

CHAPTER VIII.

BESSARABIA.—FROM LIOVA TO KISHNAU.

ARRIVED on the Bessarabian bank and now in the empire of Russia, we marched in procession, accompanied by a number of Jews going to see their friends, to the office of the commissary, who, after sundry forms and much delay, placed in our hands a French translation of the regulations of the quarantine, all of which were enforced under penalty of death. These being read, we were required to take an oath of obedience, and to give a solemn promise that we would secrete nothing from the inspectors. The great doors were then opened, and we were admitted with our baggage, which was laid out upon the grass, every article being taken separately from the boxes and compared with the inventory written on the other side of the water. The exact number of gold ducats and silver rubles possessed by each of us was entered; every scrap of paper, rag, and leather was examined, and the list made doubly correct; yet, two days afterwards, an official was directed to inform us that a pair of braces was not recorded, which, with some garters, was then formally added to the catalogue. It is not possible to conceive, without personal experience, the rigidity of this investigation. At length, the shadows of night drew over the horizon, and we were permitted to retire to our apartments; having previously bespoken the best in the quarantine, and particularly requested that mattresses might be hired for our use from the town.

Our room, floored with brick, was eleven feet square and seven high; it contained a stove, a small deal table, a wooden stool, and two frames of bedsteads supplied with narrow planks which did not nearly meet one another. This was literally the whole furniture of the apartment in which we were destined to pass four days and nights; there were none of the innumerable little comforts required in a domestic ménage, nor were we permitted to provide them at our own expense. The door opened into a small enclosure, six yards square, in which a soldier, called our *guardian*, remained day and night, the gate being locked at sunset on

him and us, and the windows fastened on the outside. One of these, (for there were two,) faced the little quadrangle, so that the *guardian* could inform himself of all we did; and between eight and nine o'clock in the evening he insisted on our putting out our candle and fire; a requisition the more vexatious, as the place swarmed with field-bugs and fleas to such a degree that, every second hour of the day and as long as light was allowed, we were compelled to wage war against them; giving, as we received, no quarter. For a candlestick we were provided with a piece of clay; a soldier's old cloak, with a coarse canvass bag, was given as a covering for each bedstead; thus, no very promising prospect opened before us. We were told that there was a Jew *traiteur* who provided food; but, on our admission, he had left his shop for the day, and the following was a Hebrew festival; so that, but for our own little stock, laid in without the slightest anticipation of being placed in such circumstances, we should probably have become ill for want of the necessaries of life.

The first morning, the doctor paid us an early visit to inquire, as well he might, how we had rested on our hard beds, and to tell us that permission would be granted to purchase from the Jew some hay to convert into *paillasse*s the sacks thrown over the bedsteads; he likewise informed us that all our goods must be suspended, or spread out, under a roof surrounded by trellis-work, there to remain for three days to be ventilated and purified. But another difficulty had arisen. Our passport was drawn out on the twenty-ninth of August at Vienna, and a *visé* appeared on it, which, according to the doctor, bore date the twenty-fifth of August. This looked like fraud, and we were responsible. The document was produced, and the *visé* proved to be written on the eleventh of September; the entry, however, was in German; and the German running-hand S is not very unlike an O with a flourish; the doctor therefore declared it was October: we reminded him that the eleventh of October had not yet arrived; and that, even if the secretary of a public office had made the blunder supposed, a traveller should not be held accountable; at the same time we maintained that, in point of fact, the word written was September, not October; nevertheless, he strongly asserted his acquaintance with German, and it was not expedient to dispute it. At length he departed, and we heard no more of the passport being in French, nor of the date, nor of any other difficulty connected with it.

The Jew made his appearance notwithstanding the holi-

day. Happily, he spoke German, without which we might have been left to starve, for our *guardians* understood only three syllables of any language but Russ; and their usual reply to our solicitations for food or other necessities was, "Jude ist nicht," "The Jew is not here;" words repeated with a somewhat vexatious monotony and indifference. The Hebrew *traiteur* sold only raw materials for the table, and we were provided with no apparatus for cooking. But necessity is the mother of invention. A few earthen vessels supplied the place of saucepans, plates, and basins; thus our meals were prepared and served; and we made the best of our lot, congratulating ourselves that the period of incarceration was so short.

The second morning, the doctor came to complain that during the previous day we had not submitted all our goods to ventilation, for our *guardian-spy* had informed the commissary that we had reserved some books and other articles for use. Soon after, he returned, and begged to be informed, for the third time, what was our object in going to Odessa. We repeated that we had no object but pleasure; that we were originally bound for Constantinople, but that tidings of the plague had led us to defer our visit to the Turkish capital; and that we proposed waiting at Odessa till its ravages should cease. After many inquiries, he asked, "But if the plague should remain there two years, what will you do?" This cross-examination concluded, he delivered to us the subjoined form in duplicate, in which he desired that each book in our possession should be recorded,

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On the fifth day preparations were made for our liberation, which, however, was not effected as readily as we had hoped. Early in the morning the doctor paid us a visit to assure himself that we were in health. We were then required to take an oath, enforced by a reference to God's presence and the anticipation of his "terrible judgment," that we had complied with all the requisitions of the establishment; that we had not been in contact with any person, except those of our party, during the time of confinement; that we had thrown nothing over the walls; and that every thing belonging to us had been aired and *turned* each day. To the last clause we objected, observing that, however

anxious we might have been to comply with the instructions received, yet it was scarcely practicable to handle daily each minute scrap of paper, &c., and that certainly we could not swear that this had been done. Our hesitation gave rise to a discussion between the doctor, the commissary, and the director, as to whether we should be detained. At length, it was decided that all our things had been turned *en masse*; and, with this understanding, we were suffered to depart.

At the gate of the quarantine a carriage was in waiting to convey us to the town, a mile distant. As we crossed the threshold, the commissary placed in our hands a paper from his superior, directing us to proceed immediately to Kishnau, the capital of Bessarabia, in order to present ourselves to the governor of that town. It was in vain that we expostulated, stating that Kishnau was out of our road, and that, as we were travellers, and not criminals, we ought to be allowed to choose our own route. Unhappily for us, we were foreigners; and as such, compelled to obey any capricious orders which these petty officials might please to issue.

The director of the quarantine was raised from the situation of a coachman; and the little commissary, who had so much annoyed us, was the son of a barber in the town. The former now receives eight hundred silver rubles, or £125 sterling, per annum; the latter half that sum. If so small a salary be attached to responsible situations, the employés must necessarily be taken from the lowest grades of society, and the government must submit to the censure of foreigners who become victims to their ignorance. The officer mis-called an interpreter receives three hundred silver rubles, or £47, a year; his acquirements correspond with his salary, being limited to Moldavian and Russ; and we were informed that, had it not been for the doctor, we should have been sent, *malgré nous*, a distance of two hundred miles to the central quarantine of Bessarabia, where the high qualification of a knowledge of French is supposed to exist in the interpreter.

Though our baggage had already been subjected to the most minute investigation, this did not exempt it from the searching scrutiny of the douaniers, who were ready to receive us the moment we passed beyond the gates of the lazaretto. All the trunks were re-opened, and re-examined; we were called upon to write a third list of our books, and were then informed that the portmanteau containing them must be sealed, and remain so till our arrival at Odessa. During the whole of this long journey, protracted as it

might be by illness or weather, we were deprived of books of every kind except a bible and prayer-book and one other, exempted as "sacred:" all the rest being collected together from various boxes and placed in one, our goods being unpacked, examined, and repacked on an exposed common, and the proscribed portmanteau being sealed, we were again closely questioned as to whether we had any thing *contra-band, especially any poison!* Finally, we were led into a room, and made to sign an engagement that we would not break the seal which secured our books till we reached the office of the governor-general at Odessa, where they would be inspected.

Sick at heart of all the forms which impede a foreigner's entrance into the kingdom of the czars, we gained the town, where, in the house of a *traiteur*, we began to breathe freely and to expatiate on the barbarity of the treatment we had received and the absurdity of the excuses under which we had been kept outside the quarantine for two days; but we tried in vain to discover why the commissary had asserted that no one in the town spoke any language but Russ, when it is crowded with Jews, all talking German; and when the public rendezvous for travellers is in the hands of an Italian, who for a trifling compensation, would have been thankful to act as an interpreter. Hence, also, we might readily have obtained mattresses and other comforts had we been permitted to enjoy them.

While waiting at the *traiteur's* for a carriage, the kind doctor, who is a Pole, paid us a visit of congratulation. When we spoke of Niemtivich, whom we had personally known in England, his eyes sparkled and a ray of joy lighted up his features, as though a chord had been touched which vibrated to his heart. A similar circumstance occurred a few months before in Venice. We were cautiously retracing our steps from the subterranean prisons under the doge's palace and the Bridge of Sighs, in company with a stranger, when an incidental allusion was made to the Polish patriot. Our companion, who proved to be a Pole who had acted as his private secretary, pressed forward, and, with a lively and interested manner, asked if we were acquainted with that great man, and then gave vent to his feelings, saying that he was the idol of his country, that infant tongues lisped his name with reverence, and that the world produced but one Niemtivich.

It was a holiday with the Hebrews, and the following day was their sabbath; on which account they refused to supply us with a conveyance. Jews are the principal tradespeople

in Liova, where they abound, having fled from Poland into Bessarabia; their peculiar dress, consisting of a long, gray, stuff coat fastened by a girdle, and a high fur cap, no less than their striking physiognomy, distinguishes them from the Christians by whom they are despised and mal-treated. As we were particularly anxious to reach Kishnau before Sunday, we ordered the best conveyance the town supplied to be procured for us without delay, and were not a little dismayed when it appeared. It consisted of a low frame, four feet long and two wide, surrounded by rough wicker-work, fixed on four crazy wheels. To this two wild-looking, unshod ponies were attached by ropes and driven by a peasant who spoke only Moldavian. When brought to the door, the vehicle was covered with a piece of old canvass fastened on some willow twigs bent over the top; but as this was not sufficiently high to allow of our sitting under it and would have afforded no shelter against rain, it was speedily removed. Having already wasted three-fourths of the day in a fruitless search for a more commodious carriage, we consoled ourselves by thinking that, possibly, the Jews might not have been able to supply a better, and that in a few hours we should be in a high road, in a civilized country, and hastening to the comforts of a good hotel, a luxury we had not enjoyed since leaving Hungary.

The road lies in a north-east direction, across a country absolutely barren; not a single tree nor cultivated field is to be seen; and the only objects which vary the sameness of the view are the tall posts erected as way-marks on this, as on every, Russian road: these are inscribed with the distances to the two stations on either side, and painted with broad vertical stripes of alternate black, white, and red. The soil is dark and rich; and the absence of tillage can be accounted for only by the scanty population and the unenterprising character of the people.

Bessarabia was conquered from Turkey in the beginning of the present century by the emperor Paul. Unlike the serfs in other parts of Russia, the peasants are at liberty to dwell where they please, and they are not compelled to furnish recruits: they retain something of the character fostered by Ottoman rule; being servile, fraudulent, and idle; never willing to work while possessing a kopeck, and therefore always living from hand to mouth: in one minor particular, however, the habits of the people on the opposite banks of the Pruth present a remarkable contrast, owing, doubtless, to the tax on tobacco in Russia: there every body smokes, here scarcely any one. The effect produced by the govern-

ment on the habits and customs of a nation, and hence on national character, is exhibited even in a trifle like this; while it is exemplified on a larger scale in Italy, whose present people, enjoying the same physical advantages of climate, but less favoured in their political institutions, differ so widely from their Roman ancestors.

Our driver at first proceeded at a pace but little superior to a snail's gallop. We endeavoured to stimulate him by the promise of a handsome reward, and in the few Moldavian words we could muster enforced on him unceasingly, "Haja meera graba; meer graba, meer bakshish; nich graba, nich bakshish." Or "Get on quickly; the quicker, the more money; no speed, no present." To all this he seemed insensible, and soon assumed an insolent air; nor was it till a harsher tone and manner were adopted, that he would proceed even at a moderate rate. Our fellow-travellers tried the practice of the country with their postillion, and found it succeed. One of them was incessantly scolding, and often running by the side of his vehicle, with stick upraised and a pretended fierceness which operated like a charm on both the drivers. Thus, threats effected what promises could not, and we moved on at a more reasonable pace.

A drive of three hours and a half brought us to the village of Sarasicca, a distance of thirty versts. Here we found in a peasant's hut a good room, with benches to lie upon, plenty of carpets to serve as mattresses and covering, and some good eggs and milk. We were too much accustomed to hard fare to be fastidious, and though the woman of the house at first refused us the carpets on which we had cast longing eyes, as they lay piled up in a heap four feet high, yet her son speedily secured her reluctant consent by making her understand that she would be a gainer by any accommodation she afforded us.

We resumed our course before day-light, only too happy to awake outside the walls of the lazaretto. The road to Kishnau passes through the villages of Hoorhahalbena and Mooshalee, which divide the journey into three stages of eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-one versts respectively, each occupying about three hours. The country is, for the most part, a wild uncultivated waste, either flat or gently undulating, but here and there it is varied by woods, which, at this season, were richly died with autumnal tints, and almost *carpeted* with an abundant, low, bright-crimson shrub, that contrasted beautifully with the yellow, red, and purple hues of the surrounding foliage; while the fragrant herbs that covered the ground over which we drove yielded their

grateful odours as our horses bruised them under foot. In more than one place large flights of crows and a few royal eagles were enjoying their aerial life, or condescending to dispute the possession of a carcass with some half-wild and famished dogs, reminding us of the Jewish proverb, "Where-soever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." In the east, vultures, crows, and dogs, often fight over their noisome prey; nor is it uncommon to see a flotilla of dead bodies on the Ganges surmounted by carrion birds, looking, at a distance, like children on a raft.

The first view of Kishnau from the summit of a neighbouring hill, is imposing; and the prospect of a comfortable inn led us to see every thing *colour de rose*. The extent of the town, its churches with their green painted domes, and its new white buildings, all seemed to confer on it an air of respectability superior to that of any place we had visited since leaving Hungary.

Just outside the gates, are ruins of one of the walls erected by Trajan, which extended as far as the ancient Chersonesus. Remains of another are found between the Black Sea and Reni, near Galatz; and a third may be traced from Reni to Taraspol.

After passing the *barrière* and driving over a series of broad, sandy roads, skirted with straggling dwellings on either side, we were surprised to find that we were in the middle of the town, when we fancied ourselves as yet in the suburbs. Kishnau looks better at a distance than on a near inspection. None of the streets are paved, nor are the houses in general close together, but separated by their respective enclosures. The shops are few and shabby in exterior; yet the population is rapidly increasing, and has risen during the last forty years from a very small number to its present amount, between thirty and forty thousand.

Our hopes of obtaining good accommodation were sadly disappointed when we drove to the door of what is said to be the best hotel in Bessarabia, and saw nothing but a low shabby building ill adapted for the reception of travellers. Each comfortless room contained a sofa, a table, a chair, and abundance of dirt, which amply furnished the otherwise empty apartment. It was with difficulty that we succeeded in procuring a leathern pillow and a quilt too greasy for use, while our application for sheets was replied to by a look of surprise and an intimation that nothing of the kind belonged to the establishment. The master seemed very indifferent to his guests, and was evidently engaged in some more thriving business than that of an innkeeper. Bad as was the

accommodation, we determined to spend the Sunday here; and as the sole cause of our visit was the order of the authorities at Liova that we should present ourselves to the governor of the chief town of the province, we waited on him immediately, and were informed that he was asleep. On a second occasion we were detained three hours and a half, and then told that we might go; that the general was indisposed! The only apparent object attained by the Russian government in compelling us to make this long détour was the enforcement of a payment of five rubles for a new passport; an accession to their treasury which might be secured without sending travellers a journey of two days out of their course.

This is one of the few towns where we found gipsies with a settled residence. Many of these degraded people dwell in little wooden huts, carrying on the trades of tinkers, basket-makers, and the like; while others traverse the country, dealing in horses. Their women are better looking than the native Russians, but disfigure themselves with a multitude of worthless trinkets.

All the business of Kishnau is transacted by Jews, ten thousand of whom are said to reside here. They consider themselves less kindly treated under the present, than under the late, emperor, who liberated them from the necessity, now re-imposed, of furnishing recruits. We did not ascertain how the Hebrew soldiers perform their duties in Russia; but it is recorded of their brethren in Turkey, whom Selim formed into regiments, that when he ordered forty thousand of them to invade Austria, they petitioned for a guard to escort them across an intermediate tract of country, said to be infested by marauders! The petition succeeded in convincing the sultan that the Moslim faith would gain little from the Hebrew sword, and his Jewish regiments were disbanded. If Scripture did not lead us to look for a marked degeneracy of character among the descendants of Israel, it would appear singularly strange that a people who have preserved nearly all their other national peculiarities, should so completely have lost that ferocity and courage which characterized them in the days of Joshua, the Maccabees, and Josephus.