N. GOGOL

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PUBLISHING HOUSE
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ABOUT THIS BOOK

Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852) wrote his epic *Taras Bulba* over a period, broken by intervals, of more than nine years: from 1833 to 1842. The Ukrainian people's struggle for their independence, waged throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, stirred and inspired Gogol, a great patriot of his country. He was an enthusiastic reader of chronicles recording the events of that epoch, and loved to listen to the Ukrainian legends and historical folk ballads.

"Songs are my joy, my life! How I love them!" wrote Gogol. "Every song," said Gogol, "is a piece of folk history, living, vivid, full of colour, truth, revealing the whole life of a people"; it is of priceless use to a writer who would "feel out the spirit of a bygone age."

Historical writings, legends, folk ballads and songs—all these helped Gogol to paint a realistic picture of the life of the Ukrainian people and their heroic struggle, which was particularly intensified after the year 1569.

In 1569 the Ukraine was, by an act of treachery, in the city of Lublin, made a part of Poland. The powerful Polish magnates took possession of the vast Ukrainian lands and ruthlessly exploited the peasants, enforced their own Polish way of life, outlawing the Ukrainian language and stamping out Ukrainian culture in their effort to enslave the Ukrainian people spiritually, sever them from their Russian brothers, and thus rob the Ukraine of its independence. The Church Union, enacted in Brest in 1596, added religious oppression to economic, political and national enslavement. The Polish priests and magnates introduced by main force the Catholic faith and Papal supremacy and severely persecuted all "heretics"—adherents of the Orthodox Greek Church. All this could not but

meet with fierce resistance and rebellions on the part of the Ukrainian serfs.

The history of this struggle owes much, in a progressive sense, to the Cossacks of the Zaporozhian Setch—a military brotherhood made up of serfs who fled from their lords to the rich southern lands of the Russian state, and of free men who flocked to the Setch in the hope of escaping the double yoke of national and social oppression. For many decades the Zaporozhian Cossacks took part in campaigns for their country's liberation, and were the terror of the Turks, Tatars, and Polish squires.

The Zaporozhian Cossack Taras Bulba is a typical representative of the freedom-loving Ukrainian people. This character reflects the hopes and aspirations of the Ukrainian people, who dreamed of reuniting with their blood-brothers, the Russian people, who had preserved their statehood. This union Cossacks like Taras Bulba regarded as the sole means of preserving their nationhood, and therein lies the objective historical value of Gogol's tale.

The profound ideological message of the tale, its thrilling and truthful characters, Gogol's colourful portrayal of the people's life, have immortalized Gogol's epic.

CHAPTER ONE

"WELL, turn round, son! What a scarecrow you look! What sort of a priest's under-cassock have you got on? Is that the way they all dress at the Academy?"

With such words did old Bulba greet his two sons, who, after finishing their education at the Kiev Seminary, had returned home to their father.

His sons had just dismounted from their horses. They were stout fellows; both of them looked bashful, as young collegians are wont to do. Their firm, healthy faces were covered with the first down of manhood, which had, as yet, never known the razor. They were greatly discomfited by such a paternal welcome, and stood quite still with their eyes fixed on the ground.

"Stay! Let me have a good look at you," he went on, turning them round. "What long coats you have on! What coats indeed! The world has never seen their like before. Just run a little, one of you! I would fain see if you do not get tangled up in the skirts and fall down."

"Don't laugh at us, Father, don't laugh!" said the elder son at last.

"Look how proud he is! And why shouldn't I laugh?"

"Because, though you are my father, if you laugh, by God, I will give you a thrashing!"

"What! You devil's son! You would thrash your own father?" cried Taras Bulba, falling back a few paces in amazement.

"What if you are my father? I will allow no one to insult me."

"And how would you fight me? With your fists, eh?"

"Any way."

"Well, let it be with fists, then," said Taras Bulba, tucking up his sleeves. "I will see what sort of a man you are with your fists!"

And father and son, in lieu of a pleasant greeting after long separation, began to pommel each other on ribs, middle, and chest, now retreating and eyeing each other, now attacking afresh.

"Look ye, good people! the old man has gone mad! he's clean out of his mind!" cried the boys' pale-faced, thin, kindly mother, who was standing in the doorway, and had not yet had time to embrace her darling children. "The children are but just home, for more than a year we have not seen them; and he takes it into his head to start fighting with them!"

"Why, he fights pretty well!" said Bulba, pausing. "By God, he fights well!" he continued, patting down his clothes. "So well that perhaps I'd better not have fought him at all. He will make a good Cossack! Well, son, welcome home! You can give your father a kiss now!" And father and son fell to kissing each other. "That's right, son! Thrash everyone as you've drubbed me! Give quarter to none! But your garb is funny all the same. What rope is this dangling here? And you, you booby, why do you stand there with your hands hanging idle?" he called, turning to the youngest. "Come now, you hound's son, aren't you going to give me a drubbing?"

"That's all you can think of!" cried the mother, who was already hugging her youngest. "Who ever heard of

children fighting their own father? As if he has nothing better to do now: he's just a child, he has come ever so far, he is tired...." The child was over twenty, and a good six feet high. "He ought to be resting and eating something, and you want to make him fight!"

"Ah, you're a milksop, I see!" said Bulba. "Don't listen to your mother, sonny: she is a woman, and knows nothing. Do you want to be a tenderling all your life? The open field and a good horse—that's the kind of life you'll live! Look at this sabre—that's your mother! It is all rubbish they rammed into your heads—the Academy, and all your books and primers, and philosophy, and the devil knows what; I spit upon it all!" Here Bulba added a word which is not used in print. "I had better send you next week, not later, to Zaporozhye. That's where you'll get all the education you need. There's a school for you; there alone will you get brains!"

"Are they to stay only a week at home?" the gaunt old woman asked mournfully, with tears in her eyes. "The poor boys will have no time to celebrate their homecoming, no time to get to know their own home, and I'll have no time to feast my eyes on them!"

"Have done with your whining, old woman! A Cossack's not made to spend his life with women. You would like to hide both of them under your petticoats, and sit upon them as a hen sits on eggs. Go now, go, and put everything you have in the house on the board. We want none of your dumplings, honey-cakes, poppy-pasties, none of your pastry. Give us a whole sheep, a goat, forty-year-old mead; yes, and plenty of vodka, not with your fangles, your raisins and rubbish, but pure, foamy vodka that sparkles and hisses madly."

Bulba led his sons into the best room of the house, whence two pretty maidservants wearing red necklaces, who had been putting the house in order, ran out hastily. They were either frightened by the arrival of the

young masters, who were so strict with everybody, or else they merely wanted to keep up the feminine custom of screaming and flying at the sight of a man, and then covering their blushing faces with their sleeves. The room was furnished in the taste of that period, a period surviving only in songs and folk legends which are no longer sung in the Ukraine by the blind, bearded old minstrels, who used to sing them to the soft strumming of the *bandura,* surrounded by crowds of country-folk; in the fashion of those warlike and stern times when the Ukraine was fighting her first battles against the Union of the Greek Church with Popery. The walls, floor, and ceiling were neatly plastered with coloured clay. The walls were hung with sabres, riding-whips, bird and fish nets, guns, a powder-horn fancifully inlaid, a golden curb-bit, and tether-ropes with silver fastenings. The windows in the room were small, with dim, round-cut panes, such as are now found only in ancient churches, and through which one could only see by raising the sash. The windows and doors were rimmed with red. On shelves in the corners stood ewers, flasks, and flagons of green and blue glass, chased silver goblets, and gilded cups of all manner of workmanship—Venetian, Turkish, Circassian, which had found their way into Bulba's possession by various ways, at third and fourth hand, a thing quite common in those adventurous days. The elm-wood benches, which ran all round the room; the huge table in the front corner, under the icons; the wide stove with its many nooks and projections, laid out with varicoloured glazed tiles, with stove-ledges between the stove and the wall—all this was familiar enough to our two youths, who had every year walked home for the holidays. Yes, walk they did, for they had no horses of their own yet and because it was not the custom to permit collegians to ride on horseback. They had nought save their long scalp-locks to show for their manhood, and these every Cossack wearing arms was entitled to pull.

It was only upon graduation that Bulba had sent them a pair of young stallions from his herd.

In honour of his sons' return Bulba had summoned all the *sotniks* and all the officers of his regiment who happened to be at home; and when two of them came together with his old comrade Captain Dmitro Tovkach, he immediately presented his sons to them, saying, "See what fine lads they are! I shall send them to the Setch very soon." The guests congratulated Bulba as well as the two youths and said that they were doing the right thing, that there was no better school for a young man than the Zaporozhian Setch.

"Well, brother officers, sit you all down, each where he likes best, at the table. Now, sons, first let us drink some vodka!" so spoke Bulba. "God's blessing be upon us! Here's to your health, my sons; to yours, Ostap, and to yours, Andrei. God grant you luck in war, that you may beat all misbelievers: Turks, and Tatars, and Poles, too—if the Poles begin aught against our faith. Well, push up your cups; isn't the vodka good? And what is the Latin for vodka? Ah, there you are, son; the Latins were fools: they did not even know there was vodka in the world. What was the name of the fellow who wrote Latin verses? I'm not much of a scholar, so I'm not sure—was it Horace?"

"That's just like him!" thought the elder son, Ostap. "He knows everything, the old dog, yet pretends to know nothing."

"I suppose the Archimandrite did not let you have so much as a whiff of vodka," Taras went on. "Confess now, my boys, did they not lash you good and proper with fresh cherry-rods about the back and everything else a Cossack has? And perhaps, when you grew too clever, they even flogged you with knouts? And not only on Saturdays, I should think, but on Wednesdays and Thursdays to boot?"

"It's no good talking about the past," Ostap coolly answered. "What has been is done with."

"Let anyone try it now," said Andrei, "let any man touch me now! Why, as soon as I catch sight of a Tatar, I'll show him what manner of thing a Cossack sabre is!"

"Well said, son, well said, by God! And since it's come to that, I'm going with you, too! By God, I am. What the devil should I stay here for? Become a sower of buckwheat, a housekeeper, tend sheep and swine, and wear my wife's petticoats? The plague take her! I am a Cossack; I'll have none of it! What if there is no war now? I'll go with you to Zaporozhye just the same and make merry there. By God, I will!" And old Bulba grew warmer and warmer until finally, having worked himself into a real rage, he rose from the table, struck a dignified pose, and stamped his foot. "We will go tomorrow! Why should we put it off? What enemy can we await here? What do we want with this hut? What are all these things to us? What do we want with these pots?" With these words he began to smash the ewers and flasks and to hurl them on the ground.

The poor old woman, well used to her husband's ways, remained seated on a bench and watched him sadly. She did not dare say anything; but when she heard the decision which she dreaded so much, she could not keep back her tears; she gazed at the children she was doomed so soon to part with, and the force of mute despair which seemed to quiver in her eyes and convulsively compressed lips defied all description.

Bulba was fearfully stubborn. He was one of those characters which first emerged in the grim fifteenth century, in a half-nomadic corner of Europe, when the whole of primitive Southern Russia, deserted by its princes, was laid waste and burned to the ground by the irresistible incursions of Mongolian spoilers; when, robbed of house and home, men grew daring; when they settled on the ashes of their homes, amidst formidable foes and per-

petual perils, and grew used to looking them straight in the face and forgot there was such a thing as fear in the world; when a warlike flame fired the Slavonic spirit, which had remained peaceable for centuries, and begot Cossackdom—a free, riotous outgrowth of the Russian character—and when all the river-banks, fords and ferries, and every suitable spot in the river country, were sown with Cossacks, whose number no man knew; and rightly did their bold comrades answer the Sultan, who inquired their numbers, "Who knoweth! We are spread over all the steppe: on every hillock will ye find a Cossack." This indeed was a remarkable manifestation of Russian strength, struck out of the people's bosom, as out of flint, by the steel of dire misfortune. Instead of the old principalities and small towns, crowded with huntsmen and whippers-in, instead of the petty princes, who warred and bartered their towns amongst themselves, there sprang up formidable settlements and embattled *kurens* bound together by common danger and common hatred of the heathen raiders. As we all know from history, it was their incessant struggle and adventurous spirit that saved Europe from the savage incursions which threatened to overwhelm her. The kings of Poland, who became the sovereigns, albeit weak and remote, of these vast lands in place of the apanaged princes, realized the value of the Cossacks and the advantages of their warlike, vigilant mode of life. They flattered them and encouraged their ways. Under their remote rule, the Hetmans, chosen from amongst the Cossacks themselves, transformed the settlements and *kurens* into regiments and military districts. This was not a regular standing army; there was no trace of it; but in the event of war it took but eight days for every man to appear horsed, armed from head to foot, and ready to serve for but one ducat from the king; and in two weeks' time such an army was gathered as no regular levy in mass could have ever banded together. Once the campaign was over,

the warrior went back to his field or pasture, to the Dnieper ferries, betook himself to fishing, trading, or brewing beer, and was once more a free Cossack. Rightly did their foreign contemporaries marvel at their singular aptitude. There was no craft the Cossack did not know: he could make wine, build a cart, grind powder, do a blacksmith's and a locksmith's work, and besides all this he could revel in the most riotous manner, could drink and feast as only a Russian can—all this he could do and more. Besides the *registered* Cossacks, whose duty it was to join the army in case of war, troops of mounted volunteers could always be mustered in time of urgent need. The *esauls* had but to make a round of the market-places and squares of all the villages and towns, and there, standing up in a cart, to shout at the top of their voices:

"Ho, you beer-brewers and wine-makers! Have done with your beer-brewing, your dawdling on stove-ledges, feeding the flies with your fat carcasses! Come and win knightly fame and honour! And you ploughmen, you sowers of buckwheat, you tenders of sheep, you lovers of women! Have done with following the plough and mucking up your yellow boots with mud; have done with running after women and wasting your knightly strength! The hour is come to win Cossack glory!"

And these words were as sparks falling on dry wood. The ploughman broke his plough, the wine-makers and beer-brewers threw away their vats and shattered their barrels, the craftsman and merchant sent their craft and shop to the devil and smashed the pots in their houses. And every man mounted his horse. In short, the Russian character displayed itself at its greatest and mightiest here.

Taras was one of the original, old colonels, born with a restless, fighting spirit and known for his blunt and straightforward manner. In those times, Polish influences had already begun to tell upon the Russian nobility.

Many of the nobles were adopting Polish customs, introducing luxuries, magnificent suites, falcons, huntsmen, banquets, courts. This was not to Bulba's taste. He loved the simple life of the Cossacks, and fell out with those of his comrades who inclined towards the Warsaw party, calling them minions of the Polish lords. An indefatigable soul, he counted himself a rightful defender of the Orthodox faith. He would ride of his own accord into any village which complained of oppression by the leaseholders or of a fresh chimney tax, and, aided by his Cossacks, would execute justice. He laid down the rule that the sabre was to be drawn on three occasions—when the Polish tax-collectors did not pay due respect to the Cossack elders and stood with covered heads in their presence; when the Orthodox faith was abused or an ancestral custom violated; and lastly, when the foes were Mussulman or Turk, against whom he considered it justifiable under any circumstances to take up arms for the glory of Christendom.

Now he rejoiced beforehand at the thought of how he would turn up at the Setch with his sons and say, "See what fine young fellows I've brought you!" how he would introduce them to all his old, battle-tried comrades; how he would behold their first feats in the art of war and in carousing, which he counted among the principal knightly qualities. At first he had intended to send them by themselves, but the sight of their freshness, their tall stature, and their strong manly beauty inflamed his warlike spirit, and he resolved to ride with them himself on the morrow, although it was only his own stubborn will which had prompted the decision. He was already busy giving orders, choosing horses and trappings for his young sons, going into stables and storehouses, and picking the servants who were to accompany them the next day. He delegated his authority to Esaul Tovkach together with the strict injunction to lead the regiment to the Setch the moment he sent for it. He forgot nothing,

although he was tipsy, the vodka fumes still lingering in his head. He even gave orders that the horses should be watered and their cribs filled with the best large-grained wheat. He was quite tired out by all this work when he returned.

"Well, children, we must sleep now, and tomorrow we shall do what God wills. Don't bother about beds, old wife; we will sleep in the open."

Night had just embraced the heavens, but Bulba always retired early. He threw himself down on a rug and covered himself with a long sheepskin coat, because the night air was rather fresh and because he liked to sleep warm when at home. He soon began to snore, and every one in the yard followed his example; a medley of snores rose from the different corners where they lay; the first to fall asleep was the watchman, for he had drunk more than anyone else in honour of the young masters' homecoming.

The poor mother alone did not sleep. She bent over her sons' heads as they lay side by side; she combed their carelessly tangled curls and moistened them with her tears. She gazed at them with all her soul in her eyes, with all her senses, nay, with all her being turned into sight, and yet she could not gaze her fill. She had fed them at her own breast—she had cherished them—she had reared them—and now she was seeing them only for an instant! "My sons, my darling sons! what will become of you? what fate awaits you?" she moaned, and tears quivered in the wrinkles which had changed her once fair face. And, in truth, she was miserable, as was every woman in those fierce times. Only for a brief moment had she lived for love, only in the first heat of passion, in the first flush of youth; and then her stern charmer had forsaken her for his sabre, his comrades, and his carousing. She would see him but for two or three days after a year's absence and then would hear nothing of him for years. And what a life was hers when she did