

Facts About Little Russia

THE name Ukraine means "border marches." For centuries it was the bulwark that protected Poland and Lithuania from the Tartars, Turks and other migrating Orientals. As a result it has had cruel taskmasters. The native population was largely Cossacks—a wild and unruly people at that time. They were not originally a tribe, but were men who went with into the wilderness to find freedom. The vast steppes, covered with grass to the height of a horse, within which a multitude of game lurked, lured them on.

There were Poles and Lithuanians and Russians and even Turks among them. They became marvellous shot-riders and swimmers; their horses were famous for their swiftness and endurance. Their differences gradually blended in a unity of purpose and principle. The name Zaporozhians was applied to the community that was the heart and soul of the great Ukraine. Their government was crude, but very republican in form. Each year the old officers laid down their duties in the presence of a general assembly, even in that day called the Rada, and new ones were then chosen.

At any member of the tribe could be elevated to the highest office, it permitted each one to aspire to this dignity. The highest official was known as the "hetman." If unpopular, he was sometimes choked to death—an effective, if cruel, displacement.

They carried on an intermittent warfare with Tartars on the east, stealing their cattle and occasionally making the unprotected towns. Again, their wandering excursions would be directed against the Turks, to the southeast, in the Balkans. Whenever of this they turned northward to the Slavonic population.

These early Ukrainians were ever at war with some body and for some body. They fought with Poland against Russia, with Russia against Poland, with Poland against Turkey, with Turkey against the Tartars. They assisted in placing an unrocked monk upon the throne at Moscow. They were simply natural warriors who rejoiced in that occupation. The warrior shaved his head except for a wig on the crown, which was allowed to grow long enough to wind around the ears.

Although professing the Orthodox Greek faith, they were the brigands and the corsairs of Christianity. Though nominally subjects of Poland for a long time, the Ukrainians were constantly invading Poland in trouble. With the Tartar and Turkish rulers. At times they even captured Polish peasants and sold them as slaves to the Tartars, who in turn passed them on to the Persians.

The most serious conflict waged by Poland with her rebellious Ukrainians was during the insurrection under Chmielnicki in 1649. The massacre and the cruelties perpetrated by the half-civilized hordes from the Ukraine were as barbarous as those of the American Indians during the onward march of the whites.

On the failure of his rebellion Chmielnicki offered the annexation of Little Russia to Moscow. The offer was accepted in 1653, when it came under the suzerainty of that growing empire. Always striving for complete independence, the Ukrainians never quite able to achieve it. The wars with Poland resulted from that action.

It was more than a century after incorporation before the entire province was brought into complete subjection by the developing Russian Empire. The "hetman" was maintained for some time, but this office was abolished by the vigorous Catherine the Great, and under her, it became an integral part of the empire.

The Ukraine's experiences with war and disaster would long ago have broken the spirit of a race gifted with a plastic temperament. There are legends in their temper that enable them to stand such oppression without revolt. This characteristic may help the German in his attempts to make the Ukraine a subject nation.

The Little Russians have worked hard and fought hard, and they have earned a fairly united and stiff vigorous people. The population increases more steadily than that of Great Russia, as the people are greatly attached to home and do not care to wander far from their native villages. They are great lovers of the soil and cling to it with a passionate tenacity.

The Ukraine includes South-western Russia, with the exception of the province known as Bessarabia, which partakes of the character of the Balkan States and is peopled with Roumanians and Bulgarians. The great majority of Odessa and surrounding country have been added to it under the new alignment.

The Ukraine does not reach much north of Kiev or east of Kharkov, but it is a large state in itself, about as large as the German Empire, with some twenty-five or thirty millions of people living in it.

There are not many old towns in the Ukraine. Except in Kiev and Kharkov one will hardly find a building more than a hundred years old. No old mediæval churches built up by the toll of generations of devout hands, no old churches of the nobility, no palaces rich in pictures, will be encountered. The great majority of the towns are still big, overgrown villages.

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