

**TARAS BULBA: A
TALE OF
THE COSSACKS**

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Taras Bulba: a tale of the Cossacks by Isabel Florence Hapgood

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ISABEL FLORENCE HAPGOOD

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TARAS BULBA

A TALE OF THE COSSACKS

"TAIL"

TRANSLATED FROM
THE RUSSIAN OF
NICOLAI V. GOGOL

BY ISABEL F. HAPGOOD
WITH AN INTRODUCTION



ALFRED A. KNOPF
NEW YORK MCMXVII

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INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The famous old Kazák, Taras Bulba, is one of the great character-creations which speak for themselves, and require no extraneous comment or "interpretation." Indeed, his overflowing vitality embraces not only his sons, but all his comrades, with their typical Little Russian nomenclature ending in *ko*, and the reader's interest in Kazakdom in general and the Zaporozhtzi in particular, is kindled to a very unusual degree. He immediately wishes to know: Where was — and is — the Ukraina? Where was Zaporozhe? Where — and what — was its capital, The Sych? Where did the Kazáks get their name, and what does it mean?

Complete answers to these questions can be found only in Russian authorities. Historians and specialists have interested themselves so deeply and so long in these and allied questions, that the data available are confusingly abundant. I shall not bewilder the reader by giving him a choice of numerous theories: I shall autocratically select the

one which appears to me to be most rational, best founded, most satisfactory for all practical purposes, and offer it for his consideration if not his adoption.

The Ukraina, briefly stated, is — the Border Marches. Naturally it has varied, in different epochs, just as our Western Frontier (pretty nearly its exact equivalent) varied at different periods in the briefer history of the United States, and was pushed further and further away from the Eastern centre of civilisation. In the case of Russia, Moscow represented that centre.

The line was never fixed, never definite. At one period it ran not very far south of Moscow, although the region beyond a line beginning two or three hundred miles south of Moscow — Southwest Russia, with Kiev as its centre — contains, roughly stated, its variations and general location, so far as the "Ukraina" of Gogol's delightful Tales, and the exquisite poetry and music of The Ukraina are concerned.

When I was visiting the late Count L. N. Tolstoy at Yasnaya Polyana, the young men of the family often played on their balalaikas (among other Russian folk-songs) a dance-song which irresistibly incited one to laughter, and set one's feet to patting. When I inquired the words to this "Bárynya-Sudárynya" (Lady-Madam) I

was told that they were not only fragmentary but really quite shocking.

No one, it appears, had ever cared much for the words of "Bárynya-Sudárynya," and the four or five couplets generally known of the other reprehensible tune, the famous "Kamarynskaya," had been so badly damaged by careless repetition and reproduction that even the learned had come to look upon both songs as purely scandalous, useless, unworthy of notice. But one day it was discovered that "Bárynya-Sudárynya" is a sequel to the "Kamarynskaya,"—and that the words are scandalous in part only, while the two combined chronicle an interesting epoch of that strenuous life of the Border Marches—the Ukraina—which, for many centuries, was the chronic condition of the Tzardom of Muscovy as it evolved triumphantly to the present Empire of Russia.

The heroes of both songs are strictly historical personages, and their abode was the Southern Frontier—the Ukraina of Moscow—which, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries meant the present Government of Orel (pronounced *Aryól*), and so continued, with the addition of an unflattering adjective, until Little Russia, the Cradle of the Empire, temporarily conquered by Poland, was reunited to Moscow. During this second period a prominent place was occupied by the District of