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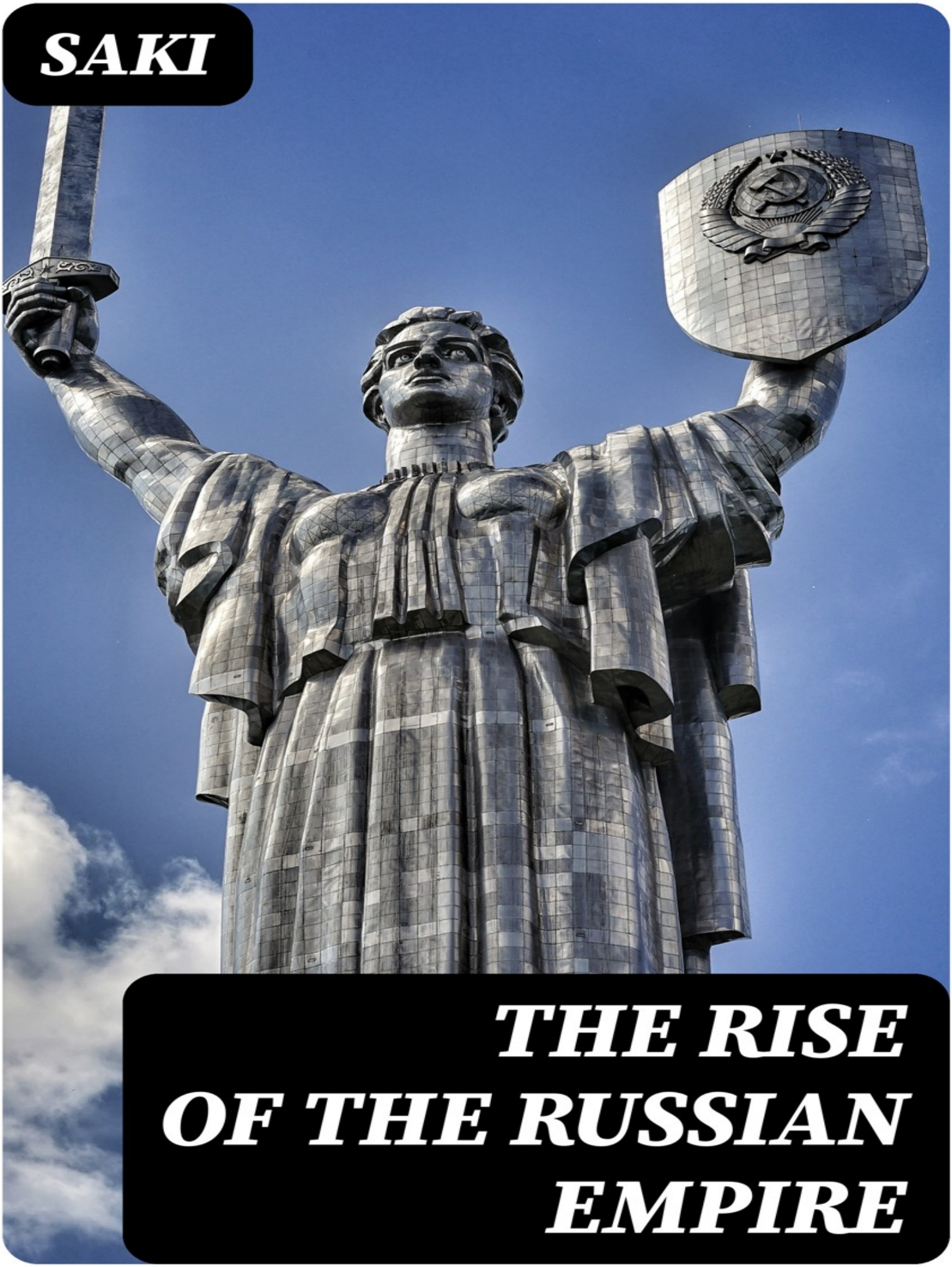

THE RISE OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Saki

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PREFACE

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With the exception of a translation of Rambaud's somewhat disjointed work, there is no detailed history of Russia in the English language at all approaching modern standards. The reigns of Petr the Great and of some of his successors down to the present day—a period covering only 200 years—have been minutely dealt with, but the earlier history of a nation with whom we are coming ever closer into contact is to the English reader almost a blank. Whether the work now submitted will adequately fill the gap remains to be seen; such is its object.

The rule observed with regard to the rendering of names of places and persons has been to follow the spelling of the country to which they belong as closely as possible. The spelling of Russian words employed, and curiously distorted, by English and other historians, has been brought back to its native forms. There is no satisfactory reason, for instance, why the two final letters of *boyarin* should be dropped, or why they should reappear tacked on to the equally Russian word *Kreml*. Moskva is scarcely recognisable in its Anglicised form, and Kiev can only be rendered Kieff on a system which would radically disturb the spelling of most English towns.

A list of works consulted is appended, arranged somewhat in the order in which they have been found useful, precedence being given to those which have been most largely drawn upon.

HECTOR H. MUNRO,
1899.

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CHAPTER I
THE DAWN OF RUSSIAN HISTORY

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Russia, which is blessed with a rich variety of tribes and peoples, the despair of the ethnographical geographer, who can scarcely find enough distinctive colours wherewith to denote them all on his maps, is characterised by a singular uniformity of physical conditions throughout the greater part of its huge extent. Geographically speaking, it is difficult to determine what are the exact limits of the region known as Russia-in-Europe, the Oural Mountains, which look such an excellent political barrier on paper, being really no barrier at all, certainly not what is known as a scientific frontier. As a matter of fact they are less a range of mountains than a chain of low table-lands, having precisely the same conditions of soil, flora, and fauna on either side of them. Zoologically the valley of the Irtuish forms a much stronger line of demarcation, but much of Russia west of the Ourals coincides more nearly in physical aspect with the great Asiatic plain than it does with the remainder of Europe. Southward and westward from this fancy boundary stretches a vast expanse of salt, sandy, almost barren steppe-land; this gives way in time to large tracts of more or less fertile steppe, partaking more of the character of prairie than of desert, bearing in spring and early summer a heavy crop of grasses, high enough in places to conceal a horse and his rider. Merging on this in a northerly direction is the “black-soil” belt, a magnificent wheat-growing country, which well merits the title of the Granary of Europe.

Northward again is a region of dense forest, commencing with oaks and other deciduous trees, and becoming more and more coniferous as it stretches towards the Arctic circle, where pine and fir disappear, and give way to the Tundras, moss-clad wastes, frozen nine months out of the twelve, the home of reindeer and Samoved. Over all this wide extent the snows and frosts of the Russian winter fall with an almost equal rigour, though for varying duration of time. Except on the east, the country possesses strongly-marked natural boundaries; on the south-east rises the huge pile of the Kaukasus Mountains, flanked east and west by the Kaspian and Black Seas respectively; on the south-west lie the Karpathians, while from north-west to north the Baltic is almost connected by lake, swamp, and the deep fissure of the White Sea with the Arctic Ocean. Broadly speaking, nearly the whole area enclosed within these boundaries is one unbroken plain, intersected and watered by several fine rivers, of which the Volga and the Dniepr are, historically, the most important. This, then, is the theatre on which was worked out the drama of Russian national development.

It will now be necessary to glance at the racial and political conditions which prevailed at the period when the curtain rises on mediæval Russian history. First as to the ethnology and distribution of the Slavs, a branch of whom was to be the nucleus round which the empire of all the Russias was to gather. The lore of peoples and of tongues has enabled scientists to assign to the Slavs a place in the great Aryan family from which descended the stocks that made their dwelling on European soil. Exactly when their wanderings brought them into their historic home-lands it is

difficult to hazard, nor is it possible to do more than speculate as to whence they came in that distant yesterday of human spate and eddy. At the epoch when Russian history, in a political sense, may be said to start into existence (the commencement of the ninth century), the distribution of the Slavs is more easy to trace; with the exception of an offshoot in the south-east of Europe, occupying Servia, Dalmatia, Croatia, and Slavonia, they appear to have been gathered in a fairly compact though decentralised mass in what may be termed North Central Europe. Holstein, Mecklenburg, and Pomerania, roughly speaking, formed the country of the Wends; another group, the Czechs and Poles, inhabited Bohemia, Moravia, and Poland; while a fourth body, destined to become the most important, was established in North-west Russia, hemmed in by Finns on the north, Turks and Avars on the east and south. These latter Slavs, the germ of the future Russian nation, lived in tribal communities in the midst of the mighty forests of oak, pine, birch, willow, etc., which stood thick around the basin-lands of the Upper Dniepr, Dvina, and Volkhov, and the source of the Volga. These dense fastnesses they shared with the wolf, boar, lynx, fox, bear, beaver, elk, aurochs, deer, otter, squirrel, and marten, which latter especially furnished them with a valuable article of commerce, the Russian marten skins being highly prized in the fur markets of Europe. Seals abounded on their sea-coast and in Lake Ladoga; the numerous swamps were the home of the wild goose, swan, and crane; the eagle, hawk, raven, cuckoo, and daw were familiar to them, while pigeons were early domesticated among their dwellings.

In their primitive state the Slavs had this obvious differentiation from their Asiatic neighbours—though essentially pastoral they were not nomadic. The village, as a unit of politico-social life, had arrived with them at a high pitch of development, which involves the supposition of long-existing contributory causes, the herding together, namely, of a permanent community of human beings, dependent on each other for mutual convenience, security, and general well-being. The *mir*, commune, or village was in the first place the natural outcome of a patriarchal system other than nomad, the expansion of the primitive association of members of one or more families who had grown up together under the common attraction of a convenient water-supply, a suitable grazing ground, or a wood much haunted by honey-bees.[1] The development of agricultural pursuits necessarily gave a greater measure of stability to village life, and the peasant insensibly rooted himself to that soil in which he had sown his crops and planted his fruit-trees. Thus far the life-story of the tribal Slavs travelled along familiar lines, but here it came to an abrupt halt. The village unit acquired a well-defined theory and practice of government, but it did not germinate into the town. The few townships that were to be found in Slavic lands owed their being for the most part not to any inward process of accumulation, but to extraneous and exceptional circumstances. While Teutonic peoples were raising unto themselves burgs and cities, and banding themselves in guilds and kindred municipal associations, the Slavs remained content with such protection as their forests and swamps afforded, such organisation as their village

institutions supplied. The reason for this limitation in social progress was an organic one; in the Slav character the commercial spirit, in its more active sense, was almost entirely wanting. Trade by barter, of course, existed among them, but their medium of exchange had not got beyond the currency of marten and sable skins. The market, the wharf, and the storehouse were not with them institutions of native growth.

From their earth of forest, swamp, and stream, which paled them in from an outer world, and from the sky above, which they had in common with all living folks, the eastern Slavs had drawn inspirations for the thought-weaving of a comprehensive catalogue of gods. Their imaginations gave deific being to the sun, moon, stars, wind, water, fire, and air, but most of all they reverenced the lightning. In their dark, over-shaded forest homes it was natural that the sun, which exercised such mystic sway in the blazing lands of the Orient, should yield place to the swift, dread might which could split great trees in its spasm of destruction and shake the heavens with its attendant thunder. Accordingly the arch-god of Slavic myth was Peroun, in whom was personified the spirit of the lightning. Under the name of Svaroga (the different tribes probably had variant names for the same god, and sometimes, perhaps, varying gods for a common name) he was worshipped as the Begetter of the Fire and Sun Gods. The latter was sometimes known as “Dajh’bog,” but in old folk-songs the Sun is Dajh’bog’s grandchild. The Wind-God was designated “Stribog.” The personality of these nature-deities was not left entirely to the worshippers’ fancy, Peroun at least being represented in

effigy by more than one idol, which conformed to the human pattern from which so few divinities have been able to escape. A slightly more advanced conception of the supernatural was embodied in the worship of Kolyada, a beneficent spirit who was supposed to visit the farms and villages in mid-winter and bring fertility to the pent-in herds and frost-bound seeds. The festival in honour of Kolyada was held about the 25th of December, the date when the Sun was supposed to triumph over the death in which Nature had gripped him and to enter on his new span of life.

Blended with Eastern mysticism there was, no doubt, in their religious ideas a considerable sprinkling of Northern magic. In their dark and lonely forest dwellings there was likely to be something more than a natural dread of that lurking prowler which stamped such an eerie impression upon the imaginations of primitive folks in many lands. The shambling form, the wailing howl, and the narrow eyes that gleamed wicked hunger in the winter woods gave the wolf a reputation for uncanny powers, and the old Slavic folk-songs clearly set forth a belief in wehr-wolf lore.

In the matter of disposing of their dead the Slavs of Eastern Europe had a variety of customs and usages, some of which were probably local practices of the different tribes. In general the body was burned and the bones enclosed in a small vessel, which was placed upon a post near the roadside. Grave-burial was also in vogue, hill-sides being chosen for that purpose. Drinking and feasting were usual accompaniments of the funeral rites, while the opposite extreme was sometimes exhibited by the slashing and scratching of the mourners’ faces in token of grief.[2]

Thickly mingled with the Slav homesteads in the lake regions of Peipus, Ladoga, and the forest country stretching eastwards, were the outlying villages of the Finns, who seem to have lived in harmony with their alien neighbours without at the same time showing the least tendency towards a fusion of national characteristics. Branches of the same people, Tchouds and Livs, occupied the lands of the Baltic sea-board on the north-west. South of these, wedged in between the Slavs of Poland and those of the east, in the marshy forest-lands of the Niemen basin, were the Lit'uanians, a people of Indo-European origin, who were divided into the sub-tribes of Lit'uanians, Letts, and Borussians (Prussians). Of doubtful affinity with the first-named were the Yatvyags, a black-bearded race dwelling on the extreme eastern limit of the Polish march. The Lit'uanians were even more ill-provided with towns and strongholds than their Slav neighbours, but they had at least a definite system of tribal government, remarkable for the division of the sovereign power between the prince (*Rikgs*) and the high-priesthood, the former having control of outside affairs, including the important business of waging war, the latter administering matters of justice and religion. The gods of the Lit'uanians were worshipped under the symbolism of sacred trees, and the religious rites included the putting to death of deformed or sickly children; this was enacted, not with the idea that bloodshed and suffering were acceptable to the Higher Powers, but rather because the latter were supposed to demand a standard of healthy and physical well-being on the part of their worshippers.[3]

In the lands lying to the south and south-east, where the forests gave way bit by bit to the open wolds of the steppe country, the Slavs had for neighbours various tribes of nomads, for the most part of Turko-Finnish origin, and these completed the encircling band of stranger folk by which the primitive forest dwellers were shut in from the outside world. At this yonder world it is now necessary to take a glimpse.

Europe towards the middle of the ninth century was still simmering in a state of semi-chaos, out of which were shortly to be evolved many of the national organisms which have lasted to modern times. Charles the Great, by the supreme folly of dividing amongst his three sons the empire he had so carefully built up, had to a great degree undone the work of his life, and political barriers are rather difficult to trace after the partition of Verdun (843), though in the dominions assigned to Charles II. some semblance of the later kingdom of France may be traced. Germany was in a transition state; the strong hand which had established dependent and responsible dukes and counts in the various Teutonic provinces—Saxony, Franconia, Swabia, Bavaria, and Karinthia—had been withdrawn, and as yet these princes had not erected their fiefs into independent hereditary duchies. Scarcely tamed and civilised themselves, the frontier districts of the east were bordered continuously by Danes, Wends, Czechs, Avars, and Slavonians, ever ready to make hostile incursions upon their territory. Hamburg in those days stood as a frontier town, almost an outpost in an enemy’s country, and formed with

Paderborn and Bremen the high-water mark of the Frankish expansion on the north-eastern marches.

In England national unification was in a more advanced stage; Wessex had gradually absorbed the other constituents of the so-called Heptarchy, with the exception of Mercia, which still held out a nominally separate existence. London, at this period a wooden-built town surrounded by a wall of stone, was beginning to be commercially important.

In Spain the Christians had established among the mountains of Asturias the little kingdom of Leon, and were commencing the long struggle which was eventually to drive the Moors out of the peninsula.

South of Rome and the Imperial territories in Italy, the duchy of Benevento alone foreshadowed the crowd of principalities and commonwealths which were to spring into existence in that country.

To the east the Byzantine Empire, pressed by the Saracens in its Asiatic possessions, by Bulgars and Slavs on its northern boundary, severed from Rome, Ravenna, and the Western world by divergencies of ritual and dogma, humiliated by military reverses in various quarters, still loomed splendid and imposing in her isolation, and the dreaded Greek fire, if no longer “the Fire of old Rome,” helped to make her navies respected in the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

But if she still attracted the attention of the world, civilised and barbarian, it was scarcely by the exhibition of any grand moral qualities; her annals were one long record of vicious luxuries, servile flatteries, intrigues, disaffection,

and cruelties, which grew like an unhealthy crop of fungi in an atmosphere charged with the gases of theological dogmatism. Revolution succeeded revolution, and each was followed by a dreary epilogue of torturings, executions, blindings, and emasculations, while synods and councils gravely discussed the amount of veneration due to pictures of the Virgin, or the exact wording of a litany. In one respect, however, the first Christian State approached the New Jerusalem of its aspirations, namely, in upholstery and artificial landscape gardening, and its gilded gates and rooms of porphyry, its jewelled trees with mechanical singing-birds, might well challenge comparison with the golden streets and walls of precious stones and sea of glass that adorned the Holy City of the Apocalypse.

North of what might be termed the European mainland of the Eastern Empire, between the south bank of the Danube and the ridge of the Balkans, was wedged in the kingdom of Bulgaria, a Turko principality whose territory waxed and waned as its arms were successful or the contrary in the intermittent warfare it carried on against its august neighbour. Though never rising to the position of a considerable power, and at times being reduced to complete subjection, it continued to give trouble to the Byzantine State for many centuries, and the adjoining Zupanate of Servia was from time to time brought under the alternate suzerainty of whichever factor was in the ascendant.

Beyond the Danube the Magyars had not as yet established themselves in Hungary, in the lands lately overrun by the Avars, and a considerable section of that

country was absorbed in the great Moravian kingdom, a Czech state whose existence was coterminous with the ninth century, and which also embraced within its limits the vassal duchy of Bohemia, the latter country having, however, its separate dynasty of dukes.

Farther north, Poland had scarcely commenced to have a defined existence in the polity of Europe. Its people, if the early annals are not merely fables borrowed from the common stock of European folk-lore, had elevated to the dignity of sovereign duke a peasant nicknamed Piast, from whom sprang the family of that name who held the throne not less than 600 years. From the fact that the Poles remained independent both of the Western Empire and of the neighbouring Moravian power, may be deduced the assumption that they already possessed some degree of cohesion and organization—more perhaps than distinguished them in later stages of their history.

On the north shore of the Black Sea the most easterly possession of the Byzantine Empire was Kherson, a port in the Krim peninsula, and here the territory of the Cæsars came into contact with the Empire or Khanate of the Khazars, a Turko-Finnish race whose dominions stretched in the ninth century from Hungary to the shores of the Kaspian, and north to the source of the Dniepr. They appear to have attained to a comparatively high degree of civilisation, and they kept up commercial and diplomatic relations with Byzantium and the two Kaliphates of Bagdad and Kordova. Their national religion was a form of paganism (subsequently they embraced Judaism), but in spite of differences of faith and race one of their princesses became

the wife of the Emperor Constantine V. Their two principal cities were Itil, on the Volga, and Sarkel (the White City), on the Don. Several of the Turanian and Slavonic tribes on their north-west borders acknowledged their authority and paid them tribute, but at the commencement of the ninth century their power was already declining.

On their north-east frontier the Khazars had for neighbours the Bulgarians of the Volga, an elder branch of the tribe which had settled in the Balkans. Bolgary, “the great City,” was their capital, and a trading centre much frequented by the merchants and dealers of the various semi-barbaric nations in their vicinity, as well as by the more highly-civilised Khazars and Persians.

Northward of all, in the bleak mountain regions of Skandinavia, on the roof of Europe as it were, dwelt the Norsemen, those wild and warlike adventurers who were to leave the impress of their hand on the history of so many countries. In those days, when Iceland and Greenland were as yet undiscovered, Norway, Sweden, and Finland formed a stepping-stone to that unknown Arctic Sea which contemporary imagination peopled with weird and grimly monsters—for the North had its magic lore as well as the shining East. And the fierce vikings, fighting and plundering under their enchanted Raven banner, seemed in those credulous times not far removed from the legendary warlocks and griffons of whom they were presumed to be the neighbours.

As has been already noticed, the Khazars were essentially a trading nation, and much of the commerce of the farther East filtered through their hands into Eastern

Europe. According to one authority[4] the products of the East, after crossing the Kaspian Sea, were conveyed up the Volga, and after a short land journey reached the Baltic by way of Lake Ilmen and Lake Ladoga. It is not easy to see why the shorter and simpler route along the Don and the Black Sea to Constantinople and the Mediterranean was not preferred, especially as the balance of power, and consequently of luxury and wealth, lay rather in the south of Europe than in the north. It was this trade, however, which built up the importance, possibly caused the birth, of Novgorod, that fascinating city which rises out of the mists that shroud the history of unchronicled times with the tantalising name of New Town, suggesting the existence of a yet older one. What was the exact footing of Novgorod in the early decades of the ninth century—whether an actual township, with governor and council, giving a head to a loose confederation of neighbouring Slavic tribes, or whether merely a village or camp, the most convenient station where “the barbarians might assemble for the occasional business of war or trade”[5]—it is difficult at this distance of time to determine. Seated on the banks of the Volkhov some little distance from where that river leaves Lake Ilmen’s northern shore, and connected with the Baltic by convenient waterways, it not only tapped the trade-route already referred to, but occupied a similar favourable position with regard to another important channel of traffic—that between the North and Byzantium by way of the Dniepr and Black Sea. Wax, honey, walrus teeth, and furs went from the frozen North to the “Tzargrad,” as the Imperial city was called by the Slavs, and in exchange came

silks and spices and other products of the South. Furs and skins, of otter, marten, wolf, and beaver especially, were in growing demand in Europe, where, from the covering of savages, they had been promoted to articles of luxury among the wealthy of Christendom. With the land covered by dense forest, or infested by savage tribes, and the seas scoured by pirate fleets, traders preferred to keep as much as possible to the great river-routes, and the large, placidly-flowing rivers of the Russian plain were peculiarly suited to their purposes. Thus the early human wanderers adopted the same methods of travel, and nearly the same lines of journey, as the birds of passage, ducks, plovers, and waders use to this day in their annual migrations, winging their way along the coasts and river-courses from Asia to Europe and back again.

Shut up in their own constricted world of forest, lake, and swamp, the Novgorodski and neighbouring Slavs would get, by means of these waterways, glimpses of other worlds, distant as the three points of a triangle, and as varied in manners, customs, and products; news of Sarkel, Itil, and the Great City, Bolgary, and strange countries yet farther east, where men dwelt in tents and rode on camels and hunted the panther, whose spotted skin was more richly marked than that of any forest lynx; visits from mariners of perhaps their own nationality, bringing tales of northern seas, of ice-floes, walruses, sturgeons, and whales; of Wends who preyed on the vessels driven on to their inhospitable shore; and, more important still, of Varangian sea-rovers who were beginning to force themselves on the Finns and Slavs of the sea-coast; above all, tidings from

bands of merchants of the City of Wonders that guarded the entrance to the Farther Sea, with its gates and palaces, and temples and gardens and marts, its emperor and saints, and miracles and ceremonials, like unto nothing they had experience of themselves.

It is just at this point that the history of the Slavs of Lake Ilmen and its neighbourhood becomes largely conjectural. That they were brought in some measure under the subjection of Varangian invaders appears tolerably certain, and, favoured no doubt by the natural advantages of their position, girt round with an intricate network of forest and swamp, or, still better, protected perhaps by the poverty of their communities, they seem to have freed themselves from this foreign yoke, as the Saxons of England from time to time drove out the Danes. It was in consequence, probably, of this common danger that the Slavs were drawn into closer confederation, with the unfortunate result that domestic quarrels became rife among them, and each clan or volost was at enmity with its neighbour. “Family armed itself against family, and there was no justice.”[6] This sudden ebullition of anarchy rather suggests that the Varangian intruders had swept away previous institutions or elements of order, and left nothing capable of replacing them, or else that the native Slavs were unable to grapple with the new problems of administration on an extended scale. Evidently, too, the vigorous Norsemen had obtained the reputation of being something more than mere undisciplined robbers and raiders, and their domination seemed more desirable than the turmoil and dissension attendant upon a state of self-government. And in support

of this deduction, almost the first definite event recorded in the national chronicles is the resolve of the people of Novgorod to call in the leaders of a tribe known as the Russ Varangians to restore order in their land.

(Controversy has arisen among Russian historians as to the probable nationality or extraction of these “Russ” foreigners, who, like the Angles, gave their name to the country of their adoption, and some writers have assumed them to have been Slavs from Rugen or the south coasts of the Baltic, and not of Skandinavian origin. Apart, however, from the decidedly Norse form of their leaders’ names—Rurik, Sineus, Truvor, Oleg, etc.—the manner of their coming and their subsequent history harmonises exactly with that of the various Skandinavian offshoots who invaded and established themselves in Normandy, England, the Scottish islands, Ireland, and Sicily. Under their vigorous rule the Slavic settlement around Novgorod expanded in a few years into an extensive principality, imposing tribute on and drawing recruits from the neighbouring tribes, and carrying the terror of the Russian name into the Black and Kaspian Seas.)

Whether the “invitation” was genuine, emanating from the desire of the Ilmen folk to secure for themselves the settled rule of capable leaders, or whether the presence of the strangers had to be accepted as a disagreeable necessity, to mitigate the humiliation of which a legendary calling-in was subsequently invented, must remain a matter for conjecture; but with the incoming of this new element Russian history develops suddenly in scope and interest.[7]

CHAPTER II
THE COMING OF THE VARANGIANS AND THE BUILDING OF KIEVIAN RUSSIA

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Whatever the nature of the causes that led up to this irruption of stranger folk, the fact and, to a certain extent, the manner of their coming is substantially set forth in the old chronicles. Like ocean demi-gods riding out from the sea into the ken of mortal men came three Russ-Varangian brothers, Rurik, Sineus, and Truvor, with a mighty host of kinsfolk and followers, steering eastward in their long, narrow-beaked boats through the waterways that lead from the Finnish Gulf into the lake-land of the Slavs. Separating their forces, Rurik established himself at—according to some accounts, built—the town of Ladoga, on the banks of the Volkhov, twelve miles from its entrance into the Lake Ladoga, thus interposing himself between Novgorod and the sea. His brothers settled at Bielozersk and Izborsk respectively, the latter occupying an important position near Lake Peipus and the Liv border, the former pushing a Varangian outpost among the Finnish tribes to the east; all three, whether from accident or design, choosing the vicinity of an open stretch of water. The date of this immigration is fixed by the chronicler at 862, which is regarded as the starting-point of the Russian State. Two years later Rurik, by the death of both his brothers, was left in sole chieftaincy of the adventurers. From his first stronghold he soon shifted his headquarters to a point farther up the Volkhov’s course, over against Novgorod,

where he built himself a citadel; from thence he eventually made himself master of the town, not apparently without some opposition from the inhabitants. Henceforward the Skandinavian chief was undisputed prince of the Slavonic people who had invited him into their country; the neighbouring districts of Rostov and Polotzk were brought under his authority, and Novgorod became the capital and centre of a state which reached from Lake Peipus to the Upper Volga, and from Ladoga to the watershed of the Dvina and Dniepr. In thus extending and consolidating his power and welding his Skandinavian following and the discordant Slavic elements into one smoothly-working organisation, Rurik evinced qualities of statesmanship equal in their way to those displayed by William the Norman in his conquest and administration of England. The absence of any national cohesion among the Slavs, while facilitating the Norse intrusion and settlement, increased the difficulty of binding them in allegiance to a central authority; yet within the space of a few crowded years the Varangian ruler enjoyed an undisputed sway in the lands of his mastery such as few princes could in those unordered times rely on. Not the least difficult part of Rurik’s task must have been the control of his own wanderlusting countrymen, turned loose in an extensive and vaguely-defined region, with rumours of wealth and plunder and fighting beckoning them to the south. In the nature of things such temptation would not be long resisted, especially as the Dniepr offered a convenient if insecure passage to the desired lands, and a short time after the first Norse settlement two Skandinavian adventurers, named Askold and Dir, broke away from the

main body with a small following, possibly with the idea of enlisting themselves in the Varangian Guard at Byzantium. They did not immediately pursue their journey, however, farther than Kiev, a townstead of the Polian Slavs,[8] standing on a low bluff above the west bank of the Dniepr. Here they established themselves as Rurik had done at Novgorod, and, reinforced perhaps by roving bodies of their countrymen, set up a second Russian State, without losing sight, however, of the original object which had drawn them southwards. Consequently in the summer of 865 an expedition of from ten to fifteen thousand men, presumably recruited from both Slavs and Norsemen, embarked in their long, narrow war-boats and sailed for Byzantium, plundering and burning along the coast of the Black Sea, and finally riding into the harbour. The audacity of the attack, or perhaps the warlike reputation of the invading host, seems to have paralysed the inhabitants of the city, and the authorities had recourse to supernatural invocation to deliver them from this new danger. The robe of the Virgin was removed from its venerated shrine in the Blacherne Chapel, escorted in solemn procession to the shores of the harbour, and dipped in the water, whereupon arose a tempest that drove the heathen fleet in disorder out to sea. That, at least, is the account of the transaction given by the Byzantine chroniclers.

Whether such a command over the atmospherical forces impressed the barbarian chiefs with the desirable qualities of so militant a religion, or whether the glories of the Tzargrad as seen dimly from their boats had insensibly attracted them to the worship of the “cold Christ and

tangled trinities," which was so much a part of the Byzantine life, it was said that Askold, shortly after the miscarriage of the expedition, professed the Christian faith. This much at least seems certain, that the Greek patriarch Photius was able in the year 866 to send to Kiev a priest with the title, if not the recognition of Bishop, and that from that time there existed a small Christian community in that town.

The *Chronicle of Nestor*, almost the only record of this period of Russian history in existence, is silent on two interesting points, namely, the works and fightings in which Rurik was presumably engaged on behalf of his infant state, and the attitude of the Khazars towards the adventurers who had filched Kiev and the adjoining territory from their authority.

The only further item in the *Chronicle* relating to Rurik is the announcement of his death in the year 879, his child son Igor and the governance of the country being entrusted to Oleg, a blood relation of the late Prince. The reign of this chieftain was of great importance to the fortunes of the germinating Russian State, and if Rurik played the part of a William the Bastard, Oleg may not unwarrantably be compared with Charles the Great. The rumours which had reached the North of a Varangian power that had sprung up among the tribes of the Slavic hinterland had attracted thither streams of roving warriors, eager to share the dangers and divide the fruits of their kinsfolks' enterprise. Thus both Rurik and the Kievian adventurers had been able to maintain an easily-recruited standing force of their own countrymen for purposes offensive and defensive. The

larger designs of Oleg, however, required a larger army, and he enlisted under his captaincy Slavs and Finns in addition to his Varangian guards. Having spent three years in gathering and perfecting his resources, he advanced in 882 into the basin-land of the Dniepr and moved upon Smolensk, the stronghold of the independent remnant of the Slav tribe of Krivitches. By virtue, possibly, of his position as leader of an army partly drawn from men of that tribe, he was allowed to take undisputed possession of the place, which was henceforth incorporated in the Russ dominion. Still following the course of the Dniepr, as Askold and Dir had followed it before him, he entered the country of the Sieverskie Slavs and made himself master of their head town, Lubetch.

By these successive steps Oleg had brought himself nigh upon Kiev, the headquarters of the rival principality, which was possibly the object he had had in view from the commencement of his southward march. For to the rising Russ-Slavonic State Kiev was at once a menace and an injury; not only did it offer an alternative attraction to the Norsemen pouring into the country, the natural reinforcements of Oleg’s following, but its separate existence cut short the expansion of the northern territory, and, above all, hindered free intercourse with Byzantium and the south. To the sea-rovers, reared among the rude and penurious lands that lay dark and uncivilised between the Baltic and the Arctic Sea, Byzantium was a dazzling and irresistible attraction; rich beyond their comprehension of riches, luxurious to a degree unknown to them, renowned for everything except renown, she seemed a golden harvest

ripe for the steel of the valorous and enterprising. Between this desired land and the Novgorodian principality the territory of Askold presented a vexatious obstacle, and it was inevitable that the sagacity of Oleg should aim at its destruction. At the same time it was understandable that he should seek to avoid an armed conflict with his fellow-countrymen, the Varangians of Kiev, and to effect his purpose by stratagem rather than by force. To this end he approached the town, laid an ambuscade on the banks of the Dniepr, and in the guise of a trader travelling from Novgorod to Byzantium, sought speech with the Kievian rulers. Askold and Dir came out unwittingly to see this wayfarer, and found no man of wares and whining suppliance; found rather one whose face they well knew, and with him a small lad whose significance was swiftly made plain to them. “You are not of the blood of princes,” cried a voice of triumph and boding in their ears, “but here behold the son of Rurik.” And therewith rushed out the hidden ones and slew the unsuspecting chieftains. And in guerdon of this stroke Oleg was accepted as sovereign by the people of Kiev, the Russian State was solidified, and the supremacy of Rurik’s dynasty received a valuable recognition.

The town of Kiev, advantageously situated at a pleasant elevation above the west bank of the Dniepr, and commanding the waterway to the coveted south, compared favourably with Novgorod, built among the flat marshes that bordered Lake Ilmen and surrounded by the Finn-gripped coasts of Ladoga. The advantages of the former were not lost upon its conqueror, who saluted it with the title of

“mother of all Russian cities” (so the Chronicles), and thenceforth it became the capital of the country. It was now necessary to secure the connection between the newly-won territory and the districts lying to the north. West and north of Kiev dwelt the Drevlians, a fierce and formidable Slavic tribe, whose country was fortified by natural defences of forest and marsh. Against them Oleg turned his arms, and once more victory went with him; the Drevlians, while retaining their own chieftain, were reduced to the standing of vassals, and an annual tribute of marten and sable skins was imposed upon them. Within the next two years the Russian ruler completed the subjugation of the Sieverskie and enthralled the remaining lands of the Krivitches, both of which tribes had hitherto owned allegiance to the Khazars. The growing Russian dominions were now put under a system of taxation, the sums levied being devoted in the first place to the payment of the Varangians in the Prince’s service. The contribution of Novgorod was assessed at the yearly value of 300 *grivnas*, a token of its substantial footing at this particular period.

It was about this time that the Ougres or Magyars, the ancestors of the modern Hungarians, squeezed out of their Asiatic home by the pressure of the Petchenigs, burst through the Khazar and Kievian territories and settled themselves in Moldavia and Wallachia, and finally in Hungary. Their passage through the Dniepr basin-land would scarcely have been undisputed, and the Magyar Chronicles speak of a victory over Oleg; the Russian chronicler is silent on the subject. This scurrying horde of nomad barbarians, unlike the Avars who preceded them, or the Petchenigs and

Kumans who followed in their wake, crystallised in a marvellously short space of time into a civilised European State, and became an important neighbour of the Russian principality.

In 903 the young Igor was mated to a Varangian maiden named Olga, who, by one account, was born of humble parents in the town of Pskov and attracted the Prince by her beauty. Other accounts make her, with more probability, a near relative of the Regent, of whose strength of character she seems to have inherited a share.

In 907 Oleg was in a position to put into practice a project which had probably never been lost sight of, the invasion, namely, of the Byzantine Empire, including an attack on Constantinople itself, a project dear to the Russian mind in the tenth century as well as in later times. His footing differed essentially from that of Askold and Dir in their attempt at a like undertaking. No longer the leader of a mere troop of adventurers, Oleg swayed an army inspired by a long series of successes and confident in the sanction and prestige of the princely authority. Slavs, Finns, and Varangians were bonded together in a representative Russian army, trained, disciplined, and, above all, reliant on the ability of their captain. In their long, light barques they went down the Dniepr, hauling their craft overland where the rapids rendered navigation impossible, and thence emerged into the Black Sea; the boats were escorted along the river-banks by a large body of horsemen, but the Chronicle does not tell whether this branch of the expedition made its way through Bessarabia and Bulgaria into the Imperial territory, and probably it only served to guard the