

CHAPTER II

The Brethren

The Ukrainian intellectuals who were to form the Cyrilo-Methodian Brotherhood were not yet in their teens at the time of the Decembrist uprising. But, like the Ukrainian Decembrists, they came, with some notable exceptions, from the ranks of the impoverished gentry. One of these exceptions was Taras Shevchenko, born a serf, although a distant descendant of the Cossacks. Posiada, too, was of peasant origin. Kulish came from Cossack stock. Others grew up on small estates or were sons of petty gentry. Most were educated or were actually university students. Unlike the originators of the Russian intelligentsia, who came to be known as *raznochintsy* (people from various ranks), the kernel of the Ukrainian intelligentsia was more homogeneous. On the one hand their country was marching towards an incipient capitalist system, with growing manufacturing and industry; on the other hand, and perhaps because of this march towards capitalism, it was experiencing severe oppression of the peasantry. The small gentry were also squeezed by these developments, and their sons sought new professions in the cities. Urbanization kept pace with these demands, and Kiev in 1840 had forty thousand more inhabitants than a decade before. Kiev had had a university since 1834. The University of Kharkiv was established in 1805.

There is no doubt that social and economic conditions played their part in the intellectual make-up of the brethren. However, what ultimately decided the kind of role they played within the Brotherhood was the diverse interplay of individual personalities and their inborn talents. This is why one peasant, Shevchenko, was a poet of genius, while the other peasant, Posiada, remained obscure; why Kostomarov became a famous historian and Pylchykiv remained an ineffectual intellectual. Genetics, not economics, often held the key to their personalities and achievements. Individual biographies may help to see their

accomplishments more clearly. A Ukrainian biographical dictionary remains to be written.

Mykola Kostomarov

The founder of the Brotherhood, Mykola Kostomarov, had a Russian father and a Ukrainian mother. Kostomarov's father, Ivan Petrovich, came from an old Russian noble family. He had served in Suvorov's army before retiring to an estate in Yurasivka, Kharkiv province, where Kostomarov was born on May 4, 1817. Ivan Petrovich deserves mention for several reasons. He was a man with intellectual interests, and he read the French philosophers, especially Voltaire, voraciously. Moreover, he tried to follow some of the precepts of the Enlightenment on his estate, especially in relation to his peasants, with whom he engaged in discussions about the virtuous life. Short-tempered as he was, he would occasionally be rather cruel to them, only to apologize later. Another rather unconventional side of his character came to light when he married a Ukrainian peasant girl. Liaisons between landlords and village girls were common in those days, but marriages were not. Out of this union the young Kostomarov was born, before the wedding, and he became deeply attached to his mother. Kostomarov's father died suddenly when the boy was eleven years old: Ivan Petrovich's peasants, who took some of his rationalist and agnostic teaching too literally, murdered him in July 1828, maintaining his death was a riding accident. In 1833 one of the murderers confessed to the deed, asserting that the landlord's teaching that there was no life after death had led them to it. This was not the first or last time in Russian history that misunderstanding between reforming landlords and their peasants led to such tragic results. The motives for Ivan Petrovich's murder are clearly spelled out in his son's autobiography, and they contradict the standard Soviet explanation of this case as revenge taken by the villagers on a cruel master. Before his father's death the young Kostomarov was, for a while, at a school in Moscow. Had his father lived, the son would probably have continued his Muscovite education. Now, however, he found himself under the sole protection of his helpless mother, who could not legally inherit her husband's estate, although she did receive a financial settlement of fifty thousand rubles and her son's freedom. She showed great resourcefulness in looking after her son, who was placed in a school in Voronezh, which offered little education to this precocious youth. He managed to educate himself by wide reading, displaying in his student years a phenomenal memory. He spent his vacations with his mother, exploring the Ukrainian countryside and learning Ukrainian from the speech of the peasants. When he was sixteen years old, he gained entrance to the University of Kharkiv.

The milieu of this university played a decisive role in forming the Ukrainian orientation of the young Kostomarov. It was there that he came into contact with what is sometimes called the first Ukrainian revival, the second being the Kiev revival of the 1840s in which he was also destined to play a leading part. Kostomarov was the only one of the brethren who went through this Kharkiv period. The Ukrainian revival in Kharkiv was connected with the founding of the university in 1805 and the periodical publications *Ukrainsky vestnik* (Ukrainian Herald, 1816–19), *Ukrainsky zhurnal* (Ukrainian Journal, 1824–25), and *Ukrainsky almanakh* (Ukrainian Almanac, 1831). The leaders of the Ukrainian movement were the rector of the University, Petro Hulak-Artemovsky (1790–1865), a professor at the university, Amvrosiy Metlynsky (1814–70), and the above-mentioned professor Izmail Sreznevsky (1812–80). Hryhory Kvitka (1778–1843), who lived near Kharkiv, was the leading writer of the period, the first to publish prose works in Ukrainian. Metlynsky and Sreznevsky were ethnographers who published some collections of Ukrainian folk poetry and also wrote poems. All this created an atmosphere in which Ukrainian interests flourished.

At the time Kostomarov entered the University of Kharkiv, that institution was in decline, and he did not like his professors. Among them was the writer Hulak-Artemovsky, in whose home Kostomarov was for a time a boarder. In 1835 a new professor of history, Mikhail Lunin, himself a follower of Herder, impressed Kostomarov with his knowledge of German history and philosophy. It was Lunin who encouraged Kostomarov to enter the field of historical research. Kostomarov undertook this research immediately after leaving the university in 1836, when he worked in the archives of the Ostrogozhsky Cossack regiment in Ostrogozhsk. Simultaneously, for a brief time, he joined a dragoon regiment as a cadet. In 1837 Kostomarov returned to Kharkiv, determined to write a dissertation. His first attempt (the topic was the church union of Brest) in 1842 did not meet with Hulak-Artemovsky's approval; although it had been printed and the day of the defence set, the Kharkiv church leaders objected to it, and the whole edition was burned. Kostomarov was forced to select another topic, "On the Historical Significance of Russian Folk Poetry," and this time he defended it successfully in 1844, receiving his master's degree. A year earlier he had been granted gentry status, and this and the university degree enabled him to obtain a teaching position in Rivne. From there he moved in July 1845 to the position of gymnasium teacher in Kiev. It was there that he met the other young Ukrainian intellectuals with whom he founded the Brotherhood.

Three features characterize Kostomarov's pre-Kievan period. First, he decided to become a historian, but to write history in a new