

## THE COSSACKS.

There is a great deal of speculation, though but very little known about the origin of this strange race of people, who have contributed so much by their arms to the aggrandizement of the Russian Empire. Historians and geographers generally treat of them under two distinct heads,—the Cossacks of the Don, and the Cossacks of the Dnieper. All the various tribes of Cossacks of which we read, are probably offshoots from the one or the other of these two principal stocks.

We will speak first of the Cossacks of the Dnieper. So long ago as the 15th century, they had their home on the banks of this river, which flowed through their country from north to south. On their north lived the Poles and the Russians. On their south, the empire of the Turks extended along the entire northern coast of the Black Sea. Their country was very appropriately called the Ukraine, that is, the frontier country. Its natural situation made it the bulwark of Christendom against Mohammedanism, in this part of the world, and its inhabitants always had to bear the brunt of the battle, in the long and bloody wars between the Turks and their northern neighbors. Even in times of peace, they were never free from the dangers of sudden invasion. They were obliged to keep themselves continually on the lookout for the enemy. Thus, from the beginning, they became a nation of soldiers.

In the times when the Poles were prosperous and powerful, the Cossacks of the Dnieper acknowledged their supremacy, and fought under their banners. Sigismund I., who came to the throne in 1507, was the first Polish king who availed himself of the services of the Cossacks for the defence of his dominions against the Tartars; though we are told that Casimir, the same who united Poland and Lithuania, recognized them as his vassals, and gave them equal privileges with the Polish nobility.

In the reign of Stephen Batory, who ascended the throne in 1575, the Cossacks of the Dnieper began to play a very important part in the history of Poland. This king spared no pains for their improvement and amelioration. He trained them to habits of military discipline; he confirmed to them the possession of their territory, and the enjoyment of their own hereditary institutions. The government of the Cossacks was a democracy. The principle of equality was recognized, and no Cossack was disqualified by distinctions of rank from attaining the highest offices. Their chief was called the Hetman or Attaman. He was chosen annually, and during his term of office, his authority was unlimited. The Cossacks were not at all exclusive or clannish in their customs. Nobody was excluded from their community; hence their numbers were swollen with fugitives from justice, and victims of oppression from the countries around them. Thus they became a mixed race, though the Slavonic element was always predominant. For this reason, some have said that the Cossacks were not, properly speaking, a nation, but only a military organization, for the purposes of defence or plunder, like the Rangers of Texas; or a peculiar class of people, like the squatters of our western country. Many of the Cossacks were sailors, rather than horsemen, and the so-called Zaporog Cossacks, who lived on the lower Dnieper, were notorious for their piratical excursions on the Black Sea.

So long as the Poles kept their promises, and respected the liberties of the Cossacks, so long as the Cossacks remained faithful subjects of the Poles. But it stands recorded upon the pages of history, that the loyalty of the Cossacks was most shamefully abused by the Poles, who were afterwards summoned to witness the consequences of their injustice, in the dismemberment of their country.

The Jesuits crept into Poland. Here, as everywhere else, they laid their plots, and wove their intrigues. They insinuated themselves into the favor of the king; they gained access to the councils or the nation, and from that time the whole atmosphere of Poland became tainted with bigotry. The Cossacks had never acknowledged the supremacy of the Roman pontiff. They belonged to the Greek Church, which was also the national church of the Russians. They are damnable heretics, cried the Jesuits. They must forthwith be converted, answered the Poles; and so, the fires of persecution were lighted against this innocent people.

The nobility of Poland too, have just as much to answer for, in their treatment of the Cossacks, as the clergy. The haughty aristocrats could not bear to see the Cossacks enjoying equal privileges with themselves. They wished to make serfs of them. The will of the king was of no effect. The monarchy had become elective, and the king was no better than a foot-ball, to be kicked about by the contending factions. The nobles vied with the priests in oppressing the Cossacks; for intolerance in religion always goes hand in hand with tyranny in politics. Treaties were disregarded, and old established laws trodden under foot.

There lived among the Cossacks at this time, a man by the jaw-breaking name of Chmielniski. He became their Hetman. His property had been violated, and family outraged by a Polish governor. Private revenge, therefore, added fuel to his patriotism; he made an alliance with the Tartars of the Crimea. An army was raised, large enough to conquer the Poles, who, in 1649, by the treaty of Zboron, were forced to recognize all the rights and privileges of the Cossacks. But the Cossacks had become too far alienated from the Poles, ever to be their friends again. No treaty of peace could close up the breach between them.

The Poles and Russians were enemies, and the Cossacks had become formidable enough to hold the balance of power between them. They had generally fought on the side of the Poles, but the wrongs they had suffered, led them to forget their enmity towards the Russians. Their religion was the same as that of the Russians; and they were as nearly allied to them by blood as to the Poles.

They accordingly put themselves under the protection of Russia, and in 1654 the treaty of peace was concluded, which made them the subjects of the Czar. This event gave a shock to Poland, from which she never recovered.

But the Cossacks of the Dnieper fared no better with the Russians for their masters, than if they had submitted to the oppressions of the Poles. It made little difference that the Czar had sworn to respect their constitution, and to refrain from interfering in their internal affairs. The democracy of the Ukraine, and the absolutism of Russia could not exist together, any more than fire and water. Sooner or later the one was to absorb the other.

The process was probably hastened by the turbulent and disorderly spirit of the Cossacks. They were a nation of warriors, and like warlike nations generally, they were heroes on the field of battle, and notorious robbers everywhere else.

When Peter the Great and Charles XII. of Sweden were at war with each other, the Cossacks had Mazeppa for their Hetman, the same whom Byron has immortalized; he turned traitor to the Russians, and united his forces to those of Charles. The victory gained by Peter at the battle of Pultowa, in 1709, gave him full opportunity to exercise his revenge against the rebels. The Cossacks were deprived of their most valuable privileges; they were no longer permitted to choose their own Hetman; and the ambassadors whom they sent to the Czar, to complain of their grievances, were put in chains. Twelve thousand Cossacks ended their days in hard labor, as convicts, upon the Ladoga Canal. Ten thousand more were marched into Persia.

In 1784, Catherine II. put a finishing stroke to the work, which her predecessor had begun. The boundaries of the empire had been extended far beyond the Ukraine. The Cossacks were no longer the protectors of the frontier, and hence there was no need of continuing an organization so inconsistent with the despotic system of Russia. They had conspired together to throw off the yoke of Russia, and establish an independent government. Thus a plausible pretext was furnished for their complete annihilation. Some of their number were transported to the banks of the river Kuban, where their descendants still form part of the line of the Caucasus, under the name of Cossacks of the Black Sea. With this exception, the existence of the Cossacks of the Dnieper is only a matter of history, and all traces of their institutions in the Ukraine are well-nigh obliterated.

The Cossacks of the Don, on the contrary, still continue to occupy their ancient home, in one of the most fertile districts of the Russian empire. Their territory is a little larger than the State of Indiana, and contains a population of 700,000, of which 150,000 are serfs. Besides these, there are about 300,000 so-called Cossacks, distributed in military colonies along the line of the Caucasus, and through Siberia, who trace their relationship with the Cossacks of the Don, through the early settlers, that were sent out from them, in former times, to those regions, to guard the frontiers. Thus it appears that the Cossacks of the Russian empire number, at present, about a million of souls.

As early as 1570, the Cossacks of the Don became tributary to Russia. In those times they were a wild race of freebooters, famous for their courage and skill in war, and their turbulent and predatory spirit. We meet them in history, fighting the battles of the Russians against the Tartars, or taking an active part in the internal convulsions of the empire; engaged, sometimes, in exploring and conquering distant regions previously unknown; at other times, in plundering the caravans that bear the commerce of the Orient from Azof and Astrachan, to Moscow.

To the roving and restless spirit of the Cossacks, Russia owes her dominion over Siberia. In the reign of John the Terrible, a Cossack chief, by the name of Yermak, in the employment of the Stroganoffs, a family of wealthy merchants, undertook, with a handful of followers, 840 in number, an expedition across the Ural Mountains, which, like the expedition of Cortez to Mexico, resulted in the conquest of an empire, immense in extent, and abounding in inexhaustible mines of gold. The descendants of these adventurers and of those who followed them, now compose the aristocracy of Siberia. Some of them live in the towns; others are stationed in garrisons along the frontiers of China.

From the Cossacks of Siberia, we pass by the Cossacks of the Ural and Orenburg, who number together about 100,000, to those who compose the military line of the Caucasus. Their population amounts to about 150,000, of whom no less than 20,000 are constantly under arms. They occupy the chain of fortified villages or military posts, which extends along the northern frontier of Circassia from the Black Sea to the Caspian.

The descendants of the Cossacks who were first sent to this region, have had their ranks thinned so often by the fortunes of war, and then again, so often reinforced by fresh levies from various parts of the empire, and volunteers from the Tartars and other tribes around them, that the original stock of the Cossacks is scarcely discernible in this mixture of races. But if these military colonists are not Cossacks, by descent, they are more so by their habits and manner of life than any other subjects of the Czar.

Here, as nowhere else, the frontier settler is constantly exposed to the same dangers from the Circassians, as the Cossacks of former times from the Tartars. The same circumstances and necessities beget the same habits of life and the same character. Here, the Cossacks are engaged in a perpetual warfare with their southern neighbors, like those of former times, and hence we find them possessed of the same bold and adventurous spirit, the same hardihood and bravery.

But it is far otherwise with those Cossacks, who still dwell in the land of their ancestors, on the banks of the Don. The boundaries of the empire have been pushed far beyond their borders,

so that their country is no longer the theatre of war—no longer the frontier any more than the Ukraine. Their soil is remarkable for its fertility. Hence they have become an agricultural and pastoral people, much more inured to the arts of peace than of war. As was said above, their population amounts to about 700,000. They speak the same language as the Russians, and belong to the same great Slavonic race. The Cossacks of the Don never undertook to throw off the yoke of Russia, and make themselves entirely independent, like the Cossacks of the Dnieper, and hence they have been spared the fate which befell the latter. But their government and institutions underwent serious modifications in the reign of Peter the Great and Catherine II.

In the present century, too, and especially within the last twenty or thirty years, the process of assimilation to the despotic system of Russia has been going on, so that the Cossacks, although more favored, perhaps, than the other subjects of the Czar, still retain very few of their ancient liberties. They no longer choose their own Hetman. The title of Hetman of all the Cossacks is now vested in the hereditary prince of the empire. Most of their military and civil functionaries are appointed by the Czar. Once the principle of equality prevailed, but now an aristocracy has been instituted, and serfdom established. Formerly, all lands were held in common. But, in 1841, this kind of tenure was abolished, and every free male person was made the exclusive owner of about 80 acres of land, and to every serf was given half that amount. The Cossacks of the Don have no direct taxes to pay, and they are free from the operation of the government monopolies, which weigh so heavily upon the other provinces. In consideration for these exemptions, every Don Cossack between the ages of 16 and 42, must hold himself in readiness for military duty at any moment, armed, equipped, and mounted, exclusively at his own expense.

By the operation of this system of conscription, the Cossacks of the Don furnish an army of 50,000 to 60,000 cavalry, for the service of the Czar. These troops form, perhaps, the best body of light cavalry in Europe. No dependence can be put upon them in a pitched battle. They would never stand before the mouth of a cannon, or a charge of bayonets. But they are proverbial for their skill in horsemanship, and their sharpness in reconnoitering an enemy. Hence the celebrated Russian general, Suwaroff, called them the eye of the army. Large detachments of Cossacks always attend the movements of the regular army, when in active service; and all who have read the account of Napoleon's campaign in Russia, know well how efficient they are in harassing the enemy, and impeding his progress.

The Cossack troops are not allowed to be idle in times of peace. They are employed to carry into execution the extensive system of internal police and espionage of the empire. They form the escort of government officials, and persons of distinction on their journeys, and the guard of exiles on their way to Siberia. They are intrusted with the conveyance of important messages from one part of the empire to another, where dispatch is the most that is required. They are the spies, the gens d'armes, and hangmen of the empire. They are employed on the frontiers to prevent the smuggling of contraband goods, and waylay those travelers who presume to enter Russia without a passport.

In Asia, along the southern boundary, which stretches more than 4,000 miles through inhospitable wastes from the Black Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and in Europe, along the bank of the Danube and the borders of Germany to the Baltic Sea, the Cossack pursues his old vocation of guarding the frontiers. Wherever Russia extends her sway, there he posts himself as sentinel to watch the avenues of approach to this immense empire—to guard them alike against the incursions of the savage hordes of Asia, and the introduction of the revolutionary propaganda of Europe—the barbarism of the east, and the civilization of the west.

The attribute of ubiquity, which he apparently possesses, renders him a fit symbol of the power of the Czar. To the traveler in Russia, especially, he seems everywhere present, and hence the word Cossack, in the language of western Europe, has come to be a synonym, or, perhaps, a term of opprobrium for everything Russian.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the entire military force of the Cossacks amounts to about 125,000. After making allowance for the troops necessary to maintain defensive operations in Asia, and perform the ordinary police service in the interior, it is estimated that from 50,000 to 60,000 Cossacks, armed and mounted, might be brought into the field against western Europe.

[From Chambers' Journal.]

## THE SEWING GIRL.

Annie Linton was the best sewer in Mrs. Roy's school; and the mistress declared, on inspecting the first shirt she made for her father, "that the Duke of Buccleuch himself might wear it!" This was high praise for little Annie, who was only eleven years of age; and she never forgot it. Her work was the neatest and cleanest ever seen. Then she did it so quickly, her mother could not keep pace with her daily demand for "something to sew."

"I wish Annie would take to her book," said Mrs. Linton to her husband. But it was quite clear that Annie would never take to her book; she had little reading and less spelling; and yet she could "mark" (with cotton) all the letters of the alphabet, as if she was a very miracle of learning.

"Something to sew?" eagerly demanded Annie.

"Will any mowing come to this sewing?" asked her father, with a very natural attempt at a pun.

"Those who do not sew shall not reap," said

little Annie, cleverly taking up her father's meaning and her work-bag at the same time, as she whisked past him in fear of being too late for school.

Three weeks after—"Annie's learning to be a scholar," said Mrs. Linton, "no more demands for sewing." That afternoon Annie came bounding into the house from school, sat upon her father's knee, opened her work-bag, which hung over her arm, and putting a screwed up paper into his hand, said, "There's the mowing."

"Her father undid the paper, and found four half crowns. "Annie," questioned her father, "where did this come from?"

"From the sewing," answered Annie, laughing delightedly at his surprise, as she escaped from his knee, and ran out of the room, to delay a little longer the solution of the riddle.

"Wife," said John Linton, "is it possible that Annie could earn all this by the sort of child's play, girls call work; and whom did she earn it from? I'm afraid there's something wrong."

And, to tell the truth Annie Linton was practising a little disguise; nor had she given her father all the money she had earned. The sum originally was twelve shillings. This was all designed for her father alone; but a prior claim had come in the way. It was cold winter weather, and the children of the school brought their forms, in a sort of square, around Mrs. Roy's fire. Annie, who was a favorite of the mistress, always occupied a warm corner close to her own chair. On the day in question, Mrs. Roy happened to be out of the room—

"I'll change seats with you, Jessie Wilson, if you're cold," said Annie, addressing a little girl, a very book worm, who, clad in a threadbare printed cotton gown, sat shivering over her lesson.

Jessie, thus invited, came a little nearer.

"You should put on a woolen frock like mine, and warm yourself well at your mother's fire before you come to school these winter days," said Annie, scrutinizing the poverty-stricken appearance of the girl.

"Mother says," replied Jessie, "that she'd rather do without fire than my schooling, and she can't pay for both."

"Has your mother no fire at home this cold weather?" asked Annie, in amazement.

"No," said Jessie, "I wish I dared bring her with me here—it's warmer than at home. And I know mother is ill, though she won't tell me."

"Sit there," said Annie, placing Jessie in her warm corner; "and don't go out of school without me."

That afternoon the two girls went hand in hand to Jessie's door.

"Have you plenty to eat, if you've no fire?" asked Annie.

"This is the first day mother has been forced to send me to school without any breakfast," said Jessie, hanging down her head, as if ashamed of the confession.

"Here," said Annie, after a slight pause, untwisting the paper in which were deposited her first earnings; "I won't go in with you, for your mother might not like to take it from a little girl like me; but—" and she put two shillings into Jessie's hand—"that is to buy you something to eat, and a fire, and if your mother can sew as well as I can," said Annie, with pardonable vanity, "I can tell her how to get plenty of money to pay for both."

No wonder Annie's riches increased; the first investment was a good one. Nevertheless the concealing of it from her parents she knew to be wrong; she feared they would disapprove of it; and she added to her little prayer at night, after the usual ending of "God bless father and mother—and forgive me for keeping secret that I helped Jessie Wilson." Could the recording angel carry up a purer prayer to heaven?

Of course, Mr. and Mrs. Linton very soon discovered that Mr. Seamwell, of the "Ready-made Linen Warehouse," was the good source of Annie's wealth. He said there was no one who could work like her, and said that he would give eighteenpence each for the finest description of shirt making. This was no great payment for Annie's exquisite stitching—and thirty years ago it would have brought her three-and-sixpence a shirt. But Annie is of the present, not of the past; and as she could complete a shirt a day, her fingers flying swifter than a weaver's shuttle, she earned nine shillings a week.

"Good wife," said Mr. Linton, "we are not so poor but that we can maintain our daughter until she is twenty, and by that time, at the present rate of her earnings, she will have a little fortune in the bank." But this little fortune amassed but slowly, for Annie seldom had nine shillings at the end of the week—there were other "Jessie Wilsons" who required food and fire.

Had Annie been a poet, she would assuredly have written, not the song, but a song of the shirt, for once when she was questioned as to the dull monotony of her work: "Dull! Delightful!" said Annie, in advocacy of her calling. "Why, with this rare linen and fine thread, my stitches seem like stringing little pearls along the wristbands and collars! What an anti-song of the shirt might not Annie have written!"

Annie's eighteenth birth day was celebrated by a tea-party to all the sempstresses of Mr. Seamwell's establishment, where she was now forewoman; besides being a cheerful, kind-hearted little creature beloved by everybody; it was a compliment, Mr. Seamwell said, she well deserved—her admirable superintendence of the department allotted her having increased his business tenfold.

Sometime after, there was a great day of rejoicing in the firm of Seamwell & Co. The father had taken his son as a partner, and the son took a partner for life—the indefatigable little seamstress, Annie Linton. There never was a blither bridal. Annie—herself having risen from the ranks—had a present for every work-woman. Indeed, it was a day of presents, for on that very morning, and in time to be worn at the wedding, a shawl arrived for Annie, all the way from India,—an India shawl that a duchess would have envied! Upon it was pinned a paper, on which was