "Allah! Allah! Jesus Christ! Save! Kill!" The report of muskets re-echoed; red flashes rent the darkness. The tramp of horses was heard

with the clash of steel. Some new horsemen rose as it were from beneath the surface of the steppe. You would have said that a storm had sprung up on a sudden in that silent and ominous land. The shrieks of men followed the terrible clash. Then all was silent; the struggle was over.

Apparently one of its usual scenes had been enacted in the Wilderness.

The horsemen gathered in groups on the height; a few of them dismounted, and examined something carefully. Meanwhile a powerful and commanding voice was heard in the darkness.

"Strike a fire in front!"

In a moment sparks sprang out, and soon a blaze flashed up from the dry reeds and pitch-pine which wayfarers through the Wilderness always carried with them.

Straightway the staff for a hanging-lamp was driven into the earth. The glare from above illuminated sharply a number of men who were bending over a form stretched motionless on the ground.

These men were soldiers, in red uniforms and wolf-skin caps. Of these, one who sat on a valiant steed appeared to be the leader. Dismounting, he approached the prostrate figure and inquired,--

"Well, Sergeant, is he alive yet, or is it all over with him?"

"He is alive, but there is a rattling in his throat; the lariat stifled him."

"Who is he?"

"He is not a Tartar; some man of distinction."

"Then God be thanked!"

The chief looked attentively at the prostrate man.

"Well, just like a hetman."

"His horse is of splendid Tartar breed; the Khan has no better," said the sergeant. "There he stands."

The lieutenant looked at the horse, and his face brightened. Two soldiers held a really splendid steed, who, moving his ears and distending his nostrils, pushed forward his head and looked with frightened eyes at his master.

"But the horse will be ours, Lieutenant?" put in, with an inquiring tone, the sergeant.

"Dog believer! would you deprive a Christian of his horse in the steppe?"

"But it is our booty--"

Further conversation was interrupted by stronger breathing from the suffocated man.

"Pour gorailka into his mouth," said the lieutenant, undoing his belt.

"Are we to spend the night here?"

"Yes. Unsaddle the horses and make a good fire."

The soldiers hurried around quickly. Some began to rouse and rub the prostrate man; some started off for reeds to burn; others spread camel and bear skins on the ground for couches.

The lieutenant, troubling himself no more about the suffocated stranger, unbound his belt and stretched himself on a burka by the fire. He was a very young man, of spare habit of body, dark complexion, very elegant in manner, with a delicately cut countenance and a prominent aquiline nose. In his eyes were visible desperate daring and endurance, but his face had an honest look. His rather thick

mustache and a beard, evidently unshaven for a long time, gave him a seriousness beyond his years.

Meanwhile two attendants were preparing the evening meal. Dressed quarters of mutton were placed on the fire, a number of bustards and partridges were taken from the packs, and one wild goat, which an attendant began to skin without delay. The fire blazed up, casting out upon the steppe an enormous ruddy circle of light. The suffocated man began to revive slowly.

After a time he cast his bloodshot eyes around on the strangers, examining their faces; then he tried to stand up. The soldier who had previously talked with the lieutenant raised him by the armpits; another put in his hand a halbert, upon which the stranger leaned with all his force. His face was still purple, his veins swollen. At last, with a suppressed voice, he coughed out his first word, "Water!"

They gave him gorailka, which he drank repeatedly, and which appeared to do him good, for after he had removed the flask from his lips at last, he inquired in a clear voice, "In whose hands am I?"

The officer rose and approached him. "In the hands of those who saved you."

"It was not you, then, who caught me with a lariat?"

"No; the sabre is our weapon, not the lariat. You wrong our good soldiers with the suspicion. You were seized by ruffians, pretended Tartars. You can look at them if you are curious, for they are lying out there slaughtered like sheep."

Saying this, he pointed with his hand to a number of dark bodies lying below the height.