



History of the Cossacks

William Cresson

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THE level plains and steppes of South Russia were known to the ancients as the broad channel followed by the ebb and flow of every fresh wave of conquest or migration passing between Europe and Asia. The legions of Rome and Byzance found this territory as impossible to occupy by military force as the high seas. The little known history of "Scythia" – from the earliest times until the thirteenth century of the Christian era – presents a confused picture of barbarous tribes pressing one upon another, the stronger driving the weaker before them from the more favoured hunting grounds. Often, voluntarily or by force, the victors included the vanquished in their own "superior" civilization. There are many reasons why it is difficult or impossible to follow with any degree of certainty the national history of these races. "Their long-forgotten quarrels, their interminglings and separations, above all the constant changes in their names and habitat make the study of their history as difficult as it is unprofitable." (Lesur, *Histoire des Kosaques*.)

This ignorance of the changes – political and economical – which are constantly taking place along the amorphous racial frontiers of Eastern Europe, has continued to our own times. But at recurrent intervals these Slav borderlands separating the Occident from the Orient become the scene of political upheavals so vast in their consequences that the very foundations of European civilization are shaken in their turn...



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