Excerpts from:

TRAVELS

IN THE

THREE GREAT EMPIRES

OF

AUSTRIA, RUSSIA, AND TURKEY.

BY

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THE FRONTIER AT LIOVA.

Crossing the Pruth into the Russian Empire.

IT WAS past nine in the evening when we found ourselves among some huts on the bank of the Pruth, at a spot dignified by the high-sounding title of Porte de Liova. By the light of the moon we discerned a ferry; and the loud cry of the guards, stationed on the opposite side and answering one another at short intervals, indicated the vicinity of the Russian quarantine, whither we were bound. This cry of the sentinels is wild and singular. It consists of one high note, which they usually sustain as long as the breath permits, when they conclude by descending the scale in semi-tones.

A hard-featured, passionate man, roused from his slumbers, soon answered the call of our driver, and came out to ask what we required. We intimated by signs that we were desirous of crossing the river to Liova: to this he replied by violent gestures and unintelligible vociferations; and after a fruitless effort to persuade him to comply with our wishes, we were beginning to make arrangements for spending the night in the carriage, when a more respectable person accosted us. He understood just two words of German; "To-morrow morning;" by means of which he intimated that we could not cross the ferry till the following day; and at the same time conducted us to a miserable hut, where a woman and a naked child, rolling themselves off a plank, placed it at our disposal. In a corner, two more children lay on the mud floor. The stove, a broad bench on three sides of the room, and a stick sus-

pended from the ceiling, on which several articles of dress were hanging, constituted the only furniture. Three holes in the wall, provided with pieces of bladder removable at pleasure, served to admit light, but did not exclude the air. Such was our apartment. Our companions had a similar one in another cabin. In a few minutes the vehicle was unloaded and the baggage piled before the door to barricade it against intruders; when, partially undressing and wrapt in our cloaks, we lay down to sleep, with the two children in the corner, thankful for a sheltered spot in which to rest our weary limbs.

The following morning we awoke to a sense of our miseries, and saw by daylight the full extent of the wretchedness by which we were surrounded. The screaming of the children had compelled us in the middle of the night to put them into the outer room, and they ceased to disturb us; but not so the insects by which we were almost devoured: an entomologist might have made a fair collection from the various species of our tormentors. On opening the door, we found ourselves enveloped in a thick mist; the Pruth flowed under the wall of the hut, and the eye could not penetrate the dense vapor that arose from its surface; but as soon as this was dissipated, we descried the roof of the Russian quarantine on the further side of a low hill, and recognized in it the site of our future prison. In vain we traversed and re-traversed the village in search of some one who spoke French, Italian, or German; but not a creature was to be found whose attainments extended beyond a knowledge of the Moldavian dialect. The uncourteous man who, the preceding night, had impressed us with no very favorable opinion of his disposition, verified to-day the estimate we had formed of him; and to our signs, so-

liciting a conveyance to the opposite shore, he replied only by negations issued with all the assumption of petty authority. In this painful situation we passed several hours, without the possibility of moving or of procuring bread, meat, clean water, or the common necessaries of life; till, in the afternoon, a flag raised on the Russian bank intimated that strangers might cross the water: at the same time several Jews arrived, some of whom spoke broken German; and from them we learned the real cause of our detention, namely, that the bureau is opened only twice a day, and on Sunday, which this happened to be, but once.

Embarking in a canoe formed of an excavated tree, and reaching the opposite shore in company with about sixteen Jews and Moldavian peasants, we proceeded to exhibit our passports and solicit permission to enter the quarantine, which consists of a number of little detached buildings, surrounded by a wooden palisade forming a square of about a hundred and fifty yards. Outside this are an office, where at stated hours an employé receives passports and strangers, and a quadrangle into which the détenus are permitted to enter once in the day, to converse with their friends through a screen of trellis-work. The visit of our companions enabled the prisoners to avail themselves of this privilege, and a dirty tribe flocked to the bars to gossip away their short half-hour. Some of the Jews, who had been long fasting, spread out their provisions on the ground and began to eat, having first washed their hands and rinsed their mouths; for, like their ancestors of old, "unless they wash, they eat not."

In the bureau we encountered an official styling himself the commissary, who spoke not a word of any language but the Russian. We were separated by a double grating

furnished with small doors opposite to each other, between which, on a glass case containing a New Testament and a picture of the virgin, our passports were placed. These were taken up with a pair of tongs, and one of the Jews was desired to inform us that we must return the following day. We represented that we had already lost time by the arrangements which prevented our reception the previous night; that we were now in a spot where the necessaries of life were not procurable; that we had literally passed fifty-four hours without washing our faces, from the impossibility of procuring any water unmixed with mud, and that we had spent two nights without enjoying the comfort of a bed; that to force us to remain longer in such a condition was cruel; and that some consideration ought to be manifested. All this touched not the heart of the commissary, who replied only that the law must be obeyed. Before we left, the doctor of the quarantine, who spoke a little French, arrived, and acted as interpreter. Having heard our just complaint, he kindly interceded for us, but without effect; and the sleek little commissary desired him to apprise us that the law requires every foreigner, not French, bringing a French passport, to be detained beyond the frontier while enquiries are instituted regarding him; nor would he understand that the passports of all English travellers are necessarily drawn out in French; that being the diplomatic language of Europe.

Finding that we were likely to be thus maltreated, we gave him a letter addressed to the governor of the town, stating that some foreign gentlemen wished to enter the Russian dominions, that they were furnished with regular passports and willing to submit to quarantine, but that they were harassed by unnecessary deten-

tion, to obviate which his aid was solicited. When we requested that this might be speedily forwarded, the following dialogue with the commissary took place by means of a Jew. "Whence comes this letter to the governor of Liova?"—"From the Porte de Liova."—"Who wrote it?"—"A gentleman."—"What gentleman?"—"His name will be found in the letter."—"The commissary must know his name."—"Then the governor will doubtless inform him." Disgusted with his examiné, the commissary turned away, the doors were locked, and we were ordered to recross the water.

Doomed to pass another day in the miserable Porte de Liova, it was a source of thankfulness and surprise that the means professedly intended to prevent our carrying infection from countries where it was well known no contagious disease existed, did not themselves induce illness; a result which would probably have ensued, but for the wholesome food supplied by our kind friends at Galatz.

After a second doleful night, we arose with such strength as survived the attacks of the insatiable insects, and were happy to see the flag flying at eight o'clock. Again we resorted to the office of the commissary, who said that it was impossible we should be received, because we must previously take an oath, and we did not understand the Russian language. We enquired why the oath could not be translated? "Because nobody can translate it."—"Where is the doctor?"—"He may perhaps come to-morrow or next day."—"Is there no one in the town who talks German, French, or Italian, and who will translate the oath for a handsome remuneration?"—"No; nobody!"—"Will you not communicate the substance of the oath to one of these Jews, and suffer him to repeat it

to us?"—"That is impossible: a Jew cannot administer an oath to a Christian."—"But a Jew can inform a Christian what he is called upon to swear."—"No; he cannot take the name of Christ."—"A Jew often does take the name of Christ, though in blasphemy: however, the word is the same in all languages; let him interpret the rest of the oath, we can supply the sacred name." The absurdity of this conversation was the more glaring, as a Jew was at the time actually naming the name of Christ in his office of interpreter between us. To suppose the commissary could not understand the feasibility of this arrangement, were to suppose him without reason; but he would not. We offered him a piece of gold, which he refused, and went away, leaving us to decide whether we should go back to Galatz or make one more effort to overcome the vexatious annoyances of a Russian frontier.

On the northern boundary equal obstacles are not opposed to the admission of travellers; but we were informed at Vienna that it was impossible to conceive the inconveniences to which those are exposed who enter Bessarabia; and so the result proved. The fact is, Russia does not wish the subjects of more liberal governments to blend with her own; and she cannot more effectually prevent such an amalgamation than by condemning them to what we suffered. Nothing but a determination to exclude foreigners to the utmost of her power can account for the anomaly that, in a frontier office, at which many must be constantly arriving, there should not be an individual capable of conversing in any language but Moldavian and Russ, except the doctor, who stated that it was no part of his duty to act as interpreter.

While we were meditating on the course to be adopted, the commissary returned: he had probably seen the governor and learned that we were furnished with an introduction to count Woronzow, the governor-general of Southern Russia; for his manner was entirely changed: he now told us that if we would attend, with our party, in the afternoon, bringing a list in Russ of every, even the most minute, article in our possession, we should be admitted, and the oath should be translated for us into French. By means of a Jew who spoke a little German and Moldavian, and a Moldavian who spoke a little Russ but could scarcely write and required two or three minutes for each word, a list of our effects was made, minute even to scraps of linen, some allumettes, and fragments of paper. This tedious work accomplished, we proceeded to cross the ferry, but were arrested in our progress by the sentinel on the Moldavian side, who insisted on a present before he would suffer us to pass. Some of his companions, encouraged by the readiness with which we had submitted to similar impositions, had asked for a trifle, which we intended to give; but when a military sentry ventured to stop us with such a demand, we felt that compliance would be weakness and that duty required we should assert our rights by forcing a passage malgré his opposition.

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 enquire, 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 paillasses 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 there-

fore 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 holiday. 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 necessaries 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 Constantino-

ple, but that tidings of the plague had led us to defer our visit to the Turkish capital; and that we purposed waiting at Odessa till its ravages should cease. After many enquiries, 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.

No.	Language.	Name of Work, and of the Author.	When and where printed.	No. of Vols.
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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 everything 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 miscalled 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 anything contraband, *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, grey, 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.