

**AN EARLY NEWS-SHEET:
THE RUSSIAN INVASION
OF POLAND IN 1563**

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An Early News-sheet: The Russian Invasion of Poland in 1563 by John Camden Hotten

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JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN

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AN EARLY NEWS-SHEET.

NOTES

THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF
POLAND IN 1563.

AN EXACT FACSIMILE OF A CONTEMPORARY
ACCOUNT IN LATIN, PUBLISHED
AT DOUAY.

TOGETHER WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL
NOTES, AND A FULL TRANSLATION
INTO ENGLISH.



LONDON:
CHATTO AND WINDUS, PUBLISHERS.

1874.

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June 21, 1940



INTRODUCTION.



HIS tiny volume is interesting, amongst other things, as being a specimen of those early printed news-sheets which were the precursors of modern journalism. After the invention of printing, the press was soon employed as a disseminator of current news. Religious disputations were the principal topics in the early part of the sixteenth century, and therefore we find the pamphlets of the time—for these were the first news-sheets—mostly occupied with the arguments and anathemas of the reformers of Northern

Europe, and the Catholics of the South. Some very early tracts, giving news of a more secular character, have recently been found in Germany; and Señor de Gayangos, of the Escorial in Madrid, informs me that Spain had news-sheets of a date quite as early as any which have yet been recorded by Italian and German bibliographers. To Venice is generally accredited the earliest newspaper. Its commercial position, in the early part of the sixteenth century—great, although somewhat on the decline from its previous splendour when a branch of the Medici family resided there—rendered the dissemination of news necessary for the trade of the city. The ships of Venice then covered all the seas which were counted as within the confines of the habitable globe; although scarcely a month passed but some adventurous captain would stray beyond the limits defined in his rude chart, and bring back with him to Venice the news of another land-discovery in the far West or in the far South. The arrival of the ship in the

Adriatic, the contents of its cargo, the price of commodities abroad, together with some account of the new island,¹ its wonderful people and marvellous products, would form the staple of the news-sheet of the hour. This document was in manuscript,

¹ The earliest accounts of the discoveries of Columbus were given in little books of a few pages, very similar to those quaint eight-page relations of our own Civil War, which recorded the defeat at Naseby, the victory at Edgehill, the death of Charles outside Whitehall, and the other great events of the hour. It is a singular fact that the substance of all these "relations," whether a barn be burnt "by accident of a soldier's firing," or 5,000 men slain and half a town levelled to the ground, was invariably given in eight pages of small quarto. In turning over a bundle of these "Intelligencers," it is amusing to note that when the newsmonger was more ignorant than usual, and could neither find words to amplify his material, nor any additional news to insert, he generally gave the substance of the first page over again on the last, enforcing it with repeated ejaculations of "may the Lord help us," "O trust in God, ye hypocrites," "may the ever-blessed God assist us all," "Amen, Amen," and such like.

written in a legible hand, and copies were affixed here and there at different points of the city—the news-rooms—for the immediate perusal of those merchants who chose to pay a gazzetta¹ for the reading.

In 1536 the Venetian possessions and factories in the East were attacked by the Turks, who at this period were very powerful, and in close alliance with Francis the First of France. As may be imagined, the people of Venice were extremely anxious to hear the news from the fleet; so the first regular monthly journal was established by the government to supply this information, and men were paid to read the particulars at the principal points of the city. But the heads of the Republic were fearful of the spread of false news and opinions dangerous to their position, so they ordained that no sheets

¹ An obsolete Venetian coin, equal in value to one-third of our penny.

should be issued but such as were sanctioned by the Doge and his Council. These functionaries, liberal in many things, were yet very jealous of the printing-press; and it was nearly fifty years after this time that the first printed newspaper was published in the city under official authority. A traveller informs us that so recently as the beginning of the present century manuscript news-sheets were in circulation amongst the poorer classes of Venice.

The origin of the now universal term *Gazette* is thus seen to have come—and very naturally—from the small coin originally paid for its perusal.

Blount, in his *Glossographia*, published in 1656, gives the following definitions to the word:—

“GAZZETTA.—A certain Venetian coin, scarce worth one farthing; also, a bill of news, or short relation of the occurrences of the time, printed most commonly at Venice, and thence dispersed every month into most parts of Christendom.”

At this date the Venice “Gazette” had evidently become a widely-circulated journal of considerable