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# TRAVELS

**IN THE**

# STEPPES OF THE CASPIAN SEA,

**THE CRIMEA, THE CAUCASUS, &c.**

**BY**

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**MEMBER OF THE SOCIETE GEOLOGIQUE OF FRANCE, AND KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF ST. VLADIMIR OF RUSSIA.**

**WITH ADDITIONS FROM VARIOUS SOURCES.**

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# AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

When I left Constantinople for Odessa my principal object was to investigate the geology of the Crimea and of New Russia, and to arrive by positive observations at the solution of the great question of the rupture of the Bosphorus. Having once entered on this pursuit, I was soon led beyond the limits of the plan I had marked out for myself, and found it incumbent on me to examine all the vast regions that extend between the Danube and the Caspian Sea to the foot of the northern slope of the Caucasus. I spent, therefore, nearly five years in Southern Russia, traversing the country in all directions, exploring the course of rivers and streams on foot or on horseback, and visiting all the Russian coasts of the Black Sea, the Sea of Azof and the Caspian. Twice I was intrusted by the Russian government with important scientific and industrial missions; I enjoyed special protection and assistance during all my travels, and I am happy to be able to testify in this place my gratitude to Count Voronzof, and to all those who so amply seconded me in my laborious investigations.

Thus protected by the local authorities, I was enabled to collect the most authentic information respecting the state of men and things. Hence I was naturally led to superadd to my scientific pursuits considerations of all kinds connected with the history, statistics, and actual condition of the various races inhabiting Southern Russia. I was, moreover, strongly encouraged in my new task by the desire to make known in their true light all those southern regions of the empire which have played so important a part in the history of Russia since the days of Peter the Great.

My wife, who braved all hardships to accompany me in most of my journeys, has also been the partner of my literary labours in France. To her belongs all the descriptive part of this book of travels.

Our work is published under no man's patronage; we have kept ourselves independent of all extraneous influence; and in frankly pointing out what struck us as faulty in the social institutions of the Muscovite empire, we think we evince our gratitude for the hospitable treatment we received in Russia, better than some travellers of our day, whose pages are only filled with exaggerated and ridiculous flatteries.

XAVIER HOMMAIRE DE HELL.

# DEFINITIONS.

*Geographic miles* are of 15 to a degree of the equator.

A Russian Verst (104-3/10 to a degree), is 1/7 of a geographical mile, 1/4 of a French league of 25 to a degree. It is equal to 3484.9 English feet, or nearly 2/3 of a statute mile. It is divided into 500 *sazhenes*, and each of these into 3 *arshines*.

A *deciatine* (superficial measure) is equivalent to 2 acres, 2 roods, 32 perches, English.

A *pood* is equal to 40 Russian or 36 English pounds.

100 *tchetverts* (corn measure) are equal to about 74-1/2 English quarters.

A *vedro* (liquid measure) contains 3-1/4 English gallons, or 12-1/4 Litres.

Since 1839 the paper ruble has been suppressed, and has given place to the silver ruble. But the former is always to be understood wherever the word ruble occurs in the following pages. The paper ruble is worth from 1 fr. 10c. to 1 fr. 18c. according to the course of exchange; the silver ruble is equal to 3-1/2 paper rubles.

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A French *hectare* is equal to 2 acres, 1 rood, 33 perches, English.

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# THE STEPPES OF THE CASPIAN SEA, &c.

# CHAPTER I.

DEPARTURE FROM CONSTANTINOPLE—ARRIVAL, IN ODESSA— QUARANTINE.

On the 15th of May, 1838, we bade adieu to Constantinople, and standing on the deck of the Odessa steamer, as it entered the Bosphorus, we could not withdraw our eyes from the magnificent panorama we were leaving behind us.

Constantinople then appeared to us in all its grandeur and beauty. Seated like Rome on its seven hills, exercising its sovereignty like Corinth over two seas, the vast city presented to our eyes a superb amphitheatre of palaces, mosques, white minarets and green plane-trees glistening in an Asiatic sunshine. What description could adequately depict this marvellous spectacle, or even give an idea of it? Would it not be wronging creation, as Lamartine has said, to compare Constantinople with any thing else in this world?

Meanwhile, we were advancing up the Bosphorus, and the two shores, fringed all along to the Black Sea with cypress groves, and half hidden beneath their sombre shade, invited a share of that attentive gaze we had hitherto bestowed only on the great city that was vanishing in our wake. The Bosphorus itself presented a very animated scene. A thousand white-sailed caïques glided lightly over the waves, coming and going incessantly from shore to shore. As we advanced, the Bosphorus widened more and more, and we soon entered that Black Sea, whose ominous name so well accords with the storms that perpetually convulse it. A multitude of vessels of all kinds and dimensions, were anchored at the entrance of the channel, waiting for a favourable wind to take them out of the straits, which alone present more dangers than the whole navigation of the Black Sea. The difficulties of this passage are further augmented in the beginning of spring and the end of autumn by dense fogs, which have caused an incalculable number of vessels to be wrecked on the steep rocks of these iron-bound coasts.

The passage from Constantinople to Odessa is effected in fifty hours in the Russian steamers, which ply twice a month from each of these ports. Those who are accustomed to the comfort, elegance, and scrupulous cleanliness of the Mediterranean and Atlantic steamers, must be horrified at finding themselves on board a Russian vessel. It is impossible to express the filth and disorder of that in which we were embarked. The deck, which was already heaped from end to end with goods and provisions, was crowded besides with a disgusting mob of pilgrims, mendicant monks, Jews, and Russian or Cossack women, all squatting and lying about at their ease without regard to the convenience of the other passengers. Most of them were returning from Jerusalem. The Russian people are possessed in the highest degree with the mania for pilgrimages. All these beggars set off barefooted, with their wallets on their backs, and their rosaries in their hands, to seek Heaven's pardon for their sins; appealing on their way to the charity of men, to enable them to continue that vagabond and miserable life which they prefer to the fulfilment of homely duties. [Pg 2]

It was a sorry specimen of the people we were going to visit that we had thus before our eyes, and our repugnance to these Muscovites was all the stronger from our recollections of the Turks, whose noble presence and beauty had so lately engaged our admiration.

On the morning of the second day, we saw on our left a little island called by the sailors the Island of Serpents. The Russians have retained its Greek name of Fidonisi. It was anciently called Leucaia, or Makaron Nesos (Island of the Blest), was sacred to Achilles, and contained a temple, in which mariners used to deposit offerings. It is a calcareous rock, about thirty yards high and not more than 600 in its greatest diameter, and has long been uninhabited. Some ruins still visible upon it would probably be worth exploring, if we may judge from an inscription already discovered.

Soon afterwards we were made aware of our approach to Odessa, our place of destination, by the appearance of the Russian coast with its cliffs striated horizontally in red and white. Nothing can be more dreary than these low, deserted, and monotonous coasts, stretching away as far as the eye can reach, until they are lost in the hazy horizon. There is no vegetation, no variety in the scene, no trace of human habitation; but everywhere a calcareous and argillaceous wall thirty or forty yards high, with an arid sandy beach at its foot, continually swept bare by the waves. But as we approached nearer to Odessa, the shore assumed a more varied appearance. Huge masses of limestone and earth, separated ages ago from the line of the cliffs, form a range of hills all along the sea border, planted with trees and studded with charming country-houses.

A lighthouse, at some distance from the walls of Odessa, is the first landmark noted by mariners. An hour after it came in sight, we were in front of the town. Europe was once more before our eyes, and the aspect of the straight lines of street, the wide fronted houses, and the sober aspect of the buildings awoke many dear recollections in our minds. Every object appeared to us in old familiar hues and forms, which time and absence had for a while effaced from our memories. Even Constantinople, which so lately had filled our imaginations, was now thought of but as a brilliant mirage which had met our view by chance, and soon vanished with all its illusive splendours. [Pg 3]

Odessa looks to great advantage from the quarantine harbour, where the steamer moored. The eye takes in at one view the boulevard, the Exchange, Count Voronzof's palace, the *pratique* harbour, and the Custom-house; and, in the background, some churches with green roofs and gilded domes, the theatre, Count de Witt's pretty Gothic house, and some large barracks, which from their Grecian architecture, one would be disposed to take for ancient monuments.

Behind the Custom-house, on some steep calcareous rocks, sixty or seventy feet high, stands the quarantine establishment, looking proudly down on all Odessa. A fortress and bastions crowning the height, protect the town. All the remarkable buildings are thus within view of the port, and give the town at first sight an appearance of grandeur that is very striking.

The day of our arrival was a Sunday; and when we entered the harbour, it was about four in the afternoon, the hour of the promenade, and all that portion of the town adjoining the port presented the most picturesque appearance imaginable. We had no difficulty in distinguishing the numerous promenaders that filled the alleys of the boulevard, and we heard the noise of the droshkys and four-horse equipages that rolled in every direction. The music, too, of a military band stationed in the middle of the promenade, distinctly reached our ears, and heightened the charms of the scene. It was, indeed, a European town we beheld, full of affluence, movement, and gaiety. But, alas! our curiosity and our longings, thus strongly excited, were not for a long while to be satisfied. The dreaded quarantine looked down on us, as if to notify that its rights were paramount, and assuredly it was not disposed to abrogate them in our favour. One of the officers belonging to it had already come down to receive the letters, journals, and passports, and to order us into a large wooden house, placed like a watchful sentinel on the verge of the sea. So we were forced to quit the brilliant spectacle on which we had been gazing, and go and pass through certain preliminary formalities in a smoky room, filled with sailors and passengers, waiting their turn with the usual apathy of Russians.

We had no sooner entered the quarantine, than we were separated from each other, and every one made as much haste to avoid us, as if we were unfortunate pariahs whose touch was uncleanness. All our baggage was put aside for four-and-twenty hours, and we were accommodated in the meantime with the loan of garments, so grotesque and ridiculous, that after we had got into them, we could not look at each other without bursting into laughter. We made haste to inspect our chambers, which we found miraculously furnished with the most [Pg 4] indispensable things. But what rejoiced us above all, was a court-yard adorned with two beautiful acacias, the flowery branches of which threw their shade upon our windows. Our guardian, who had been unable to preserve the usual gravity of a Russian soldier at the sight of our ludicrous *travestissement*, surprised us greatly by a few words of French which he addressed to us. By dint of mangling our mother tongue, he managed to inform us that he had made the campaign of 1815, and that he was never so happy as when he met Frenchmen. On our part we had every reason to be satisfied with his attentive services.

The first hours we passed in quarantine, were extremely tedious and unpleasant, in consequence of the want of our baggage. Our books, our papers, and every thing we had most urgent need of, were carried off to undergo two whole days' fumigation. But afterwards the time passed away glibly enough, and I should never have supposed it possible to be so contented in prison. But for the iron bars and the treble locks which had to be opened every time we had occasion to leave our rooms, we might have fancied we were rusticating for our pleasure. A handsome garden, a capital cook, books, a view of the sea—what more could any one desire? We were allowed to walk about the whole establishment, on condition only that we kept at a respectful distance from all who came in our way, and that we were constantly accompanied by our guardian. On one of the angles of the rock there is a little platform, with seats and trees, looking down on the sea, the harbour, and part of the town. In this delightful lounging-place we often passed hours together, in contemplating the beautiful spectacle before us.

What a lively source of endless enjoyment does the imagination find in a broad extent of sea animated by numerous vessels! The bustle of the harbour, the boats plying with provisions and passengers; the various flags flying from the mast-heads; the brig preparing to sail, with canvass unfurled, and the crew singing out as they tramp round the capstan; a sail suddenly appearing on the horizon, like a bird on the wing, gleaming in the sun, and gradually enlarging on the sight; the zones of light and shade, that scud athwart the sea's surface, and give it a thousand varying aspects; the coast, with its headlands, its lighthouse, its sinuous and indented lines, its broad beach and belt of rocks; all these things form a panorama, that completely absorbs the faculties. You envy the good fortune of those who are outward bound, and whose course lies over yon smooth expanse of water, limited only by the sky, in search of other shores and other scenes. You bid them farewell with voice and gesture as familiar friends, and wish them fair winds and good speed, as though they could hear you.

We were then in the beautiful month of June; the placid sea was as limpid and bright as the sky; the acacia was coming into full bloom, and embalmed the air far over sea and shore with its delicious perfume. Odessa is full of these trees, and when they are covered with their odorous [Pg 5] blossoms, the streets, the squares, and even the meanest quarters, put on a charming gala aspect; the whole town is metamorphosed into a smiling garden.

We feel bound to testify to the excellent arrangements of the quarantine establishment, and to the ready, obliging disposition of its officers. Though placed in such propinquity to Constantinople, the Odessa lazaret may serve as a model of its kind, and the excellence of the system observed in it is proved by the happy results obtained. Travellers are subjected to a quarantine of a fortnight only, and merchandise, after undergoing forty-eight hours' fumigation with preparations of chlorine, is immediately set free; yet since the existence of this establishment, there has not occurred in Odessa a single case of plague which could be ascribed to any defect in the sanatory regulations of the place. There is no denying the fact that in matters of quarantine, France remains in the extreme background. The lazaret of Marseilles, is at this day exactly what it was at the beginning of the last century. All our discoveries in chemistry and medicine have been of no avail against the inveterate force of old habits; and up to the present

time, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of commercial men, it has been impossible to modify the sanatory regulations enforced in our Mediterranean ports. Marseilles is 600 leagues away from the countries ravaged by the plague, and yet vessels are subjected there, after five-and-twenty days' navigation, to a quarantine of forty-five days, and their cargoes are exposed in the open air for the same period. It has been frequently proposed to establish a new system, more in accordance with the advanced state of our knowledge; but it seems that the efforts of the government have always been defeated by the prejudices of the inhabitants of the south.

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# CHAPTER II.

STREETS OF ODESSA—JEWS—HOTELS—PARTIALITY OF THE RUSSIANS FOR ODESSA—HURRICANE, DUST, MUD, CLIMATE, &c.—PUBLIC BUILDINGS.

The day of our release from quarantine, was as full of bustle and annoyances as that of our arrival, the *spolio* alone excepted. How we regretted the freedom of the East! There the traveller's movements are shackled by no formalities, but he is free from the moment he quits his vessel, to roam about the town as he pleases, without being pestered with the custom-house and police officers, and the *employés* of all sorts that assail him in lands calling themselves civilised. But it is in Russia especially that he has most reason to pour out his wrathful imprecations on that army of birds of prey that pounce on him with an avidity truly intolerable. I can't tell how [Pg 6] many formalities we had to go through from the hour appointed for our leaving the lazaret, until we finally got out of the clutches of the Custom-house, and could breathe freely. But our feelings of vexation, strong as they were, gave way to downright stupefaction, when we entered the town. Was this really that Odessa which had seemed so brilliant when we saw it from the lazaret, and which now presented itself to our eyes under so mean and wretched an aspect? Could we even grace with the name of town the place where we then were and the streets we beheld? It was a great open space without houses, filled with carts, and oxen rolling in the dust, in company with a mob of Russian and Polish peasants, all sleeping together in the sun, in a temperature of more than 90°.

Whirlwinds of dust exactly like waterspouts in all but the material composing them, darkened the air every moment, and swept the ground with incredible fury. Further on, we entered a street wider than our highways in France, and flanked with little houses, one story high, and separated from each other by uncultivated gardens. The population consisting of Jews, whose filth is become proverbial in Russia, completed our disgust, and we knew not which way to turn our eyes to escape the sight of such loathsome objects. However, as we approached the heart of the town the streets began to show shops and houses, and the appearance of the inhabitants grew more diversified. But notwithstanding the carriages and droshkys that passed us rapidly, notwithstanding the footways of cut stone, and the Grecian architecture of the corn stores, we reached the Hotel de la Nouvelle Russie without having been able to reconcile ourselves to the aspect of the town; and there again we encountered fresh disappointments. We had been told by many of our acquaintances in Constantinople that the hotels of Odessa were among the best in Europe; great, therefore, was our surprise at not finding any one of the commonest requisites for travellers in the one at which we stopped. No linen, no bells, no servants to wait on us; it was with difficulty we could get a carafe of water after waiting for it half an hour. Our single apartment looked due south, and all the furniture in it consisted of a bedstead, a chest of drawers, and a few chairs, without a scrap of curtain to mitigate the blazing sunshine that scorched our eyes. And for such accommodation as this we had to pay eight rubles a day. But our amazement reached the highest pitch, when, after giving orders to fit up the bedstead which made so piteous a figure in this agreeable lodging, we were informed by the hotel keeper that every article was charged for separately. "What!" I exclaimed, in great indignation, "do we not pay eight rubles a day?" "Certainly, madame, but accessories are never included in the charge for the room. But if madame don't like, there is no need to have a bed furnished completely. We have generals and countesses that are satisfied with a plain mattress." We had no desire to follow the example of their Excellencies, so we were obliged to submit to our host's terms. It is fair to add, [Pg 7] however, that circumstances to a certain extent justified some exorbitance of charge, for the Emperor Nicholas and his family were hourly expected, and the hotels were of course thronged with military men and strangers.

Odessa now lays claim to a respectable rank among the towns of Europe. Its position on the Black Sea, the rapid increase of its population, its commercial wealth, and its brilliant society, all concur to place it next in Russia after the two capitals of the empire. Though but forty years have elapsed since its foundation, it has far outstripped those half-Sclavonic, half-Tartar cities, Kiev the holy, the great Novgorod, and Vladimir, all celebrated in the bloody annals of the tzars, and already old before Moscow and St. Petersburg were yet in existence.

Odessa is not at all like any of the other towns in the empire. In it you hear every language and see all kinds of usages except those of the country. Nevertheless, the Russians prefer it even to St. Petersburg, for they enjoy greater liberty in it, and are relieved from the rigorous etiquette that engrosses three-fourths of their time in the capital. Besides this, Odessa possesses one grand attraction for the Russian and Polish ladies in the freedom of its port, which enables them to indulge their taste for dress and other luxuries without the ruinous expense these entail on them in St. Petersburg. Odessa is their Paris, which they are all bent on visiting at least once in their lives, whatever be the distance they have to travel. The reputation of the town has even passed the Russian frontiers, and people have been so obliging as to bestow on it the flattering name of the *Russian Florence*; but for what reason I really cannot tell. Odessa possesses neither arts nor artists; even the dilettante class is scarcely known there; the predominant spirit of trade leaves little room for a love of the beautiful, and the commercial men care very little about art. It is true that M. Vital, a distinguished French painter, has endeavoured to establish a drawing-academy under the patronage of Count Voronzof, but the success of his efforts may be doubted.

The infatuated admiration of the Russians for Odessa is carried to the utmost extreme, and they cannot understand how a stranger can fail to share in it. How indeed can any one refuse to be enraptured with a town that possesses an Italian opera, fashionable shops, wide footways, an English club, a boulevard, a statue, two or three paved streets, &c.? Barbarian taste or envy could alone behold all this without admiration. After all, this enthusiasm of the Russians may be easily accounted for: accustomed as they are to their wildernesses of snow and mud, Odessa is for them a real Eldorado comprising all the seductions and pleasures of the world.

If you will believe the Russians, snow is a thing of rare occurrence there, and every winter they wonder in all sincerity at the reappearance of sledges in the streets. But this does not hinder the thermometer from remaining steadily for several months at 25° or 26° R. below zero, and the [Pg 8] whole sea from becoming one polished sheet of ice; nor does it dispense with the necessity of having double windows, stoves, and pelisses, just as in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Great, therefore, is the surprise of the traveller, who, on the strength of its flattering *sobriquet*, expects to find an Italian sun in Odessa, and who meets at every step nothing but frost-bitten faces and sledges. Besides these wintry rigours, there are the hurricanes that continually desolate the whole region, during what is elsewhere called the fine season. And these vicissitudes of the atmosphere are aggravated by another evil still more distressing, the dust, namely, which makes the town almost uninhabitable during a part of the year. Dust is here a real calamity, a fiend-like persecutor, that allows you not a moment's rest. It spreads out in seas and billows that rise with the least breath of wind, and envelop you with increasing fury, until you are stifled and blinded, and incapable of a single movement. The gusts of wind are so violent and sudden as to baffle every precaution. It is only at sunset that one can venture out at last to breathe the sea air on the boulevard, or to walk in the Rue Richelieu, the wide footways of which are then thronged by all the fashion of the place.

Many natural causes combine to keep up this terrible plague. First, the argillaceous soil, the dryness of the air, the force of the wind, and the width of the streets; then the bad paving, the great extent of uncultivated ground still within the town, and the prodigious number of carriages. The local administration has tried all imaginable systems, with the hope of getting rid of the dust, and has even had stones brought from Italy to pave certain streets, but all its efforts have been ineffectual. At last, in a fit of despair, it fell upon the notable device of macadamising the well-paved Rue Italienne and Rue Richelieu. The only result of this operation was, of course, prodigiously to increase the evil. A wood paving, to be laid down by a Frenchman, is now talked of, and it appears that his first attempts have been quite successful.

In order to give some idea of the violence of the hurricanes to which the country is subject, I will mention a phenomenon of which I was myself a witness. After a very hot day in 1840, the air of Odessa gradually darkened about four in the afternoon, until it was impossible to see twenty paces before one. The oppressive feel of the atmosphere, the dead calm, and the portentous colour of the sky, filled every one with deep consternation, and seemed to betoken some fearful catastrophe. For an hour and a half the spectator could watch the progress of this novel eclipse, which as yet was without a precedent in those parts. The thermometer attained the enormous height of 104° F. The obscurity was then complete; presently the most furious tempest imagination can conceive, burst forth, and when the darkness cleared off, there was seen over the sea, what looked like a waterspout of prodigious depth and breadth, suspended at a height of several feet above the water, and moving slowly away until it dispersed at last at a distance of [Pg 9] many miles from the shore. The eclipse and the waterspout were nothing else than dust, and that day Odessa was swept cleaner than it will probably ever be again.

During the winter the dust is changed into liquid mud, in which the pedestrian sinks up to mid-leg, and in which he might soon drown himself, if his humour so disposed him. A long pole to take soundings with, would not come amiss to one who had to steer his course between the slimy abysses with which some streets are filled. Formerly, that is to say some fifteen years ago, ladies used to repair to the ball-room in carts, drawn each by a numerous team of oxen. At present the principal streets are paved and lighted, and one may proceed to an evening party in a rather more elegant equipage; but the poor pedestrian, nevertheless, finds it a most difficult task to drag his feet out of the adhesive mud that meets him whichever way he turns; those, therefore, who have no carriages in Odessa, are obliged to live in absolute solitude. The distances are as great as in Paris, and the only vehicle for hire is what is called in Russia a droshky; that is to say, a sort of saddle mounted on four wheels, on which men sit astride, and ladies find it very difficult to seat themselves with decorum. The droshky affords you no protection from either mud, dust,

or rain, and at most is only suitable to men of business and Russians, who never go out of doors without their cloaks, even in the height of summer.

Odessa contains no remarkable building. In many private houses and in most of the corn warehouses, a lavish use has been made of the Greek style of architecture, which accords neither with the climate, nor above all with the materials employed. All those columns, pediments, and regular façades, with which the eye is so soon satiated, are in plaster, and they begin to spoil even before the building is finished. The mouldings must be renewed every year, and notwithstanding this care, most of the houses and churches have an air of dilapidation, that makes them resemble ruins rather than palaces and temples. The cathedral itself has nothing to distinguish it but its bulk. One must not look for the rules of architecture, or for elegance of form, or pleasing details in the religious edifices. They are monotonous in character, and shabby in structure and fittings. Their interiors are glaring with pictures and gilding, but all in the spurious taste of the Lower Empire. The oddly-accoutred saints, the biblical scenes so grotesquely travestied, the profusion of tinsel, and the reds, greens, and blues, laid one upon the other, in the coarsest discordance, far too disagreeably shock the sight to inspire any serious and pious thoughts.

Odessa has also some synagogues, a Catholic church, and one or two Protestant places of worship, which from their humble appearance might rather be taken for private houses. It has but one promenade, the Boulevard, which overlooks the whole harbour, and is exposed, from its situation, to frequent landslips. The vicinity of this promenade is the most fashionable quarter. [Pg 10] The theatre, the exchange, the mansions of Count Voronzof and the Princess Narishkin; a line of very elegant houses, and the throng of carriages, all bespeak the presence of the aristocracy. Workmen have been employed for the last two or three years in constructing a gigantic staircase, to lead by a very gentle descent from the Boulevard to the sea-beach. This expensive and useless toy, is likely to cost nearly forty-thousand pounds. It is intended to be ornamented with vases and statues; but some considerable fissures already give reason to fear the speedy destruction of this great staircase, which after all can never be of any use, except to the promenaders on the Boulevard.

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# CHAPTER III.

THE IMPERIAL FAMILY IN ODESSA—CHURCH MUSIC—SOCIETY OF THE PLACE, COUNT AND COUNTESS VORONZOF—ANECDOTE OF THE COUNTESS BRANISKA—THE THEATRE—THEATRICAL ROW.

The brilliant fêtes that took place on the arrival of the imperial family, happened most opportunely for us, and enabled us to see many celebrated personages. All the foreigners of distinction who had been present at the famous review of Vosnecensk, followed the emperor to Odessa, and prolonged their stay there after his departure. The whole town was in revolution. The houses of dubious colour were most carefully re-coated, and even old tumbling walls were plastered and coloured. Te Deum was chanted in the cathedral the day their majesties arrived; the emperor and his eldest son attended, and were met at the great doors by the whole Russian clergy dressed in their richest robes, and headed by the archbishop. The emperor was accompanied by a long-train of courtiers and officers, whose golden embroideries and glittering decorations vied in splendour with the magnificent costumes of the popes and choristers. The Te Deum appeared to me incomparably beautiful. Whoever would know the full power of harmony, should hear the religious music of the Russians. The notes are so full, so grave, of such thrilling sweetness, and such extraordinary volume, and all the voices, seeming as though they issued from the depths of the building, accord so admirably with each other, that no language can express the effect of that mighty music and the profound emotion it excites. I had often heard enthusiastic accounts of the Russian church-singing, but all fell far short of what I then heard. After the Te Deum the archbishop presented his episcopal ring to the tzar and the grand duke, who kissed it respectfully. The imperial party then left the cathedral, which was filled with clouds of incense. The vast throng, assembled in front of the building, dispersed in silence, without pressure or confusion; and the interference of the Cossacks, appointed to maintain order, was not [Pg 11] for a moment requisite.

In the evening there was a grand illumination, the empress held a drawing-room, and there was an extraordinary representation at the theatre, at which the whole imperial family was present. It was noticed that during the whole evening, the emperor sat behind the empress and did not once advance to the front of the box. There was therefore not a single hurrah, but every one seemed to affect ignorance of his majesty's presence. Next day the merchants gave a grand ball to the imperial family. It was a very brilliant assemblage: the exchange-rooms were all full of Highnesses and Excellencies, and the poor merchants cut but a sorry figure amongst all the

embroidered uniforms, the wearers of which elbowed and pushed them aside contemptuously. With an excessive devotion to etiquette, they had adopted knee-breeches, cocked-hats, and a *soi-disant* uniform, with swords at their sides; but this costume was far less becoming than the black dress which they would certainly have done better in retaining. A boudoir all lined with vines had been constructed for the empress, and the fine clusters of grapes hung from the branches as if to invite her royal hand to pluck them.

The imperial family remained but five or six days in Odessa, and then proceeded in a steamer to the Crimea. Their presence in the town produced on the whole a very favourable impression.

It remains for us to say a few words respecting the society to be met with in Odessa. It consists of so many heterogeneous elements, that it possesses no distinctive character of its own; French, Germans, Russians, English, Greeks, and Italians, all bring to it their respective opinions, habits, language, interests, and prejudices. The Countess Voronzof's drawing-rooms are the general rendezvous of that aristocratic, commercial, and travelling world, which is to be found in similar admixture only in some of the towns of Italy. The same confusion prevails among the women; the noble and proud Narishkin may be seen there side by side with a broker's wife: pure blood, mixed blood, all shades, all tones, all possible physiognomies are there assembled together.

Count Voronzof is a veritable *grand seigneur*, and spends more than £6000 a year in pomps and entertainments. His name, his immense fortune, and his influence at court give him the predominance over most of the emperor's favourites. Brought up in England, where his father was ambassador for more than forty years, he seems more an Englishman than a Russian, and has retained nothing of his nationality except his devoted loyalty to the emperor, and the exquisite politeness that distinguishes the Russian nobles. His talents, his affability, and great facility of character, secure him numerous admirers amongst the Odessians and foreigners. Nicholas could not have made a better choice than in selecting him for governor of New Russia. His sumptuous tastes and vast wealth give great *éclat* to the rank he fills, and put him on a par with the most magnificent lords of Europe. His wife is the daughter of the celebrated Countess [Pg 12] Braniska, whose gigantic fortune was long an object of astonishment to the Russians themselves. She died but recently at the age of ninety-five, leaving her immense fortune to her only son, with the exception only of a fourteenth part, which was all that devolved, according to the laws of Russia, on her two daughters. Her avarice was as notorious as her wealth, and stories are told of her, that far out-do all that is related of the most famous misers. I will mention but one of them, the authenticity of which was warranted to me by an eye-witness.

Mr. Dantz, one of our friends, having had occasion to call on the countess, on matters of business, left his britchka in a court-yard of her house, in which there was some cattle. A large bundle of hay, intended for his horses, was hung behind the carriage, according to the usual custom in Russia. Being shown into a room that looked out into the court-yard, he became engaged in a brisk discussion with the countess, who would not yield to any of his arguments, and soon losing patience rose, as if to put an end to the interview, and walked to a window. But no sooner had she looked down into the court-yard than she again took up all the points of the discussion, one after the other, seeming half-disposed to yield, and keeping Mr. Dantz in suspense for more than a half an hour. Exceedingly puzzled by this sudden change in the lady's temper, which he knew not how to account for, he narrowly watched all her movements, and observed that from time to time she cast a rapid glance into the court-yard; whereupon he went with affected carelessness to the window, and what did he see? Two or three horribly lean cows busily devouring the hay behind his carriage. The countess had prolonged the interview in order to gain time for her cows to feed at her visitor's expense; and, accordingly, as soon as the last blade of hay was eaten up, she resumed all her stateliness, cut short the discussion with a word, and gave Mr. Dantz his congé.

Odessa is a town of pleasure and luxury, where the ladies, it is said, ruin their husbands by their profusion and extravagant love of dress. In addition to the balls, concerts, and soirées of all sorts, performances for the benefit of the poor are given every year in the great theatre, by the *court*, as the Countess Voronzof's establishment is called. All the *élite* of Odessa, take part in these amusements, which bring in considerable sums. The countess at first set the example, by herself performing a part; but an order from the emperor forbade her thus exhibiting in public, and since that time she confines herself to the business of managing behind the curtain. The house is always well filled, and each performance brings in four or five thousand rubles. The skill displayed by these noble actors is not to be surpassed by any professional company; but this is not surprising, for every one knows in how high a degree the Russians possess the talent for imitation; whatever they see they mimic with ease, and without preparation. It is needless to add that the performances are in French, and that the pieces are taken from our stock. M. Scribe is [Pg 13] almost the sole contributor. Nowhere, perhaps, is our witty vaudevillist so much prized as in Russia.

Odessa possesses the only Italian theatre in Russia. The company is generally well composed, and gives, during the whole year, performances, which are but scantily attended, notwithstanding the passionate admiration which the Odessians affect for Italian music. It is only in the bathing season, when the Poles fill the town, that the house presents a somewhat more animated appearance. All the rest of the year the boxes are almost deserted, and the Jews alone frequent the pit. In 1840, Mademoiselle Georges entered into a six months' engagement with the manager of the Odessa theatre, and arrived with a numerous company, including some really superior actors. Yet, notwithstanding her European celebrity and her ample *repertoire*, she would scarcely have covered her expenses, but for the strenuous exertions of her quondam admirer, General N., who welcomed her as though fifteen years had not interrupted their liaison,

and placed his mansion, his equipages, his purse, and his credit, at her disposal, with all the chivalric gallantry of a Russian magnifico.

But all his efforts were unable to reverse the very unfavourable sentence which public opinion had, from the first, pronounced upon his protégé. Notwithstanding the superior talent with which she still plays certain parts, she was appreciated but by a very small number of persons; and she left Odessa with sentiments of deep disdain for a public that so much preferred the paltriest vaudeville to all her bursts of passion as to make almost open war upon her. A thing till then almost unheard-of in Russia took place at the last performance of the French company: a regular cabal was formed, attended with an explosion of very stormy passions. The whole town was divided into two factions, the one for Mademoiselle Georges, the other for M. Montdidier, one of her best actors. Our tragedy queen, it is said, was exceedingly jealous of this preference, and lost no opportunity of mortifying her rival. Accordingly, she purposely selected for the last performance, two pieces in which he had no part. The public, greatly dissatisfied at not seeing the name of their favourite actor in the bills, repaired to the theatre in an ill-humour, of which they soon gave very intelligible symptoms. Things passed off, however, tolerably well until the end of the last piece; but then there was a call for Montdidier, which was taken up, and vehemently sustained by the whole pit, notwithstanding all the efforts of the police, General N's coterie, and the presence of the governor-general. This incident which had been altogether unforeseen by the managers, caused them extreme perplexity; no one knew where Montdidier was to be found. At last, seeing the row increase, Count Voronzof himself ordered the commissioner of police to go to Montdidier's hotel, and fetch him alive or dead. The commissioner found him fast asleep, and quite unconscious of all the agitation he was causing in the theatre. He hurried thither, and was proceeding to show himself on the stage, but was [Pg 14] stopped by the whole company with Mademoiselle Georges at their head, under pretext that such a course would be an infraction of all the rules of the theatre. In short, there was, for a while, an indescribable tumult. The whole pit stood up and never ceased shouting until they saw Montdidier rush on the stage, with his dress in a state of disorder that showed what a hard battle he had sustained behind the scenes. The angry shouts were now succeeded by an explosion of applause; the boxes rang with prolonged bravos, and even Count Voronzof himself was seen clapping his hands and laughing with all his might. The whole audience seemed to have lost their wits. General N., quite disconcerted, slunk back into the rear of his box, and said to one of his friends as he pointed to the stage, "Look at those Frenchmen; they have only to show themselves to upset all established usages and principles. They bring with them disorder, rebellion, and the spirit of revolution; and the contagion soon spreads even among the most sensible people." In truth nothing of the kind had ever before been seen in Odessa; and all the jealousies of the *primissime donne* had never caused the twentieth part of the confusion that marked that memorable night.

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# CHAPTER IV.

COMMERCE OF THE BLACK SEA—PROHIBITIVE SYSTEM AND ITS PERNICIOUS RESULTS—DEPRESSED STATE OF AGRICULTURE—TRADE OF ODESSA—ITS BANK.

From the destruction of the Genoese colonies in the Crimea, in 1476, down to the treaty of Kainardji, a period of 300 years, the Black Sea remained closed against the nations of the West, and was the privileged domain of Turkey. Its whole coast belonged to the sultans of Constantinople, and the khans of the Crimea. The Turks, and the Greeks of the Archipelago, subjects of the Ottoman Porte, had the sole right of navigating those waters, and all the commerce of Europe with that portion of the East was exclusively in the hands of the latter people. The conquests of Peter the Great, and subsequently those of the celebrated Catherine II., changed this state of things. The Russians advanced towards the south, and soon made themselves masters of the Sea of Azof, the Crimea, and all the northern coasts of the Black Sea. Nevertheless, it was not until July 21, 1774, after six consecutive campaigns, and many victories achieved by the Russians, by sea and land, that the treaty of Kainardji was signed, which by throwing open the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, effected a real revolution in the commercial relations of Europe, and definitively secured to Russia that immense influence which it exercises to this day over the destinies of the East. The treaty of Kainardji ere long received a more ample [Pg 15] extension. Austria, France, and successively all the other powers, partook in the advantages of the Black Sea navigation. Russia was, therefore, justly entitled to the gratitude of Europe, for the new channels she had opened to its commerce.

Once mistress of the Black Sea, and free to communicate with the Mediterranean, Catherine earnestly applied herself to the foundation of a port, which should be at once military and commercial. The mouth of the Dniepr, one of the largest rivers of Russia, at first attracted her

attention. General Hannibal founded the town of Kherson upon it, in 1788, by her orders; and in 1783, a Frenchman, afterwards ennobled by Louis XVI., established the first foreign commercial house there, and contracted to supply the arsenals of Toulon with the hemp and timber conveyed down the Dniepr. Kherson, however, did not prosper as might have been expected. The empress's intentions were defeated by the exigencies of the system of customs prevailing in the empire, and it was impossible to obtain for the port of Kherson the franchises so necessary for a new town, and for the extension of its commerce.

The dismemberment of Poland gave a new turn to Catherine's commercial ideas. The port of Kherson was abandoned, or nearly so, in 1796, and the preference was given to Odessa, which, by its more western position, considerably facilitated the exportation of agricultural produce, wherein consisted the chief wealth of the palatinates of Podolia, Volhynia, and the other provinces newly incorporated with the Russian possessions. No change, however, was made in the system of customs, and it was not until 1803, in the reign of Alexander, that a reduction of one-fourth was made in the duties imposed by the general tariff on all exports and imports in the harbours of the Black Sea. In 1804, Odessa was made an entrepôt for sea-borne goods, the entrance of which was permitted into Russia. They might remain there in bond for eighteen months; a favour which was the more important at that period, because, as the import duties were considerable, the merchants would have been obliged to draw heavily on their capital, had they been obliged to defray them at once. An ukase of the 5th of March, in the same year, allowed transit, free of duty, to all foreign goods which were not prohibited in Odessa, or which arrived there from other towns of Russia; such goods if destined for Moldavia and Wallachia, were to pass through the custom-houses of Mohelef and Dubassar; for Austria, through those of Radzivilof; for Prussia, through those of Kezinsky; and foreign goods sent through these four establishments to Odessa, were allowed free transit there by sea. These liberal and very enlightened arrangements vastly augmented the prosperity of Odessa, and soon attracted the attention of all speculators to that port.

About the year 1817 an increased duty was laid on all foreign goods in the Black Sea; but at the same period Odessa was definitively declared to be a free port, without restriction. Things continued thus until 1822; and it was during this interval that all those great foreign houses were [Pg 16] established in Odessa, some of which exist to this day. The commerce of Southern Russia had then reached its apogee. After the long wars of the French empire the agriculture of Europe was in a very depressed condition, and it was necessary to have recourse to Russia for the corn which other countries could not raise in sufficient quantity for their own subsistence. Odessa thus became, under the wise administration of the Duc de Richelieu, one of the most active commercial cities of eastern Europe; its population increased prodigiously; the habits induced by prosperity gave a new stimulus to its import trade, and every year hundreds of vessels entered its port to take in agricultural freights of all kinds.

Dazzled by this commercial prosperity, till then unexampled in Russia, and, doubtless believing it unalterably established, the government then chose to return to its prohibitive system, and, whether through ignorance or incapacity, the ministry deliberately ruined with their own hands the commercial wealth of Southern Russia. In 1822, at the moment when it was least expected, an ukase suppressed the freedom of the port of Odessa, and made it obligatory on the merchants to pay the duties on all goods then in the warehouses. This excited intense alarm, and as it was totally impossible to pay immediately such enormous duties as those imposed by the general tariff of the empire, the merchants remonstrated earnestly and threatened, all of them, to commit bankruptcy. The governor of the town, dismayed at the disasters which the enforcement of the law would occasion, took it on his own responsibility to delay; and commissioners were sent to St. Petersburg to acquaint the emperor with the state of commerce in Odessa. Alexander, whose intentions were always excellent, and who had no doubt been deceived by false reports, promptly annulled the ukase. The freedom of the port of Odessa was therefore re-established, but not to the same extent as before. Concessions were made to the board of customs, a fifth of the duties exacted in other Russian ports was imposed on goods entering Odessa, and the other four-fifths were to be paid on their departure for the interior. The limits of the free port were also considerably reduced, and two lines of custom-houses were formed, the one round the port, the other round the town. These lines still subsist.

The victories of the board of customs did not stop here, and new measures, suggested and supported no doubt by fraud, were put in force. We have spoken of the free transit traffic through the towns of Doubassar, Radzivilov, and Odessa. This traffic was increasing rapidly; all the merchants of western Asia were beginning to take the Odessa route to make their purchases in the great fairs of Germany. There was every probability that Odessa would be one of the principal points of arrival and exchange for all the produce of Europe and Asia. The Transcaucasian provinces enjoyed very extensive commercial freedom at this period by virtue of an ukase promulgated, October 20, 1821. Redoutkalé, at the mouth of the Phasis, on the shores of [Pg 17] Mingrelia, was then the port to which all the goods from Leipsic were conveyed by sea; from thence they passed to Tiflis and Erivan, and were then distributed over all the adjacent countries, through Turkey, Armenia, and even as far as Persia. The Armenians had secured this traffic almost exclusively to themselves. They appeared for the first time in Odessa in 1823. The next year they advanced as far as Leipsic, where they bought European manufactures to the amount of more than 600,000 francs; in 1825 their purchases rose to 1,200,000 francs, and in 1826 to 2,800,000. All these goods were conveyed by land to Odessa, and there embarked on the Black Sea for Redoutkaleh. It may easily be conceived what a happy influence such a traffic would have exercised over the agriculture and cattle rearing of Southern Russia, and eventually on the prosperity of the population engaged in this carrying trade. But all these promising elements of

prosperity were to be annihilated by the narrow views of the minister of finance. The commercial franchise of the Caucasian provinces, after having lasted for ten years, was suddenly suppressed on the first of January, 1832. The most rigorous prohibitive system was put in force; Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, more than 220 miles from the Black Sea, was made the centre of the customs administration, and all goods destined for that part of Asia had to pass through that town to be examined there and pay duty.

By these arbitrary and exclusive measures, the government thought to encourage native manufactures; and by prohibiting the goods of Germany, France, and England, it hoped to force the productions of Russia on the trans-Caucasian provinces. The transit trade was, of course, proscribed at the same period. By a first ukase, the merchants were forced to deposit at the frontier in Radzivilof, double the value of their goods, and the money was only to be returned to them at Odessa, upon verification of their bales. It is obviously not to be thought of that merchants, however wealthy, should carry with them, in addition to the capital to be expended on their purchases, double the value of their goods *in transitu*. This new measure, therefore, was sufficient of itself alone to put an entire stop to the transit trade. The Persians and Armenians forsook this route, and chose another, to the great detriment of Russia. At present the value of the transit is from 180,000 to 200,000 francs, the goods being chiefly yellow amber, sent from Prussia to Turkey. For a charge of fifteen francs per twenty kilogrammes, the Jews undertake to give security to the customs in title-deeds, which they hire at the rate of five or six per cent., and they despatch the goods directly to Odessa.

England, always so prompt to seize opportunities, took advantage of the blunders of Russia. She secured a position in Trebizond, and her merchants, recoiling from no sacrifice, formed there an immense entrepôt, from which they soon sent out the manufactures of their country into all the provinces of Asia. Business to the amount of more than 2,000,000*l.* sterling, is now carried on in Trebizond, and two sets of steamboats ply between it and Constantinople.

Thus Russia lost one of the most important commercial lines in the world, and by her [Pg 18] extravagant increase of duties she completely extinguished the lawful import trade of the Caucasian provinces. But English and other foreign goods still find their way there by contraband, and the government officers are themselves the first to profit by this system; for they are still more desirous than the native inhabitants to procure manufactured goods, and, above all, at a moderate price. The prohibitive measures of Russia have, therefore, really recoiled on the government itself, and the treasury loses considerably by them, not only in the Caucasus, but also on the European frontiers. Owing to the freedom of its port, the town of Odessa, of course, suffers less from the disastrous effects of this prohibitive system, and finds some commercial resources in its own consumption, and in that of its environs. Nevertheless, as this consumption, (which notwithstanding the contraband trade is kept in full vigour by the Jews, and even by the highest classes,) is out of all proportion to the exportation, and as there is very little exchange traffic, foreign vessels are gradually deserting the Black Sea; and, besides this, their charges for freight are necessarily too high, in consequence of their being obliged in almost every instance to repair in ballast to the harbours of South Russia. Then we must take into account the remoteness of the Black Sea; the dread, not yet quite effaced, with which it is regarded; the impossibility of finding freights anywhere except in Odessa; the excessive severity of the winter, and the usual obstructions of the harbours by ice during three or four months every year. All these things combine to repel mariners; so that nothing, except extraordinary cheapness and great profits, could induce merchants to send their vessels for freight to the ports of Southern Russia.

Thus driven away by the prohibitive system of Russia, many nations are seeking to establish markets for their productions elsewhere. It is also to be remarked that agriculture has made very great progress in Europe since the re-establishment of peace; and consequently the exportation of corn from Russia has considerably diminished. Nevertheless, we are of opinion that Southern Russia would have lost little of its agricultural importance, notwithstanding its system of customs, if the government, instead of remaining stationary, had sincerely entered on a course of improvement.

All circumstances seem to combine in New Russia to make the productions of the soil as economical as possible, and to enable them to compete successfully with those of all other countries. The soil is virgin and very abundant; labour is cheap and the price of cattle extraordinarily low; whilst serfdom, by obliging thousands of men to employ at least half their time for the benefit of their lords, ought naturally to tend to diminish the price of bread stuffs. Unfortunately the means of communication have been totally neglected, and the government has taken no steps to facilitate transport; in consequence of this the price of grain, instead of falling is constantly increasing, and merchants are no longer willing to purchase except in seasons of [Pg 19] scarcity. The wheat sent to Odessa from Khivia, Volhynia, Podolia, and Bessarabia, arrives in carts drawn by oxen. The journeys are tedious, the extreme rate of travelling being not more than fifteen miles a day; and they are costly, for the carriage of a tchetvert or seven bushels of corn varies from four to six rubles; moreover, the transport can only be effected between May and September in consequence of the deplorable state of the roads during the other seven months of the year. The result of all this is that wheat, though very cheap in the provinces we have mentioned, is quoted at very high prices comparatively at Odessa, so as not to leave foreign speculators a sufficient profit to compensate for the length of the voyage to the Black Sea, the outlay of capital, and the enormous expenses caused by the quarantines to which many goods are subject. Besides this, Odessa is the only port that offers any facilities for commerce; Kherson situated in the midst of a fertile and productive region, is only a harbour of export, and its commerce cannot possibly extend; for the ships destined to take in freight at that port must

previously perform quarantine in Odessa. All the landowners are therefore forced to send their produce to Odessa, if they would have any chance of sale. But, as we have already observed, the means of communication are everywhere wanting. It must, indeed, be owned that the construction of stone-faced roads is attended with great difficulty, for throughout all the plains of Southern Russia the materials, are scarce and for the most part of bad quality, being limestone of a friable character. But might not the produce of a great part of Poland, and of all new Russia, be conveyed to Odessa by the Pruth, the Dniestr, and the Dniepr?

The only goods conveyed down the Dniestr consist at present of some rafts of timber and firewood from the mountains of Austrian Gallicia. The Russian government has repeatedly been desirous of improving the navigation of the river in compliance with the desire of the inhabitants of its banks. A survey was made in 1827, and again in 1840. Unfortunately all these investigations being made by men of no capacity led to nothing. An engineer was commissioned in 1829 to make a report on the works necessary for rendering the river practicable at Jampol, where it is obstructed by a small chain of granite. He estimated the expense at 185,000 francs, whereas it was secretly ascertained that 10,000 would be more than enough. The project was then abandoned. Thus with the best and most laudable intentions, the government is constantly crippled in its plans of amelioration whether by the incapacity or by the bad faith and cupidity of its functionaries. Last year the subject of the navigation of the Dniestr was again taken up, and it is even alleged that the Russian government has given orders for two steam-vessels destined to ply on that river.

The works on the Dniepr are scarcely in a more forward state than those of the Dniestr. It is known that below Iekaterinoslaf the course of the river is traversed by a granite chain, which extends between that town and Alexandrof, a distance of more than fifteen leagues. At the time of [Pg 20] the conquest of the Crimea and the shores of the Black Sea, it was proposed to render navigable the thirteen rapids that form what has been improperly denominated the cataracts of the Dniepr. Works were begun at various times, but always abandoned. They were resumed under Nicholas with new ardour, but the government was soon discouraged by the enormous cost, and, above all, by the peculations of its servants. The whole amount of work done up to the present time is a wretched canal 300 yards long, more dangerous for barges to pass through than the rapids themselves. This canal was finished in 1838. The works had not yet been resumed when we left Russia in 1841. The rapids of the Dniepr are therefore still as impracticable as ever, and it is only during the spring floods, a period of a month or six weeks, that barges venture to pass them; and even then it rarely happens that they escape without accident. More than eighty men were lost in them in 1839, and a multitude of barges and rafts were knocked to pieces on the rocks. The goods that thus descend the Dniepr consist almost exclusively of timber and firewood, and Siberian iron. Corn never makes any part of the cargo, because in case of accident it would be lost beyond recovery. But what will really seem incredible is, that the German colonists settled below the rapids, are obliged to convey their produce to the Sea of Azov in order to find any market for it; hence the greater part of the government of Iekaterinoslaf, and those of Poltava and Tchernikof, watered by the Dniepr, are in a perpetual state of distress, though they have wheat in abundance; and the peasants sunk into the deepest wretchedness, are compelled every year to make journeys of 300 miles, and often more, to earn from six to seven francs a month in the service of the landowners on the borders of the Black Sea. The eastern part of the government of Iekaterinoslaf profits by the vicinity of the Sea of Azov, and tries to dispose of its corn in Taganrok, Marioupol, and Berdiansk, a port newly established by Count Voronzof.

This general survey of the means of transport possessed by Russia, is enough to show that the corn-trade of these regions owes its vast development in a great measure to fortuitous circumstances; and that the absence of easy communication, and the prohibitive system, both tend to bring it down lower and lower every year. Here follows a statement of the price of corn at Tulzin, one of the least remote points of Volhynia, and the cost of carriage to Odessa, during the years 1828-30, and 1839, 40, 41.

| 1828-30. | Rubles. | 1839-40-41. |
|---|---|---|
| Price of 100 kilogrammes of wheat on the spot | 15.30 | 63.70 |
| Cost of carriage to Odessa | 1.56 | 2.50 |
| Export Duties | 0.39 | 0.39 |
| Total | 17.25 | 66.59 |
| Or | *15.s.9d.* | *61s.3d.* |

From this table we see that prices rose remarkably during the latter years. We must remark, [Pg 21] however, that the years 1828-29-30, were unusually productive, and the prices prevailing in them are by no means an average. But it is altogether obvious that with such prices, and an absolute blank in importation, the commerce of Southern Russia must necessarily perish. In 1841, the merchants could only offer the masters of merchant vessels two-and-a-half francs per sack for freight to Marseilles, while the latter can hardly realise any profit even at the rate of four francs. For Trieste they offered only twenty, and even eighteen kreutzers, whereas not less than sixty will yield any remuneration. Ship owners will not henceforth be tempted to visit Odessa in quest of gain. The English alone have obtained tolerable freights.

To all these causes of ruin are to be added the enormous charges to which merchants are subject; those of the first class pay 300 rubles for their licence, always in advance; the postage charges for letters are exorbitant; there are persons whose yearly correspondence costs 10,000, 15,000, 20,000 rubles. An ordinary letter to London pays seven and even eight rubles. Again, the

great merchants not choosing to sit idle, keep up the high prices by their purchases: they may no doubt gain occasionally by these speculations, but they generally lose. Witness the disasters and failures of the year 1841. What chance of prosperity can there be for a trade that at the moment of the departure of the goods, hardly ever promises any profit at the current prices in the place of destination, and which consequently lives only on the hope of an eventual rise? How will it be with it in a few years, when the canals and railroads projected in Germany, shall have been finished? At this day the wheat of Nuremberg and Bamberg, reaches England by way of Amsterdam.

But without going so far, Southern Russia now sees growing up against it in the Black Sea a competition, which is daily becoming more formidable. The principalities of the Danube, have made immense progress in ten years, in consequence of the franchises and privileges bestowed on them by the treaty of Adrianople. Galatz and Ibraïla, now furnish a considerable quantity of corn to the foreigner; and in spite of the disadvantages of having to ascend the Danube, masters of vessels now prefer repairing to those ports on account of their administrative facilities, and above all by reason of the commercial resources which importation offers there. In 1839, Marseilles bought more than 4000 hectolitres of wheat in the markets of Galatz and Ibraïla, whilst the port of Odessa hardly supplied it with twice that quantity. We will return by and by to the question of the Danube, when we come to speak of Bessarabia.

Another measure fatal to the corn-trade, was the decision of the government with respect to the confiscated lands of the Poles. After the revolution of 1831, more than 423,000 peasants were sequestrated to the crown. These peasants occupied extremely fertile regions lying very near Odessa: Ouman, the property of Alexander Potocki, made part of them. The government committed the management of these lands to public servants, selected chiefly from among the [Pg 22] retired veteran officers, or those who had been incapacitated for service by their wounds. Under such management, pillage and the most utter neglect were the order of the day, and the consequence was, that the lands produced literally nothing to the crown, and served only to enrich their administrators. Weary of this disorder, the government determined in 1836 to detach nearly 93,000 peasants from these lands, and incorporate them with the military colonies. Nor did it stop there, but under pretext of removing all opportunity for extortion on the part of its servants, it issued an order in 1840, confining the new colonists to the cultivation of oats and barley, and forbidding them to sow wheat for exportation. These regulations, occasioned by the general corruption of the public servants, which the imperial will is powerless to check, produced melancholy results for the trade of Odessa, and that town was suddenly deprived of the agricultural produce it used to draw from the fertile soil of Ouman.

We must now enter into some considerations, bearing more immediately on Odessa itself. The credit that town enjoys abroad is extremely limited by the inordinate privileges of the imperial bank. In cases of bankruptcy, that establishment is entitled to disregard all competing claims, and to pay itself immediately by the sale of the real and personal property of its debtor, without reference to his other creditors; it is entitled to pay itself: 1st. the capital lent; 2nd. A surcharge of eight per cent., called re-exchange, arising out of the cost of brokerage and renewal of bills every three months; and, 3rd. Interest on the capital and surcharge, at the rate of 1-1/2 per cent, per month, until the whole debt is liquidated. The fatal effects of such a system may easily be conceived; the merchants of Odessa can seldom establish a credit with foreign houses.

As for the uses of the bank, they consist: 1st. In discounting town bills that have not more than four months to run; 2nd. In making advances on goods; 3rd. In serving as a bank of deposit for the mercantile houses; 4th. In giving drafts on the other banks of the empire, and paying their drafts on itself; 5th. In receiving deposits on interest.

The drafts were of great use in commerce, particularly for the payments between St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Odessa: the charge upon them was a quarter per cent., whilst the conveyance of money through the post costs one per cent., besides postage. This convenient system was unfortunately put an end to in 1841. The charge on drafts now amounting to five per cent., operations of this kind have consequently become impossible. It was, probably, with a view to the revenues of the post-office, that this sage measure was adopted by the minister of finance.

Every one knows, that in order that a bank of discount should carry on business profitably for itself and for the commerce it is intended to assist, it must deal only in genuine commercial bills. Merchants recognise as genuine and discountable bills, only those drawn by other places for [Pg 23] banking operations, and home bills drawn in consideration of goods sold for payment at a determinate future date. Now the Odessa bank not being a bank of issue, does not practise acceptance properly so called; Constantinople is almost the only town that draws on Odessa, and that but for small amounts, and as these acceptances are at twenty-one days' date, they are rarely discounted. Sales of goods for bills are also seldom practised, and from all we could learn, we believe they make but a very small part of the business of the Odessa bank. Goods are generally bought in that town on trust and without bills.

On what bases then have the operations of the Odessa bank hitherto rested? Rather, we are disposed to think, on fictitious than on real commerce. From its first establishment, the bank, strong in its privileges, thought to serve trade by encouraging discounts; and the facilities it afforded, induced many persons to avail themselves of this means of credit. Every one in Odessa knows how many disasters have been the consequence. Suppose a merchant wished to make a speculation, to buy for instance, a ship-load of wheat, amounting to 12,000*l.*; if he had only 80,000 or 100,000 rubles capital, he obtained the indorsement of one or more of his friends, and the bank immediately advanced him the whole sum necessary, at three months. The merchant was, therefore, forced to dispose of his goods as fast as possible, in order to meet his

engagements with the bank: clogged and disturbed in his operations, and fearing lest he should involve his friends, he must often have incurred great losses, and after a few similar speculations, his ruin, and that of his friends were inevitable. Such has been the fate of many a merchant, in consequence of the unfortunate facility they found in obtaining money. The bank ought to have been aware, that instead of genuine commercial bills, it was discounting mere accommodation paper, and that there is an immense difference between discount for the realisation of business actually done, and discount for the realisation of business yet to be done. Unquestionably, the bank ought to have modified its system, after seeing the mischiefs it led to; but it has persisted in its original course, and were it to desist from it without a radical change of institutions, the operations of an establishment constructed on so vast a scale would become quite insignificant.

Hitherto, then, the bank of Odessa has completely failed to answer the purpose for which it was founded; it has done infinitely more harm than good to trade, and its enormous privileges have, moreover discredited Odessa abroad. The abolition of these privileges could repair the errors and mischiefs of the first establishment. The bank would thereby be compelled to discount only genuine commercial paper, and to do business on a much smaller scale; but its operations, though restricted, would be but the more advantageous for itself and for commerce; every one would then conduct his business with, reasonable regard to the extent of his means; failures [Pg 24] would no longer be so ruinous to creditors; and this new bank, in correspondence with those of St. Petersburg and Moscow, by continuing to make transfers as in the beginning, and by accepting deposits at four per cent., would suffice for all the wants of the place. Unfortunately, judging from the last measure adopted with respect to transfers, there is no hope whatever that a new bank will be established, or that the existing one will undergo the requisite reforms. Yet if the Russian government, which persists in its prohibitive system, wishes to avoid the complete destruction of the commerce of Southern Russia, it must absolutely change its line of conduct, it must devote its strenuous attention to the means of internal communication, and render the commercial transactions of Odessa as easy and economical as possible. What is most deplorable in Russia is, that the truth never finds its way to the head of the state, and that a public functionary would think himself undone if he disclosed the real state of things; hence in the memoirs, reports, and tables laid before the emperor, the good only is acknowledged, and the evil is always disguised. Once committed to this course of dissimulation and lying, the public functionaries render all improvements impossible; and by always sacrificing the future to the present, do incalculable mischief to the country. The question is now entertained, of depriving Odessa of its last franchises, and putting its port on the same footing with the other commercial places of the empire. If Count Cancrine has not yet succeeded in doing this, the town has to thank the protection and the influence of Count Voronzof.

The following table shows the exports and imports at the different ports and custom-houses of Southern Russia, during the years 1838 and 1839, the value being set down in paper rubles.

EXPORTS.

| PORTS. | 1838. | | 1839. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Goods. | Specie. | Goods. | Specie. |
| Odessa | 38,300,872 | 3,730 | 48,551,077 | 54,406 |
| Ismael (on the Danube) | 3,913,494 | 9,915 | 2,793,244 | |
| Reny (on the Danube) | 718,040 | 50,773 | 609,541 | 77,745 |
| In Bessarabia | | | | |
| Novoselitza | 1,978,172 | 163,868 | 3,277,660 | 81,868 |
| Skouliany | 829,602 | 525,638 | 737,462 | 540,618 |
| Leovo | 96,832 | 60,537 | 58,906 | 36,709 |
| Tagranok | 7,666,943 | 60,537 | 8,219,648 | |
| Marioupol | 4,152,710 | 60,537 | 6,808,526 | |
| Berdiansk | 2,971,426 | 60,537 | 4,107,638 | |
| Kertsch | 226,999 | 60,537 | 123,082 | |
| Theodosia | 1,281,244 | 60,537 | 955,108 | |
| Eupatoria | 9,299,365 | 60,537 | 2,394,867 | |
| Balouclava | | | | |
| Total | 64,435,699 | 814,461 | 78,637,759 | 793,346 |

IMPORTS. [Pg 25]

| PORTS. | 1838. | | 1839. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Goods. | Specie. | Goods. | Specie. |
| Odessa | 17,483,635 | 3,825,258 | 19,297,201 | 3,992,799 |
| Ismael (on the Danube) | 253,697 | 1,632,996 | 238,996 | 820,035 |
| Reny (on the Danube) | 50,193 | 797,497 | 85,429 | 553,174 |
| In Bessarabia | | | | |
| Novoselitza | 221,324 | 1,939,604 | 245,198 | 3,048,064 |
| Skouliany | 222,507 | 497,200 | 195,088 | 721,015 |
| Leovo | 52,336 | 29,932 | 55,664 | 26,291 |
| Taganrok | 5,887,901 | 1,415,596 | 5,334,369 | 2,885,279 |
| Marioupol | 300 | 640,660 | 987 | 1,515,525 |
| Berdiansk | 300 | 768,722 | 987 | 825,113 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Kertsch | { 175,321 | | { 250,887 | |
| Theodosia | { 673,535 | 1,678,658 | { 695,130 | 1,891,947 |
| Eupatoria | { 185,480 | | { 131,222 | |
| Balouclava | 6,605 | | | |
| Total | 25,212,834 | 13,226,132 | 26,520,171 | 16,281,242 |
| Total of Duties | 25,212,834 | 8,492,074 | 26,520,171 | 8,215,426 |

The foreign goods that entered the interior of the empire in 1839, by way of Odessa, amounted in value to 9,130,148 paper rubles, which, curiously enough, was not even half the total importation of that port. From this we may judge of the consumption of Odessa, and at the same time of the extent of the contraband trade.

From these tables we see that there is no equilibrium in the trade of Odessa. Southern Russia absorbs every year more than 15,000,000 of foreign specie, and its exports are treble its imports. It is evident that such a trade rests on no solid basis; that its prosperity is due only to accidental circumstances, and that ships will gradually abandon the Black Sea, and seek some other destination, wherever agriculture flourishes, and is accompanied by a less exclusive system of customs. In the present state of things, the cultivation of corn in Egypt would be enough to ruin immediately all the ports of Southern Russia. With such contingencies before it, the government of Russia ought to ponder well before obstinately persevering in its present system. Mariners do not like the northern parts of the Black Sea, and once they shall have left them, they will return to them no more.

The year 1839 was most memorable in the commercial history of Odessa. The exports, consisting almost entirely of corn, amounted to 48,000,000 paper rubles. The harvests in the country had been very abundant, and as those of the rest of Europe were very unpromising, the demand was at first so encouraging that the merchants launched out into the boldest speculations. These were successful for a while, but disasters soon followed, and the houses which were supposed to have realised profits to the amount of millions, failed a year or eighteen months afterwards. Since that time trade has always been in a perilous state. In 1840, under the still subsisting influence of the movement of the preceding year, there was a diminution of 7,184,021 rubles; and in 1841 the first quarter alone presented a decrease of 6,891,332 rubles in comparison with the corresponding quarter in 1840. [Pg 26]

On examining a general table of the exportation of Odessa, we see that during Napoleon's wars its commerce, completely stationary, did not exceed five or six millions of rubles. After the events of 1815, during the horrible dearth that afflicted all western Europe, the exports rose in 1817 to more than 38,000,000. In 1818 they fell without any transition to 20,000,000. During the war of 1828-29 they sank to 1,673,000. After the treaty of Adrianople, Southern Russia, being encumbered with an excess of produce, the exports again rose to 27,000,000. After this they varied from twenty to thirty, until 1839 when they reached the highest point they ever attained, namely, 48,000,000. We have already explained the causes of this factitious augmentation. From these data we see that the activity of the trade of Odessa has always arisen out of fortuitous circumstances, which are becoming more and more rare, and that it is by no means the result of the progressive development of agricultural resources: the country is, therefore, completely stationary.

It is also easy to convince ourselves, by simple comparison, that the commerce of Southern Russia is far from prosperous. In 1839, the most productive year, the custom-houses yield but 8,215,426 rubles; and ten seaports distributed over more than 400 leagues of coast, together with three land custom-houses, show on an average but from forty-five to fifty-five millions of exports, and hardly a third of that amount of imports; whilst Trebizond alone annually sends out more than 50,000,000 worth of English goods into the various adjoining countries.

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# CHAPTER V.

## NAVIGATION, CHARGE FOR FREIGHT, &c. IN THE BLACK SEA.

Of all the seaboard of the East, the coasts of the Black Sea are those from which the expense of freight are the greatest. Different circumstances combine in producing this effect. 1. The amount of importation being inconsiderable, most of the vessels must arrive in ballast, or with a very scanty cargo. 2. The vessels are exposed to long delays in the Archipelago, and still more so in the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. Fifty days may be taken as the average duration of the voyage from Marseilles, Genoa, Leghorn, or Trieste, to Odessa. It does not take longer to reach America from the same ports, by a voyage at once less difficult and more lucrative. 3. The Black Sea is situated at the extremity of the inland seas of Europe, and its coasts, which have little traffic, especially with each other, offer few resources to merchant vessels; so that if there is [Pg 27]

nothing profitable to be done at Odessa or Taganrok, a ship has no alternative but to take freight at ruinously low prices, or to return in ballast, and retrace some hundred miles of a route on which it has already incurred such delays. Certain merchants often take advantage of the distressing position of the masters, and for many years past, a part of the profits on some goods sent to the Mediterranean, has regularly consisted in the sacrifices to which the shipowner has been compelled. 4. The passage through the Straits of Constantinople subjects vessels freighted in the Russian ports for those of the Mediterranean, to a quarantine which, besides consuming from thirty-five to forty days, always entails considerable expense. It is generally reckoned that it takes a vessel fully six months to accomplish the voyage both ways between a Mediterranean port and Odessa, and to get *pratique* again, even supposing it to have tolerably favourable winds, and to obtain cargo almost immediately in the Black Sea, a thing which unhappily occurs very seldom. Now a Mediterranean brig of 275 tons, or 200,000 tchetverts' burden, has a crew that costs at least 800 rubles a month for wages and keep. If we add to this, for wear of rigging, insurance, and harbour-dues 400 rubles, we shall have more than 1200 rubles a month for ordinary expenses, without reckoning what storms and other casualties may occasion. Thus the cost of a six months' voyage will amount to 7200 rubles.

Before 1838, the average price of freight in paper rubles was as follows:

| | Per Tchetvert. | Per 2000 Tchetverts, or 275 Tons. |
|---|---|---|
| For Constantinople | 1.40 | 2,800 |
| Trieste | 2.33 | 4,666 |
| Leghorn | 2.66 | 5,332 |
| Genoa | 4.25 | 8,500 |
| Marseilles | 2.40 | 4,800 |
| Holland | 5.75 | 11,500 |
| England | 7.00 | 14,000 |

From this table it appears that the freights did not pay the ordinary expenses of the vessels, with the exception of those bound for England, Holland, and Genoa, under the Sardinian flag.

Odessa has hardly any intercourse with the portion of the Black Sea coast subject to the Sultan, but it often furnishes cargoes for the banks of the Danube, to vessels of not more than twelve feet draught. These vessels usually proceed to Galatz and Ibraïla. Those which have no return cargo, touch at Toultcha and Isacktcha, to take in firewood; others ship a cargo at Galatz and Ibraïla, for Constantinople and the Mediterranean. Good prices for freight are generally procured in the Danube, particularly of late years. The progress of agriculture in the principalities, and the facilities met with in their ports, attract foreign captains, and many of them have entirely forsaken Odessa for Galatz.

The government supplies, the war in the Caucasus, and private speculations likewise afford [Pg 28] employment to a certain number of vessels between Odessa and the Russian provinces of the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov. The prices of freight in these cases depend on the greater or less demand, but they are always kept very low by the competition of Kherson *lodkas* (large coasting vessels). These lodkas ply at a very cheap rate, but they are exposed to risks which ought to make them less sought after than better built and better commanded vessels. The passage from Odessa to Taganrok, is tedious and expensive, above all for vessels which are obliged to be accompanied with lighters, in order to pass the Straits of Kertch where the waters are low, and must then anchor in the Taganrok-roads, at a distance of ten from the shore. We may confidently estimate the voyage between Taganrok and Odessa both ways, as of two months' duration.

Thus navigation is hardly more prosperous than trade itself. If it Has hitherto maintained a part of its activity, this must be attributed to the great number of vessels belonging to the Mediterranean, to the influence of a past period, fertile in profit, and to commercial routine. Nevertheless, a revolution is gradually taking place, and already many vessels that formerly frequented the Russian ports, have found means to employ themselves advantageously on the Ocean. We find their names mentioned in foreign journals, in the shipping intelligence from America and India, and it is probable they are quite as successful there as others that have not yet chosen to visit the coasts of Southern Russia.

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# CHAPTER VI.

AGRICULTURE AND MANUFACTURES OF SOUTHERN RUSSIA—MINERAL PRODUCTIONS—RUSSIAN WORKMEN.

In justification of its prohibitive system, the government alleges the protection and encouragement it owes to native industry. Now it is evident that absolute exclusion cannot favour industry. The high tariff, it is true, seems to secure a certain market for Russian manufactures; but it results from it that those manufactures, being kept clear of all competition, are worse than stationary; for the manufacturers, whose number is very limited, agree among themselves to turn out exactly the same sort of workmanship, and in the same proportion. Moscow is now the centre of all the manufactures of silk, cotton, and woollen stuffs, shawls, &c.; yet, in spite of all the privileges secured to those establishments by the tariff, a great number of them have failed of late years. Their goods have become so bad that they could no longer compete in sale with [Pg 29] smuggled articles. In 1840, or 1841, the emperor made a journey to Moscow, on purpose to preside over the meeting of manufacturers; but unfortunately ukases and proclamations are inefficient to create a body of manufacturers; the imperial desires in nowise altered the face of things.

There are at this day, in Russia, two great branches of manufacturing industry, one of which, employing the raw materials furnished by the soil, such as iron, copper, and other metals, belongs properly to Russia, and has no need to fear foreign competition. It is true we cannot speak very highly of the Russian hardware and cutlery, but they find a sure sale, the inhabitants caring more for cheapness than quality. The most important manufactures of this sort are established at Toula, and in the government of Nijni Novgorod; the materials are furnished by Siberia.

The Ural is one of the most remarkable mountain chains on the globe, for the extent and variety of its mineral wealth. I say nothing of its gold, silver, and platina ores; they add too little to the real prosperity of the country to call for mention here. The iron ores of Siberia are generally of superior quality; but as the processes to which they are subjected, are somewhat injudicious, the iron produced from them is seldom as good as it might be. The working of the iron mines has been a good deal neglected of late years, landowners having turned their attention chiefly to the precious metals; hence the prices of wrought and cast iron have risen considerably in Southern Russia, which employs those of Siberia exclusively. The carriage is effected for this part of the empire by land; in one direction by the Volga, the Don, and the Sea of Azov, in another by the Dniepr. The journeys are long and expensive, and often they cannot be effected at all in consequence of irregularities either in the arrivals, or in the river floods. The present price of pig-iron is from eighteen to twenty francs for the 100 kilogrammes, and of bar-iron from forty-four to forty-five francs, in Kherson and Odessa. I do not know the prices at the places where the iron is produced, but whatever they may be, these figures show how much Russia has yet to do towards facilitating the means of internal communication. Of copper, lead, &c., notwithstanding the cost of carriage, Russia exports a considerable quantity to foreign countries.

Not content with these valuable sources of wealth, which alone would suffice for the support of a vast and truly national industry, Russia has thought it desirable to create for herself a manufacturing industry such as exists in other countries of Europe, and to arrive at this end she has devised a system of the most absolute prohibition. How far has she been successful? Of all European countries Russia is unquestionably placed in the most unfavourable circumstances for contending with foreign manufactures. Situated as she is at the extremity of Europe, she can only be reached by long, difficult, and expensive routes; and as her manufactures of stuffs, silks, &c., are all concentrated in Moscow, the expenses of carriage are enormous. Thus the cottons landed [Pg 30] in Odessa are first carried to Moscow, and then return, after being wrought, to the governments of the Black Sea. The want of capable and intelligent workmen is also one of the most serious obstacles to the establishment of manufactures; the Russian peasant is essentially agricultural, and knows nothing of handicraft trades, except so far as they are of service to him in his daily labours; and then, by constitution and by the effects of that long slavery that has weighed and still weighs upon him, his ideas are naturally contracted and can never apply themselves to more than a single object. The sole talent he possesses in a really remarkable degree is that of imitation. The black enamelled work of the Caucasus is admirably imitated at Toula; and at Lughan, in the government of Iekaterinoslaf, they make very pretty things in Berlin iron, copied from Prussian models. This talent for imitation is no doubt valuable in the workshops where they are constantly making the same set of things, and in the same way; but it becomes completely inefficient in the manufactories for piece-goods, in which there must be incessant innovation and improvement: hence we find all the great manufactories, after being at first managed by foreign superintendents and workmen, fall gradually into decay from the moment they are transferred to native hands. The Russians are essentially destitute of imagination and the spirit of invention; and then the proneness of the workmen to laziness and drunkenness cannot but be fatal to industry. The workman is always seeking some pretext to escape from labour; he has his own calendar, in which the number of holidays is doubled; these he employs in getting drunk, and the days following them in sleeping off his liquor. The result is, that he passes half the year in doing nothing, that he strives to sell his day's work at the dearest possible rate, and that the working time being thus indefinite, it is impossible to fix punctually the time of production. This unhappy moral condition of the labouring classes is the same throughout all Russia, and may be regarded as one of the worst evils incidental to the native industry. To these obstacles, proceeding from the very nature of the people, are superadded physical difficulties no less imperious. In France, England, and Germany, when any new manufacture is established, it always rests on other branches already in existence, and about which it has no need to employ itself. In Russia, on the contrary, in order to succeed in any branch of manufactures, it is necessary at the same time to create all the accessories connected with it. Every one knows what a vast quantity of merino and

other wools Southern Russia supplies, and it would seem at first sight that of all manufactures that of woollen cloths ought to offer the fairest chances of success in that country. But it is not so: I have visited two or three cloth factories on the banks of the Dniepr belonging to foreigners, and managed by them with an ability beyond all praise; yet it was with the utmost difficulty and through the personal labour of their proprietors that they were able to subsist. The government [Pg 31] itself, some years ago, erected at Iekaterinoslaf one of the largest cloth manufactories I am acquainted with; the looms were set in motion by two steam-engines, and several hundred workmen were employed. The establishment, nevertheless, was closed after three years' existence, and I myself saw all the materials sold at a great depreciation.

The number of manufacturing establishments of all sorts in Russia amounted in 1839 to 6855, and that of the workmen employed to 412,931, not including those engaged in the mines and in the smelting-houses, forges, &c., belonging to them. We will enumerate as the most important branches of Russian industry:—

| | | Establishments. |
|---|---|---|
| Manufactories of | Cloth and Woollen Stuffs | 606 |
| | Silks | 227 |
| | Cottons | 467 |
| | Canvass and other Linen Goods | 216 |
| Ten Yards | | 1918 |
| Tallow-melting Houses | | 554 |
| Manufactories of | Candies | 444 |
| | Soap | 270 |
| | Metal Ware | 486 |

In this table the manufactories of woollen cloths, silks, and cottons, together figure but as 1300; and yet it is in a great measure to the supposed encouragement which the government desires to afford these branches of industry, that Russia owes her system of customs; for setting aside a few objects of luxury, Russia has no need to fear foreign competition with regard to any other articles. Certainly, if the silk and cotton manufactures could exercise a beneficial influence upon the prosperity of the country, if they were necessary to supply the wants of the whole population, in that case we could to a certain extent understand the sentence of exclusion pronounced on foreign goods; but the productions of the Moscow factories are destined only for the aristocracy and the trading classes, and the 40,000,000 of slaves that constitute the European population of Russia, consume but an insignificant portion of them, all their clothes being wrought by their own hands.

It is not surprising then that all the manufacturing establishments are concentrated in Moscow, that being the place where the aristocratic and trading part of the community exist in most considerable numbers, and where there is most certainty of finding customers. Everywhere else the chances of success would be few or none: witness Southern Russia where all manufacturing attempts have hitherto failed, notwithstanding the advantages it derives from its seaports. The three governments composing it reckon at this day but 2000 workmen, even including those who work in the rope walks and the tallow houses.

According to authentic documents the numbers of the nobility and tradespeople do not exceed 3,000,000. Without a complete alteration, therefore, in the manners and habits of the peasants, it is impossible to hope that the manufacture of piece-goods can ever attain a great development, [Pg 32] and it would have been infinitely better to have left the supply of these articles to importation; the imperial treasury would thereby have been a gainer, and more active relations with the foreigner would have afforded valuable guarantees for the prosperity of the country. But Russia suffered herself to be seduced by the most brilliant branch of industry of our times; she, too, wished to have her cachemires and her silks; and not considering that agriculture is for her the most lucrative, the most positive of all branches of industry, she recoiled from no prohibitive measure in order to favour some indigenous manufactures. I say again, Russia is before all things a country for the production of raw materials. Agriculture, including therein the breeding of cattle, evidently forms the basis of the national prosperity, and it is only by facilitating its extension and its outlets that Russia can hope to secure the future welfare of its people.

If at this day the establishment of new villages in Southern Russia is becoming so difficult, it is not for want of land, but because the peasants have no means of ready transport for their produce, and because also the want of importation, naturally exercising a great influence upon the price of corn, signally restricts the demand from abroad. Is it not indeed deplorable to see the most fertile and productive governments of New Russia sunk in extreme penury by the want of roads, and by the culpable neglect of the administration which deprives them of the navigation of the rivers! Will the government at last open its eyes to the mischiefs of the course it is pursuing? We can scarcely hope so. All the commercial reports of the empire dress up things in so fair a light, and the public functionaries agree so well together in falsifying public opinion, that the emperor, beguiled by the brilliant picture incessantly laid before his eyes, cannot but persevere in the fatal course adopted by his predecessors.

# CHAPTER VII.

DEPARTURE FROM ODESSA—TRAVELLING IN RUSSIA—NIKOLAÏEF, OLVIA, OTSHAKOF—KHERSON—THE DNIEPR—GENERAL POTIER—ANCIENT TUMULI—STEPPES OF THE BLACK SEA—A RUSSIAN VILLAGE—SNOW STORM—NARROW ESCAPE FROM SUFFOCATION—A RUSSIAN FAMILY—APPENDIX.

After some months' stay in Odessa, we left it in company with General Potier, a Frenchman by birth, to pass the winter at his country-house. Travelling would nowhere be more rapid than in Russia, if the posting-houses were a little better conducted and more punctual in supplying horses. The country is perfectly flat, and you may traverse several hundred leagues without meeting a single hill. Besides this, the Russian driver has no mercy on his horses; they must [Pg 33] gallop continually, though they should drop dead under the whip. Another reason that contributes to the rapidity of posting, is, that there are never less than three or four horses yoked to the lightest vehicle. The general's carriage being rather heavy, we had six horses, that carried us along at the rate of fifteen versts (ten miles) an hour. We found the rooms in the posting-stations much more elegant than we had expected; but this was owing to the journey of the imperial family, for whom they had been completely metamorphosed. The walls and ceilings were fresh painted with the greatest care, and we found everywhere handsome mirrors, divans, and portraits of the emperor and empress. Thanks, therefore, to the transit of their majesties, our journey was effected in the most agreeable manner, though on ordinary occasions, one must make up his mind to encounter all sorts of privations and annoyances in a long excursion through Russia. The towns are so few, and the villages are so destitute of all requisites, that one is in sore danger of being starved to death by the way, unless he has had the precaution to lay in a stock of provisions at starting. The post-houses afford you literally nothing more than hot water for tea, and a bench to rest on. The Russian and Polish grandees never omit to carry with them on their journeys a bed with all its appurtenances, a whole range of cooking implements, and plenty of provisions. In this way they pass from town to town, without ever suspecting the unfortunate position in which the foreigner is placed who traverses their vast wildernesses. The latter, it may be said, is free to follow their example; but the thing is not so easy. Supposing even that he was possessed of all this travelling apparatus, still the expense of carriage would imperatively forbid his taking it with him, whereas the Russians, who generally travel with their own horses, may have a dozen without adding to their expenses. As for those who have recourse to the post, they care very little about economy, and provided they have a good dinner prepared by their own cooks, a soft bed and all other physical comforts, they never trouble themselves to calculate the cost. But as for the foreigner who travels in this country, the inconvenience I have just mentioned is nothing in comparison with the countless vexations he must endure, simply because he is a foreigner. Having no legal right to lay his cane over the shoulders of the clerks of the post, he must make up his mind to endure the most scandalous impositions and annoyances at their hands, and very often he will be obliged to pass forty-eight hours in a station, because he cannot submit to the conditions imposed on him. Neither threats nor entreaties can prevail on the clerk to make him furnish horses if it does not suit his humour. The epithet *particularnii tcheloviek* which is applied in Russia to all who do not wear epaulettes, and which signifies something less than a nobody, is a categorical reply to the traveller's utmost eloquence.

Before we reached Kherson, we stopped at Nicolaïef, a pretty town, which has been for some years the seat of the Admiralty formerly established in Kherson, and which is daily increasing at [Pg 34] its rival's expense. Its vast dockyards attract a whole population of workmen, whose presence swells its wealth and importance. Its position on the Bug, its new houses and pretty walks planted with poplars, make it the most agreeable town in the government. When we passed through it, a splendid ship of the line of three decks had just been completed, and was waiting only for the ceremony of being christened to take its place in the Black Sea fleet.

Four or five leagues below Nicolaïef, on the right bank of the Bug, near its embouchure in the liman[1] of the Dniepr, are the ruins of Olvia or Olviopolis, a Milesian colony founded about 500 B.C. There have been found inscriptions and medals which put the origin of these remains beyond all doubt. Lower down on the liman of the Dniepr, not far from the sea, is the fortress of Otchakov, which formerly belonged to the Turks, and then formed a considerable town, known by the name of Ozou. It was twice taken by the Russian troops on the 13th of June, 1737, under the command of Marshal Munich, and on the 6th of December, 1788, under Potemkin. At present, not a trace of the Turkish sway remains in the village. All the Mussulman buildings have been pulled down to give place to a steppe, on which some Russian cabins and about fifty miserable shops have been set up. The environs of Otchakov also present traces of the abode of the ancient Greeks. In 1833 there were found here a fragment of a bas-relief in tolerable preservation, a male torso, and an offering with an inscription from certain Greek military chiefs to Achilles, ruler of the Pontus.

Otchakof was founded at the close of the fifteenth century, by Mengli Chereï, khan of the Crimea, on the ruins of Alektor, a little town belonging to a queen of the Sauromatians, and which was destroyed probably by the Getæ at the same time as Olvia, 100 B.C. Alektor must have

possessed specimens of Greek workmanship, but they disappeared under the hands of the Turks, who employed them in building Otchakov.

Kherson, where we arrived in the evening, retains no relics of its ancient opulence, or of the importance it derived scarcely fifty years ago from its commerce, its port, and its admiralty; at present, it exhibits the melancholy spectacle of a town entirely ruined; its population does not exceed 6000 or 8000 souls. Odessa and Nicolaïef have dealt it mortal blows, and it now subsists only by its entrepôt for the various productions of the empire, which are conveyed to it by the Dniepr, and forwarded by lighters to Odessa. It has even lost its custom-house for imports, retaining only the privilege of exporting; and beside this, the vessels which take in cargo at Kherson, must first perform quarantine in Odessa. Fevers and the Jews are likewise formidable foes to its prosperity. Expelled from Nicolaïef and Sevastopol, the Israelites swarm like locusts in [Pg 35] Kherson, and form almost its whole population. Nothing can be more hideous than the appearance of the Russian Jews. Dressed in a uniform garb, consisting of a long robe of black calico, fastened with a woollen girdle, canvass drawers, and a broad-brimmed black hat, they all present so degraded a type of humanity, that the eye turns from them with deep disgust. Their filthiness is indescribable; the entrance of a single Jew into an apartment is enough suddenly to vitiate the atmosphere.

We had already had occasion in Odessa to see into what an abject state this people is fallen in Russia; but it was not until we came to Kherson that we beheld them in all their vileness. What a contrast between their sallow faces, disgusting beards, and straggling locks, plastered flat on the skin, their brutified air, and crawling humility, and the easy, dignified bearing, the noble features, and the elegant costume of the Jews of Constantinople! It is impossible to bring oneself to believe there is any thing in common between them, that they belong to the same race, and have the same rules and usages, the same language and religion. But the cause which has produced such a difference between two branches of one people, is a question involving political and philosophical considerations of too high an order, to be discussed here; all we can say, is that, in seeing the Jews of Kherson, and comparing them with their brethren of the East, we had evidence before us of the depth to which governments and institutions can debase mankind.

The streets of Kherson are thronged with these miserable Israelites, who carry on every kind of trade, and recoil from no species of occupation, provided it be lucrative. Their penury is so great, that they will run from one end of the town to the other for a few kopeks, and in this respect they are of much use to the stranger, who would be greatly embarrassed if they were not at hand, ready to render him every possible service. The moment a traveller arrives at an inn, in New Russia, he is beset and persecuted without ceasing by these officious agents, who place at his disposal their goods, their persons, all they have and all they have not. It is to no purpose he threatens them and turns them out a hundred times; they care little for abuse; and do what you will, they sit themselves down on the ground opposite your door, and remain there with imperturbable phlegm, waiting their opportunity to walk in again, and renew their offer. Many a time have we seen Jews thus spend four or five hours consecutively, without evincing the least impatience, or seeming to regret the waste of time they might have employed more profitably, and go away at last satisfied with having gained a few kopeks.

It was in the government of Kherson that the plan of forming Jewish colonies was first tried. Several were established in the districts of Kherson and Bobrinetz, and in 1824 these contained nine villages, with a population of 8000 souls, settled on 55,333 *hectares* of land. All the new [Pg 36] colonists are wholly exempt from taxation for ten years; but after the lapse of that time, they are placed on the same footing as the other crown peasants, except that they remain free from military service for fifty years.

The colonisation of these Jews was no easy matter; at first, it was necessary to keep the most rigorous watch over them, to prevent them from leaving their villages. The colonists are all dependent on the governor-general of New Russia, and each of their villages is under the control of a non-commissioned officer of the army. I have not the least idea of the object for which the government founded these colonies, which, as far as agriculture is concerned, can be of no use to the country. Was its motive one of a philanthropic kind? I do not think so. I should rather suspect that the prospective advantages in a military point of view may have been the inducement, an opinion, which seems justified by the fact, that the Russian government has found it necessary, for some years past, to enrol the Jews by force in the naval service. The unfortunate men are chiefly employed as workmen, and I have seen great numbers of them in the arsenals of Sevastopol and Nicolaïef.

The aspect of Kherson is as dismal as that of Nicolaïef is brilliant and lively. Nothing is to be seen but dilapidated houses and abandoned sites, which give it the appearance of a town devastated by war. But viewing it from a distance, as it rises in an amphitheatre on the banks of the Dniepr, with its numerous belfries, its barracks, and its gardens, one would be far from suspecting the sort of spectacle its interior presents. Above all, one cannot conceive why a town in such a position, with a river close at hand, navigable for ships of war, should have been thus abandoned; but such has been the imperial will, and Kherson, completely sacrificed to Odessa, now shows scarcely any signs of life, excepting its great wool washing establishments, which employ hundreds of workmen, and its retail trade, which the Jews monopolise. The only remains of its past greatness the town has preserved, are its title as capital of the government, and its tribunals. The governor resides in it, no doubt much against his will; but many great families have forsaken it on account of the fevers prevailing in it during a part of the year, with more fatal violence than in any other region. They are occasioned by the wide sheets of water left behind by the inundations of the Dniepr, and which, finding no issue when the river returns to its bed,

stagnate among the reeds, until the rays of the sun are strong enough to make them evaporate. Fetid and pestilential exhalations then rise, and produce malignant and typhoid fevers that almost always prove mortal.

The population of Kherson, like that of all the other towns in Southern Russia, is a medley of Jews, Armenians, Russians, Greeks, Italians, &c.; a few French have been long settled there, and have acquired some wealth; some deal in wood, others are at the head of the wool-washing establishments I have already mentioned. Among the latter, there is a Parisian, who, by dint of [Pg 37] washing and rewashing wool, and that too on another's account, has managed to amass nearly 12,000*l.* in less than eight years. The *lavoirs* of MM. Vassal and Potier are the most considerable in Kherson, giving daily employment to more than 600 men.

The Dniepr seen from Kherson, resembles a vast lake studded with islands; the views it presents are very beautiful, and partake very much of the character of maritime scenery. The estate we were going to lay on the other side of the river, and we had the pleasure of travelling about fifteen versts by water, through the labyrinth of islands, and a constant succession of the most enchanting views. We found horses waiting for us on the opposite bank, and in less than four hours we were at Clarofka, our journey's end.

M. Potier, the proprietor of Clarofka, is an ex-pupil of the Polytechnic School, who was sent to St. Petersburg by Napoleon, with three colleagues, to establish a school of civil engineering. In 1812, the government fearing lest they should join the French, sent them away to the confines of China, where they were detained more than two years. When our troops had evacuated Russia, and the presence of these young men was no longer to be feared, the Emperor Alexander recalled them, and gave them each a pension of 6000 rubles, to indemnify them for their exile. From that time forth, they all made rapid progress in fortune and in honours. M. Potier was for a long while director of the civil engineering institution. He is highly esteemed by the Emperor Nicholas, who wished to attach him completely to his court, by conferring on him a post of the highest importance, but M. Potier always refused, and at last succeeded in obtaining permission to retire. He is the son-in-law of M. Rouvier, who made himself popular in Russia and even in France, by being the first to introduce the breed of Merino sheep into Southern Russia. M. Potier followed his father-in-law's example, and has more than 20,000 sheep on his estate.

The estate of M. Vassal, another son-in-law and successor of M. Rouvier, is but a dozen versts from Clarofka. It is larger than many a German duchy; but instead of the fertile fields and thriving villages that adorn Germany, it presents to view only a vast desert with numerous tumuli, salt lakes, and a few sheep folds. These tumuli exact models of mole-hills, from ten to fifteen yards high, are the only hills in the country, and appear to be the burial-places of its old masters, the Scythians. Several of them have been opened, and nothing found in them but some bones, copper coins of the kings of Bosphorus, and coarse earthen utensils. Similar tombs in the Crimea have been found to contain objects of more value, both as regards material and workmanship. This difference is easily accounted for; the Milesian colonies that occupied part of the Crimea 200 years ago, spread a taste for opulence and the fine arts all through the peninsula; their tombs would, therefore, bear token of the degree of civilisation they had reached. They had a regular government, princes, and all the elements and accessories of a kingdom; whilst our [Pg 38] poor Scythians, divided into nomade tribes like the Kirghises and Kalmucks of the present day, led a rude life in the midst of the herds of cattle that constituted their sole wealth.

Agriculture could never have yielded much in these steppes, where rain is extremely rare in summer, where there are neither brooks nor wells for irrigation, and where hot winds scorch up every thing during the greater part of the fine season. It is only on the banks of the rivers that vegetation makes its appearance and the eye rests on cultivated fields and green pastures. There are indeed here and there a few depressions, where the grass retains its verdure during a part of the year, and some stunted trees spread their meagre branches over a less unkindly soil than that of the steppe; but these are unusual circumstances, and one must often travel hundreds of versts to find a single shrub. Such being the general configuration of the country, it may easily be imagined how cheerless is the aspect of those vast plains with nothing to vary their surface except the tumuli, and with no other boundaries than the sea. No one who is unaccustomed to that monotonous nature can long endure its influence. Those dreary wastes seem to him a boundless prison in which he vainly exerts himself without a hope of escape. And yet that flat and barren soil from which the eye turns away so contemptuously, has become a source of wealth to its present proprietors by the great success of the first experiments in Merino sheep-breeding. It was M. Rouvier, who first conceived the happy idea of turning the unproductive steppes into pasture. The Emperor Alexander, always ready to encourage liberal ideas, not only advanced the projector a sum of a hundred thousand rubles, but gave him even a man-of-war to go and make his first purchases in Spain, and on his return, granted him an immense extent of land, where the flocks, increasing rapidly, brought in a considerable fortune to M. Rouvier in a few years. His sons-in-law, General Potier and M. Vassal inherited it, and formed those great establishments of which we have spoken. Thenceforth the stock of merinos increased with incredible rapidity in New Russia; but an enormous fall in the price of wool soon occurred, and many proprietors have now reason to regret their outlay in that branch of rural economy, and are endeavouring to get rid of their flocks. The rams which fetched 500 or 600 francs in 1834 and 1835, were not worth more than 250 or 300 in 1841. In 1842, a landowner of our acquaintance had made up his mind to part with his best thorough-bred rams for 140 and even 100 francs a head. The exportation of wool increased, nevertheless, during the last years of our stay in Russia; but this was only because the landowners, after holding out a long while, found themselves at last constrained to accept prices one-half lower than those current a few years before, and to dispose of the wools

they had long kept in their warehouses. Here was another instance of the disastrous consequences of the Russian prohibitive system; it has been as fatal to the wool-trade as to that in corn.

Clarofka is a village consisting of fifteen or twenty houses, each containing two families of peasants. It is some distance from the farm, which alone contains more dwellings and inmates than the whole village. [Pg 39]

The steward resides in a very long, low house, with small windows in the Russian fashion, and an earthen roof, and standing at the edge of a large pond, the fetid exhalations from which are very unwholesome during the hot season. A few weeping-willows wave their branches over the stagnant water, and increase still more the melancholy appearance of the spot. The pond is frequented by a multitude of water-fowl, such as teal, gulls, ducks, pelicans, and kourlis, that make their nests in the thick reeds on the margin. Beside the house, according to the Russian custom, stand the kitchens and other offices, the icehouse, poultry-yard, wash-house, cellar for fruit and vegetables, &c. A little further on are the stables and coach-houses, containing a great number of carriages, caleches, droshkies, and a dozen horses; other buildings, including the workmen's barracks, the forge, the gardener's and the miller's dwellings are scattered irregularly here and there. Two great wind-mills lift their huge wings above the road leading to the village. All this is not very handsome; but there is one thing indicative of princely sumptuousness, namely, an immense garden that spreads out behind the house, and almost makes one forget the steppes, so thick is the foliage of its beautiful alleys. One is at a loss to conceive by what miracle this park, with its large trees, its fine fruit, and its charming walks, can have thus sprung up out of the scorched and arid soil, that waits whole months for a few drops of water to clothe it in transient verdure. And indeed to create such an oasis in the heart of so barren a land, there needed not one miracle, but a series of miracles of perseverance, toil, and resolution, seconded by all the means at the disposal of a Russian lord. All kinds of fruit are here collected together; we counted more than fifty varieties of the pear in one alley. Grapes of all kinds, strawberries, beds of asparagus of incomparable flavour, every thing in short that the most capricious taste can desire, grows there in such abundance, that seeing all these things one really feels transported into the midst of regions the most favoured by nature.

No one but a Russian lord could have effected such metamorphoses. Master of a whole population of slaves, he has never to pay for labour; and whims which would be ruinous to others, cost him only the trouble of conceiving them. In the dry season, which often lasts for more than five months, chain pumps worked by horses supply water to every part of this extensive garden, and thus afford what the unkind skies deny it. The work to be done in the spring season generally requires the labour of more than 200 pair of hands daily, and during the rest of the year three-score peasants are constantly employed in pruning the trees, plucking up the weeds that rapidly spring up in the walks, training the vines, and attending to the flowers. In return for all this expenditure the general has the satisfaction of seeing his table covered with the finest fruits and most exquisite preserves; and for one who inhabits a desert these things unquestionably have their value. On the whole Clarofka is a real *pays de cocagne* for good cheer: the steppes abound with game of every kind, from grouse to the majestic bustard. A hunter is attached to the farm, and daily supplies the table with all the delicacies of this sort which the country affords. The sea also contributes abundance of excellent fish. It is evident, therefore, that in a gastronomic point of view it would be difficult to find a more advantageous residence; but this merit, important as it is, fails to make amends for the intolerable ennui one labours under in Clarofka. Thanks to the garden, one may forget the steppe during the fine season; and then there is the amusement of fishing, and of picking up shells on the sea-shore, so that one may contrive to kill time passably well. But what are you to do in winter, when the snow falls so thickly that you cannot see the houses, particularly when the *metel* turns the whole country topsy-turvy? No language can give an idea of these *metels* or hurricanes. They come down on the land with such whirling and driving gusts, such furious and continuous tempests, such whistlings and groanings of the wind, and a sky so murky and threatening, that no hurricane at sea can be more alarming. The snow is now piled up like a mountain, now hollowed into deep valleys, and now spread out into rushing and heaving billows; or else it is driven through the air like a long white veil expanding and folding on itself until the wind has scattered its last shreds before it. In order to pass from one house to another, people are obliged to dig paths through the snow often two yards deep. Whole flocks of sheep, surprised by the tempest not far from their folds, and even herds of horses, have been driven into the sea and drowned. When beset by such dangers their instinct usually prompts them to cluster together in a circle and form a compact mass, so as to present less surface to the *metel*. But the force of the wind gradually compelling them forwards, they approach the shore, the ground fails them, and finally they all disappear beneath the waves. These tempests are generally succeeded by a dead calm, and an intense cold that soon changes the surface of the Dniepr and the sea-shore into a vast mirror. This is the most agreeable part of the winter. The communications between neighbours are renewed; sporting expeditions on a great scale, excursions in sledges, and entertainments within doors follow each other almost without interruption. Despite the intensity of the cold, the Russians infinitely prefer it to a milder temperature, which would put a stop to their business as well as to their pleasures. The great fairs of the empire generally take place in winter; for then the frozen lakes and rivers serve the inhabitants as a safe and rapid means of communication. In this way they traverse immense distances without quitting their sledges, and even without perceiving whether they are on land or water. Wrapped up in their furs they encounter with impunity a temperature of 35° for several consecutive days, without any other auxiliaries than brandy and tea, which they consume in fearful quantities. During our winter residence in Clarofka, we had an opportunity of convincing [Pg 40] [Pg 41]

ourselves that people suffer much less from cold in northern than in southern countries.

In Constantinople, where we had passed the preceding winter, the cold and the snow appeared to us insupportable in the light wooden houses, open to every wind, and furnished with no other resource against the inclemency of the weather than a manghal, which served at best only to roast the feet and hands, whilst it left the rest of the body to freeze. But in Russia even the mujik has constantly a temperature of nearly 77° in his cabin in the very height of winter, which he obtains in a very simple and economical manner. A large brickwork stove or oven is formed in the wall, consisting of a fireplace and a long series of quadrangular flues ending in the chimney and giving passage to the smoke. The fire is made either of *kirbitch*[2] or of reeds. When these materials are completely consumed, the pipe by which the flues communicate with the chimney is hermetically closed, and the hot air passes into the room by two openings made for that purpose. Exactly the same apparatus is used in the houses of the wealthy. The stoves are so contrived that one of them serves to heat two or three rooms. The halls, staircases, and servants' rooms, are all kept at the same temperature. But great caution is necessary to avoid the dangers to which this method of warming may give rise. I myself was saved only by a providential chance from falling a victim to them. I had been asleep for some hours one night, when I was suddenly awakened by my son, who was calling to me for drink. I got up instantly, and without waiting to light a candle I was proceeding to pour out a glass of water, but I had scarcely moved a few steps when the glass dropped from my hand and I fell, as if struck with lightning, and in a state of total insensibility. I had afterwards a confused recollection of cries that seemed to me to have come from a great distance; but for two minutes I remained completely inanimate, and only recovered consciousness after my husband had carried me into an icy room and laid me on the floor. My son suffered still more than myself, but it happened most strangely that my husband was not in the smallest degree affected, and this it was that saved us. The cause of this nocturnal alarm was the imprudence of a servant who had closed the stove before all the kirbitch was consumed; this was quite enough to make the atmosphere deadly. All the inmates of the house were more or less indisposed.

The hothouse temperature kept up in all the apartments cannot fail to act injuriously on the health. For more than ten months the outer air is never admitted into the house, and foreigners [Pg 42] are affected in consequence with an uneasy sense of oppression and a sort of torpor that almost incapacitates them for thinking. As for the Russians, who are habituated to the thing from their childhood, they suffer little inconvenience from it; nevertheless many maladies probably owe their origin to this artificial warmth, which is equally enervating for body and mind. To this cause, no doubt, we must attribute the utter absence of blooming freshness from the cheeks of the Russian ladies. Incapable of enduring the slightest change of temperature, they have not the least idea of the pleasure derived from inhaling the fresh air, and braving the cold by means of brisk exercise. But for dancing, of which they are passionately fond, their lives would pass away in almost absolute immobility, for lolling in a carriage is not what I call putting oneself in motion. There is scarcely any country where women walk less than in Russia, and nowhere do they lead more artificial lives. We had a Russian family for two months at Clarofka, returning from the waters of the Caucasus, and waiting until the sledging season was fully set in, to get back to Moscow. This family, consisting of a husband and wife and the sister of the latter, was a great godsend for us during part of the winter. Madame Bougainsky is a very clever young woman, equally well acquainted with our literary works as with our Parisian frivolities. But dress and play are for her the two grand concerns of life, and all the rest are but accessories. I do not think she went out of doors three times during her two months' stay in Clarofka. The habit of living in the world of fashion and in a perpetual state of parade had taken such inveterate hold on her, that, without thinking of it, she used to dress three or four times a day, just as if she were among the salons of Moscow. I learned from her that the Russian ladies are as fond of play as of dancing, and that many ruin themselves thereby. On the whole, there is little poetry or romance in the existence of Russian women of fashion. The men, though treating them with exquisite politeness and gallantry, in reality think little about them, and find more pleasure in hunting, smoking, gaming, and drinking, than in lavishing on them those attentions to which they have many just claims. The Russian ladies have generally little beauty; their bloom, as I have said, is gone at twenty; but if they can boast neither perfect features nor dazzlingly fair complexions, there is, on the other hand, in all their manners remarkable elegance, and an indescribable fascination that sometimes makes them irresistible. With a pale face, a somewhat frail figure, careless attitudes, and a haughty cast of countenance, they succeed in making more impression in a drawing-room than many women of greater beauty.

## FOOTNOTES:

[1] *Liman*, a Tartar word signifying harbour, is the name given to the gulfs formed by the principal rivers of Southern Russia before their entrance into the sea.

[2] Kirbitch consists of dung kneaded into little bricks, and dried in summer. Along with straw and reeds, it forms the only firing used for domestic purposes. At Odessa, however, they procure firewood from Bessarabia, but it costs as much as ninety francs the cube fathom.

# APPENDIX TO CHAPTER VII.

A propensity to sedentary habits is not peculiarly a female failing in Russia, as will appear from the following extract: "The Russian has as little taste for promenading on foot as any Oriental. Hence, with the exception of the two capitals, and the north-west provinces, in which German usages prevail, there are no public walks or gardens for recreation. True enjoyment, according to the notions of the genuine Muscovite, consists in sitting down to a well-furnished table, either in his own house or a neighbour's, and indulging after the repast in some game which requires the least possible exertion of body. Soon after my arrival in Kasan, I was glad to employ the early days of summer, which there begins at the end of May, in making pedestrian excursions in the neighbourhood, to the great and general surprise of my new friends, who could not conceive why I thus roamed like an idiot about the country, in which I had no business, as they very well knew. It was conjectured that I was ill, and had adopted this laborious discipline as a mode of cure; but even under this interpretation my proceedings seemed very strange to them, for their own invariable practice when they feel unwell, is to go to bed immediately. In one of my walks I fell in with an acquaintance, who asked me what took me to the village, to which he supposed I was going. On my replying, that I had nothing whatever to do there, and that as yet I had neither seen the village nor any of its inhabitants, he said then of course I was going to look at it. No, I told him, that was not my intention, for I knew very well I should see nothing there different from any of the other villages in the vicinity. 'Well, then, Daddy (*batiushka*),' said my puzzled and curious friend, 'do tell me, what is it you are afoot for?' 'I am afoot, simply for the sake of being afoot,' was my answer, 'for the pleasure of a little exercise in the open air.' My friend burst into a loud fit of laughter at this explanation of my rambling habits, which had so long been an enigma to himself and every body else. To walk for walking sake! He had never heard any thing like that in all his life, and it was not long before this most novel and extraordinary phrase ran the round of the whole town, so that even to the following year it remained a standing joke against me in every company I entered."—*Von Littrow.*

*Suffocating vapours.*—Accidents like that which befel Madame Hommaire, are unavoidably frequent under such a system of warming, and with servants so negligent as those in Russia; but happily they do not often end fatally. The worst result of them is generally a violent headache, all [Pg 44] trace of which disappears the following day. Incredible as it may appear, the common people take pleasure in the sort of intoxication produced by the inhalation of diluted carbonic acid, and purposely procure themselves that strange enjoyment on leisure days. "They close the stoves before the usual time, and lie down on them; for in the peasants' houses the stoves are so constructed as to present a platform, on which the family sleep in winter. On entering a cabin on these occasions, you see the inmates lying close together on their bellies, chatting pleasantly with one another. Their faces are tumid and of a deep red hue, from the effects of the noxious gas. There is an unusual lustre in their protruding eyeballs, and in short, they have all the outward appearance of intoxication, though the intellectual functions are not affected by the gas. The headache they suffer may, indeed, be a drawback to their pleasure, but the increased warmth thus obtained, is so delightful to them, that they are content to purchase it even at that price. There is no mistaking their evident enjoyment and satisfaction, though one may not be tempted to partake in their joy."

Another mode of obtaining artificial heat is practised in what the Russian peasants call their smoke-rooms. These rooms have but a few very small windows, just large enough to pass the head through, and seldom glazed, except with talc, where that mineral is abundant and cheap. Where this is not the case they are stopped up, in winter only, with moss and rags. When the fire is lighted, the chimney is closed, and the smoke escapes through the stove-door into the room. Being lighter than the cold air, it ascends at first, and hangs overhead in a thick cloud. But as its mass increases, it gradually descends, until there is no standing upright in the room without danger of suffocation. As the smoke approaches the floor, so too do the inmates, first stooping, then kneeling, sitting, and at last lying prone. If the smoke threatens quite to reach the ground, they open the windows or air-holes, which are not quite level with a man's head, and the black vapour rushes out. The under part of the room is thus left free, the prostrate inmates gradually rise, and set about their occupations in the clear warm space below. The first time I entered one of these dark sooty dens, I was so disgusted with it, that I should not have hesitated in my choice between a prison and so horrible an abode. I was, therefore, not a little surprised when I saw the inmates lying on the floor, gossiping quite at their ease, and bandying about jokes that will hardly bear repeating, but which manifested a degree of mirthfulness in these people I had, until then, thought quite impossible."—*Idem.*

[Pg 45]

# CHAPTER VIII.

AN EARTHQUAKE—LUDICROUS ANECDOTE—SLEDGING—SPORTING—DANGEROUS PASSAGE OF THE DNIEPR—THAW; SPRING-TIME—MANNERS AND CUSTOMS OF THE LITTLE RUSSIANS—EASTER HOLIDAYS—THE CLERGY.

That same winter at 10 P.M. on the 11th of January, we had a smart shock of earthquake, but which happily did no mischief in that part of the steppes. We were seated at the whist table, when we were suddenly startled by a loud rolling noise, that seemed rapidly approaching us, and the cards dropped from our hands. The sound was like that of a large heavily-laden waggon rattling over the pavement. Scarcely two seconds after our first surprise the whole house received a sudden shock, that set all the furniture in motion, before the idea of an earthquake had occurred to our minds. This first shock was followed by another of longer duration, but less alarming character; it was like the undulation of the waves when they are seeking to recover their equilibrium. The whole house was filled with dismay, except the party in the drawing-room; with us surprise prevailed over fear, and we remained motionless as statues, whilst every one else was running out of doors. The earthquake, of which mention has been made in several journals, gave occasion to a ludicrous story that was related to us some days after.

One of the general's peasants, an old fellow whose conscience was no doubt burthened with some weighty sin, imagined when he felt his house dancing like a boat on the waves, that the devil in person was come to bid him prepare to accompany him to the bottomless pit. Tearing out his hair by the roots, bawling, roaring, and crossing himself, he begins to confess his sins aloud, and gives himself up to the most violent terror and despair. His wife, who was no less alarmed, accused her husband of all sorts of wickedness; the husband retorted on the wife, and the whole night was passed in unspeakable confusion. The day dawned, but brought no comfort to the unfortunate sinner, whose spirits were all in a ferment, like new wine. Fully assured that the devil would soon come and lay his claws on him, he had no thought of going to his daily work. His wife was equally regardless of her household cares; what was the use of her preparing the porridge, when she and her husband were sure of breakfasting with Lucifer? So there they sat, waiting the fatal moment, with an anxiety that would have petrified them at last, but for an unexpected incident. All the other peasants, probably having less on their consciences, had been a-field since dawn. The head man of the village missed Petrovitch and his wife; he waited for them some hours, and at last bent his steps towards their cabin, calculating as he went how many stripes of the knout he should administer to them for their unpardonable neglect of duty. He steps in, but no one seems to notice his presence. Petrovitch sits huddled together in a corner, [Pg 46] staring before him with glassy eyes; whilst his wife, on her knees before a picture of St. Nicholas, never for a moment interrupts her crossings and lamentations. "Hallo! what's all this?" cries the overseer, "have you lost your wits, and don't you know that you ought to have been at work hours ago?" "Oh Ivan Ivanovitch, it's all over; I shall never work again." "Not work again, wont you? we shall see. Come, start, booby!" And down comes the knout on the back of the peasant, who receives the blows with the most stoical composure. "O beat me if you like; it's all the same. What signify a few blows more or less, when a body is going to be roasted with the fiends?" "What on earth do you mean?" said the puzzled overseer; "what has happened to you to make you talk such nonsense?" "Nonsense here, or nonsense there, I have had a warning in the night." Ivan now recollected the earthquake, and suspecting he had found a clue to the mystery, burst into a hearty fit of laughter. "Oh, you may laugh; but you don't know that I am a great sinner, and that the devil came last night to claim my soul." After amusing himself sufficiently with the man's terrors, the overseer had the utmost difficulty in convincing him that all the other houses had been shaken like his own, and that the devil had nothing to do with the matter.

Sledge driving is one of the greatest amusements of the Russian winter. The horses, stimulated by the cold, sweep with you over the plain with the most mettlesome impetuosity. In the twinkling of an eye, you have left behind you the whole surface of a frozen lake, measuring several versts in length. It is a downright steeplechase: the keenness of the air, the rapid motion, the shouts of the driver urging the willing steeds, the vast plain that seems to enlarge as you advance, all produce an intense excitement, and pleasurably dispel the torpor caused by the indolent life of the steppes. We frequently crossed the Dniepr in this manner, to drive about the streets of Kherson, where all the fashion of the neighbourhood rendezvous from noon to two o'clock. It is an exercise which has as much charm for the Russians as for foreigners; the smallest landowner, or the lowest clerk in a public office, though he earns but a few rubles a year, must have his sledge and his two horses, if he starves for it half the year. At the usual hour you may reckon more than a hundred sledges of every form, most of them covered with rich rugs and furs, chasing each other through the streets, and each containing a gentleman and lady, and a driver furred from head to foot. This sort of amusement is an admirable aid to coquetry. Nothing can be more fascinating than those female figures wrapped up in pelisses, and with their faces dimly seen through their blonde veils; appearing for an instant, and then vanishing into the vaporous atmosphere, followed by many a tender glance.

I must say a few words as to the field sports of the steppes. Shooting parties use a very long low carriage called a *dolgushka*, and accommodating more than fifteen persons seated back to back. The feet rest on a board on each side about a foot from the ground. Behind the driver is a [Pg 47] large box for holding provisions and all the accoutrements of the sportsmen; and the game is received in another box fixed at the end of the carriage. Nothing can be more convenient for country parties. The *dolgushka* is drawn by four horses yoked abreast; birds are much less afraid

of it than of a man on foot, and come near enough to allow the sportsman to shoot without alighting. Parties often amounting to many hundreds, both nobles and peasants, assemble for the pursuit of wolves, foxes, and hares. The usual scene of these hunts is a desert island belonging to General Potier. They begin by a general beating of the steppes, whereupon the wild animals cross the ice to the little island, thinking to be safe there from the balls of their pursuers; but their retreat is soon invaded. The hunters form a circle round the island, and then begins a slaughter that for some time clears the country of those sheep devourers. Two or three battues of this kind take place every year, chiefly for the purpose of destroying the wolves that come in flocks and carry dismay into the sheep-folds.

Among the peculiarities presented by the plains of the Black Sea, I must not omit to mention the extensive conflagrations that regularly take place in winter, and remind one of the scenes witnessed by many travellers in the prairies of America. In Russia, it is the inhabitants themselves who set fire to the steppes, thinking that by thus clearing away the withered herbage from the surface, they favour the growth of the new grass. But the flames being often driven by the winds in all directions, and over immense surfaces, now and then occasion great disasters; and there have been instances in which sheep-folds and whole flocks have been consumed.

The thaw begins on the Dniepr, about the end of March. It is preceded by dull cracklings and muffled sounds, giving token that the river is awakening from its long icy sleep, and is about to burst its prison. All communication between the farms and Kherson is interrupted for more than six weeks; posts of Cossacks stationed along the banks, give notice of the danger of crossing; but as the temperature is continually changing at that season, the final break-up does not take place for a long while.

At the beginning of the thaw we persisted in going to Kherson, in opposition to all advice. When we came to the banks of the Dniepr and manifested our intention of crossing, all the boatmen stared at us in amazement, and not one of them would let us hire his sledge. We were therefore about to give up our project, when we saw two or three gentlemen coming towards us on foot across the Dniepr, followed by an empty sledge. They told us that the river was partially clear of ice opposite Kherson, and that it would be extremely dangerous to attempt crossing in a sledge. They had left Kherson at six in the morning, (it was then ten) and had been all that time engaged in effecting their passage. They united with the boatmen in dissuading us from undertaking such a journey, the danger of which was now the greater, inasmuch as the sun had acquired much [Pg 48] power since the morning; but all was of no avail; their sledge which they placed at our disposal decided the business, and we embarked gaily, preceded by a boatman, whom our example had encouraged, and who was to sound the ice before us. A glowing sun streamed over the vast sheet of ice, raising from it a bluish vapour, which the driver and the guide watched with lively anxiety. Notwithstanding their looks of uneasiness we pushed on rapidly, and the boatman was oftener on the sledge than in advance of it. By and by, however, the sounds of cracking ice growing more and more frequent, rather cast a gloom over our imaginations, and made us begin to fear that we should meet with more serious obstacles further on. We saw the ice melting in some degree beneath the rays of the sun, and gradually parting from the shores of the islands we were coasting; and what still more augmented our uneasiness, was the elasticity of the ice, which bent very visibly under the motion of our sledge. Its gradual rise and fall seemed like the breathing of the river, becoming more and more distinct as the ice diminished in thickness. As our guide still continued to advance, we had no other course than to follow him, and so we came to an arm of the Dniepr, which is much dreaded on account of its current, the rapidity of which does not allow the ice to acquire much solidity even in the most intense frosts. We all proceeded to cross it on foot, each maneuvering as best he could on a surface as smooth as a mirror. At last, notwithstanding our zigzags, our tumbles, and the splitting of the ice, we found ourselves safe over the perilous passage, very much delighted at having escaped so well, and at feeling solid ground under our feet. We had then more than two versts to travel over an island, before we came to the branch of the river opposite Kherson. With the utmost confidence, then, we seated ourselves once more in the sledge, and bounded away at full speed over a soft surface of snow melting rapidly in the sun. But it is always when the mind is most at ease, that accidents seem to take a malicious pleasure in surprising us. A wide crevice, which the driver had not time to avoid, suddenly yawned athwart our course; the sledge was immediately upset, and we were all pitched out. My husband, who was seated on the top of the baggage, was quite stunned by the blow; the driver and the guide, who were thrown a considerable distance from the sledge, remained motionless likewise; and as for me, I found myself rolled up in my pelisse in the middle of a bush. When I cast a look on my companions in misfortune, they were beginning to stir and to feel themselves all over. They seemed in no hurry to get up, and they cut such piteous figures, that I could not help laughing most heartily. Notwithstanding our bruises we were soon on our legs, with the certainty that none of our bones were broken. The driver limped back to his seat, in great amazement at not receiving a severe castigation for his awkwardness. Had this mishap occurred to Russians, the poor fellow would not have escaped with less than a sound drubbing. [Pg 49] We were more magnanimous, and imputed wholly to fortune an accident which, indeed, could not easily have been avoided.

Our journey continued without much to alarm us, until we were just about to commit ourselves to the wide arm of the Dniepr, that still lay between us and the town. Its surface presented an appearance that was really frightful. Enormous banks of ice were beginning to move, and had already left a great part of the river exposed. Besides this, the ice that still remained fixed, was so intersected with clefts, that we could not advance without serious danger. Our position was becoming more and more critical, and we were thinking of returning to the island we had just left, and waiting until a boat could take us across to Kherson; but as there would probably have

been as much risk in returning as in proceeding, we continued our route but with the utmost caution. The first glow of exulting boldness was over, and we sorely regretted our temerity. The floor that separated us from the waters seemed so treacherous, that we every moment despaired of escape. This state of perplexity lasted more than an hour; but at last we reached the vessels that were ice-locked at some distance from the harbour. We were now in safety, and we finished our perilous expedition in a boat.

Two days afterwards a southerly wind had almost completely swept away the immense sheet of ice that for so many months had imprisoned the waters of the Dniepr. The thaw took place so rapidly, that the river was free before any one could have noted the progress of its deliverance. In eight days there was not a vestige of ice, and we returned to Clarofka, without experiencing any of the emotions we had felt on our first rash and picturesque expedition. But this mild weather, very unusual in the month of March, soon gave place to sharp frosts, which renewed the winter mantle of the Dniepr, and did not entirely cease until the beginning of April. At this season the steppes begin to be clothed with a magnificent vegetation, and in a few days they have the appearance of a boundless meadow, full of thyme, hyacinths, tulips, pinks, and an infinity of other wild flowers of great sweetness and beauty. Thousands of larks nestle in the grass, and carol everywhere over the traveller's head. The sea, too, partakes in the common gladness of the general season. Its shells are more beautiful and more numerous; its hues are more varied, and its murmurs gentler. Plants and animals seem all in haste to live and reproduce their kind, as if they foresaw the brief duration of these pleasant days. Elsewhere, summer is often but a continuation of spring; fresh blossoms come forth, and nature retains her vital power for a long period; but here a fortnight or three weeks are enough to change the vernal freshness of the landscape into a sun-burnt waste. In all these countries there are really but two seasons; you pass from intense cold to a Senegal heat; without the body having time to accustom itself to this sudden change of temperature. The sea-breezes alone make it possible to endure the heat which [Pg 50] in July and August almost always amounts to 94° or 95°.

The thing to which the stranger finds it most difficult to accustom his eyes in Russia, is the horrible sheep-skins in which men, women, and children are muffled at all times of the year. These half-tanned skins, which are worn with the wool inwards, give them a savage appearance, which is increased in the men by the long beard and moustaches they invariably wear. Yet there are handsome faces to be seen among the Russian peasants, and in this respect Nature has been much more liberal to the men than to the women, who are generally very ugly. The dress of the latter consists in a shift with wide sleeves, fitting tight round the throat, and trimmed with coloured cotton, and a petticoat fastened below the bosom. Instead of a petticoat, girls commonly wear a piece of woollen stuff, which laps across in front, without forming a single plait, and is fastened by a long, narrow scarf, embroidered at the ends. Their legs are quite bare, and any rather sudden movement may open their singular garment more than is consistent with decorum. On holidays they add to their ordinary attire a large muslin cap, and an apron of the same material, adorned with a wide flounce. Their hair is tied up with ribands, into two tresses, that fall on their shoulders, or are twisted into a crown on the top of the head. When they marry, they cease to wear their hair uncovered; a handkerchief of a glaring colour is then their usual head-dress. We are now speaking only of the women of Little Russia; but those of Great Russia retain the national costume called *serafine*, which is very picturesque, and is still worn at court on special occasions.

The women of Little Russia, accustomed to field labour from their childhood, and usually marrying at the age of fifteen or sixteen, are old before they have reached their thirtieth year; indeed, one can hardly say when they cease to be young, since they never exhibit the bloom of youth. Whether a Russian woman's age be fifteen, twenty, or thirty, it is all one in the end. Immediately after childhood, her limbs are as masculine, her features as hard, her skin as tanned, and her voice as rough as at a more advanced age. So much has been written about the relaxed morals and the drunkenness of the Russian peasants, that we need not dwell on the subject. We shall only say that their deplorable passion for strong liquors, is continually on the increase, and that most of the young women are as much addicted to them as the old. It frequently happens that a peasant and his wife go on Sunday to a *kabak*, drench themselves with brandy, and on their way back fall dead drunk into some gully, where they pass the whole night without being aware of their change of domicile.

A fondness for dancing is another distinguishing characteristic of this people. You often see a party of both sexes assemble after work, and continue dancing all the evening. The Ruthenians are remarkable for their gaiety and extreme indifference to worldly cares. Leaving to their [Pg 51] masters the whole trouble of providing for their lodging and maintenance, they never concern themselves about the future. Their tasks once ended, they think only of repose, and seldom entertain any idea of working for themselves. When you pass through their villages, you never see the peasants busy in repairing their hedges, cultivating their gardens, mending their implements, or doing any thing else that bespeaks any regard for domestic comforts. No—the Russian works only because he is forced to do so; when he returns from his labour, he stretches himself out to sleep on his stove, or goes and gets drunk at the next *kabak*. A curious custom I have noticed in Southern Russia, and which is common to all classes, is that of chewing the seeds of the melon or the sunflower, from morning till night. In order to indulge this taste, every one dries in the sun the seeds of all the melons he eats during the summer, and puts by his stock for the winter. I have seen many wives of *pometchiks* (landowners) pass their whole day in indulging this queer appetite.

In Russia, as in all imperfectly civilised countries, religious ceremonies still retain all their

ancient influence. They afford the peasant a season of pleasure and emancipation, that makes him for a moment forget his thraldom, to revel in intoxication. Full of superstition, and indolent to an extreme degree, he longs impatiently for the interval of relaxation that allows him to indulge his favourite propensities. For him the whole sum and substance of every religious festival consists in cessation from toil, and in outward practices of devotion that bear a strong impress of gross idolatry. The Russian thinks he perfectly understands and fulfils his religion, if he makes innumerable signs of the cross and genuflections before the smoky picture that adorns his isbas, and scrupulously observes those two commandments of the Church, to fast and make lenten fare. His conscience is then quite at ease, even though it should be burdened with the most atrocious crimes. Theft, drunkenness, and even murder, excite in him much less horror than the mere idea of breaking fast or eating animal food on Friday.

Nothing can exceed the depravity of the Russian clergy; and their ignorance is on a par with their vicious propensities. Most of the monks and priests pass their lives in disgraceful intoxication, that renders them incapable of decently discharging their religious duties. The priestly office is regarded in Russia, not as a sacred calling, but as a means of escaping from slavery and attaining nobility. The monks, deacons, and priests, that swarm in the churches and monasteries, are almost all sons of peasants who have entered the Church, that they may no longer be liable to the knout, and above all to the misfortune of being made soldiers. But though thereby acquiring the right to plunder the serfs, and catechise them after their own fashion, they cannot efface the stain of their birth, and they continue to be regarded by the nobility with that sovereign disdain which the latter profess for all who are not sprung from their own caste. The [Pg 52] great and the petty nobles are perfectly agreed in this respect, and it is not uncommon to see a pometshik raise his hand to strike a pope, whilst the latter humbly bows his head to receive the chastisement. This resignation, which would be exemplary if it were to be ascribed to evangelical humility, is here but the result of the base and crouching character of the slave, of which the Russian priest cannot divest himself, even in the midst of the highest functions of his spiritual life.

The appearance of the popes provokes equal disgust and astonishment. To see those men, whose neglected beards, besotted faces, and filthy dress, indicate a total want of all decent self-respect, it is impossible to persuade oneself that such persons can be apostles of the divine word. As usual in the Greek Church, they are all married and have large families. You may look in vain in their dwellings for any indication of their sacred character. A few coarsely-coloured pictures of saints, and a few books flung into a corner of the room, in which the whole family are huddled together, are the only marks of the profession exercised by the master of the house. As they receive nothing from the state, it is the unfortunate serfs who must support their establishments, and even supply them with the means of indulging their gluttony and drunkenness. It is particularly on the eve of a great Church festival, that the Russian priest is sure of an abundant harvest of poultry, eggs, and meal. Easter is the most remarkable of these festivals, and lasts a whole week. During the preceding seven weeks of Lent, the Russian must not eat either eggs, meat, fish, oil, butter, or cheese. His diet consists only of salted cucumbers, boiled vegetables, and different kinds of porridge. The fortitude with which he endures so long a penance, proves the mighty influence which religious ideas possess over such rude minds. During the last few days that precede the festival, he is not allowed to take any food before sunset, and then it may be fairly admitted that brandy is a real blessing for him.

It is impossible to imagine all the discussions that take place between the popes and the peasants on these occasions. As the Russian must then fulfil his religious duties, whether he will or not, he is at the mercy of the priest, who of course makes him pay as dearly as he can for absolution, and keeps a regular tariff, in which offences and punishments are set down with minute precision. Thus for a theft, so many dozens of eggs; for breach of a fast, so many chickens, &c. If the serf is refractory, the punishment is doubled, and nothing can save him from it. The thought of complaining to his lord of the pope's extortionate cupidity never enters his head; for assuredly, if he were to adopt such a course, he would think himself damned to all eternity.

As long as the holidays last, the lords keep open table, and every one is free to enter and take part in the banquet. Such was the practice of the *knias* (princes) and boyards of old, who lived as sovereigns in their feudal mansions, and extended their hospitality to all strangers, without [Pg 53] distinction of country or lineage. Many travellers allege that this patriarchal custom still prevails in some families of Great Russia. But here, except on gala days, most of the pometshiks live in such a shabby style, as gives but a poor idea of their means or of their dispositions.

To return to our Easter holidays: the last week of Lent is employed in making an immense quantity of cakes, buns, and Easter bread, and in staining eggs with all sorts of colours. A painter was brought expressly from Kherson to our entertainer's mansion for this purpose, and he painted more than 1000 eggs, most of them adorned with cherubims, fat-cheeked angels, virgins, and all the saints in paradise. The whole farm was turned topsy-turvy, the work was interrupted, and the steward's authority suspended. Every one was eager to assist in the preparations for merry making; some put up the swings, others arranged the ball-room; some were intent on their devotions, others half-smothered themselves in the vapour baths, which are one of the most favourite indulgences of the Russian people: all in short were busy in one way or other. A man with a barrel organ had been engaged for a long while beforehand, and when he arrived every face beamed with joy. The Russians are passionately fond of music. Often in the long summer evenings, after their tasks are ended, they sit in a circle and sing with a precision and harmony that evince a great natural aptitude for music. Their tunes are very simple and full of melancholy;

and as their plaintive strains are heard rising at evening from some lonely spot in the midst of the desert plain, they often produce emotions, such as more scientific compositions do not always awaken.

At last Easter day was come. In the morning we were greatly surprised to find our sitting-room filled with men who were waiting for us, and were meanwhile refreshing themselves with copious potations of brandy. The evening before we had been sent two bottles of that liquor, and a large basket of cakes and painted eggs, but without any intimation of the use they were to be put to; but we at once understood the meaning of this measure, when we saw all these peasants in their Sunday trim, and a domestic serving out drink to them, by way I suppose of beguiling the time until we made our appearance.

The moment my husband entered the room, all those red-bearded fellows surrounded him, and each with great gravity presented him with a painted egg, accompanying the gift with three stout kisses. In compliance with the custom of the country my husband had to give each of them an egg in return, and a glass of brandy, after first putting it to his own lips. But the ceremony did not end there: *Kooda barinya? kooda barinya?* (where is madame), *nadlegit* (it must be so), and so I was forced to come among them and receive my share of the eggs and embraces. During all Easter week the peasant has a right to embrace whomsoever he pleases, not even excepting the emperor and the empress. This is a relic of the old patriarchal manners which prevailed so long unaltered all over northern Europe. In Russia, particularly, where extremes meet, the peasant to [Pg 54] this day addresses the czar with *thou* and *thee*, and calls him father in speaking to him.

When we had got rid of these queer visitors we repaired to the parlour, where the morning repast was served up with a profusion worthy of the times of Pantagruel. In the centre of the table stood a sucking pig flanked with small hams, German sausages, chitterlings, black puddings, and large dishes of game. A magnificent pie containing at least a dozen hares, towered like a fortress at one end of the table, and seemed quite capable of sustaining the most vehement onslaught of the assailants. The sondag and the sterlet, those choice fish of Southern Russia, garnished with aromatic herbs, betokened the vicinity of the sea. Imagine, in addition to all these things, all sorts of cordial waters, glass vases filled with preserves, and a multitude of sponge cake castles, with their platforms frosted and heaped with bonbons, and the reader will have an idea of the profuse good cheer displayed by the Russian lords on such occasions.

General Potier, surrounded by all his household retinue, and by some other guests, impatiently awaited the arrival of the pope, whose benediction was an indispensable preliminary to the banquet. He arrived at ten o'clock precisely, accompanied by a monk, and began to chant a hallelujah, walking two or three times round the table; then blessing each dish separately, he concluded by bravely attacking the sucking pig, to the best part of which he helped himself. This was the signal to begin; every one laid hold on what he liked without ceremony; the pie, the hams, and the fish, all vanished. For more than a quarter of an hour nothing was to be heard but a continual noise of knives and forks, jaws munching, and glasses hobnobbing. The pope set a bright example, and his rubicund face fully declared the pleasure he took in fulfilling such functions of his office.

The Russians in general are remarkable for gluttony, such as perhaps is without a parallel elsewhere. The rudeness of their climate and their strong digestive powers would account for this. They make five meals daily, and those so copious and substantial that one of them would alone be amply sufficient for an inhabitant of the south.

During the repast a choir of girls stood before the windows and sang several national airs in a very pleasing style; after which they received the usual gratuity of nuts with tokens of the liveliest glee. The Russians are strict observers of all ancestral customs, and Easter would be no Easter for them if it came without eggs or nuts.

On leaving the breakfast table we proceeded to the place where the sports were held; but there I saw nothing of that hearty merriment that elsewhere accompanies a popular holiday. The women, in their best attire, clung to the swings, I will not say gracefully, but very bodily, and in a manner to shame the men, who found less pleasure in looking at them than in gorging themselves with brandy in their smoky *kabaks*. Others danced to the sound of the organ with cavaliers, whose zigzag movements told of plenteous libations. Some old women nearly dead drunk went from one group to another singing obscene songs, and falling here and there in the [Pg 55] middle of the road, without any one thinking of picking them up.

We noticed on this occasion an essential characteristic of the Russian people. In this scene of universal drunkenness there was no quarrelling; not a blow was struck. Nothing can rouse the Russians from their apathy; nothing can quicken the dull current of their blood; they are slaves even in drink.

Next day we went to dine with one of the general's neighbours, who gave us a most sumptuous reception. Before we sat down to table, we were shown into a small room with a side-board loaded with cold meat, caviar, salted cucumbers, and liqueurs, all intended to whet our appetites. This collation, which the Russians call *sagouska*, always precedes their meals; they are not content with their natural appetite, but have recourse to stimulants that they may the better perform their parts at table.

All the time of dinner we were entertained by a choir of forty young men who sang some fine harmonised pieces, and some Cossack airs that pleased us much. Our entertainer was one of the richest landowners in New Russia, and his manner of living partakes of many of the old national usages. His musicians are slaves taught by an Italian long attached to the establishment in the

capacity of chapel master.

Such are the Easter festivities. As the reader will perceive, they consist on the whole in eating and drinking inordinately. The whole week is spent in this way, and during all that time the authority of the master is almost in abeyance; the coachman deserts the stables, the cook the kitchen, the housekeeper her store-room; all are drunk, all are merry-making, all are intent on enjoying a season of liberty so long anticipated with impatience.

The rejoicings in the town are of the same character. The *katchellni*, a sort of fair lasting three days, brings together all classes of society. The nobles and the government servants ride about in carriages, but the populace amuse themselves just as they do in the country, only they have the pleasure of getting drunk in better company.

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# CHAPTER IX.

EXCURSION ON THE BANKS OF THE DNIEPR—DOUTCHINA—ELECTION OF THE MARSHALS AND JUDGES OF THE NOBILITY AT KHERSON—HORSE-RACING—STRANGE STORY IN THE "JOURNAL DES DÉBATS"—A COUNTRY HOUSE AND ITS VISITERS—TRAITS OF RUSSIAN MANNERS—THE WIFE OF TWO HUSBANDS—SERVANTS—MURDER OF A COURIER—APPENDIX.

We left Clarofka in May, to explore the banks of the Dniepr, and the shores of the Sea of Azov. The object we had in view was purely scientific, but the journey became doubly interesting by affording us a closer insight into the habits of Russian society, and the manner in which noble families live on their estates. I had intended to visit Taganrok, but on this occasion I proceeded no further than Doutchina, the property of a Baroness de Bervick, who most hospitably insisted on my remaining with her whilst my husband was continuing his geological researches in the country of the Cossacks. [Pg 56]

Doutchina is situated on the post-road from Kherson to Iekaterinoslav, in a broad ravine formed by a brook that falls into the Dniepr a little way from the village. From the high ground over which the road passes, the eye suddenly looks down on a beautiful landscape—a most welcome surprise for the traveller who has just passed over some hundred versts of uncultivated plains.

In Russia, travelling is not, as elsewhere, synonymous with seeing new sights. In vain your *troïka* bears you along with dizzy speed; in vain you pass hours, days, and nights in posting; still you have before your eyes the same steppe that seems to lengthen out before you as you advance, the same horizon, the same cold stern lines, the same snow or sunshine; and nothing either in the temperature or the aspect of the ground indicates that you have accomplished any change of place.

It is only in the vicinity of the great rivers that the country assumes a different aspect, and the wearied eye at last enjoys the pleasure of encountering more limited horizons, a more verdant vegetation, and a landscape more varied in its outlines. Among these rivers, the Dniepr claims one of the foremost places, from the length of its course, the volume of its waters, and the deep bed it has excavated for itself athwart the plains of Southern Russia. But nowhere does it present more charming views than from the height I have just mentioned and its vicinity. After having spread out to the breadth of nearly a league, it parts into a multitude of channels, that wind through forests of oaks, alders, poplars, and aspens, whose vigorous growth bespeaks the richness of a virgin soil. The groups of islands capriciously breaking the surface of the waters, have a melancholy beauty and a primitive character scarcely to be seen except in those vast wildernesses where man has left no traces of his presence. Nothing in our country at all resembles this kind of landscape. With us, the creature has everywhere refashioned the work of the Creator; the mark of his hand appears even on the most inaccessible mountains; whereas, in Russia, where the nobles are the sole proprietors, nature still remains, in many places, just as God created it. Thus these plavniks[3] of the Dniepr, seldom touched by the woodman's axe, have all the wild majesty of the forests of the new world. For some time after my arrival at Doutchina, I found an endless source of delight in contemplating those majestic scenes, lighted by a pale sky, and veiled in light mists, that gave them a tinge of sadness, sometimes more pleasing than the glare of noon. [Pg 57]

Doutchina, situated, as I have said, on a ledge of a ravine that ends in the plavniks, is altogether unlike the other villages of Russia. Its pretty cottages, separated by gardens and groups of fruit-trees, its picturesque site and magnificent environs, strikingly remind one of the Danube, near Vienna. The whole country, as far as one can see from the highest point of the road, belongs to the Baroness of Bervick, and forms one of the most valuable estates in the neighbourhood. But her residence is strangely unsuited to her fortune, being a mere cabin, open to every wind, and fit, at most, for a sporting lodge. As we looked on this shabby abode, we were

amazed that a wealthy lady, still young and handsome, should be content to inhabit it, and to endure a multitude of privations, which we should have thought intolerable to a person of her station. At the time we became this lady's guest, she had left France about eighteen months, to reside on this property, bequeathed to her by her late husband.

Some days after my husband's departure we set out for Kherson, where the elections of the marshals and judges of the nobility were soon to take place. All the great families of the government of Kherson were already assembled in the town, and gave it an appearance of animation to which it had long been a stranger. These elections, which take place only every three years, are occasions for balls and parties, to which the pometchiks and their wives look forward with eager anticipation. For more than a fortnight the town is thronged with officers of all ranks, and elegant equipages with four horses, that give the streets and promenades an unusually gay appearance. The Russians spare no expense on these occasions of display. Many a petty proprietor's wife, who lives all the year on *kash*[4] and dried fish, contrives at this period to out-do the ladies of the town in costly finery.

The amusements began with a horse-race, which made some noise in the world in consequence of an article in the *Journal des Débats*. Those who have any curiosity to know how one may mystify a newspaper, and amuse oneself at the expense of a credulous public, have but to read a certain number of the year 1838, which positively alleges, that forty ladies, headed by the young and beautiful Narishkin, appeared on the course as jockeys, rode their own horses, &c., and a thousand other things still more absurd and incredible. All I can say of this race, at which I was present, is, that it was like every other affair of the kind, and was not distinguished by any remarkable incident or romantic adventure. Eight horses started, one of which belonged to the Countess Voronzof and another to General Narishkin, and the riders were not lovely ladies, but rather clumsy grooms. The first prize, a large silver cup worth 1500 rubles, was won by the [Pg 58] Countess Voronzof's Atalanta: the second was carried off by the general's horse. Such is the way in which these things always end, and the consequence may very likely be, that the races will cease altogether. The landowners know very well that their horses stand no chance against those belonging to great people, and as they are sure of being beaten they will at last grow tired of the mock contest. The Countess Voronzof ought to consider that these races are not merely an amusement, but that they were instituted for the purpose of encouraging the improvement of the breed of horses.

After the race there was a grand dinner at the general commandant's, which was attended by all the rank and fashion then assembled in Kherson. It was at this dinner I first remarked the custom observed by the Russians of placing the gentlemen on one side of the table and the ladies on the other, a custom both unsightly and injurious to conversation. It has almost fallen into disuse in Odessa, like all the other national practices; but in the provincial towns it would still be thought a deadly insult to a lady to help her after a gentleman, and no doubt it is in order to avoid such a breach of politeness that the ladies are all ranged together in one row.

The nobility of the district gave a grand ball that evening in one of the club-rooms, and there I noticed all the contrasts that form the ground-work of Russian manners. The mixture of refinement and barbarism, of gallantry and grossness, which this people exhibits on all occasions, shows how young it still is in civilisation. Here were officers in splendid uniforms and ladies blazing with diamonds, dancing and playing cards in a very ugly room with old patched and plastered walls, dimly lighted by a few shabby lamps, and they were as intent on their pleasures as if they were in a court drawing-room, and never seemed to think that there was any thing at all offensive to the sight in the accommodations around them. The refreshments, consisting of dried fruits and *eau sucrée*, were in as much demand as the best ices and sherbets could have been. The same inconsistency was displayed in the behaviour of the gentlemen towards the ladies. Though ready, like the Poles, to drink every man of them to his fancy's queen out of the heel of her shoe, they did not think it unbecoming to take their places alone in the quadrilles, neither troubling themselves to go in search of their partners nor escorting them back to their seats after the dance. Setting aside, however, this total want of tact, they perfectly imitate all the outward shows and forms of politeness.

A final ball, given by the governor at the conclusion of the election, was much more brilliant than those of the noblesse, and satisfied my critical eye in every respect. Every thing testified the taste and opulence of our entertainer. A splendid supper was served up at midnight, and a chorus of young lads sang some national airs, full of that grave and melancholy sweetness that [Pg 59] constitutes the charm of Russian music. When the champagne was sent round the governor rose and made a speech in Russian, which was responded to by a general hurrah: the healths of the emperor, the empress, and the rest of the imperial family, were then drunk with shouts of joy; the married ladies were next toasted, then the unmarried, who were cheered with frantic acclamations. These duties being accomplished, the company returned to the ball-room, where dancing was kept up until morning. This entertainment was perfect in its kind; but, in accordance with the national habits, it was destined to end in an orgy. We learned the next day that the dawn had found the gentlemen eating, drinking, and fighting lustily. It was reckoned that 150 bottles of champagne were emptied on this occasion, and as the price of each bottle is eighteen francs, the reader may hence form some idea of Russian profusion.

Two days afterwards we left Kherson for the country seat of the marshal of the nobles, where a large party was already assembled. The manner in which hospitality is exercised in Russia is very convenient, and entails no great outlay in the matter of upholstery. Those who receive visiters give themselves very little concern as to whether their guests are well or ill lodged, provided they can offer them a good table; it never occurs to them that a good bed, and a room provided with

some articles of furniture, are to some persons quite as acceptable as a good dinner. Whatever has no reference to the comfort of the stomach, lies beyond the range of Russian politeness, and the stranger must make up his account accordingly. As we were the last comers, we fared very queerly in point of lodging, being thrust four or five of us into one room, with no other furniture than two miserable bedsteads; and there we were left to shift for ourselves as we could. The house is very handsome in appearance; but for all its portico, its terrace, and its grand halls, it only contains two or three rooms for reception, and a few garrets, graced with the name of bed-rooms. Ostentation is inherent in the Russian character, but it abounds especially among the petty nobles, who lavish away their whole income in outward show. They must have equipages with four horses, billiard-rooms, grand drawing-rooms, pianos, &c. And if they can procure all these superfluities, they are quite content to live on mujik's fare, and to sleep in beds without any thing in the shape of sheets.

Articles of furniture, the most indispensable, are totally unknown in the dwellings of most of the second-rate nobles. Notwithstanding the vaunted progress of Russian civilisation, it is almost impossible to find a basin and ewer in a bed-room. Bedsteads are almost as great rarities, and almost invariably you have nothing but a divan on which you may pass the night. You may deem yourself singularly fortunate if the mistress of the mansion thinks of sending you a blanket and a pillow; but this is so unusual a piece of good luck that you must never reckon upon it. In their own persons the Russians set an example of truly Spartan habits, as I had many opportunities of [Pg 60] perceiving during my stay in the marshal's house. No one, the marshal himself not excepted, had a private chamber; his eldest daughter, though a very elegant and charming young lady, lay on the floor, wrapped up in a cloak like an old veteran. His wife, with three or four young children, passed the night in a closet that served as boudoir by day, and he himself made his bed on one of the divans of the grand saloon. As for the visiters, some slept on the billiard-table; others, like ourselves, scrambled for a few paltry stump bedsteads, whilst the most philosophical wore away the night in drinking and gambling.

I say nothing as to the manner in which the domestic servants are lodged; a good guess as to this matter may be easily made from what I have just said of their masters. Besides, it is a settled point in Russia never to take any heed for servants; they eat, drink, and sleep, how and where they can, and their masters never think of asking a word about the matter. The family whose guests we were was very large, and furnished us with themes for many a remark on the national usages, and the notions respecting education that are in vogue in the empire. A Swiss governess is an indispensable piece of furniture in every house in which there are many children. She must teach them to read, write, and speak French, and play a few mazurkas on the piano. No more is required of her; for solid instruction is a thing almost unknown among the petty nobles. A girl of fifteen has completed her education if she can do the honours of the drawing-room, and warble a few French romances. Yet I have met with several exceptions to this rule, foremost among which I must note our host's pretty daughter Loubinka, who, thanks to a sound understanding and quick apprehension, has acquired such a stock of information as very few Russian ladies possess.

It is only among those families that constantly reside on their estates that we still find in full vigour all those prejudices, superstitions, and usages of old Russia, that are handed down as heir-looms from generation to generation, and keep strong hold on all the rustic nobility. No people are more superstitious than the Russians; the sight of two crossed forks, or of a salt-cellar upset, will make them turn pale and tremble with terror. There are unlucky days on which nothing could induce them to set out on a journey or begin any business. Monday especially is marked with a red cross in their calendar, and woe to the man who would dare to brave its malign influence.

Among the Russian customs most sedulously preserved is that of mutual salutations after meals. Nothing can be more amusing than to see all the persons round the table bowing right and left with a gravity that proves the importance they attach to a formality so singular in our eyes. The children set the example by respectfully kissing the hands of their parents. In all social meetings etiquette peremptorily requires that the young ladies, instead of sitting in the drawing-room, shall remain by themselves in an adjoining apartment, and not allow any young man to [Pg 61] approach them. If there is dancing the gravest matron in the company goes and brings them almost by force into the ball-room. Once there they may indulge their youthful vivacity without restraint; but on no pretext are they to withdraw from beneath the eyes of their mothers or chaperons. It would be ruinous to a young lady's reputation to be caught in a *tête-á-tête* with a young man within two steps of the ball-room. But all this prudery extends no further than outward forms, and it would be a grand mistake to suppose that there is more morality in Russia than elsewhere. Genuine virtue, such as is based on sound principles and an enlightened education is not very common there. Young girls are jealously guarded, because the practice is in accordance with the general habits and feelings of the country, and little reliance is placed in their own sense of propriety. But once married, they acquire the right of conducting themselves as they please, and the husband would find it a hard matter to control their actions. Though divorces are almost impossible to obtain, it does not follow that all wives remain with their husbands; on the contrary, nothing is more common than amicable arrangements between married people to wink at each other's peccadilloes; such conventions excite no scandal, and do not exclude the wife from society. One of these divorces I will mention, which is perhaps without a parallel in the annals of the civilised world.

A very pretty and sprightly young Polish lady was married to a man of great wealth, but much older than herself, and a thorough Muscovite in coarseness of character and habits. After two or three years spent in wrangling and plaguing each other, the ill-assorted pair resolved to travel, in the hopes of escaping the intolerable sort of life they led at home. A residence in Italy, the chosen

land of intrigues and illicit amours, soon settled the case. The young wife eloped with an Italian nobleman, whose passion ere long grew so intense that nothing would satisfy him short of a legal sanction of their union. Divorces, as every one knows, are easily obtained in the pope's dominions. Madame de K. had therefore no difficulty in causing her marriage to be annulled, especially with the help of her lord and master, who, for the first time since they had come together, agreed with her, heart and soul. Every thing was promptly arranged, and *Monsieur* carried his complaisance so far as to be present as an official witness at *Madame's* wedding, doubtless for the purpose of thoroughly making sure of its validity. Three or four children were the fruit of this new union; but the lady's happiness was of short duration. Her domestic peace was destroyed by the intrigues of her second husband's family; perhaps, too, the Italian's love had cooled; be this as it may, after some months of miserable struggles and humiliations, sentence of separation was finally pronounced against her, and she found herself suddenly without fortune or protector, burdened with a young family, and weighed down with fearful anticipations of the future. Her first step was to leave a country where such cruel calamities had [Pg 62] befallen her, and to return to Podolia, the land of her birth. Hitherto her story is like hundreds of others, and I should not have thought of narrating it had it ended there; but what almost surpasses belief, and gives it a stamp of originality altogether out of the common line, is the conduct of her first husband when he heard of her return. That brutal, inconstant man, who had trampled on all social decencies in attending at the marriage of his wife with another, did all in his power to induce her to return to his house. By dint of unwearied efforts and entreaties he succeeded in overcoming her scruples, and bore her home in triumph along with her children by the Italian, on whom he settled part of his fortune. From that time forth the most perfect harmony subsists between the pair, and seems likely long to continue. I saw a letter written by the lady two or three months after her return beneath the conjugal roof; it breathed the liveliest gratitude and the fondest affection for him whom she called *her beloved husband*.

The Russians pique themselves greatly on having a large retinue of servants; the smallest proprietor never keeps fewer than five or six; yet this does not prevent their houses from being, without exception, disgustingly dirty. Except the state-rooms, which the servants make a show of cleaning, all the rest of the house is left in a state of filth beyond description. The condition of these domestic servants is much less pitiable than one would suppose; they are so numerous that they have hardly any thing to do, and spend half the day in sleeping. The canings they receive from time to time do not at all ruffle their good humour. It is true they fare horribly as to victuals, and have no other bed than the bare ground; but their robust constitutions enable them easily to endure the greatest privations, and if they have salted cucumbers, arbutus berries, and *kash*, they scarcely envy their masters their more nutritious viands.

After some ten days spent very agreeably in the house of the marshal of the nobles, we at last set out on our return for Doutchina, where my husband was soon to meet us again. On arriving at the third post-station, we were surprised to find the house filled with Cossacks and police-officers. Neither postmaster, horses, nor coachmen, were to be seen, and it was plain some extraordinary event had taken place. We were presently informed that a murder had been committed two days before, at a very short distance from the station, on the person of a courier, who had a sum of 40,000 rubles in his charge. The following are the details communicated to us on the subject. A courier arrived at the post-station in the evening, having with him a small valise containing a considerable amount of property. He drank a few glasses of brandy with the postmaster before he resumed his journey, and told him he was not going further than Kherson, and would return that way next day.

That same night some peasants found a deserted carriage on the highway, near Kherson, and were soon satisfied on examining it, that a crime had been committed in it. Several pieces of silver coin were scattered in the straw, as if some one had forgotten them there in his haste, and [Pg 63] copious marks of blood were discernible on the ground and in the carriage. These facts were communicated to the police, inquiries were instituted, and the courier's body, with a deep gash in the head, was found in a ditch two or three versts from the station. The driver had disappeared, and the postmaster, an unfortunate Jew, who was perhaps innocent of all participation in the crime, was immediately taken to prison. Such was the state of the case when we arrived at the station and found it all in confusion, and filled with Cossacks.

This tragic event threw the whole country into agitation, but it was not until six weeks afterwards that the police at last succeeded in arresting the perpetrator of the deed, in consequence of quite new information, which gave a still stranger complexion to the whole story. By the murderer's own statement, it appeared that he belonged to a family of shopkeepers, and that he had given up his business only to execute a long cherished project. Some months before the murder he had gone into the Crimea, where he had taken pains to conceal his identity and baffle any attempt to track his steps, by letting his beard grow, adopting the habits and appearance of a mujik, and frequently changing his place of abode. When he thought his measures complete in this respect, he went and hired himself as postillion to the Jew, who kept the post-station before mentioned. He had been waiting more than a month for a favourable opportunity, when the unfortunate courier, who was his victim, arrived. He confessed he had hesitated for some moments before committing the murder, not from horror of the deed itself, but because he recognised in the courier an old companion of his boyhood. Twice, perceiving that the man was asleep, he had left his seat and got up behind the carriage with the intention of knocking him on the head; but twice his courage failed him; the third time, however, he drew the courier's own sabre and cleft his skull with it at a blow. Having secured the valise, he threw the corpse into a ditch, and continued his journey to within a short distance of Kherson, where he left the kibitka, changed his dress, cut off his beard, and then entered the city on foot. His family

received him without the least suspicion, never doubting but that he came straight from the Crimea, and for more than six weeks he lived quite at his ease, making like every body else numberless conjectures respecting the event which was the constant theme of conversation. Meanwhile, several persons having been struck by the resemblance of his features to those of the postillion who had disappeared, they put the police on the alert, and he was arrested just as he was setting out for Bessarabia. He was condemned to a hundred strokes of the knout, and the postmaster was sent to Siberia. The children of the latter were enrolled as soldiers, and all he was worth became the booty of the police.

With such penal laws, Russia has little to fear from malefactors. Notwithstanding its vast extent and its thinly scattered population, the traveller is safer there than in any other country. But this [Pg 64] state of things is to be ascribed rather to the political situation of the people, than to the strict administration of the police, and it is easy to conceive that in a country, in which there are none but slaves bound to the soil, highway robberies, generally speaking, are morally impossible, because they can scarcely ever yield any gain to their authors. There existed, nevertheless, in Bessarabia, from 1832 to 1836, a very formidable gang of robbers, of which the police found it extremely difficult to rid the country. The captain, of whom a thousand extraordinary tales are told, was a revolted slave, unconsciously playing the part of Fra Diavolo, in a corner of Russia. He waged war not against individuals, but against society. It is alleged, that he never killed any one, and that many a peasant found with him an asylum and protection. He was a daring fellow, beloved by his gang, and a merciless plunderer of landlords, and above all of Jews. It was not until the close of 1836 that he was taken, through the treachery of a girl he was attached to, who betrayed him to the officers of justice. He died under the knout; the death of their leader dispersed his gang, and they fell one by one into the hands of the police.

Some days after my husband's return, we took our leave of the baroness to return to Clarofka. Our main journey through the Kalmuck steppes and to the Caucasus, being fixed for the following spring, part of the winter was spent in making preparations for our departure. Count Voronzof most obligingly furnished us with letters for the governors and authorities of the countries we were to pass through.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[3] The name applied collectively to the islands and channels formed by all the great rivers of Southern Russia.

[4] A favourite Russian dish, a sort of porridge of buckwheat or Indian corn.

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# APPENDIX TO CHAPTER IX.

*Petty Larceny.*—"Highway robbery and burglary, with violence, are things wholly unknown in the greater part of Russia. The peasants laugh when they see foreigners travelling about with swords, pistols, and a whole arsenal of weapons. The Russian trader journeys from one end of the empire to the other, often with all he is worth in the world, and does not think it necessary even to carry a knife in his pocket; yet one never hears of their being robbed by force on the highways, at least in the parts of the country with which I was more intimately acquainted. Cases of the kind do indeed occur in the southern provinces, adjoining the Turkish dominions, and in Siberia, where so many malefactors are settled, and where there is often extreme distress. Some may be disposed to ascribe this unfrequency of highway robbery to the great remoteness of the villages from each other, and to the severity of the climate, which must deter rogues from remaining much in the open air, especially at night. But even in summer, and in the more populous regions, [Pg 65] where the villages are tolerably close together, highway robbery is equally rare, and the absence of this crime seems to me attributable rather to the character of the people themselves, to whom the practice seems repugnant and unnatural. It were to be wished that they had the same instinctive aversion to robbery without violence, but this unfortunately is not the case. As I was a frequent sufferer from the nimbleness of their fingers, I had occasion enough to ponder on the causes of this striking propensity of theirs, and I came to the conclusion, paradoxical as it may perhaps seem, that it arises not so much from want of moral feeling as from want of intellectual cultivation. Most of the common folk who are given to this vice (for among educated persons it is as rare and is reputed as infamous as in any other country) see no harm at all in pilfering, and are, therefore, prone to practise it whenever they have an opportunity. I am fully persuaded that these people, who are often the most good-natured and even honest-hearted fellows, would desist from the practice if they were once taught to regard it in a different light, and were made conscious of its impropriety. This is a case as to which primary instruction, village schools, and church sermons, in the vernacular tongue, would deal most happily and beneficially for the morals of the nation. But village schools are rare, and sermons or religious instruction of any

kind, are rarer still; books there are none, and if there were any the populace could not read them. What means then have they of becoming enlightened as to themselves and the things around them, and of correcting the views and notions handed down to them from generation to generation? Centuries ago they worked out for themselves their own system of ethics, if I may so speak, and they now make the best they can of it. Certain things, for instance, such as household furniture and the like, are regarded as sacred; the owners may leave them all night in the street, and be sure of finding them again in the morning, whereas there are a thousand other things which they cannot watch too carefully, though far less serviceable, and consequently less tempting. On the former there is a sort of interdict laid by tacit consent, whereas the latter are looked upon as common property. The same man who will not hesitate to pick another's pocket, or to filch something from his table, will never, even though quite safe from detection, open a closed door, or put his hand in at an open window to take any thing out of a room. He would call this 'stealing' (*vorit*,) and that has an ugly sound even in Russian ears, and is considered a great sin. But the first-mentioned little matters he looks on as allowed, or at least not forbidden, and he applies to them the endearing diminutive *vorovat*, a pretty, harmless word, not at all associated with the odious idea of thieving properly so called. To put this matter in a clearer light I will relate two little incidents that came under my own personal observation.

"I was once in the house of a common chapman on an affair of business, in which he behaved [Pg 66] like an upright worthy man. We had finished the transaction between us, and were sipping our tea, when an old man with an open, honest-looking countenance, but very poorly clad, came in and offered the chapman a silver spoon for sale. After some chaffering the latter bought the spoon at a price much below its worth, and said, banteringly, as he paid over the money: '*Sukin tu sin, tu vorovat*.' 'You pilfered it, you son of a b——.' (This last phrase, as I have elsewhere remarked, is practically equivalent to 'my good friend,' or the like.) The old man looked at him with a roguish twinkle of the eye, laid his hand on his breast, and said very gravely: '*Niet sudar, Bog podal*,' 'No, sir, God bestowed it,' and then went quietly about his business. I often took pains to come at the special meaning of this '*Bog podal*,' by a series of indirect questions, and every time I became more and more assured that by many persons the phrase was understood as signifying a sort of divine permission to steal.

"The second anecdote is perhaps still more characteristic. In the year 1816 I was on my way with a German friend to the country-seat of Count S. We thought we were the only persons in our little open carriage who understood the German language, in which we conversed, when, to our surprise, our long-bearded *ishvorshtik* (coachman) joined in the discourse with great fluency, though his German was somewhat broken. Observing our astonishment, he told us that he had been in Germany, and had served in a detached corps of the army, which had been organised in the form of a *landwehr*, or local militia: he had passed a summer in Saxony, and seen Leipsig, Dresden, Wittenberg, &c. All this he told us with an air of no small self-complacency. 'And how did you like Germany?' said I. 'Why, pretty well,' he answered, 'only for one thing that I could not abide at all.' He might have settled there advantageously, and his colonel would have given him his discharge, as the corps was to be disbanded; but this *one thing* he talked of was not to be got over, and so he had preferred to return home. 'And what was this thing that stuck so in your stomach?' 'Sir,' said he, turning to us with one eye half shut, and speaking almost in a whisper, '*Sudar, vorovat ne velat*,' 'Sir, they won't allow a body to do a wee bit of pilfering.' We were not a little confounded by this unexpected reply, and my friend, who had not been long in Russia, was beginning to lecture him on the enormity of such principles, when the coachman, who had no mind to hear a long sermon, laughingly cut short the preacher's harangue, and gave him to understand that he was wandering wide of the mark. 'O, you don't understand me, *sudar*, I don't mean stealing; of course not; I know very well it is a bad thing; I only mean *vorovat*, which surely ought to be allowed everywhere; leastways it ought to be allowed to a poor soldier.'

"The world is ruled by opinion: we should therefore try to set this governing power right, where [Pg 67] we can, and where that may not be one, we should at least make the best use we can of it in the state in which we find it. Russia affords one striking exemplification of this wise system of compromise with reference to the subject we have been discussing. It is a received opinion among the populace, as I have said, that a man may filch a little from a stranger without being guilty of downright dishonesty, but to rob one's own master, is a grievous and unpardonable sin. Hence, the surest way of protecting yourself against a house-thief, when you once know him, is to take him into your service. From that moment you are not only safe from any larceny on his part, but you have secured besides the best watch against all other thieves, since it is a point of honour with him to prevent all acts of peculation that might entail suspicion on himself; and he knows practically all the tricks and stratagems against which he must be on his guard. An officer of high rank in the Russian army, a German by birth, told me, that once when his battalion had to encamp for several weeks together along with a Cossack pult, he and his men had like to be stripped of all they had by a continual course of thieving. Every morning brought a disastrous list of clothes missing, horse trappings carried off, &c. &c. More sentinels were placed, strict vigilance was observed, but every precaution failed. Almost at his wit's end, the officer complained to the hetman of the pult, and was advised by him to withdraw all his own sentries, and to make one of the Cossacks mount guard in his own quarters, and in every division of those occupied by his men. The German could not help thinking the proposed measure very like committing the fold to the custody of the wolf, but as he knew nothing better he could do, he adopted it, and from that moment all the thieving was at an end. The Cossacks always laid themselves down at nightfall right before the doors of the quarters and stables, and the officer never again heard even of any attempt to annoy him or his men. Such is the force of opinion, and of the manner in which these people (and all of us, too, if we will but own it) are in the habit of

seeing things."—*Von Littrow.*

Von Littrow remarks that we ought not to be too hasty in laying to the account of moral depravity the nimbleness of finger of the Russian peasant, but consider whether even among the most civilised people there are not some relics of the olden barbarism, some striking deviations from moral propriety, which OPINION is pleased to look on with indulgence. Books change owners in the German universities by a surreptitious process, for which a slang word has been adopted. This kind of *vorovat* is called "shooting" (*schiessen*) and some very learned professors we are told, plume themselves on the skill with which they contrive to "shoot" rare specimens of natural history, &c. There are men otherwise of great probity and worth, who we fear are not always scrupulously careful to return a borrowed umbrella.

*Russian Servants.*—"Where a German would think himself very well off with the attendance of one woman servant, a Russian tradesman, in like pecuniary circumstances, keeps at least four; but the German's one servant does quite as much as the Russian's four put together. In the houses of the wealthy, the number of menservants amounts to fifty, sixty, and even a hundred or more. There is an intendant and a *maître-d'hôtel*, a couple of dozen of pages and footmen, the master of the house's own men, the lady's own men, and again own men for the young gentlemen and for the young ladies; then come the butlers, caterers, hunters, doorkeepers, porters, couriers, coachmen, and stable-boys, grooms and outriders, cooks and under-cooks, confectioners, stove-lighters, and chamber-cleaners, &c. &c., not to mention the female servants of all sorts. But the worst of the thing is the continual increase of this numerous body; for it is a matter of course in Russia that every married man who enters service takes his wife with him; his children, too, belong to the house and remain in it; nay, his kith and kin, if not actually domesticated in the establishment, take up their abode in it for days and weeks together, without demur; besides which, the friends and acquaintances of the servants may drop in when they please, and partake of bed and board. 'When I married,' said a wealthy Russian to me, 'I made up my mind to have no more of these good-for-nothing people in my house than were unavoidably necessary for myself and my wife, and I therefore restricted myself to forty, but after the lapse of three or four years, I remarked, to my great astonishment, that this number was already almost doubled.' In any other country, some three or four of these fellows would be thought enough to wait at table even in the best appointed houses; but in Russia, where dinner parties often consist of forty or fifty persons, there must be a servant behind every chair, or the whole set out would be considered extremely shabby. It was formerly the custom generally, and it is so still in the country-houses of the great, to have a footman constantly stationed in each of the rooms of the numerous suite of apartments, and one or two lads outside, their business being to do the office now performed by bells. An order given by the lord of the mansion in the innermost apartment, was transmitted from room to room, and from door to door, until it reached the last of the train, who fetched the article called for, and so it was passed from hand to hand until it reached the *gosudar* (the lord). [Pg 68]

"A Polish countess told me, that she once called on Count Orloff on business, and while they were conversing, the count desired the servant who stood by the door, to call for a glass of water. The man disappeared for a moment to speak to his next neighbour, and immediately returned to his post; half-an-hour elapsed, and no water came. The thirsty count had to repeat the order, and turning to the countess, he said, 'See what a poor man I am; I have more than a hundred and twenty servants in this house alone, and if I want a glass of water, I cannot have it.' The countess smiled at the poor man, and told him that if he was a good deal poorer, and had but one servant, he would be better attended on. The Countess Orloff, his daughter, who inherited his whole fortune, is said to have upwards of 800 servants of both sexes in her palace at Moscow, and to maintain a special hospital for them."—*Von Littrow.* [Pg 69]

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# CHAPTER X.

DEPARTURE FOR THE CASPIAN—IEKATERINOSLAV—POTEMKIN'S RUINED PALACE—PASKEVITCH'S CAUCASIAN GUARD—SHAM FIGHT—INTOLERABLE HEAT—CATARACTS OF THE DNIEPR—GERMAN COLONIES—THE SETCHA OF THE ZAPOROGUES—A FRENCH STEWARD—NIGHT ADVENTURE—COLONIES OF THE MOLOSHNIA VODI—MR. CORNIES—THE DOUKOBOREN, A RELIGIOUS SECT.

About the middle of May, 1839, we left the shores of the Black Sea, accompanied by a Cossack and an excellent dragoman, who spoke all the dialects current in Southern Russia. After we had travelled more than 100 leagues upwards along the banks of the Dniepr, we reached Iekaterinoslav, a new town, which about fifty years ago consisted only of some wretched fishermen's cabins, scattered along the margin of the river.

Iekaterinoslav, founded in 1784 by the great Catherine, who laid the first stone in the presence of the Emperor Joseph II., is built on such a gigantic plan as makes it a perfect wilderness, in which the sparse houses and scanty population seem lost, as it were. Its wide and regular streets, marked out only by a few dwellings at long intervals, seem to have been planned for a million of souls; a whole government would have to be unpeopled to fill them, and give them that life and movement so necessary to a capital. But there seems no likelihood that time will fill up the void spaces of this desert, for the number of its inhabitants has not much increased within forty years; it is a stationary town, which will probably never realise the expectations formed by the empress when she gave it her name. It contains, however, some large buildings, numerous churches, bazaars, and charming gardens. But for the absurd mania of the Russians for planning their towns on an enormous scale, it would be a delightful abode, rich in its beautiful Dniepr and the fertile hills around it.

But Iekaterinoslav possesses one thing that distinguishes it from all the towns with which Russian civilisation is beginning to cover the south of the empire; and that is Potemkin's palace and garden. The palace is in ruins though it was built for Catherine II., barely sixty years ago. [Pg 70] The indifference of the Russians for their historical monuments is so great, that they hasten to destroy them, merely to clear the ground of things that have ceased to be of use.

The government, despotic as it is, unfortunately has not the power to stay the instinctive vandalism of its people. We will give melancholy proofs of this by and by, when we come to speak of the ancient tombs of the Crimea, so rich in objects of art, and so precious for their antiquity, yet which, in spite of the pretended care of the police, are day by day disappearing before the barbarous cupidity of the peasants, and still more of the *employés*.

To judge from its remains, Potemkin's palace appears to have been one of truly royal magnificence; on each side are still standing wings which must have contained a great number of apartments. There is a profusion of colonnades, porticoes, capitals, and beautiful cornices in the Italian style of the period; but all is at the mercy of the first peasant who wants stones or wood to repair his cabin. The ground is all strewed over with shapeless fragments, blocks of stone, and broken shafts. Nothing can look more sad than such skeletons of monuments which no accumulated ages have hallowed, and which have not even a veil of ivy to hide their decrepitude, nor any thing to throw a cast of dignity over their blank disorder. The feeling they impart is like that produced by the effects of an earthquake: no lesson given by the past, nothing for the imagination to feed on: no chronicles, no poetry.

The haughty Catherine little suspected that one day the serfs would carry away piecemeal that magnificent edifice planned by the inventive genius of her favourite, at the most brilliant period of her life. It was there she rested from the fatigues of her fantastic journey, and prepared herself for the new wonders that awaited her in the Crimea.

The amorous sovereign of the largest empire in the world, left the ices of St. Petersburg, and performed a journey of 1800 versts, to visit the richest jewel added to her imperial crown, that enchanting Tauris which Potemkin laid at her feet.

At intervals all along the route from Iekaterinoslav to Kherson, stand little pyramids surrounded by a balustrade, to mark the spots where the empress halted, changed horses, &c. In many places are still to be seen palaces that suddenly sprang up on her way, as if at the touch of an enchanter's wand. The whole tract of country is stamped with reminiscences of her grandeur, though she but passed rapidly through these deserts, which were metamorphosed beneath her glance into smiling and populous plains.

Of all these ephemeral palaces, that of Iekaterinoslav was the most worthy to harbour the imperial beauty. It stands on a gentle slope descending to the Dniepr, and is still surrounded with a magnificent park, presenting an admirable variety of sites and views: forests, labyrinths, and granite rocks, clothed with rich vegetation, with paths so capricious, thickets so dense, and [Pg 71] resting-places so mysterious, that every step reveals some token of the genius of a courtier, and the power of an empress.

Opposite the palace a little granite island lifts itself above the waters of the Dniepr like a Nereid. Its sole inhabitants are some white albatrosses and an old forest-keeper, whose cabin is hidden among trees. He leads a true hermit life. His gun and his fishing-tackle supply his food; the bushes and briars yield him firing, and thus he finds every thing requisite for his wants within the limits of his retreat. He has a nutshell of a boat, in which he can visit every nook of the island shore, which he shares with the fowls of the air. Except a few fishermen, no one ventures to thread that labyrinth of rocks and whirlpools that render the Dniepr so dangerous hereabouts.

Besides Potemkin's Park, the town has another of great beauty, which serves as a public promenade. It is crowded twice a week, when a military band performs. Its extent, its broad sheets of water, its shady alleys and fine expanse of lawn, make it one of the handsomest gardens I have seen in Russia.

We spent a week in Iekaterinoslav under the roof of an excellent French family long settled in the country. The cloth factory of Messrs. Neumann is the only industrial establishment in the town. Their machines, imported from France and England, and their thorough knowledge of their business, enable them to give the utmost perfection to their goods, notwithstanding which M. Neumann assured us that he should certainly be obliged to shut up his establishment before the lapse of two years. We have already set forth the causes that obstruct the progress of manufactures in Russia, and completely paralyse the industrial efforts of the ablest men.

During our stay in Iekaterinoslav, we had all the pleasure of an excursion into the mountains of

Asia, without the trouble of changing our place. It is only in Russia one can encounter such lucky chances. Three hundred mountaineers of the Caucasus arrived in the town, and by the governor's desire entertained the inhabitants with a display of their warlike games and exercises. They were on their way to Warsaw, to serve as a guard of honour for Paskevitch, the hero of the day. This whim of a man spoiled by fortune and the emperor, is tolerably characteristic of the Russians: merely to satisfy it, some hundreds of mountaineers had to quit their families, and traverse vast distances to go and parade on the great square of a capital.

The sight of those half-barbarians arriving like a torrent, and taking possession of the town as of a conquered place, was well calculated to excite our curiosity. We forgot time and place as we gazed on this unwonted spectacle, and seemed carried back among the gigantic invasions of Tamerlane, and his exterminating hordes of Asia, with their wild cries and picturesque costumes, swooping down with long lances and fiery steeds on old Europe, just as they appeared some centuries before, when they subjected all the wide domains of Russia to their sway. [Pg 72]

These mountaineers are small, agile, and muscular. There is no saying how they walk, for their life is passed on horseback. There is in the expression of their countenances, an inconceivable mixture of boldness, frankness, and fierce rapacity. Their bronzed complexion, dazzlingly white teeth, black eyes, every glance of which is a flash of lightning, and regular features, compose a physiognomy that terrifies more than great ugliness.

Their manœuvres surpass every thing an European can imagine. How cold, prim, and faded seem our civilised ways compared with those impassioned countenances, those picturesque costumes, those furious gallops, that grace and impetuosity of movement, that belong only to them. They discharge their carbines on horseback at full speed, and display inimitable address in the exercise of the djereed. Every rider decks his steed with a care he does not always bestow on his own adornment, covering it with carpets, strips of purple stuffs, cashmere shawls, and all the costly things with which the plunder of the caravans can supply him.

The manœuvres lasted more than two hours, and afforded us an exact image of Asiatic warfare. They concluded with a general *mêlée*, which really terrified not a few spectators, so much did the smoke, the shouts, the ardour of the combatants, the discharges of musketry, and the neighings of the horses complete the vivid illusion of the scene. It was at last impossible to distinguish any thing through the clouds of dust and smoke that whirled round the impetuous riders.

Paskevitch will perhaps be more embarrassed with them than he expects. From the moment these lions of the desert arrived, the town was in a state of revolution. The shopkeepers complained of their numerous thefts, and husbands and fathers were shocked at their cavalier manners towards the fair sex.

Though it was but the beginning of June, the heat had attained an intensity that made it literally a public calamity. The hospitals were crowded with patients, most of them labouring under cerebral fevers, a class of affections exceedingly dangerous in this country. The dust lay so thick in the street, that the foot sank in it as in snow, and for more than a fortnight the thermometer had remained invariably at 84° R. You have but to visit Russia to know what is the heat of the tropics. We nevertheless carried away not a few agreeable recollections of Iekaterinoslav, thanks to its charming position, and some distinguished *salons* of which it has reason to be proud.

On leaving Iekaterinoslav we proceeded to the famous cataracts of the Dniepr, on which attempts have been ineffectually made for more than a hundred years to render them navigable, and in the vicinity of which there are several German colonies.

My husband having in the preceding year discovered a rich iron mine in this locality, we had to stop some time to make fresh investigations. I have already spoken so much of the Dniepr, that I am almost afraid to return to the subject. In this part of its course, however, there is nothing like the maritime views of Kherson, the plavnicks of the Doutchina, or the cheerful bold aspect of the vicinity of Iekaterinoslav. Near the cataracts, the river has all the depth and calmness of a beautiful lake; not a ripple breaks its dark azure surface. Its bed is flanked by huge blocks of granite, that seem as though they had been piled up at random by the hands of giants. Every thing is grand and majestic in these scenes of primeval nature; nothing in them reminds us of the flight and the ravages of time. There are no trees shedding their leaves on the river's margin, no turf that withers, no soil worn away by the flood: the scene is an image of eternal changelessness. [Pg 73]

The Dniepr has deeps here which no plummet has ever fathomed, and the inhabitants allege that it harbours real marine monsters in its abysses. All the fishermen have seen the silurus, a sort of fresh water shark, capable of swallowing a man or a horse at a mouthful, and they relate anecdotes on this head, that transport you to the Nile or the Ganges, the peculiar homes of the voracious crocodile and alligator. One of these stories is of very recent date, and there are many boatmen who pretend to speak of the fact from personal knowledge. They positively aver, that a young girl, who was washing linen on the margin of the water, was carried down to the bottom of the Dniepr, and that her body never again rose to the surface.

A German village is visible on the other side of the river, at some distance from the house of Mr. Masure, the proprietor of the mine. Its pretty red factories with their green window-shutters, the surrounding forest, and a neighbouring island with cliffs glistening in the sun, fill the mind with thoughts of tranquil happiness. On the distant horizon the eye discerns the rent and pointed rocks, and the fleecy spray of the cataracts. Here and there some rocks just rising above the water, one of which, surnamed the Brigand, is the terror of boatmen, are the haunts of countless water-fowl, whose riotous screams long pursue the traveller as he ferries across from bank to

bank. All this scene is cheerful and pastoral, like one of Greuze's landscapes; but the bare hills that follow the undulations of the left bank show only dreariness and aridity.

The Germans settled below the cataracts of the Dniepr are the oldest colonists of Southern Russia: their colony was founded by Catherine II., in 1784, after the expulsion of the Zaporogue Cossacks, who were removed to the banks of the Kouban. It is composed solely of Prussian Mennonites, and comprises sixteen villages, numbering 4251 inhabitants, very industrious people, generally in the enjoyment of an ample competence. Corn and cattle form the staple of their wealth, but they are also manufacturers, and have two establishments for making cotton goods, and one for cloth. These Mennonites, however, have remained stationary since their [Pg 74] arrival in Russia: full of prejudices, and intensely self-willed, they have set their faces against all innovation and all intellectual development. One of their villages stands on the island of Cortetz, in the Dniepr, once the seat of the celebrated Setcha of the Zaporogue Cossacks. The Setcha, as the reader is perhaps aware, was at first only a fortified spot, where the young men were trained to arms, and where the public deliberations and the elections of the chiefs were held. Afterwards it became the fixed abode of warriors who lived in celibacy; and all who aspired to a reputation for valour were bound to pass at least three years there. I went over the island of Cortetz, and saw everywhere numerous traces of fortifications and entrenched camps. It would not have been easy to select a position more suited to the purpose the Cossacks had in view. The island is a natural fortress, rising more than 150 feet above the water, and defended on all sides by masses of granite, that leave scarcely any thing for art to do to render it impregnable.

We made our first halt, after our departure from the cataracts, at the house of a village superintendent, in whom we discovered, with surprise, a young Frenchman, with the most Parisian accent I ever heard. He is married to a woman of the country, and has been two years *prigatchik* (superintendent) in one of General Markof's villages. He placed his whole cabin at our disposal, with an alacrity that proved how delighted he was to entertain people from his native land. We had excellent honey, cream, and water-melons, set before us in profusion; but in spite of all our urgent entreaties, we could not prevail on him to partake with us. This made a painful impression on us. Is the air of slavery so contagious that no one can breathe it without losing his personal dignity? This man, born in a land where social distinctions are almost effaced, voluntarily degraded himself in our eyes, by esteeming himself unworthy to sit by our side, just as though he were a born serf, and had been used from his childhood to servility.

He gave us a brief history of his life, a melancholy tissue of disappointments and wretchedness, the narration of which deeply affected us. His ardour and his Parisian wilfulness, his efforts and his hopes, all the exuberance of his twenty years, were cast into a withering atmosphere of disgusts and humiliations, which at last destroyed in him all feeling of nationality: he is become a slave through his intercourse alike with the masters and with the serfs; and what completely proves this, is the cold-blooded cruelty with which he chastises the peasants under him. The whole village is struck with consternation at the punishments he daily inflicts for the most trivial offences. While he was conversing with us, word was brought him that two women and three men had arrived at the place of punishment in pursuance to his orders. Notwithstanding our entreaties, and the repugnance we felt at being so near such a scene, he ordered that they should each receive fifty blows of the stick, and double the number if they made any resistance. The wretched man thus avenges himself on the mujiks, for what he has himself endured at the hands [Pg 75] of the Russian aristocracy, and it is at best a hazardous revenge; even for his own sake he ought not to exasperate the peasants, who sometimes make fearful reprisals; frequent attempts have already been made to assassinate him, and although the criminals have paid dearly for their temerity, he may one day fall a victim to some more cunning or more fortunate aggressor. Only the week before our visit, as his wife told us, a more daring attempt than any preceding one, had been made by a peasant who from the first had declared himself his enemy.

After a long walk in the fields, the superintendent sat down under the shade of some trees in a ravine. Overcome with heat and fatigue, he at last fell asleep, after placing his two pistols by his side. An instinctive fear possessed him even in sleep, and kept him sensible of the least noise around him. The body slept, but not the mind. Suddenly his ear catches a suspicious sound; he opens his eyes, and sees a mujik stooping down softly in the act of picking up one of his pistols. There was so much ferocity in the man's looks, and such a stealthiness in his movements, that there could be no doubt of his intentions. The superintendent, with admirable presence of mind, raised himself on his elbow, and asked, with a yawn, what he was going to do with the pistol; to which the mujik, instantly putting on an air of affected stolidity peculiar to the Russian serf, answered, that he was curious to see how a pistol was made. So saying, he handed the weapon to his master, without appearing in the least disconcerted. The unfortunate man nearly died under the knout, and the superintendent's wife remarked, with a *naïveté*, thoroughly Russian, that he would have done much better to die outright.

We had further opportunities in this village for remarking how little compassion the Russian peasants have for each other. They look on at the beating of a comrade without evincing the least sympathy, or being moved by so degrading a sight to any reflection on their unhappy condition; it seems as though humanity has lost all claim on their hearts, so completely has servitude destroyed in them all capability of feeling, and all human dignity.

We left this station about six in the evening, having still some twenty versts to travel before arriving at the first village of the German colonies of the Moloshnia, where we intended to pass the night. Thanks to the bad horses and the stupid driver our countryman had given us, we had scarcely got over a quarter of the ground when we were in total darkness.

The coachman was all black and blue from the brutal treatment of his master, who had given

him half a dozen blows in our presence. The fellow was every moment changing his road at random, without regard to the fresh corrections of the same sort, which Antoine showered thickly upon him by way of admonition. He made us lose a great deal of time on the way, besides [Pg 76] wearing out the strength of his cattle to no purpose.

Nothing can be more wearisome and monotonous than travelling in the steppes; but it is, above all, by night that the uniformity of the country is truly discouraging, for then you are every moment in danger of turning your back on the point you want to reach: you have an immensity like that of the sea around you, and a compass would be of real service. Such, however, is the instinct of the peasants, that they find their way with ease, in the darkest night or the most violent snow-storm, through tracks crossing each other in every direction.

Our driver was an exception to the general rule, but sulkiness had more to do than inability with his apparent embarrassment. Our perplexity increased considerably when we found that the horses at last refused to move. The night was very gloomy; there was not a twinkling of light, nor any sound or sign of human habitations; every fresh question we put to our driver only elicited the laconic answer, "*nesnai*" (I don't know); and when a Russian has said *he does not know*, no power of tongue or stick can make him say *he knows*. Of this we had a proof that night. Our Cossack, tired of vainly questioning the unlucky driver, began to tickle his shoulders with a long whip he carried at his girdle; but it was all to no purpose; and but one course remained to us, if we would not pass the night in the open air. The Cossack unharnessed one of the horses, and set off to reconnoitre. After an absence of two hours, he came back and told us we were not very far from a German village, and that we might reach it in two hours; that is to say, provided our horses would move; but they were dead beat.

Here, again, the Cossack relieved us from our difficulty, by yoking to the carriage a poor little colt that had followed its mother, without suspecting that it was that night to begin its hard apprenticeship. Weak as was this reinforcement, it enabled us to advance, though very slowly; but at last the barking of dogs revived the mettle of our horses, and they broke into a trot for the first time.

A forest of handsome trees and distant lights gave indubitable assurance of a village. It was not like the ordinary villages, collections of mean-looking *kates* rising like mushrooms out of the arid ground, without a shrub to screen them; we were entering the German colonies, and the odours from the blossoming fruit-trees, and the sight of the pretty little red houses of which we caught glimpses through the trees, soon carried us in imagination far away from the Russian steppes.

With as keen delight as ever oasis caused the desert wanderer, we entered this pretty village, the name of which (*Rosenthal*, Rosedale) gives token of the poetic feeling of the Germans. Its extensive gardens obliged us to make a long *détour*. The people were all in bed when we arrived, and we had much difficulty in finding the house of the *schultz* (the headborough). At last we [Pg 77] discovered it, and the hospitable reception we met with soon made us forget the events of this memorable night.

The region occupied by these colonies is unlike the steppes, though the form of the ground is the same. The villages are very close to each other, are all built on the same plan, and are for the most part sheltered in ravines. The houses have only a ground-floor, and are built with wood or with red and blue bricks, and have very projecting roofs. Their parti-coloured walls, their carved wooden chimneys, and pretty straw roofs, that seem as neatly finished as the finest Egyptian mats, produce a charming effect as seen through the green trees of the gardens that surround them. They are almost all exactly similar, even to the most minute details: a few only are distinguished from the rest by a little more colouring or carving, and a more elegant balustrade next the garden.

The fields are in excellent cultivation; the pastures are stocked with fine cattle; and sheep-folds and wells placed here and there enliven the landscape, and break the fatiguing monotony of the plain; the whole face of the country tells of the thriving labours of the colonists. But one must enter their houses to appreciate the habits of order and industry to which they owe not only an ample supply for the necessaries of life, but almost always a degree of comfort rarely to be found in the dwellings of the Russian nobles. One might even accuse the good housewives of a little sensuality, to see their eider-down beds and pillows heaped almost up to the ceiling. You may be certain of finding in every house a handsome porcelain stove, a glazed cupboard, containing crockery, and often plate, furniture carefully scrubbed and polished, curtains to the windows, and flowers in every direction.

We passed two days in Orlof with the wealthiest and most philanthropic proprietor in all the German villages. M. Cornies came into the country about forty years ago, and started without capital, having like the others only a patch of land and some farming implements. After the lapse of a few years every one already envied his fortune, but all acknowledged his kindly solicitude for those who had been less prosperous than himself. Endowed with an active and intelligent character, and strongly interested in the cause of human improvement, he afterwards became the leader in the work of civilising the Nogai Tartars, and he now continues with very great success the work so ably begun by one of our own countrymen, Count Maison. M. Cornies is a corresponding member of the St. Petersburg Academy, and has contributed to its Transactions several papers of learned research, and remarkable for the comprehensive scope of their ideas; hence he enjoys a great reputation not only among his countrymen, but likewise throughout all Southern Russia. His flocks, his nurseries, and his wools, are objects of interest to all persons engaged in trade, and his plans for the improvement of agriculture and cattle rearing, are generally adopted as models.

Though M. Cornies is worth more than 40,000*l.*, his way of life is in strict conformity with the rigorism and simplicity of the Mennonites, to which sect he belongs. The habits of these sectarians are of an extreme austerity that strips domestic life of all its ordinary charms. The wife and daughters of a Mennonite, whatever be his fortune, are the only female servants in his house, and Madame Cornies and her daughters waited humbly on us at table, as though they had no right to sit at it with the head of the family. Notwithstanding this apparent inequality of the sexes, there is a great deal of happiness in the married life of the Mennonites; nor should it be forgotten that in judging of all matters appertaining to foreigners, we should endeavour to behold things in the peculiar light in which education and custom invest them for native eyes. [Pg 78]

The dress of the women is like their habits of life, plain and simple. It consists invariably of a gown of blue printed cotton, the bodice of which ends just below the bosom, an apron of the same material, and a white collar with a flat hem; the hair is combed back *à la Chinoise*, and on it sits a little black cap without trimming, tied under the chin. This head-dress, which has some resemblance to that of the Alsatian women, sets off a young and pretty face to advantage, but increases the ugliness of an ugly one. The dress of the men is the same as that of the German peasants, with the exception of some slight modifications.

One dish of meat and two of vegetables, compose the whole dinner of a Mennonite; each person at table has a large goblet of milk set before him instead of wine, the use of which is altogether prohibited in their sect.

There are no regular priests in these colonies; the oldest and most esteemed members of each community, are elected to fulfil the office of the ministry. These elders read the Bible every Sunday, preach, and give out the hymns, which are sung by the whole congregation.

The Mennonites are generally well educated; but their information has no more than their wealth the effect of impairing the patriarchal simplicity of their habits. We happened to see a young man, belonging to one of the wealthiest families, on his return from a long foreign tour; he had visited France, Switzerland, and Germany, and yet it was with a most cordial alacrity he returned to share in the agricultural labours of his father and his brothers.

All these German colonies are divided into two distinct groups: the one established on the right bank of the Moloshnia Vodi[5] is composed of people from Baden and Swabia, and comprises twenty-three villages, with 6649 inhabitants; the other seated on the left coast of the Black Sea, and along the little rivulet Joushendli, contains forty-three Mennonite villages. As the latter is unquestionably the most important and thriving colony in Southern Russia, we will direct our attention to it almost exclusively. [Pg 79]

The Mennonites, so called after the name of the founder of their sect, profess nearly the same religious principles as the Anabaptists of France. They first arose in Holland, the language of which country they still speak, and settled towards the close of the last century in Northern Prussia, in the vicinity of Dantzig. Attempts having been made about that time, to force them into military service, contrary to their tenets, a first migration took place, and the colony of Cortetz, below the cataract of the Dniepr, was founded under the auspices of Catherine II. That of Moloshnia Vodi, was founded in 1804, by a fresh body of emigrants; it was greatly enlarged in 1820, and at the end of the year 1837, it covered 100,000 hectares of land, and contained forty-three villages, with 9561 inhabitants, including 984 families of proprietors.

The non-agricultural population is composed of handicraftsmen of all sorts, some of whom are very skilful. Alpstadt, the chief place of the colony, has a cloth manufactory, in which seven looms are at work. Wages are very high; for almost all the workmen as soon as they have saved any money, give up their trade and addict themselves to agriculture.

Each village is under the control of a headborough, called the *schultz*, and two assistants. They are elected every three years, but one of them remains in office a year after the two others, that he may afford their successors the necessary current information. An *oberschultz* (mayor), who likewise has two assistants, resides in the chief place of the colony. These magistrates decide without appeal, in all the little differences that may arise between the colonists. Important cases are carried before the central committee. As for criminal cases, of which there has yet been no example, they fall under the jurisdiction of the Russian tribunals. Laziness is punished by fine and forced labour for the benefit of the community.

The inspector, who represents the government, resides in the Swabian colony, on the right bank of the Moloshnia. Odessa is the seat of the administrative council, which consists of a president and three judges, all Russians, nominated by the emperor. The committee exercises a general control over all the colonies, and ratifies the elections of the schultzes and their assistants. Its last president was the infantry general Inzof, a man remarkable for his personal character and the deep interest he took in the establishments under his direction.

Every proprietor has sixty-five hectares of land, for which he pays an annual quit-rent to the crown of fifteen kopeks per hectare; besides which he pays four rubles a year towards defraying the general expenses of the colony, the salaries of the committee, the inspector, the schoolmasters, &c. Each village has a granary for reserve against seasons of dearth; it must always contain two tchetverts of wheat for every male head. [Pg 80]

The cattle is all under the management of one chief herdsman, at whose call they leave their stalls in the morning, and return in the evening to the village.

Every five or six years one or more new villages are established. A newly-established family does not at once receive its sixty-five hectares of land; if the young couple do not choose to reside with their parents, they generally build themselves a little house beyond the precincts of the

village. But when the young families are become so numerous that their united allotments shall form a space sufficient for the pasture of their flocks in common, and for the execution of the agricultural works enjoined by the regulations, then, and not till then, the new colonists obtain permission to establish themselves on the uncultivated lands. At present the Mennonite colony possesses nearly 30,000 hectares of land not yet brought under the plough. Thus these Germans, transplanted to the extremity of Southern Russia, have successfully realised some of the ideas of the celebrated economist, Fourrier.

It will readily be conceived that under such a system of administration, and, above all, with their simple habits, their sobriety and industry, these Mennonites must naturally have outstripped the other colonists in prosperity. Those from Swabia and Baden, though subjected to precisely the same regulations, will never attain to the same degree of wealth. They are generally fond of good cheer, and addicted to drink; but they have, perhaps, the merit of understanding life better than their Puritanical neighbours, and of making the most of the gifts Providence has bestowed on them.

The Mennonite colony possessed at the close of 1837:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Horned cattle | 7,719 |
| Horses | 6,029 |
| Merino sheep | 412,274 |
| Fruit-trees in the gardens | 316,011 |
| Forest trees | 609,096 |

These last have since perished for the most part. The sale of wheat in 1838, amounted to 600,000 rubles. The provisions for public instruction are highly satisfactory. The colony numbers forty schools, attended by 2390 pupils of both sexes, who are taught the German language, arithmetic, history, and geography. Russian is also taught in two of the schools.

The Mennonites, as well as the other German colonists of Southern Russia, for a long while enjoyed a very special protection on the part of the government; and both the present sovereign and his predecessor have on several occasions given them signal proofs of their favour. But unhappily their committee was suppressed eighteen months ago, and this measure will be fatal to them. They had long looked forward with alarm to a change in their affairs, and sent many deputations to St. Petersburg, to solicit a continuance of the original system: their efforts were [Pg 81] ineffectual; the work of centralization and unity has involved them in their turn, and they are now in immediate dependence on the newly-constituted ministry of the domains of the crown. No doubt the government had a full right to act in this manner; and after having allowed the colonists to enjoy their peculiar privileges for such a long series of years, it may now, without incurring any obloquy, subject them to the ordinary system of administration prevalent in the empire. But it is not the less certain, seeing the corruption and venality of the Russian functionaries, that this change of system will lead to the ruin of the colonists, and that, notwithstanding all the efforts and the good intentions of the government, when once the Germans are put under the same management as the crown serfs, they will be unable to save their property from the rapacity of their new controlers. The colonies have been but a few months under the direction of the ministry of the domains, and already several hundred families have abandoned their dwellings and their lands, and retired to Germany. I saw a great number of them arrive in 1842, in Moldavia, where they thought to form some settlements; but they did not succeed.

Besides the German colonies of which we have been speaking, there are others in the environs of Nicolaïef and Odessa, in Bessarabia and the Crimea, and about the coasts of the sea of Azov. Altogether these foreign colonies in New Russia, number upwards of 160 villages, containing more than 46,000 souls. In the midst of them are several villages inhabited by Russian dissenters, entertaining nearly the same religious views as the Mennonites and Anabaptists. These are the Douckoboren and Molokaner, who separated from the national church about 160 years ago, at which time they were resident in several of the central provinces; but the government being alarmed at the spread of their doctrines, transported them forcibly to New Russia, where it placed them under military supervision. Here they admirably availed themselves of the examples set them by the Germans, and soon attained a high degree of prosperity. In 1839, they amounted to a population of 6617 souls, occupying thirteen villages. Most of their houses were in the German style, and every thing about them was indicative of plenty. Two years after this first visit to them, I met on the road from Taganrok to Rostof, two large detachments of exiles escorted by two battalions of infantry. They were the unfortunate dissenters of the Moloshnia, who had been expelled from their villages, and were on their way to the military lines of the Caucasus. The most perfect decorum and the most touching resignation appeared in the whole body. The women alone showed signs of anger, whilst the men sang hymns in chorus. I asked several of them whither they were going; their answer was "God only knows."

After leaving the German colonies, we passed through several villages of Nogaï Tatars. We shall reserve what we have to say of these people for another place.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[5] The Moloshnia Vodi (Milk River) is a little stream emptying itself between Berdiansk and Guenitshky into the liman of a lake which no longer communicates with the Sea of Azov.

# CHAPTER XI.

MARIOUPOL—BERDIANSK—KNAVISH JEW POSTMASTER—TAGANROK—MEMORIALS OF PETER THE GREAT AND ALEXANDER—GREAT FAIR—THE GENERAL WITH TWO WIVES—MORALITY IN RUSSIA—ADVENTURES OF A PHILHELLENE—A FRENCH DOCTOR—THE ENGLISH CONSUL—HORSE RACES—A FIRST SIGHT OF THE KALMUCKS.

Our arrival in Marioupol unpleasantly reminded us that we were no longer in the German colonies. A dirty inn-room, horses not forthcoming, bread not to be had, nor even fresh water, rude *employés*—every thing in short was in painful contrast with the comfort and facilities to which we became accustomed in our progress through the thriving villages of the Mennonites.

Marioupol is the chief place of an important colony founded on the shores of the Sea of Azov, at the mouth of the Kalmious, by the Greeks whom Catherine II. removed thither from the Crimea in 1784. It now reckons eighty villages, a population of about 30,000, occupying 450,000 *hectares*[6] of land. The taxes paid by these colonists amount to ten kopeks per *hectare*; in addition to which, each family contributes one ruble fifty kopeks towards the salary of the government officers in their district. They enjoy several privileges, have their own magistrates and subordinate judges, elected by themselves, and are exempt from military service. Criminal cases and suits not terminated before their own tribunals, come under the general laws and regulations of the empire.

Agriculture and commerce are the chief resources of the colony, but I have seen no trace of the mulberry plantations attributed to it.

Having been for a long series of ages subject to the khans of the Crimea, all these Greeks speak a corrupt Tatar dialect among themselves. They are on the whole a degenerate and thoroughly unprincipled race, particularly in Marioupol, the traders of which enrich themselves by robbing the agriculturists, who are forced to sell them their produce.

Marioupol is a large dirty village, and its port, which has only a custom-house of exit, is nothing but a paltry roadstead of little depth, in which vessels are sheltered from none but western winds. With the exception of a solitary brig, there were only some small coasting vessels in it when we visited the place. Its export trade is considerable notwithstanding, amounting to the annual value of four or five millions of francs.

Marioupol is infallibly destined to lose all its commercial importance since the foundation of the new and more advantageously-situated harbour of Berdiansk, to which the greater part of the produce of the surrounding country already takes its way. As a general rule, one town of Southern Russia can prosper only at the expense and by the abandonment of another; thus Kherson has been sacrificed to Odessa, Theodosia to Kertch, &c. It must, however, be owned that the preference given to Berdiansk is well grounded. Placed at the mouth of the Berda, that town is unquestionably the best port on the Sea of Azov. Its population in 1840 was 1258, and during the year 1839 it exported 187,761 tchetverts of wheat; its importation is a blank as yet.



After waiting several hours we at last procured horses that conveyed us rapidly to the next post; but there we had another stoppage. The clerk had a fancy to squeeze our purses, and knew no better way of doing so than by refusing us horses. Commands, threats, and abuse, never for a moment ruffled his dogged composure. Unfortunately our Cossack had been seized with a violent fever, and remained behind at Marioupol; had he been with us the clerk would hardly have ventured on his tricks, for he would have been sure of a sound drubbing. But this manner of enforcing compliance was not in our way, and as we had written authority to hire horses from the peasants wherever we found them, we sent Anthony to the next village, and thought no more about being supplied by the postmaster. Our unconcern began to alarm the clerk; gangs of horses were every moment returning from pasture, and he saw plainly that his position was becoming critical. After an hour's absence Anthony appeared in the distance with three stout horses and a driver. I will not attempt to depict the consternation of the Jew when he was assured that the team was really for us. He threw himself at our feet, knocked his head against the ground, and in short, evinced such a passion of grovelling fear, that disgusted and wearied with his importunities, we at last promised not to make any complaint against him. We made all haste to quit the spot, and in five hours afterwards we were in Taganrok.

The town, situated on the bay of the same name at the northern extremity of the Sea of Azov, is the chief place of a distinct administrative district, dependent on Iekaterinoslav only as regards the courts of law, and comprising within its limits, Rostof, Marioupol, Nakitchevane, and a little territory lying round the northern end of the sea, and encompassed by the country of the Don. Its boundaries are, on one side, the Mious, which falls into the Sea of Azov, and on the other side, the Government of the Cossacks of the Black Sea.

Taganrok was founded in 1706, by Peter the Great, after the taking of Azov, and was demolished in pursuance of the treaty of the Pruth. War with Turkey having been renewed, it was rebuilt in 1709, and fortified; and a harbour was constructed, surrounded with a mole, the remains of which are still seen just level with the surface of the water.

This harbour is a long rectangle, with a single entrance towards the west. There is some idea of renovating it, by reconstructing its mole, and clearing it of the sand with which it has been long choked; but this project, if carried into effect, will not remove the natural defects of the Taganrok [Pg 84] roadstead. The water is so low, that vessels are obliged to lie from four to six leagues off the shore, and to load and unload their cargoes in a curious round-about, and very expensive manner. Waggons surmounted with platforms loaded with grain, perform the first part of the process, and advance in files, often to a distance of half a league into the sea. There they are unloaded into large barges, and these almost always require the aid of a third auxiliary, before their freight is finally shipped.

On approaching Taganrok, one almost fancies the town before him is Odessa. Its position on the Sea of Azov, the character of the landscape, its churches, its great extent, and every feature of the place, even to the fortress commanding it, combine to favour the illusion.

Taganrok has thriven rapidly, as Peter the Great foresaw it would do, and has become one of the most commercial towns of Southern Russia. Its trade, however, has considerably diminished since the suppression of its lazaret, and the closure of the Sea of Azov, in consequence of a fifty days' quarantine established at Kertch. The town now contains 16,000 inhabitants.

Peter the Great's sojourn in Taganrok, is commemorated by an oak wood of his own planting. Such a memorial of a great prince is certainly better than a pompous monument; more durable, and more philanthropic, particularly in a country destitute of forests.

It was at Taganrok that the Emperor Alexander died, far away from the splendours of St. Petersburg. As we visited the modest dwelling that served him for his last abode, all the events of the great epoch in which he was one of the most illustrious actors crowded on our memories. The bed-room where he died has been converted into a *chapelle ardente*, but in every other respect the house has been preserved with religious care, just as he left it.

There was a fair in the town when we arrived. The suffocating heat, the clouds of dust, and the crowded state of all the hotels, at first made us look unfavourably on the place, but the diversions of the fair soon reconciled us to the inconveniences of our lodgings.

In Russia, fairs still retain an importance they scarcely any longer possess in our more civilised countries. Every town has its own, which is more or less frequented; that of Nijni Novgorod is reputed the most considerable on the European continent; all the nations of Europe and Asia, send their representatives to it. Next after it, the fair of Karkhof, is in high esteem among merchants for its rich furs. These fairs often last more than a month, and they are impatiently looked forward to by all the country nobles, whom they enable for a while to breathe as it were the odour of fashionable town life. Balls, theatres, shopping, music, horse races—what a world of pleasures in the compass of a few days! And every one sets about enjoying them with feverish [Pg 85] ardour. Every thing else is interrupted; the fair to-day, all other concerns to-morrow. At some little distance from Taganrok, there are huge bazaars filled with oriental merchandise, and the covered alleys are crowded with fashionable loungers in the evening. A very curious spectacle indeed is this labyrinth of Persian cloths, slippers, furs, Parisian bonnets and caps, shawls from Kashmir, and a thousand other articles too numerous to detail. Every thing is arranged to the best advantage, and the eye is delighted with the picturesque and fantastic medley of colours and forms.

Europe and Asia are matched against each other, and exert all their arts of fascination to allure purchasers. In spite of all the elegance of the French fashions, it must be owned that our little bonnets and our scanty mantillas cut but a sorry figure beside the muslins interwoven with gold and silver, the rich termalamas and the furs that adorn the shops of the country. And yet all eyes, all desires, all purses turn towards the productions of France. Some faded ribands and trumpery bonnets attract a greater number of pretty customers than all the gorgeous wares of Asia.

During our stay at Taganrok, we were invited to a ball at the mansion of General Khersanof, son-in-law of the celebrated Hetman Platof. The general possesses the handsomest residence in the town, and keeps his state like a real prince, amidst the motley society of a commercial town. All his apartments are stuccoed and decorated with equal taste and magnificence. The windows consist of single panes of plate glass more than three yards high. The furniture, lustres, ceilings, and pictures, all display a feeling for the fine arts, and a sumptuosity governed by good taste, which may well surprise us in a Cossack.

In front of the mansion lies a handsome garden, which was lighted up with coloured lamps for the occasion. The whole front of the dwelling was brilliantly illuminated. It was a magic *coup d'œil*, particularly as it was aided by the transparent atmosphere of a beautiful summer night, that vied in purity with the clearest of those of the south.

On entering the first *salon*, we were met by the general, who immediately presented us to his two wives. But the reader will say, is bigamy allowed among the Cossacks? Not exactly so; but if the laws and public opinion are against it, still a man of high station may easily evade both; and General Khersanof has been living for many years in open, avowed bigamy, without finding that his *salons* are the less frequented on account of such a trifle. In Russia, wealth covers every thing with its glittering veil, and sanctions every kind of eccentricity, however opposed to the usages of the land, provided it redeem them by plenty of balls and entertainments. Public opinion, such as

exists in France, is here altogether unknown. The majority leave scruples of conscience to timorous souls, without even so much as acknowledging their merit.

A man the slave of his word, and a woman of her reputation, could not be understood in a country where caprice reigns as absolute sovereign. A Russian lady, to whom I made some [Pg 86] remarks on this subject, answered *naïvely*, that none but low people could be affected by scandal, inasmuch as censure can only proceed from superiors. She was perfectly right, for, situated as the nobility are, who would dare to criticise and condemn their faults? In order that public opinion should exist, there must be an independent class, capable of uttering its judgments without fearing the vengeance of those it calls before its bar; there must be a free country in which the acts of every individual may be impartially appreciated; in short, the words justice, honour, honesty, and delicacy of feeling must have a real meaning, instead of being the sport of an elegant and corrupt caste, that systematically makes a mock of every thing not subservient to its caprices and passions.

Notwithstanding their opulence, and the society that frequents their *salons*, Mesdames Khersanof retain a simplicity of manners and costume in curious contrast with every thing around them. An embarrassed air, vulgar features, an absence of all dignity in bearing and in conversation, and an ungainly style of dress—this was all that struck us as most remarkable about them. The younger wore a silk gown of a sombre colour, with a short body and straight sleeves, and so narrow that it might be taken for a bag. A silk kerchief covered her shoulders and part of her neck, and her little cap put me strongly in mind of the head-gear of our master-cooks. The whole costume was mean, awkward, and insipid. Except a few brilliants in her girdle and her cap, she showed no other trace of that Asiatic splendour which is still affected by many other women of this country.

It is said that the two co-wives live on the best possible terms with each other. The general seems quite at his ease with respect to them, and goes from the one to the other with the same marks of attention and affection. His first wife is very old, and might be taken for the mother of the second. We were assured that being greatly distressed at having no children, she had herself advised her husband to make a new choice. The general fixed on a very pretty young peasant working on his own property. In order to diminish the great disparity of rank between them, he married her to one of his officers, who, on coming out of church, received orders to depart instantly on a distant mission, from which he never returned. Some time afterwards the young woman was installed in the general's brilliant mansion, and presented to all his acquaintance as Madame Khersanof.

Two charming daughters are the fruit of this not very orthodox union. Dressed in seraphines of blue silk, they performed the Russian and the Cossack dances with exquisite grace, and enchanted us during the whole continuance of the ball. The Russian dance fascinates by its simplicity and poetry, and differs entirely from all other national dances: it consists not so much in the steps, as in a pensive, natural pantomime, in which northern calmness and gravity are tempered by a charming grace and timidity. Less impassioned than the dances of Spain, it affects [Pg 87] the senses with a gentle langour which it is not easy to resist.

We met with a Frenchman at Taganrok, a real hero of romance. At eighteen his adventurous temper impelled him to quit the service to go and play a part in the Greek revolution. He participated in all the chances and dangers of the struggle against the Turks; and battling sometimes as a guerrillero, sometimes as a seaman, and sometimes as a diplomatist, he was thrown into more or less immediate contact with all those who shed such a lustre on the war of independence. In one of his campaigns he chanced to save the life of a young and pretty Smyrniote, whom he lost no time in marrying and bearing far away from the scenes of massacre with which the whole archipelago then abounded. A Russian nobleman advised him to repair to Moscow, and furnished him with the means. His wife's magnificent Greek costume, her youth and beauty, produced an intense sensation in that capital. The whole court, which was then in Moscow, was full of interest for the young Smyrniote, and the empress even sought to attach her to her person by the most tempting offers. Madame de V. refused them, preferring to remain with her husband, whose conduct, however, was far from irreproachable. Being young, very handsome, and of an enterprising character, his successes among the Muscovite ladies were very numerous; and he was everywhere known by the name of the handsome Frenchman.

An adventure that made a great deal of noise, and in which a lady of the court had completely compromised her reputation for his sake, obliged him to quit Moscow in the midst of his triumphs. He then led his wife from one capital to another, presenting her everywhere as an interesting victim of the Greek revolution. After this European tour, he returned to Paris, where he passed some years. Many eminent artists of that city painted the portrait of his wife, who is still very beautiful. In 1838 he left Paris and settled in Taganrok as a teacher of the French language; and there this poet, traveller, man of the world, and *beau cavalier* is throwing away almost all his advantages, which are of little service to him in the walk he has chosen, and in a town where there are so few persons capable of appreciating him.

Our whole colony in Taganrok consists of Doctor Meunier, who acts as consul; M. de V., and a Provençal lady, who keeps a boarding-school.

This Doctor Meunier is another original. He passed I know not how many years in the service of the Shah of Persia, who had a great regard for him, and invested him on his departure with the order of the sun, a magnificent decoration, more brilliant than that of a grand cordon.

Having shrewdly availed himself of his extensive opportunities for observation, his acquaintance is highly to be prized by all who love to give their imagination free scope: his

graphic and marvellous stories are like pages from the Arabian Nights. In an instant, he sets [Pg 88] before his hearers palaces of gold and azure, bewitching almehs, towns ruined to their foundations, towers of human heads, a French milliner superintending the education of Persian ladies, princes, beggars, dervishes, unbounded luxury side by side with the most hideous poverty, and all that the East can show to move, allure, or terrify the soul.

One of the houses that offer most attractions for foreigners, is that of Mr. Yeams, brother of the English consul-general of Odessa. We found him possessed of all his brother's amiable qualities and perfect tact. When the English can shake off the stiffness with which they are so justly reproached, and their immoderate pride, they are perhaps the most agreeable of all acquaintances. They generally possess strong powers of observation and analysis, large and sound information, genuine dignity of conduct, and above all, a good-humoured kindliness, that is more winning for the pains they take to conceal it.

While looking over Mr. Yeams' English, French, and German library, and the journals of all nations that lie on the tables, it is not easy to believe oneself on the shores of the Sea of Azov, and on the outskirts of Europe. The "Journal des Débats," the "Times," and the "Augsburg Gazette," put you *au courant* of the affairs of Europe, as though Paris and London were not a thousand leagues away from you.

It is not to be conceived into what a confusion of ideas one is cast at first, by the sight of a room filled with books, maps, journals, familiar articles of furniture, and people talking French: you ask yourself what is become of the days and nights you have spent in galloping post, the vast extent of sea you have crossed, the leagues of land and water, the regions and the climes you have left between you and your native country.

With the advances civilisation is daily making, distances will soon be annulled; for distance to my thinking, consists not in difference of longitude, but in diversity of manners and ideas. I certainly felt myself nearer to France in Taganrok than I should have been in certain cantons of Switzerland or Germany.

On the eve of our departure we attended some horse-races, that interested us only by the number and the variety of the spectators. There we began to make acquaintance with the Kalmucks, some of whom had come to the fair to sell their horses, the breed of which is in great request throughout the south of Russia. There was nothing very captivating in the Mongol features and savage appearance of these worshippers of the Grand Lama; and when I saw the jealous and disdainful looks they cast on those around them, and heard their loud yells whenever a horse passed at full speed before them, I could not help feeling some apprehension at the thought that I should soon have to throw myself on their hospitality.

Taganrok has the strongest resemblance to a Levantine town, so much are its Greek and Italian [Pg 89] inhabitants in a majority over the rest of the population. Such was the perpetual hubbub, that we could hardly persuade ourselves we were in Russia, where the people usually make as little noise as possible, lest the echo of their voices should reach St. Petersburg. The Greeks, though subjected to the imperial *régime*, are less circumspect, and retain under the northern sky the vivacity and restless temperament that characterise their race. We particularly admired that day, a number of young Greek women, whose black eyes and elegant figures attracted every gaze. A string of carriages was drawn up round part of the race-course, and enabled us to review all the aristocratic families of the town and neighbourhood. The ladies were dressed as for a ball, with short sleeves, their heads uncovered and decked with flowers.

A blazing sun and whirlwinds of dust, such as would be thought fabulous in any other country, soon dimmed all this finery, and drove away most of the spectators: we were not the last to seek refuge in the covered alleys of a neighbouring bazaar, where we had ices and delicious water-melons set before us in the Armenian café for a few kopeks.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[6] A *hectare* is a little more than two acres.

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# CHAPTER XII.

DEPARTURE FROM TAGANROK—SUNSET IN THE STEPPES—A GIPSY CAMP—ROSTOF; A TOWN UNPARALLELED IN THE EMPIRE—NAVIGATION OF THE DON—AZOV; ST. DIMITRI—ASPECT OF THE DON—NAKITCHEVANE, AND ITS ARMENIAN COLONY.

As we turned our backs on Taganrok, we could easily foresee what we should have to suffer

during our journey. A long drought and a temperature of 99° had already changed the verdant plains of the Don into an arid desert. At times the wind raised such billows of dust around us, that the sky was completely veiled from our eyes; our breath failed us, and the blood boiled in our ears; our sufferings for the moment were horrible. The hot air of a conflagration does not cause a more painful sense of suffocation than that produced by the wind of the desert. The horses could not stand against it, but stopped and hung down their heads, seeming as much distressed as ourselves.

As we approached the Don the country was not quite such a dead, unbroken flat as before; a few Cossack stanitzas began to show themselves among the clumps of trees on the banks of the river. Deep gullies lined with foliage, and the traces of several streams, show how agreeable this part of the steppes must be in spring; but at the period of our journey every thing had been dried up and almost calcined by the rays of a sun which no cloud had obscured for two months.

Before reaching Rostof, we passed through a large Armenian village. Its picturesque position, [Pg 90] in the midst of a ravine, and the oriental fashion of its houses, give some interest and variety to these lonely regions, and transiently busy the imagination. The evening promised to be very beautiful; something serene, calm, and melancholy, had succeeded to the enervating heat of the day.

Sunset in the steppes is like sunset nowhere else. In a country of varied surface, the gradually lengthening shadows give warning long beforehand that the sun is approaching the horizon. But here there is nothing to intercept its rays until the moment it sinks below the line of the steppe; then the night falls with unequalled rapidity; in a few moments all trace is gone of that brilliant luminary that just before was making the whole west ablaze. It is a magnificent transformation, a sudden transition to which the grandeur of the scene adds almost supernatural majesty and strangeness.

Fatigued by the rapidity with which we had been travelling since we left Taganrok, I took advantage of our halt at a post station, not far from the village, to ascend the rising ground that concealed the road from my view.

As I have said, the night had come down suddenly, and there remained in the west but a few pale red stripes that were fading away with every second. At the opposite point of the horizon the broad red glowing moon, such as it appears when it issues from the sea, was climbing majestically towards the zenith, and already filled that region of the heavens with a soft and mysterious radiance. The greater part of the steppe was still in gloom, whilst a golden fringe marked the limits of earth and sky: the effect was very singular and splendid.

When I reached the summit of the hill an involuntary cry of surprise and alarm escaped me. I remained motionless before the unexpected scene that presented itself to my eyes—a whole gipsy camp, realising one of Sir Walter Scott's most striking fictions. Dispersed over the whole surface of the globe, and placed at the bottom of the social scale, this vagrant people forms in Russia, as elsewhere, a real tribe of pariahs, whose presence is regarded with disgust, even by the peasants. The government has attempted to settle a colony of these Bedouins of Europe in Bessarabia, but with little success hitherto. True to the traditional usages of their race, the Tsigans abhor every thing belonging to agriculture and regular habits. No bond has ever been found strong enough to check that nomade humour they inherit from their forefathers, and which has resisted the rude climate of Russia and the despotism of its government. Just as in Italy and Spain, they roam from village to village, plying various trades, stealing horses, poultry, and fruit, telling fortunes, procuring by fraud or entreaty the means of barely keeping themselves alive, and infinitely preferring such a vagabond and lazy existence to the comfort they might easily secure with a moderate amount of labour.

Their manner of travelling reminds one of the emigrations of barbarous tribes. Marching [Pg 91] always in numerous bodies, they pass from place to place with all they possess. The women, children, and aged persons, are huddled together in a sort of cart called *pavoshk*, drawn each by one or two small horses with long manes. All their wealth consists of a few coarse brown blankets, which form their tents by night, and in some tools employed in their chief trade, that of farriery.

All travellers who have visited Russia, speak with enthusiasm of the gipsy singing heard in the Moscow *salons*. No race perhaps possesses an aptitude for music in a higher degree than these gipsies. In many other respects too, their intelligence appeared to us remarkable. A long abode in Moldavia, where there are said to be more than 100,000 Tsigans, enabled us to study with facility the curious habits of this people, and to collect a great number of facts, which would not perhaps be without interest for the majority of readers.[7]

The Tsigans pass the fine season in travelling from fair to fair, encamping for some weeks in the neighbourhood of the towns, and living, heedless of the future, in thorough Asiatic indolence; but when the snows set in, and the northern blasts sweep those vast plains as level as the sea, the condition of these wretched creatures is such, as may well excite the strongest pity. But half clad, cowling in huts sunk below the surface of the ground, and destitute of the commonest necessaries, it is inconceivable how they live through the winter. Horrible as such a state of existence must be, they never give it a thought from the moment the breath of the south enables them to resume their vagrant career. Recklessness is the predominant feature in their character, and the most frightful sufferings cannot force them to bestow a moment's consideration on the future.

The singular apparition that had suddenly arrested my steps by the road side, was that of a

troop of gipsies encamped for the night in that lonely spot, about thirty yards from the road, near a field of water-melons. Their *pavoshks* were arranged in a circle, with the shafts turned upwards, and support the cloths of their tents, which could only be entered by creeping on all fours. Two large fires burned at a little distance from the tents, and round them sat about fifty persons of the most frightful appearance. Their sooty colour, matted hair, wild features, and the rags that scarcely covered them, seen by the capricious light of the flames, that sometimes glared up strongly, and at other moments suddenly sank down and left every thing in darkness, produced a sort of demoniacal spectacle, that recalled to the imagination those sinister scenes of which they have so long been made the heroes.

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The history of all that is most repulsive in penury and the habits of a vagrant life, was legible in their haggard faces, in the restless expression of their large black eyes, and the sort of voluptuousness with which they grovelled in the dust; one would have said it was their native element, and that they felt themselves born for the mire with all swarming creatures of uncleanness. The women especially appeared hideous to me. Covered only with a tattered petticoat, their breasts, arms, and part of their legs bare, their eyes haggard, and their faces almost hidden under their straggling locks, they retained no semblance of their sex, or even of humanity.

The faces of some old men struck me, however, by their perfect regularity of features, and by the contrast between their white hair and the olive hue of their skins. All were smoking, men, women, and children. It is a pleasure they esteem almost as much as drinking spirits. What painter's imagination ever conceived a wilder or more fantastic picture!

Hitherto they had not perceived me, but the noise of our carriage, which was rapidly advancing, and my husband's voice, put them on the alert. The whole gang instantly started to their feet, and I found myself, not without some degree of dread, surrounded by a dozen of perfectly naked children, all bawling to me for alms. Some young girls seeing the fright I was in began to sing in so sweet and melodious a manner, that even our Cossack seemed affected. We remained a long while listening to them, and admiring the picturesque effect of their encampment in the steppes, under the beautiful and lucid night sky. No thought of serious danger crossed our minds, and, indeed, it would have been quite absurd; but in any other country than Russia such an encounter would have been far from agreeable.

In the course of the following day we reached Rostof, a pretty little town on the Don, entirely different in appearance from the other Russian towns. You have here none of the cold, monotonous straight lines that afflict the traveller's sight from one end of the empire to the other; but the inequality of the ground, and the wish to keep near the harbour, have obliged the inhabitants to build their houses in an irregular manner, which has a very picturesque effect.

The population, too, a mixture of Russians, Greeks, and Cossacks, have in their ways and habits nothing at all analogous to the systematic stiffness and military drill that seem to regulate all the actions of the Russians. The influence of a people long free has changed even the character of the chancery *employés*, who are here exempt from that arrogance and self-sufficiency that distinguish the petty nobles of Russia. Hence society is much more agreeable in Rostof than in most of the continental towns. The ridiculous pretensions of *tchin* (rank) do not there assail you at every step; there is a complete fusion of nationality, tastes, and ideas, to the great advantage of all parties.

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This secret influence exercised by the Cossacks on the Russians, is worthy of note, and seems to prove that the defects of the latter are attributable rather to their political system, than to the inherent character of the nation.

Their natural gaiety, kept down by the secret inquisition of a sovereign power, readily gets the upper hand when opportunity offers. The public functionaries associate freely in Rostof, with the Cossacks and the Greek merchants, without any appearance of the haughty exclusiveness elsewhere conspicuous in their class.

One thing that greatly surprised us, and that shows how much liberal ideas are in favour in this town, is the establishment of a sort of casino, where all grades of society assemble on Sunday, to dance and hold parties of pleasure. This is without a parallel elsewhere.

This casino contains a large ball-room, handsome gardens, billiard and refreshment-rooms, and every thing else that can be desired in an establishment of the sort. Though all persons are at liberty to enter without payment, it is nevertheless frequented by the best society, who dance there as heartily as in the most aristocratic *salons*. All distinctions vanish in the casino: public functionaries, shopkeepers, officers' wives, work-girls, foreigners, persons, in short, of all ranks and conditions mingle together, forming an amusing pell-mell, that reminds one, by its unceremonious gaiety, of the *bals champêtres* of the environs of Paris. Every thing is a matter of surprise to the traveller in this little town, so remote from all civilisation: the hotels are provided with good restaurants, clean chambers, each furnished with a bed, and all appurtenances complete (a thing unheard of everywhere else in the interior of Russia), besides many other things that are hardly to be found even in Odessa.

Rostof is the centre of all the commerce of the interior of the empire, with the Sea of Azov, and with a large portion of the Russian coasts of the Black Sea. Through this town pass all the productions of Siberia, and the manufactured goods intended for consumption throughout the greater part of Southern Russia. These goods are floated down the Volga as far as Doubofka, in the vicinity of Saritzin. They are then carried by land, a distance of about thirty-eight miles to Kahilnitzkaia, where they are embarked on the Don, and conveyed to Rostof, their general

*entrepôt*. The barges on the Don and the Volga are flat; 112 feet long, from twenty to twenty-six wide, and about six feet deep. They draw only two feet of water, and cost from 300 to 500 rubles. They are freighted with timber and firewood, mats, bark, pitch, tar, hemp, cables, and cordage, pig and wrought iron, pieces of artillery, anchors, lead, copper, butter, &c. The whole traffic and navigation of the Don, down stream, from Kahalnitzkaia, depends on the arrivals from the Volga. The barges employed on the latter river, being put together with wooden bolts, are taken asunder at Doubofka, and laid with their cargoes in carts, on which they are conveyed to the [Pg 94] banks of the Don.[8] Seven or eight days are sufficient for this operation, the expense of which amounts nearly to a quarter of the capital employed. Thus every year the crown and the merchants spend from 850,000 to 1,000,000 rubles at Doubofka. It is reckoned that 10,000 pairs of oxen, on an average, are employed on the road connecting the two rivers. The charge for heavy goods is from sixty to sixty-five kopeks the 100 kilogrammes. The vessels that ascend the Upper Don convey the goods above-named to the government of Voronege and the adjoining ones; besides which, some are freighted with the fruits and wines of the Don. Scarcely any traffic ascends the lower part of the river.

The coasting trade of Rostof is, therefore, brisk, and particularly so since the establishment of the quarantine at Kertch. There were exported from the town, in 1840, for Russian ports, more than 3,500,000 rubles' worth of domestic goods of various kinds, and about 700,000 rubles' worth of provisions, chiefly intended for the armies. Flax-seed and common wool have also become, within the last three years, rather important articles of export to foreign countries. The population of Rostof is about 8000.

Azov, on the other side of the Don, a little below Rostof, is now only a large village. Its long celebrated fortress has been abandoned, and is falling into ruin. It is said to occupy the site of the ancient Tana, built by the Greeks of the Bosphorus.

The fort of Saint Dimitri, built by Peter the Great, between Rostof and Nakhitchevane, has had the same fate as Azov. It was formerly destined to protect the country against the incursions of the Turks, who were then masters of the opposite bank. The post-road traverses its whole length, and then continues all the way to Nakhitchevane, along a raised causeway, and overlooks the whole basin of the river. Nothing can be more varied than the wide landscapes through which one travels along this extended ridge. Behind lies Rostof, with its harbour full of vessels, and its houses rising in terrace rows, one above the other, its Greek churches, and its hanging gardens. On the right is the calm and limpid mirror of the river, spreading out into a broad basin, with banks shaded with handsome poplars. Fishing-boats, rafts, and barges diversify its surface, and give the most picturesque appearance to this part of the landscape. Then in front, Nakhitchevane, the elegant Armenian town, towers before you, the glazed windows of its great bazaars glittering in the sun. Enter the town, and you are surprised by a vision of the East, as you behold the capricious architecture of the buildings, and the handsome Asiatic figures that pass before you.

Impelled by our recollections of Constantinople, we visited every quarter of the town without [Pg 95] delay. At the sight of the veiled women, trailing their yellow slippers along the ground with inimitable *nonchalance*, the Oriental costumes, the long white beards, the merchants sitting on their heels before their shops, and the bazaars filled with the productions of Asia, we fancied ourselves really transported to one of the trading quarters of Stamboul; the illusion was complete. The shops abound with articles, many of which appeared to us very curious. The Armenians are excellent workers in silver. We were shown some remarkably beautiful saddles, intended for Caucasian chiefs. One of them covered with blue velvet, adorned with black enamelled silver plates, and with stirrups of massive silver, and a brilliantly adorned bridle, had been ordered for a young Circassian princess. Here, as in Constantinople, each description of goods has its separate bazaar, and the shops are kept by men only.

This Armenian town, seated on the banks of the Don, in the heart of a country occupied by the Cossacks, is still one of those singularities which are only to be met with in Russia. One cannot help asking what can have been the cause why these children of the East have transplanted themselves into a region, where nothing is in harmony with their manner of being; where the language, habits, and wants of the inhabitants are diametrically opposite to their own, and where nature herself reminds them, by stern tokens, that their presence there is but an accident. It is true that the Armenians are essentially cosmopolitan, and accommodate themselves to all climates and governments, when their pecuniary interests require it. Industrious, intelligent, and frugal, they thrive everywhere, and commerce springs up with their presence, in every place where they settle. Thus it was that Nakhitchevane, the town of traffic *par excellence*, to which purchasers resort from the distance of twenty-five leagues all round it, arose amidst the wilderness of the Don. It was only Armenians who could have effected such a prodigy, and found the means of prosperity in a retail trade. But nothing has escaped their keen sagacity; every source of profit is largely employed by them. They do not confine themselves to the local trade; on the contrary, there is not a fair in all Southern Russia that is not attended by dealers from Nakhitchevane. The supply of dress and arms to the inhabitants of the Caucasus, still forms one of the principal branches of commerce for these Armenians. They maintain a pretty close correspondence with the mountaineers, and are even accused of serving them as spies. As to their social habits, the Armenians are in Nakhitchevane what they are everywhere else; they may change their country and their garb, but their manners and their usages never undergo any alteration. Their race is like a tree whose trunk is almost destroyed, but which throws up at every point new shoots, invariable in their nature, and differing from each other only in some outward particulars.

The colony of Nakhitchevane dates from the year 1780, when Catherine II. had the greater part of the Armenians of the Crimea transported to the banks of the Don. The colonists are divided into agriculturists and shopkeepers. The former inhabit five villages, containing a population of [Pg 96] 4600; the others reside exclusively in the town, which is the chief place of their establishment, and contains about 6000 souls. These Armenians enjoy the same privileges as the Greeks of Marioupol, already mentioned. They are under the control of functionaries chosen by themselves, and it happens very rarely that they are obliged to have recourse to the Russian tribunals.

The following was the decision adopted by the Council of the Empire, in 1841, relatively to the Armenians of New Russia. "The descendants of the Armenians settled at the invitation of the government, in the towns of Karasson Bazar, Starikrim in the Crimea, Nakhitchevane, and Gregorioupol, in the government of Kherson, will continue to pay, not the poll-tax, but the land-tax, and that on houses, according to the privileges granted to their fathers by an ukase of October 28, 1799; whilst those who have settled since that time, as well as all Armenians generally, shall be liable to the poll-tax, in pursuance of an ukase of May 21, 1836; in addition to which they shall pay from January 1, 1841; viz., townspeople and artisans, seven rubles per house, and agriculturists seventeen and a half kopeks per deciatine of land."

**FOOTNOTES:**

[7] As the plan of the present work does not allow of our entering on the subject in this place, we reserve it for our "Travels in the Principalities of the Danube," to be hereafter published.

[8] The construction of a canal or a railroad between the Don and the Volga has long been talked of. Peter I. began a canal, but the works were soon abandoned. A new project was laid before the government in 1820, the expense of which was estimated at 7,500,000., but it remains still to be realised.

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# CHAPTER XIII.

GENERAL REMARKS ON NEW RUSSIA—ANTIPATHY BETWEEN THE MUSCOVITES AND MALOROSSIANS—FOREIGN COLONIES—GENERAL ASPECT OF THE COUNTRY, CATTLE, &c.—WANT OF MEANS OF COMMUNICATION—RIVER NAVIGATION; BRIDGES—CHARACTER OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE—HISTORY OF THE STEAMBOAT ON THE DNIESTR—THE BOARD OF ROADS AND WAYS—ANECDOTE.

New Russia, which we have now traversed in its whole length, from west to east, consists of the three governments of Kherson, Taurid, and Iekaterinoslav. It is bounded on the north by the governments of Podolia, Kiev, Poltava, and Kharkov; on the east by the country of the Don Cossacks, the Sea of Azov, and the Straits of Kertch; on the south by the Black Sea, and on the west by the Dniestr, which divides it from Bessarabia. Its surface may be estimated at 1882 square myriamètres. It contains a population of 1,346,515, which makes about 715 inhabitants to a square myriamètre.

The existing organisation of the three governments dates from the year 1802. Their territory was successively annexed to the empire, by the treaty of Koutchouk Kainardji, the conquest of the Crimea, and the convention concluded at Jassy, in 1791.

The population of these regions is extremely mixed. The Malorossians (Little Russians) formerly known by the appellation of Cossacks of the Ukraine, form its principal nucleus; then come [Pg 97] numerous villages of Muscovites (Great Russians) belonging to the crown and to individuals; colonies of Germans, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, and Bulgarians; the military establishments of Vosnecensk, formed with the Cossacks of the Boug and fugitives from all the neighbouring nations; and lastly the Tatars, who occupy the greater part of the Crimea and the western shores of the Sea of Azov.

Here are certainly very various and heterogeneous elements; nor can there exist between them any religious or political sympathy. The Muscovites and the Malorossians are even very hostile to each other, though professing the same creed and subject to the same laws. In spite of all the efforts of the government, and notwithstanding all the Muscovite colonies disseminated through the country, no blending of the two races has yet been effected. The old ideas of independence of the Cossacks of the Ukraine, are very far from being entirely extinguished, and the Malorossians, who have not forgotten the liberty and the privileges they enjoyed down to the end of the last century, always bear in mind that serfdom was established amongst them only by an imperial ukase of Catherine II. When the Emperor Alexander travelled through the Crimea, in 1820, it is said that he received more than 60,000 petitions from peasants claiming their freedom. Two

years afterwards an insurrection broke out at Martinofka, in the environs of Taganrok; but it was speedily put down, and led to nothing but the transportation of some hundreds of unhappy serfs to Siberia.

As for the foreign colonies established in New Russia, the government adapted its regulations at first in strict accordance with their wants. Each of them possessed a constitution in harmony with its manners, its usages, and its state of civilisation, and nothing had been neglected that could prompt the development of their prosperity.

But within the last few years, the principles of political unity have been gaining the upper hand, and all the government measures are tending to assimilate the foreign populations to the free peasants of the crown. It is with this view that the special administrative committees have been suppressed, and the ministry of the domains of the crown has been created. Undoubtedly, as we have already said, when speaking of the German colonies, Russia has an incontestible right to strive to render herself homogeneous; the interests of her policy and her nationality require that she should neglect no means of arriving at a uniform administrative system. Unfortunately, generalisations are still impossible in the empire. Where there are so many conflicting forms of civilisation, the attempt to impose one unvarying system of rule upon so many dissimilar peoples, cannot be unattended with danger, particularly when that system is an exclusive one, and belongs only to one of the least enlightened portions of the population. It is, at this day, quite as impolitic to apply to the German colonists the administrative system practised with the Russian peasants, as it would be absurd to govern the latter like the Germans. [Pg 98]

The government would act more wisely if it tried, in the first place, to raise its native subjects to the level of the foreigners, instead of depressing the latter by subjecting them to the same conditions as its 40,000,000 of serfs. The difficulties would no doubt be great; but obstinately to persist in establishing a forced administrative unity by dint of ukases, is nothing short of ruin to those thriving and industrious foreign colonies, which for more than half a century have done so much for the prosperity of the country, by bringing the soil of Southern Russia into productive cultivation; and it is well known, that already, several hundred families have abandoned their settlements and returned to Germany.

The whole of Southern Russia from the banks of the Dniestr to the Sea of Azov, and to the foot of the mountains of the Crimea, consists exclusively of vast plains called steppes, elevated from forty to fifty yards above the level of the sea. The soil is completely bare of forests; it is only in some sheltered localities along the banks of the Dniepr and the other rivers, and in their islands, that we find a few woods of oak, birch, aspen, and willow. The inhabitants of the country are obliged to use for firing, reeds, straw, and the dung of cattle kneaded into little masses like bricks. In Odessa, they import wood from Bessarabia, the Crimea, and the banks of the Danube; but it costs as much as eighty rubles the fathom. English coal is also consumed, and as the merchant vessels carry it as ballast, its cost is very moderate. Within the last few years the native coal from the government of Iekaterinoslav and the Don country, is also beginning to be used throughout Southern Russia.

The growth of wheat and the rearing of cattle, chiefly Merino sheep, are the main sources of wealth in these regions. The best cultivated tracts are, in the first place, those occupied by the German colonies, and next, the environs of Podolia and Khivia. But the most productive soil is, unquestionably, that of the north-east of the government of Iekaterinoslav, where the surface of the country is more varied and better irrigated. Unfortunately, the inhabitants have scarcely any markets for their produce.

The grand want of this part of the empire is, the means of transport. Within the sixty years or thereabouts, during which the Russians have been in possession of these regions, they have founded many towns and erected many edifices to accommodate the public functionaries; but they have completely forgotten the most important thing, the thing without which agriculture and trade can make no progress worth speaking of. There are no causeways anywhere; the roads are mere tracks marked out by two ditches a few inches deep, and a line of posts set up from verst to verst to mark the distance. But usually no account is made of the imperial track, and the wheel-ruts vary laterally over a space of half a league and more. With every fall of rain the course of the road is changed. In winter, when snow-storms and fogs prevail, travelling in New Russia is beset with serious perils. It is then so easy to wander from the route, that travellers are often in danger of losing themselves in the steppes, and dying of cold. [Pg 99]

Bridges over the streams and rivers are as rare as causeways, and where any exist they are so defective, that drivers always try to avoid them, and so save their vehicles from the chance of being broken. Whenever the traveller is suddenly roused up from a sound sleep by a violent shock, he may be certain he is passing over a bridge or a fragment of a causeway. Spring and autumn are the seasons when he has most reason to curse the bad management of the Board of Bridges and Roads, for then the roads are impracticable: the smallest gully becomes the bed of a torrent, and communications are often totally interrupted. The consequence is that the transport of goods can only be effected in winter and during four months of summer. Nor must we allow ourselves to imagine that sledging is a very safe mode of carriage; the snow-storms cause great disasters, and if the winter be at all rigorous, an enormous number of draught oxen are lost.

Every one knows what fine rivers nature has bestowed on New Russia. The Dniestr and the Dniepr are two admirable canals, which, after having traversed the central parts of the empire and its most fertile regions, terminate in the Black Sea. Their navigation, if well managed, would certainly compensate largely for the difficulties in the way of constructing roads, and might amply suffice for the wants of the population. But, as we have said in our chapter on the

commerce of the Black Sea, every thing in Russia bears deplorable proof of the supineness of the government. It must, however, be owned that it is not to be reproached in every case with want of the will to do better; for recently, upon the enlightened solicitation of Count Voronzof, it was determined to establish on the Donetz, one of the confluents of the Don, a steam-tug to take in tow the coal-barges of the government of Iekaterinoslav.

The two grand obstacles which, in our opinion, impede the accomplishment of useful works in Russia, consist in the self-sufficient incapacity of the ministry of finance, and in the peculation of the functionaries. Count Cancrine[9] may be an excellent bookkeeper; we grant that he possesses no ordinary talent in matters of account; but we believe, and facts demonstrate it, that his administration has greatly diminished the financial resources of the empire. The man possesses not one enlarged idea, no forecast; he sacrifices every thing to the present moment. Every item of expenditure must bring in an immediate profit, or he looks on it as money mis-spent; he can never be brought to understand that all capital expended in promoting agriculture and trade, returns sooner or later to the exchequer with large interest. [Pg 100]

In 1840, a landowner, deeply interested in the navigation of the liman of the Dniestr, after many fruitless efforts, at last succeeded by stratagem in inducing him to establish a small steamer on those waters, in order to facilitate the commercial intercourse between Akermann and Ovidiopol. The salt works of Touzla, situated in the vicinity, were to advance the necessary funds to the directory of the steamer, and although that directory was entirely dependent on the government, it was, nevertheless, obliged to enter into an engagement for the repayment of the small sum advanced, within a specified time. The steamboat was set plying; but whether from mismanagement or from other causes, no profit was realised in the first few years; on the contrary, there was some loss. Angry expostulations on the part of the ministry soon followed; and for a while there was an intention of suppressing the new means of communication, though so highly important to both banks. Such is the behaviour of the ministry on all industrial or commercial questions. We shall have many other facts of the same kind to mention, when we come to speak of Bessarabia and the Crimea.

Now for an anecdote exemplifying the proceedings of the Board of Roads and Ways.[10] It was proposed by Count Voronzof in 1838, to have a bridge constructed over a brook that crosses the road from Ovidiopol to Odessa, and which is twice every year converted into a torrent. The chief engineer of the district having estimated the expense at 36,750 rubles, the scheme was discountenanced by the ministry, and the bridge remained unbuilt for four years. In 1841, Count Voronzof visited Bessarabia, and his carriage was near being overturned on the little old bridge by which the brook is crossed. "It is very much to be regretted," said he to M——i, who accompanied him, "that there is not a suitable bridge here; the ministry would not, perhaps, have refused to sanction it, if the engineers had been more moderate in their demands."

Some days afterwards M——i sent for an Italian engineer, and put into his hands a statement of all the measurements on which the government engineers had founded their estimate. The Italian asked at first 8400 rubles, and finally reduced his demand to 6475. M——i hastened to lay his proposal before Count Voronzof, who was amazed, and instantly accepted the terms. The bridge was to be forthwith constructed. It was not long before the chief engineer visited M——i, and beset him with reproaches and remonstrances, to which the former replied thus: "My good sir, I have not slandered you, nor do I bear you the least enmity. I wanted a bridge that I might visit my estate without danger. It is not enough to have a steamer on the liman of the Dniestr, unless one has also the means of making use of it. Your demand for the execution of the works was 36,750 rubles; another person, who has no desire to lose by the job, is content to perform it for 6475. I am sorry you think he has asked too little. Be that as it may, I shall have the bridge, and that was a thing I had set my mind on. Excuse me this once." [Pg 101]

We see by this, with what difficulty useful improvements are effected in Russia. The most earnest and laudable purposes are constantly frustrated by the vices of the administrative system. Unhappily there never can be an end to the fatal influence and the tyranny everywhere exercised by the public functionaries, until a radical reform shall have taken place in the social institutions of the empire; but nothing indicates as yet that there is any serious intention of effecting such a system.

## FOOTNOTES:

[9] See Appendix, p. 101.

[10] It is needless to say that our remarks do not apply to all the Russian engineers without exception, for we ourselves have known many upright and worthy men amongst them; and these men were the more deserving of esteem, as they always ended by being the victims of their own integrity.

# APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XIII.

"Count Cancrine was the only statesman in Russia who possessed some share of learning and general information, though somewhat deficient in the knowledge specially applicable to his own department. He was a very good bookkeeper; but chemistry, mechanics, and technology were quite unknown to him. His sense of duty overbore all feelings of German nationality; he really desired the good of Russia, while at the same time he did not neglect his own affairs, for the care of which his post afforded him peculiar facilities. Colbert's fortune was made matter of reproach to him; a similar reproach may be fairly made against M. Cancrine, even though he leaves to his children the care of expending his wealth. He has amassed a yearly income of 400,000 rubles. 'It will all go,' he says, 'my children will take care of that.'

"He was the most ardent partisan both of the prohibitive and of the industrial system; and the feverish development he gave to manufactures does not redeem the distress of agriculture to which he denied his solicitude. A true Russian would never have fallen into this error, but would have comprehended that Russia is pre-eminently an agricultural country. The question of serfdom found this minister's knowledge at fault. His monetary measures were but gropings in the dark, with many an awkward fall, and sometimes a lucky hit. He deserves credit, however, for having opposed the emperor's wasteful profusion, with a perseverance which the tsar called wrongheadedness, though he did not venture to break with him. It was Mazarine's merit that he gave Colbert to Louis XIV. In appointing M. Vrontshenko as his successor, Count Cancrine has rendered a very ill service to Russia."—*Ivan Golovine, Russia under Nicholas I.*

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# CHAPTER XIV.

THE DIFFERENT CONDITIONS OF MEN IN RUSSIA—THE NOBLES—DISCONTENT OF THE OLD ARISTOCRACY—THE MERCHANT CLASS—SERFDOM.

The Russian nation is divided into two classes: the aristocracy, who enjoy all the privileges; and the people who bear all the burdens of the state.

We must not, however, form to ourselves an idea of the Russian nobility at all similar to those we entertain of the aristocracies of Germany, or of ante-revolutionary France. In Russia, nobility is not exclusively conferred by birth, as in the other countries of Europe. There every freeman may become noble by serving the state either in a military or a civil capacity; with this difference only, that the son of a nobleman is advanced one step shortly after he enters the service, whilst the son of a commoner must wait twelve years for his first promotion, unless he have an opportunity of distinguishing himself in the meanwhile. Such opportunities indeed are easily found by all who have the inclination and the means to purchase them.

The first important modifications in the constitution of the noblesse were anterior to Peter the Great; and Feodor Alexievitch, by burning the charters of the aristocracy, made the first attempt towards destroying the distinction which the boyars wanted to establish between the great and the petty nobles. It is a curious fact, that at the accession of the latter monarch to the throne, most offices of state were hereditary in Russia, and it was not an uncommon thing to forego the services of a man who would have made an excellent general, merely because his ancestors had not filled that high post, which men of no military talent obtained by right of birth. Frequent mention has of late been made of the celebrated phrase, *The boyars have been of opinion and the tzar has ordained*, and it has been made the theme of violent accusations against the usurpation of the Muscovite sovereigns. But historical facts demonstrate that the supposed power of the nobility was always illusory, and that the so much vaunted and regretted institution served, in reality, only to relieve the tzars from all personal responsibility. The spirit of resistance, whatever may be said to the contrary, was never a characteristic of the Russian nobility. No doubt there have been frequent conspiracies in Russia; but they have always been directed against the life of the reigning sovereign, and never in any respect against existing institutions. The facility with which Christianity was introduced into the country, affords a striking proof of the blind servility of the Russian people. Vladimir caused proclamation to be made one day in the town of Kiev, that all the inhabitants were to repair next day to the banks of the Dniepr and receive baptism; and accordingly at the appointed hour on the morrow, without the least tumult or show of force, all the inhabitants of Kiev were Christians.

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The existing institutions of the Russian noblesse date from the reign of Peter the Great. The innovation of that sovereign excited violent dissatisfaction, and the nobles, not yet broken into the yoke they now bear, caused their monarch much serious uneasiness. The means which appeared to Peter I. best adapted for cramping the old aristocracy, was to throw open the field of

honours to all his subjects who were not serfs. But in order to avoid too rudely shocking established prejudices, he made a difference between nobles and commoners as to the period of service, entitling them respectively to obtain that first step which was to place them both on the same level. Having then established the gradations of rank and the conditions of promotion, and desirous of ratifying his institutions by his example, he feigned submission to them in his own person, and passed successively through all the steps of the scale he had appointed.

The rank of officer in the military service makes the holder a gentleman in blood, that is, confers hereditary nobility; but in the civil service, this quality is only personal up to the rank of college assessor, which corresponds to that of major.

The individual once admitted into the fourteenth or lowest class, becomes noble, and enjoys all the privileges of nobility as much as a count of the empire, with this exception only, that he cannot have slaves of his own before he has attained the grade of college assessor, unless he be noble born.

It results from this system that consideration is attached in Russia, not to birth, but merely to the grade occupied. As promotion from one rank to another is obtained after a period of service, specified by the statutes, or sooner through private interest, there is no college registrar (fourteenth class) whatever be his parentage, but may aspire to attain precedence over the first families in the empire; and the examples of these elevations are not rare. It must be owned, however, that the old families have more chance of advancement than the others: but they owe this advantage to their wealth rather than to their personal influence.

With all the apparent liberality of this scheme of nobility, it has, nevertheless, proved admirably subservient to the policy of the Muscovite sovereigns. The old aristocracy has lost every kind of influence, and its great families, most of them resident in Moscow, can now only protest by their inaction and their absence from court, against the state of insignificance to which they have been reduced, and from which they have no chance of recovery.

Had it been necessary for all aspirants to nobility to pass through the wretched condition of the common soldier, it is evident that the empire would not possess one-tenth of its present number of nobles. Notwithstanding their abject and servile condition, very few commoners would have the courage to ennoble themselves by undergoing such a novitiate, with the stick hanging over [Pg 104] them for many years. But they have the alternative of the civil service, which leads to the same result by a less thorny path, and offers even comparatively many more advantages to them than to the nobles by blood. Whereas the latter, on entering the military service, only appear for a brief while for form's sake in the ranks, become non-commissioned officers immediately, and officers in a few months; they are compelled in the civil service to act for two or three years as supernumeraries in some public office before being promoted to the first grade. It is true, the preliminary term of service is fixed for commoners at twelve years, but we have already spoken of the facilities they possess for abridging this apprenticeship.

But this excessive facility for obtaining the privileges of nobility has given rise to a subaltern aristocracy, the most insupportable and oppressive imaginable; and has enormously multiplied the number of *employés* in the various departments. Every Russian, not a serf, takes service as a matter of course, were it only to obtain rank in the fourteenth class; for otherwise he would fall back almost into the condition of the slaves, would be virtually unprotected, and would be exposed to the continual vexations of the nobility and the public functionaries. Hence, many individuals gladly accept a salary of sixty francs a year, for the permission of acting as clerks in some department; and so it comes to pass that the subaltern *employés* are obliged to rob for the means of subsistence. This is one of the chief causes of the venality and of the defective condition of the Russian administrative departments.

Peter the Great's regulations were excellent no doubt in the beginning, and hardly could that sovereign have devised a more efficacious means of mastering the nobility, and prostrating them at his feet. But now that the intended result has been amply obtained, these institutions require to be modified; for, under the greatly altered circumstances of the country, they only serve to augment beyond measure the numbers of a pernicious bureaucracy, and to impede the development of the middle class. To obtain admission into the fourteenth class, and become a noble, is the sole ambition of a priest's or merchant's son, an ambition fully justified by the unhappy condition of all but the privileged orders. There is no country in which persons engaged in trade are held in lower esteem than in Russia. They are daily subjected to the insults of the lowest clerks, and it is only by dint of bribery they can obtain the smallest act of justice. How often have I seen in the post stations, unfortunate merchants, who had been waiting for forty-eight hours and more, for the good pleasure of the clerk, without daring to complain. It mattered nothing that their papers were quite regular, the noble of the fourteenth class did not care for that, nor would he give them horses until he had squeezed a good sum out of the *particularnii tchelovieks*, as he called them in his aristocratic pride. The same annoyances await the foreigner, who, on the strength of his passport, undertakes a journey without a decoration at his buttonhole, [Pg 105] or any title to give him importance. I speak from experience: for more than two years spent in traversing Russia as a private individual, enabled me fully to appreciate the obliging disposition of the fourteenth class nobles. At a later period, being employed on a scientific mission by the government, I held successively the rank of major, lieutenant-colonel, and colonel; and then I had nothing to complain of; the posting-clerks, and the other *employés* received me with all the politeness imaginable. I never had to wait for horses, and as the title with which I was decked authorised me to distribute a few cuts of the whip with impunity, my orders were fulfilled with quite magical promptitude.

Under such a system, the aristocracy would increase without end in a free country. But it is not so in Russia, where the number of those who can arrive at a grade is extremely limited, the vast majority of the population being slaves. Thus the hereditary and personal nobility comprise no more than 563,653 males; though all free-born Russians enter the military or civil service, and remain at their posts as long as possible; for once they have returned into private life they sink into mere oblivion. From the moment he has put on plain clothes, the most deserving functionary is exposed to the vexations of the lowest subalterns, who then omit no opportunity of lording over their former superior.

Such social institutions have fatally contributed to excite a most decided antipathy between the old and the new aristocracy; and the emperor naturally accords his preference and his favours to those who owe him every thing, and from whom he has nothing to fear. In this way the new nobles have insensibly supplanted the old boyars. But their places and pecuniary gains naturally attach them to the established government, and consequently they are quite devoid of all revolutionary tendencies. Equally disliked by the old aristocracy whom they have supplanted, and by the peasants whom they oppress, they are, moreover, too few in numbers to be able to act by themselves; and, in addition to this, the high importance attached to the distinctions of rank, prevent all real union or sympathy between the members of this branch of Russian society. The tzar, who perfectly understands the character of this body, is fully aware of its venality and corruption; and if he honours it with his special favour, this is only because he finds in it a more absolute and blind submission than in the old aristocracy, whose ambitious yearnings after their ancient prerogatives cannot but be at variance with the imperial will. As for any revolutions which could possibly arise out of the discontent of this latter order, we may be assured they will never be directed against the political and moral system of the country; they will always be, as they have always been, aimed solely against the individual at the head of the government. Conspiracies of this kind are the only ones now possible in Russia; and what proves this fact is, the impotence of that resentment the tzars have provoked on the part of the old aristocracy, whenever they have touched on the question of emancipating the serfs.

The tzars have shown no less dexterity than the kings of France in their struggles against the [Pg 106] aristocracy, and they have been much more favoured by circumstances. We see the Russian sovereigns bent, like Louis XI., on prostrating the great feudatories of the realm; but there was this difference between their respective tasks, that the French nobles could bring armies into the field, and often did so, whereas the Russian nobles can only counteract the power of their ruler by secret conspiracies, and will never succeed in stirring up their peasants against the imperial authority.

What may we conclude are the destinies in store for the Russian nobility, and what part will it play in the future history of the country? It seems to us to possess little inherent vigour and vitality, and we doubt that a radical regeneration of the empire is ever to be expected at its hands. The influence of Europe has been fatal to it. It has sought to assimilate itself too rapidly with our modern civilisation, and to place itself too suddenly on a level with the nations of the west. Its efforts have necessarily produced only corruption and demoralisation, which, by bastardising the country, have deprived it of whatever natural strength it once possessed.

No doubt there are in Russia as elsewhere, men of noble and patriotic sentiments, who feel a lively interest in the greatness and the future destinies of their native land; but they are, perhaps, committed to an erroneous course; and it is to be feared that by adopting our liberal principles in their full extent, and seeking to apply them at home, they will do still more mischief than the obstinate conservatives who suffer themselves to be borne along passively by the current of time and circumstances.

Hence, after having studied the influence of European civilisation on Russia, we are fully prepared to understand the efforts which the Emperor Nicholas is making to isolate his empire as much as possible, and to restore its primitive nationality. Despairing of the destinies of his aristocracy, he, no doubt, wishes to preserve the middle class (whose development will infallibly be effected sooner or later) from the rock on which the former class have made shipwreck of their hopes. And certainly it is not among a few thousand nobles he can hope to find sufficient elements of greatness and prosperity for the present and for future times.

After the nobles come the merchants and burghers, about a million and a half in number, and now constituting the first nucleus of a middle class. They are wholly engrossed with commerce and their pecuniary interests. Among them there are some very wealthy men, and they are allowed to discharge the inoffensive functions of mayors in the towns. The nobility profess almost as much contempt for this class as for the slaves, and are not sparing towards it of injustice and extortion. But the Russian merchant is the calmest and most patient being imaginable, and in comparison with slavery and the sad condition of the soldier, he regards his own lot as the very ideal of good fortune. Down to the reign of Ivan IV., merchants enjoyed tolerably extensive privileges in Russia. They were, it is true, placed below the lowest class of the nobility, just as in [Pg 107] our days; but they were considered as a constituent part of the government, were summoned to the great assemblies of the nation, and voted in them like the boyars.

The Emperor Nicholas has sought of late years to raise their body in public estimation, by granting them many prerogatives of nobility; but his efforts have hitherto not been very successful. The only means of giving outward respectability to this important class, would be to afford it admission into the body of the nobles without compelling it to enter the government service. And surely an individual who contributes to develop the trade and commerce of the land, has as strong claims to honorary distinctions as a petty clerk, whose whole life is passed in cheating his superiors, and robbing those who are so unfortunate as to have any dealings with

him. Should the emperor ever adopt such a course, there would follow from it another advantage still more important, namely, that it would gradually extinguish the abuses of the present nobiliary system, and would immediately rid the public departments of all those useless underlings, who now encumber the various offices solely with a view to acquire a footing among the privileged orders.

The Russian and foreign merchants, established in the country, are divided into three classes, or guilds. Those of the first guild must give proof of possessing a capital of 50,000 rubles. They have a right to own manufactories, town and country houses, and gardens. They may trade with the interior of the empire, and with foreign countries; they are exempt from corporal punishments, and are privileged like the hereditary nobility to drive four horses in their carriages; but they must pay 3000 rubles for their licence.

Those of the second guild are required to prove only a capital of 20,000 rubles, and their trade is confined to the interior of the empire. They may be proprietors of factories, hotels and boats; but they are not allowed to have more than two horses to their carriages.

The third guild merchants, whose capital needs not exceed 8000 rubles, are the retail dealers of the towns and villages, they keep inns and workshops, and hold booths in the fairs.

The peasants who engage in trade, are not required to prove any capital. The statistics of these several classes, in 1839, were as follows:—

| | |
|---|---|
| First guild merchants | 889 |
| Second guild merchants | 1,874 |
| Third guild merchants | 33,808 |
| Peasants having permission to trade | 5,299 |
| Clerks | 8,345 |
| Total | 50,215 |

The slaves form by far the most considerable part of the population; their numbers, exclusive of those belonging to the crown and to private proprietors, exceed 45,000,000; an enormous amount in comparison with the numbers of the nobles.

We will not enter into any historical details respecting the origin of serfdom in Russia; every one knows that the institution is one of somewhat modern date, and that servitude, though long existing virtually, was established legally in the empire only by an ukase of Boris Godounof. We will confine our remarks to the institution as it exists at the present day. [Pg 108]

The slaves are divided into two classes, those belonging respectively to the crown, and to private individuals. The former are under the control of the ministry of the domains of the crown, a special board created January 1st, 1838, and presided over by General Count Kizelev. By law they are required to pay to the crown a capitation tax of fifteen rubles yearly for every male, but this tax is almost always raised to thirty or thirty-five rubles by the rapacity of the government servants. Besides these money contributions, they are subjected to *corvées* for the repair of the roads and public works, and they may also be required to furnish means of conveyance and food for the troops. For these latter services, it is true, they receive a nominal compensation in the shape of orders payable by treasury, but these are never cashed. Lastly, they are liable to military recruitment, which of late years has annually taken off six out of every 1000 male inhabitants in the governments of New Russia.

In exchange for all these burdens, the peasant receives from the crown the land necessary for his subsistence, the quantity of which varies from ten or eleven deciatines, to one or two, according to the density of the population. Whatever may have been said on the subject, the condition of the crown serf is neither miserable nor destitute, and his slavery cannot but be favourable to physical and animal life, the only life as yet understood by the bulk of the Russian people. Except in years of great dearth, such as often desolate the country, the peasant has his means of existence secured; his dwelling, his cattle, and his little field of buckwheat; and as far as freedom from moral and physical sufferings constitute happiness, he may be considered much better off than the free peasants of the other European states. With plenty of food, his dwelling well warmed in winter, his mind disencumbered of all those anxieties for the future that harass our labouring poor; and endowed by nature with a vigorous constitution, he possesses all the elements of that negative happiness which is founded on ignorance and the want of all awakened sense of man's dignity. The slave besides is so frugal, he needs so little to live, his wants and desires are so circumscribed, that poverty, as it exists in our civilised lands, is one of the rarest exceptions in Russia. But all these conditions of existence constitute a life essentially brutish; and the most wretched being in France would certainly not exchange his lot for that of the Muscovite peasant.

It cannot, however, be questioned that the crown serfs enjoy almost complete liberty. Simply attached to the soil, they are masters of their own time, and may even obtain permission to go and seek employment in the towns, or on the estates of private landowners. Hence, were it not for the difficulties connected with the emancipation of the private serfs, the crown peasants might be declared independent to-morrow, without any sort of danger to the empire. Their physical condition is in perfect harmony with the present state of civilisation, and in this respect the system established by the crown, does not deserve the outcry raised against it. The penury and distress in which the imperial serfs are plunged in some districts, are ascribable solely to the cupidity and corruption of the public functionaries, or to the want of outlets for the produce of the soil, and not to the laws regulating serfdom. [Pg 109]

The condition of the slaves on seignorial lands is both morally and physically less satisfactory than that of the crown serfs. They are subject to arbitrary caprice, and to countless vexations, particularly when they belong to small proprietors, or are immediately dependant on stewards. There exist, indeed, very strict regulations for their protection against the undue exactions of their lords; but the latter are, nevertheless, all-powerful through their social position and the posts they fill, and however they may abuse their authority, they are always sure of impunity. Thanks to judicial venality, they know that all appeals to justice against them are futile. There is only one case in which the peasant can hope for a favourable hearing, namely, where there is any ill-will between his master and the higher powers; but his wrongs must be very cruel indeed if they goad him to seek legal redress, for he well knows that sooner or later he will be made to pay dearly for his rebellion. We are bound, however, to acknowledge that the lords often act with the greatest humanity towards the serfs, and they have at last come to understand that in caring for the welfare of their peasants, they are taking the best means to augment their own fortunes. It is only to be regretted that their benevolent efforts are almost constantly paralysed by the rapine and insatiable cupidity of their stewards and agents.

The private slaves, who number about 23,000,000, pay a poll tax of eight rubles for every male to the crown, and must give half their time to their masters. They usually work three days in the week for the latter, and the other three for themselves. Their lord grants them five or six hectares of land, and often more, and all the produce they raise from them is their own. They are required furthermore to supply out of their numbers all the domestic servants requisite for their master's establishment, and to do extra duty labour of various kinds, dependent solely on the caprice of the latter. A peasant cannot quit his village without his master's permission, and if he exercises any handicraft trade whatever, he is bound to pay an annual sum proportioned to his presumed profits. This sum is called his *obrok*, and is often very considerable; in the case of agricultural and other peasants, it averages fifty rubles. But whatever be the position the serf [Pg 110] may have attained to by his talents and his skill, he never shakes off his absolute dependence on his master, one word from whom may compel him to abandon all his business and his prospects, and return to his village. Many of the wealthiest merchants of Moscow have been named to me, who are slaves by birth, and who have in vain offered hundreds of thousands of rubles for their freedom. It flatters the pride of the great patrician families to have men of merit among their serfs, and many of them send young slaves into the towns, and supply them with all the means necessary for pursuing a creditable and lucrative calling.

All the hawkers and pedlars that go from village to village, and from mansion to mansion, from the banks of the Neva to the extremity of Siberia, are slaves, who bring in large profits to their masters; it frequently happens that a *pometchik* has no other income than that which he thus derives from his peasants.

Marriages between serfs can only take place with the consent of the lord. They are usually consummated at a very early age, and are arranged by the steward, who never consults the parties, and whose sole object is to effect a rapid increase in the population of his village. The average price of a whole family is estimated as ranging from 25*l.* to 40*l.*

A great deal has been often said of the boundless attachment of the serfs to their lords; I doubt that it ever existed; at any rate, it exists no longer. The slaves no longer regard with the same resignation and apathy the low estate which Providence has assigned them in this world; the more liberal treatment enjoyed by the imperial serfs, has inoculated them with ideas of independence, and they are all now ambitious of passing into the domain of the crown—a good fortune, which in their eyes is equivalent to emancipation. This tendency of the serfs to detach themselves from the aristocracy is a most important fact, and if the emperor succeeds in regulating this great social movement so that it may be effected without turbulence, he will have rendered a signal service to Russia, and have mightily contributed to the regeneration and future welfare of her people.

Every village has its mayor, called *golova*, and its *starosts*, whose number depends on that of the population, there being usually one for every ten families. They are all elected by the community, and to them it belongs to regulate the various labours performed by it, and to apportion and collect the taxes. Whatever petty differences may arise between the peasants, are settled before the *starosts* or council of elders, whose decisions are always received with blind submission.

Military service is the only *corvée* which the Russian peasants regard with real horror. Their antipathy to it is universal, and the regiments can only be recruited by main force. There is no conscription in Russia, but whenever men are wanted, an imperial ukase is issued, commanding a certain number to be raised in such or such a government. In the crown lands, it is the head man of the village aided by the district authorities, who selects the future heroes, and this is usually [Pg 111] done in secret, in order to prevent desertion. The young men chosen are forthwith arrested, generally in the middle of the night, and remain fettered until they have been inspected by the surgeon, after which they are sent off in small detachments to the regiments, under the guard of armed soldiers. In the seignorial villages, the selection is made by the steward. But the business is here of more difficult execution than in the domains of the crown, and the unfortunate recruit is often chained to an aged peasant, who acts as his keeper, and cannot quit him day or night. I saw two young peasants thus chained to two old men, in a village belonging to General Papof; they spent their time quietly in drinking in the dram-shops, without exciting any surprise in the spectators. When we reflect on the privations and sufferings that await the Muscovite soldier, we cannot wonder at the intense repugnance the peasants entertain for the service.

The military spirit, so potent elsewhere, scarcely exists in the empire. Glory and honour are

things for which the Russian serfs care very little, nor have they any conception of the magic that lies in the words "Our country," "Our native land." The only country they know is their village, their stove, their *kasha*, the patch of ground they daily cultivate, and that mud which a French grenadier lifted up with his foot, exclaiming, "And this they call a country!" "*ils appellent cela une patrie!*" At the same time, it is evident that this antipathy of the Russians for military service, is to be attributed as much to the political constitution of the empire, as to the character of the inhabitants; and as that constitution has hitherto been a national necessity, it would be unjust to charge as a crime upon the government, the unhappy moral condition of its armies. We shall speak at more length in another place, on the subject of the Russian soldiery.

Moral and intellectual instruction have hitherto made very little way among the slave population. Attempts indeed have been made to found schools in some of the crown villages, but these attempts have been always ill-directed, and necessarily unsuccessful. Religion which everywhere else constitutes the most potent instrument of civilisation, can have in Russia no favourable effect on the improvement of the people. Consisting solely in fasts, crossings, and outward ceremonies, it leaves the mind totally uninfluenced, and in no respect acts as a bar to the demoralisation which is gradually pervading the immense class of the serfs. The peculiar circumstances of the Russian towns and villages are also perhaps among the greatest obstacles to intellectual progress. The advance of civilisation depends in a great measure on facility of intercourse. When a population is compact, and its several members are continually in presence of each other, each man's knowledge is propagated among his compatriots, facts and opinions are discussed, and men become mutually enlightened as to what is thought and done around them. From this continual interchange of mental wealth, there naturally arises an amount of [Pg 112] enlightenment and capacity that tends greatly to extend the domain of thought. But let any one cast his eyes on Russia, and he will be struck by the unfavourable manner in which its population is distributed. Not only are the great centres of population very thinly scattered over the surface, but the several dwellings too in the towns are placed very wide apart, and those of the villages still more so. Every man is isolated, every man lives by and for himself, or at least within a very contracted sphere. Social meetings are rare, and in winter almost impossible; in a word, it is not at all unusual for people not to know their neighbours on the opposite side of the street; hence the invariable *nesnai* (I do not know) with which the Russian replies to every question the traveller puts to him, ought not to astonish or incense the latter. At first I was disposed to think this ignorance was pretended, and to attribute it to sulkiness and indolence; but I afterwards perceived that it was occasioned in much greater measure by the absurd style of building adopted in the country.

Another thing that tends to enervate the Russians and keep them in their brutified condition, is the immoderate use of brandy, to which both men and women are addicted. It is truly deplorable that the government feels constrained to favour the sale of that pernicious liquor which forms its most important source of revenue. How often have I seen the dram-shops full of women dead drunk, who had left their poultry yards tenantless, and sold their household furniture to gratify their fatal passion.

A thing by which I have always been much struck in Russia, is the stationary uniformity which prevails over the whole surface of the empire, both in ideas and in physical productions. You see everywhere the same plans and arrangements of the buildings, the same implements, and the same agricultural practices and modes of carriage. Contact with foreigners has as yet had no influence on the Sclavonic population, and the prosperity generally enjoyed for sixty years by the German colonies has done little in the way of example. Is this intellectual insensibility the result of servitude exclusively? I think not. Servitude may indeed repress, but it cannot extinguish, the various qualities with which nature has endowed us; and if the Russians are still so backward, and give so little promise of improvement, we must explain the fact by the nature of their race, by their still infant state as a nation, and their want of precedents in civilisation. At the same time there is no reason to despair of them. In our opinion, the future civilisation of Russia rests in a great measure on the contingency of a religious reformation; but as that reformation could not but be hazardous to absolute power by awakening ideas of independence and resistance to oppression, the government impedes it by every means in its power, and labours unceasingly to reduce all the inhabitants of the empire to religious uniformity, as is proved by its conduct towards the United Greeks of Poland, and towards the Douckoboren and the Molokaner. I had [Pg 113] opportunities of observing among the members of the two latter communities, how great an influence a change of religion may have on the character and intellect of the Russians. The Douckoboren and the Molokaner differ essentially in this respect from the other subjects of the empire. Activity, probity, intelligence, desire of improvement, all these qualities are developed among them to the highest degree, and after having consorted with the Germans for fifteen years, they have completely appropriated all the agricultural ameliorations, and even the social habits of those foreign colonists. Among the Russian peasants on the contrary, whether slave or free, a complete immobility prevails, and nothing can force them out of the old inevitable rut. All the efforts and all the encouragements of the government have hitherto been of no avail.

The emancipation of the slaves seems earnestly to occupy the Emperor Nicholas; and the measures adopted of late years testify in favour of his generous intentions. Unfortunately, the task is beset with difficulties for the legislator, and an abrupt attempt to make the Russian people independent, would infallibly expose the empire to the greatest dangers.

There are in the Russian slave two natures, essentially distinct: the one, destitute of all energy, of all vitality, is the result of the servitude under which the nation has bent for ages; the other, a bequest of barbarism, starting into action at the breath of liberty, is prompt to the most alarming

excesses, and inspires the revolted serf with the desire, above all things, to massacre his master. Emancipation, therefore, is not so easy as certain philanthropists would believe it to be, and the details we have just given may enable one to conceive all the mischiefs that might ensue from it.

The greatest obstacle to this social metamorphosis is presented by the private slaves, the majority of whom belong to the hereditary aristocracy; it is especially on the part of this class that premature liberty might occasion fatal and bloody reactions, which would endanger the empire itself, though immediately directed against the lords only. Accordingly the tzar, who is not ignorant of these facts, does all in his power to withdraw the serfs from their proprietors, and bring them into the crown domain: hence the position of the serfs has been considerably altered within the last few years. Slaves can now no longer be purchased without the lands to which they are attached. Formerly owners often hired out their slaves: they can now only grant them passports for three years, and the serf himself chooses the master he will serve, and the kind of labour to which he will apply himself.

It was evidently with a view to the same end that a bank was created some years ago in St. Petersburg, for the purpose of rendering pecuniary assistance to the aristocracy. Every proprietor can borrow from the bank at eight per cent., on a mortgage of his lands. But by the rules of the institution, when the term of payment is past, the property of a defaulting creditor [Pg 114] may be immediately sequestrated to the crown. What the government foresaw has happened, and does happen daily, and it has acquired numerous private estates, and incorporated them with the imperial domains.

A new ukase respecting the emancipation of the slaves which was issued in 1842, fixed the relative position of freedmen and their former lords. The measure was shaped so as to give the government a direct influence conducive to the gradual emancipation of the population. The owners were left, as before, the power of emancipating their serfs; but by the terms of the ukase, they could only do so in accordance with certain rules, and with the express sanction of the emperor. This ukase excited so much dissatisfaction among the old *noblesse*, that the tzar was induced subsequently to neutralise its effect by a police enactment. The primary end was, nevertheless, obtained, and the ukase dealt a heavy blow to the subsisting relations between lord and serf.[11] We believe, nevertheless, that the course adopted by the Emperor Nicholas (by the advice, no doubt, of Count Kizilev) is erroneous, and that the last ukases are impolitic. Do what it will, the government will never succeed in liberating the private slaves without the co-operation of their owners. It is impossible to think of making all the peasants exclusively serfs of the crown; such a means of emancipation is impracticable, for it implies that the government should remain, in the last result, sole possessor of all the lands in the empire, and that the nobility, great and small, should be infallibly ruined. In our opinion, the last ukases have only served to make emancipation more difficult, by exciting hatred between masters and slaves, and fostering the germs of a dangerous rebellious spirit. The Russians are still so backward in civilisation, that ideas of independence, abruptly and incautiously introduced amongst them, would be very likely to cause disastrous convulsions. Liberty must reach them gradually; and above all, it is absolutely necessary that they should be prepared, by instruction, to exchange their slavery for a better state of things. Otherwise, with their present character, liberty, after being first summed up by them in the privilege of doing nothing, in pillage and massacre, would inevitably end in wretchedness and destitution. In the treatment of this great social question, it is before all things necessary that the government should come to a fair understanding with the nobles, and labour conjointly with them for the regeneration of the slave population: it is only by earnest mutual aid that those two powers will ever succeed in advancing the cause of emancipation without imminent peril to the empire. But in any case, there is no denying the many difficulties of this [Pg 115] enterprise, no answering for all future contingencies. Considerations connected with landed property will probably long defeat all efforts in this direction, unless the peasants be freely permitted to become landowners, on payment of a certain sum for the redemption of their persons, and the purchase of the land requisite for their subsistence. This seems to us the only rational, nay, the only possible means, of arriving at complete emancipation without violence. No doubt if such a privilege be granted to the peasants, the present improvident and prodigal race of nobles will be rapidly dispossessed; but this will not occasion the country any serious inconvenience, and the new order of things will but favour the development of the middle class, in which really reside, in our day, all the strength and prosperity of a nation.

As for the clergy, whose numbers amount to about 500,000, both males and females, we mention them here only to repeat our declaration of their nullity and immorality. Utterly unacquainted with any thing pertaining to polity and administration, having nothing to do with public instruction, and being in their own persons ignorant to excess, the priests enjoy no sort of influence or consideration, and are occupied solely with corporeal things. We will not enter further into this subject. We are loath to unveil completely the vices and ignoble habits that distinguish the priests of the orthodox Russian church.

The following is a general table of the Russian population as published by the ministry in 1836:

| *Clergy.* | Males. | Females. |
|---|---|---|
| Orthodox Greek clergy of all grades, including the families of ecclesiastics | 254,057 | 240,748 |
| United Greek | 7,823 | 7,318 |
| Catholic | 2,497 | |
| Armenian | 474 | 343 |
| Lutheran | 1,003 | 955 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Reformed | 51 | 37 |
| Mahommedan Mollahs | 7,850 | [A] 6,701 |
| Buddhist Lamas | [B] 150 | |
| *Nobility.* | | |
| Hereditary nobles | 284,731 | 253,429 |
| Personal nobles, including the children of officers | 78,922 | 74,273 |
| Subaltern functionaries, retired soldiers, and their families | 187,047 | 237,443 |
| *Populations bound to military service in time of war.* | | |
| Cossacks of the Don, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, Astrakhan, Azov, and the Danube, Orenburg and the Ural, and of Siberia, Bashkirs, and Mestcheriaks | 950,698 | 981,467 |
| *Inhabiting towns, or included in the municipalities.* | | |
| Merchants of the three guilds, including notable *bourgeois*. | 131,347 | 120,714 |
| Bourgeois and artisans | 1,339,434 | 1,433,982 |
| Bourgeois in the towns of the western provinces | 7,522 | 6,966 |
| Greek of Nejine, armourers of Toula, apprentices in the pharmacies, and others, brokers in the towns, and functionaries in the service of the municipalities | 10,882 | 10,940 |
| Inhabitants of the towns of Bessarabia | 57,905 | 56,176 |
| *Inhabiting the rural districts.* | | |
| Serfs of the crown and the apanages | 10,441,399 | 11,022,595 |
| Serfs of the seignorial lands | 11,403,722 | 11,958,873 |
| *Nomade races, such as* | | |
| Kalmucks, Khirghis, Turkmans, Tatars | 254,715 | 261,982 |
| Inhabitants of the Transcaucasian Provinces | 689,147 | 689,150 |
| Kingdom of Poland | 2,077,311 | 2,110,911 |
| Grand Duchy of Finland | 663,658 | 708,464 |
| Russian colonies in America | 30,761 | 30,292 |
| Total | 28,883,106 | 30,213,759 |

[Pg 116]

[A: These figures are evidently misplaced. Ought they to stand for Catholic nuns?—*Translator.*]

[B: This number is quite erroneous, for we ourselves found several hundred priests among the Kalmucks of the Volga. The encampment of Prince Tumene, which we visited, alone possesses more than 200.]

Soldiers and sailors in actual service, their wives and families, not having been included in this total, the gross amount of the population of the empire appears to be about 61,000,000,—at least if we may judge from the ministerial table, the correctness of which we by no means guarantee.

According to the report of the ministry of the interior, the part of the population of European Russia not belonging to the orthodox Greek church, was, in 1839, as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Catholics | 2,235,586 |
| Gregorian Armenians | 39,927 |
| Catholic Armenians | 28,145 |
| Protestants | 1,500,000 |
| Mohammedans | 1,530,726 |
| Jews | 1,069,440 |
| Buddhists | 65,000 |
| Total | 6,868,824 |

**FOOTNOTE:**

[11] We have not the honour of being acquainted with the Emperor of Russia's secret thoughts, and we willingly ascribe to a certain liberalism all the ukases concerning the emancipation of the slaves; it is possible, however, that the tzar's measures may have been prompted, in a great degree, by the fears with which he regards an aristocracy still possessing more than 20,000,000 of slaves.

# CHAPTER XIV.

CONSTITUTION OF THE EMPIRE; GOVERNMENTS—CONSEQUENCES OF CENTRALISATION; DISSIMULATION OF PUBLIC FUNCTIONARIES—TRIBUNALS —THE COLONEL OF THE GENDARMERIE—CORRUPTION—PEDANTRY OF FORMS—CONTEMPT OF THE DECREES OF THE EMPEROR AND THE SENATE—SINGULAR ANECDOTE; INTERPRETATION OF A WILL—RADICAL EVILS IN THE JUDICIAL ORGANISATION—HISTORY AND PRESENT STATE OF RUSSIAN LAW.

The existing division of the Russian empire into fifty-six governments dates from the reign of the Emperor Paul. A nearly similar organisation existed indeed in the time of Catherine II., but the functions of the governors had a much wider range at that period than in our days, and those administrators, called by the empress her stewards, enjoyed nearly sovereign power.

The Russian governments correspond to the French departments, the districts to sub-prefectures; each government has its chief town, which is the seat of the different civil and military administrations. [Pg 117]

The governor, who has the exclusive charge of the civil administration, nominates to various secondary places, is the head of the college of *prévoyance*, and ex-officio inspector of the schools, can demand an account of their proceedings of all the provincial authorities except the high court, and determines administrative questions with the aid of a council of regency composed of two councillors and a secretary, nominated by the emperor.

At first sight the governor's power seems unlimited; and indeed he has all the authority requisite to do mischief, but very little to do good. In Russia the most laudable intentions and the most brilliant capabilities are completely paralysed, and the chief administrators must, whether they will or not, undergo the disastrous consequences of the venality and corruption of their subordinates. Distrust and suspicion have been made the essential basis of the organisation of the bureaucracy. By surrounding the high functionaries with a multitude of *employés*, and subjecting them to countless formalities, it was thought the abuses of power would be hindered; and all that is come of it is the creation of an odious class, who use the weapons put into their hands to cheat the government, rob individuals, and prevent honest men from labouring for the prosperity of their country. The governors have not even the right of inquest in judicial questions, and the judges may, by entrenching themselves behind the text of the rules, pronounce the most iniquitous sentences with impunity. I have known some true-hearted and generous administrators, but all after struggling for long years to arrive at some sage reforms, at last gave up their efforts in despair, and most of them fell into disgrace through the multiplied intrigues of their subordinates. In each chief town it is the secretary, the head of the chancery, who is the real wielder of the power of government. He alone is regarded as knowing the text of the Russian laws; so that, in order to oppose any measure of the governor's, he has but to cite a few phrases, more or less obscure, from the code of regulations, and it very rarely happens that his principal ventures, without his approbation, to take on himself the responsibility of any administrative act. There have been instances in which governors, disregarding bureaucratic formalities, and acting for themselves, have impeded the execution of a decree of the tribunals; but they have never failed to expiate their audacity by dismissal, unless they were supported by a high social position and potent protectors.

Furthermore, the representatives of government are so cramped in their powers, that a governor-general, who often rules over several millions of men, cannot dispose of 200*l.* without the sanction of the ministry.

Centralisation, no doubt, has its advantages; but in a country so vast, and of such varied wants as Russia, it is impossible that a minister, be his talents what they may, can ever satisfy the reasonable demands of all parts of the empire. The consequence is that the most useful projects are almost always neglected or rejected in the provinces remote from the capital. [Pg 118]

Another evil, not less deplorable, is the necessity of practising mutual deception, under which the public functionaries labour. A public servant never thinks of making known to his superior the real situation of the country he governs: either he ridiculously exaggerates the good, or he is absolutely silent as to what is bad. In the latter case, he acts only in accordance with the imperative dictates of prudence, for if he declared the truth he would infallibly incur disgrace, and would even run the risk of being dismissed. So whenever a public calamity happens, it is only at the last extremity, and when the mischief is become irremediable, that he makes up his mind to call for an aid that usually comes not at all, or else is sure to come too late.

This profound dissimulation, joined with the jealousy which the distinctions of rank excite among the *employés*, does incalculable damage to the empire by impeding every useful reform. However, of all the sovereigns of the empire, the Tzar Nicholas is, perhaps, the one to whom truth and plain dealing are most welcome, and with whom well-grounded censure finds most acceptance. Unfortunately, since Potemkin's mystifications, falsehood has become a normal thing with the Russian *employés*, and the basis of all their proceedings, and hitherto the imperial will has been incapable of eradicating this fatal evil.

The superior court of justice sitting in the chief place of each government, and comprising a civil and a criminal section, consists of two presidents, two councillors, two secretaries, and eight assessors, four of whom are burghers. The emperor endeavoured in 1835 to extend the rights of the nobility, by making the offices of president and judge in these tribunals elective, but this

change appears to have produced but very unfavourable results. As all the great proprietors had very little inclination to fill such offices, the electors had no opportunity of making a good choice, and at last it was found necessary to return to the old institutions.

The superior court of justice decides finally in all civil cases, in which the sum in dispute does not exceed 500 rubles. Over it are the various departments of the senate and the general assembly, resident partly in St. Petersburg, and partly in Moscow, and constituting two courts to which appeals lie from the governmental courts. There is no appeal from the decisions of the general assembly of the senate, or from those of the council of the empire approved by the emperor, except on the ground of misrepresentations in the evidence.

In the district courts (corresponding to the French *tribunaux de première instance*) there are also two sections, civil and criminal, consisting each of a president, a secretary, having under him several *employés* who constitute the chancery, and four assessors, two of whom are chosen from among the inhabitants of the rural district. These latter sit only in cases where peasants are concerned. [Pg 119]

There is likewise in each governmental chief town, and in each district town, an inferior court, specially charged with the affairs of the rural police, the taking of informations in criminal affairs, summary jurisdiction as to minor offences, and the execution of sentences. This court consists of a president, called *ispravnik*, and four assessors, two of them nobles, two peasants. These judges, who are all elected by the nobles, are assisted by a secretary, the only *employé* directly dependent on the government.

The chief towns and the district towns have also a sort of municipal council, consisting of a mayor (*golova*), and four assistants, elected by the municipality, and afterwards approved of by the government. This council acts also as a tribunal, and takes cognizance of all the petty cases of litigation that may arise among the townsfolk. A nearly similar institution exists among the peasants of the empire.

We will not speak of the colleges of wards, the committees of the nobles presided over by the marshals of the nobles, the courts of conscience which try cases between parents and children, &c. The members of all these institutions are elected, but their functions are too insignificant to demand mention here.

One of the most influential personages in each government, is the colonel of the gendarmerie, who is completely independent of the governor. He is the head of the secret police, corresponds directly with the minister, and has it in his power, if he is an honest man, to do much good by the rigorous control he can exercise over all the *employés* of a province.

This justiciary scheme is in itself very liberal, and ought, one would suppose, to satisfy the wants of the population; but like the governors, the judges of the different tribunals are in fact but puppets, moved at the discretion of the subordinate clerks, who alone are masters of the tricks and quibbles of Russian jurisprudence, and legal practice. The lowest clerk in a chancery has often more influence than the president himself, and the suitor who refuses to be squeezed by him may be quite certain thathe will never see the termination of his cause. It is impossible to imagine with what adroitness all these fellows, many of whom receive for salary only sixty or a hundred rubles a year, manage to sweat the purses of those who require their assistance. Justice is continually violated in favour of the highest bidder, and thanks to the number of contradictory ukases which pass for laws, the most audacious robberies are unblushingly committed without the possibility of redress. It may be asserted with truth, that the jurisdictional authority in Russia resides in the offices of court rather than in the persons of the judges. The secretary is the omnipotent arbiter of sentences, and dictates them under the influence of money and the bureaucracy.

Nothing can give an idea of the arts of knavery and chicane put in practice to fleece the unfortunates who have to do with the underlings of justice. The rigorous stickling for forms, and the multitude of papers, are a curse to the country; no business is done by word of mouth in Russia.[12] All law proceedings are carried on in writing; the slightest question and the most trivial explanation must be put down on stamped paper according to the appointed forms. Hence it may be conceived that with the horrible spirit of chicanery that characterises the *employés*, and the readiness with which they can find a flaw (a *krutchuk* as they call it), in every paper, legal proceedings are spun out to an indefinite length, and scarcely end until both parties are ruined, or until the one prevails over the other by dint of money and corruption. I have often known a document to be sent back from St. Petersburg after a lapse of six months, merely because this or that phrase was not written according to rule. The government of Bessarabia alone paid 63,000*l.* for stamps, in the course of four years, and the population of that province does not exceed 500,000. The want of publicity, moreover, has the most pernicious influence on the administration of justice. All judgments are made up in secret; there are no open pleadings; law processes consist from first to last in piles of paper, which enrich the judges and their subordinates, but in no-wise affect their opinions, which are always based on the most advantageous offers. [Pg 120]

This woful state of things is further aggravated by the fact that the judges are secure from all responsibility; in whatever manner they decide a cause, they always do so in accordance with the laws, provided they observe the due forms; but what is really incredible, is the impudence with which the lowest tribunal of a district town presumes to annul both the decrees of the emperor and those of the general assembly of the senate. I will mention in illustration a certain suit brought against the heirs of a rich landowner in Podolia, who was deeply indebted at his death to the imperial bank of St. Petersburg and to several foreign bankers. These latter having become

creditors before the bank, naturally claimed to be paid in the first instance. The consequence was a suit, which had been going on for twelve years when I arrived in Russia. The foreigners were defeated in the district court, but they gained their cause successively in the governmental court and the general assembly of the senate, and finally they obtained a decree in their favour from the emperor himself; but the district tribunal, under pretext that certain regulations had been violated, took upon itself to annul all the decisions of the senate, and to make the whole suit be begun over again.

It sometimes happens, however, that the imperial will is declared in so positive a manner, that all the tricks and subterfuges of judges and secretaries must give way to it. Here is an anecdote that conveys a perfect notion of what law means in Russia. In Alexander's reign the Jesuits had [Pg 121] made themselves all-powerful in some parts of Poland. A rich landowner and possessor of 6000 peasants at Poltzk, the Jesuit head-quarters, was so wrought on by the artful assiduities of the society that he bequeathed his whole fortune to it at his death, with this stipulation, that the Jesuits should bring up his only son, and afterwards give him whatever portion of the inheritance *they should choose*. When the young man had reached the age of twenty, the Jesuits bestowed on him 300 peasants. He protested vehemently against their usurpation, and began a suit against the society; but his father's will seemed clear and explicit, and after having consumed all his little fortune, he found his claims disowned by every tribunal in the empire, including even the general assembly of the senate. In this seemingly hopeless extremity he applied to a certain attorney in St. Petersburg, famous for his inexhaustible fertility of mind in matters of cunning and chicanery. After having perused the will and the documents connected with the suit, the lawyer said to his client, "Your business is done; if you will promise me 10,000 rubles I will undertake to procure an imperial ukase reinstating you in possession of all your father's property." The young man readily agreed to the bargain, and in eight days afterwards he was master of his patrimony. The decision which led to this singular result rested solely on the interpretation of the phrase *they shall give him whatever portion they shall choose*, which plainly meant, as the lawyer maintained, that the young man was entitled exclusively to such portion as the Jesuits *chose*, *i. e.*, to that which they chose and retained for themselves. The emperor admitted this curious explanation; the son became proprietor of 5700 peasants, and the Jesuits were obliged to content themselves with the 300 they had bestowed on their ward in the first instance. Assuredly the most adroit cadi in Turkey could not have decided the case better.

We have already seen that litigants can appeal to the governmental court, and again to the general assembly of the senate, in all suits for more than five hundred rubles. This privilege instead of being advantageous, appears to us to be highly the reverse. In France, where distances are short, and where justice is administered with a promptitude and impartiality elsewhere unexampled, the appeal to the court of cassation affords the most precious guarantee for the equitable application of the laws. Besides this, it only gives occasions to a revision of the documents in the case, and to a new trial before another tribunal if there have been any error of form; but in Russia, where distances are immense, and where all things conspire to render suits interminable, litigants from the provinces can only ruin themselves by using their right of recourse to the tribunals of St. Petersburg. I have known landowners who spent twenty years of their lives in prosecuting a suit in the capital, and who died without having obtained judgment. It must be acknowledged, however, that appeals to St. Petersburg are justified to a certain extent [Pg 122] by the deplorable nature of governmental justice.

The last radical vice we have to mention has its origin in the nobiliary system of Peter the Great, in inadequate salaries and the want of a special body of magistrates. We have seen the necessity entailed on all freemen of entering the service of the state and acquiring a more or less elevated rank, the consequence is, that all the public departments are overburdened with *employés*; and as most of them have no patrimony and are very scantily paid, sometimes not paid at all, they are of course driven to dishonest shifts for their livelihood. Even the heads of departments are not sufficiently remunerated to be safe from the many temptations that beset them. The government has indeed augmented their salaries at various times, but never in a sufficient degree to produce any desirable reform in their conduct. The office of judge, too, is not regarded with sufficient respect and consideration to make it an object of ambition to the high nobility; it is filled in all instances by the lowest privileged class in the empire, or bestowed as a recompense on retired military men. This will no doubt appear extraordinary; but it must be remembered that there exists as yet in Russia no distinct corps of magistrates, nor any official class of lawyers; the members of the several tribunals, whether elected by the nobles, or nominated by the emperor, are by no means expected to be acquainted with jurisprudence and the laws, and if any among them have studied law in the universities this is a mere accident. Those of them who are honest, judge according to their conscience and their common sense; the others give their voices for those who have bought them.

It is the same with the senate, the supreme judicial court in the empire. It consists only of military veterans, and superannuated servants of the state; in a word, of men who know nothing whatever of law. Hence it is easy to conceive the unlimited power exercised in all these courts by the government secretaries, who, when they know by heart the some thousands of ukases that form what is called the imperial code, pass for eminent lawyers in the eyes of the Russians.

The same evil affects, to an equal degree, all the administrative departments. In Russia, no calling or profession has its limits strictly defined; a man passes indifferently from one service to another. A cavalry officer, for instance, will be nominated as director of a high school, an old colonel as head of a custom-house, and so forth.

In addition to the laws which are peculiar to it, Russian legislation evidently comprises two

foreign elements, the German and the Roman. Germanic law was introduced into Russia by the Varengians, a branch of the Northman stock. To the leaders of those warriors the country owes the origin of its feudal system. Subsequently, when the Russians were converted to Christianity, Vladimir adopted certain parts of the Roman law as modified by the Byzantines. But if we may [Pg 123] judge from the documents furnished by the Nestorian chronicle, it would appear, that previously to that epoch, the Russians had already borrowed some particulars from the Roman code, and blended them with their customary law of indigenous and German origin.

The first written code mentioned in Russian history, is that of Jaroslav, who reigned in the beginning of the thirteenth century; from that period the country remained quite stationary, in consequence of the continual wars and troubles occasioned by its territorial division; and more than a century of suffering and anarchy prepared the nation to submit without resistance to a foreign yoke.

It was in 1218 that the Tatars crossed the Volga and seized the dominions of the tzars; and whilst Europe, under the energetic influence of the crusades and of the lights of the Lower Empire, was sapping the edifice of feudalism, and labouring towards its future glorious emancipation, Russia remained for more than 300 years in ignominious thraldom, taking no part in the great intellectual movement of the fifteenth century, retrograding rather than advancing, debasing its national character day by day, and thus heaping up against the progress of civilisation, obstacles which the genius of its modern sovereigns has not yet been able to annihilate.

In the ever memorable reign of Ivan III. the Tatars were expelled from the greater part of Russia, the dissensions caused by the parcelling out of the empire were extinguished, the several principalities were united into a single body, and legislative labours were resumed after four hundred years of inaction.

Ivan III. had a collection made of all the old judicial constitutions, and published, with the assistance of the metropolitan Jerome, a collection of laws, which is not without merit, considering the period when it was made. But this code allowed wager of battle; and murder, arson, and highway robbery, continued to be judged in the lists.

About 1550, Ivan IV. surnamed the Terrible, completed the code of laws promulgated by his grandfather, Ivan III. and put a check upon the territorial aggrandisements of the clergy. The new code, known by the name of *Sudebnick*, remained in force almost without any change, until the accession of the tzar Alexis Michaelovitz (father of Peter the Great), who, having collected the laws of the several provinces of the empire, published them in 1649, under the title of *Ulogeniè*. This collection, the first printed in Russia, was begun and completed within the space of two months and a half; but notwithstanding its imperfection, it has nevertheless, served as the foundation on which all subsequent improvements have been based.

Since the reign of Peter the Great, ten commissions have been successively employed in the codification of the Russian laws. We will not enter into the details of the changes introduced by [Pg 124] them: on this subject, the work published by M. Victor Foucher, and the "Coup d'oeil sur la législation Russe," by M. Tolstoi, may be consulted with advantage. The tenth commission was appointed in 1804, and sat until 1826. It applied itself earnestly to the construction of the civil, penal, and criminal codes; but numerous difficulties prevented it from completing its task.

On his accession to the throne, the Emperor Nicholas promised at first a new code which should correct and complete its predecessors. But the difficulties were too great, and he ended by adopting a digest, which merely classified according to their subjects all the existing laws promulgated since the general regulation of 1649, effected by Alexis Michaelovitz. In 1826, he laid down the following rules for this revision.

1. Enactments fallen into desuetude to be excluded.

2. All repetitions to be suppressed, by choosing among statutes to the same effect that one which is most complete.

3. The spirit of the law to be preserved by expressing in a single rule the substance of all those that treat of the same matter.

4. The acts from which each law is drawn are to be exactly set forth.

5. Between two contradictory laws, the preference to be given to the more recent.

The design of the Emperor Nicholas was speedily carried into effect. The complete collection of the laws of the empire was published in 1830; and on the 31st of January, the tzar announced in a manifesto that the classification of the law as a systematic body was terminated. The matter was then spoken of in the Russian journals in 1830:

"The second section of the private chancery of his majesty the emperor has just finished printing the first collection of the laws of the Russian empire from 1649 to December 12, 1825 in forty-five volumes, 4to.

"This collection consists of four principal parts: 1, the text of the laws from the general regulation of 1649 to the first manifesto of the Emperor Nicholas (December 12, 1825), in forty volumes. This part comprises 30,920 laws, rules, treaties, and acts of various kinds; 2, a general index containing a chronological table, which is in some sort a juridical dictionary for Russia; 3, a book of the appointments of civil functionaries and of the administrative expenditure and the tariffs from 1711 to 1825, to the number of 1351; 4, a book of the plans and designs pertaining to the several laws.

"The laws and acts belonging to the reign of his majesty the Emperor Nicholas, will form the second collection beginning on the 12th of December, 1825. The printing is already begun, and it will appear in the course of the year. A supplement to it will afterwards be published every year.

"The laws anterior to the year of 1649, which are generally considered as obsolete, but which are nevertheless of high importance as regards, history, will form a separate collection under the name of the ancient laws. [Pg 125]

"This first collection was begun in 1826, and finished on the 1st of March, 1830. The printing began on the 21st of May, 1828, and ended on the 1st of April last, at the press of the second section of his majesty's chancery. For the composition of this collection, it has been necessary to collate and extract from 3396 books of laws. The forty volumes of the text, and the volume of the chronological index, contain 5284 printed sheets.

"This book will be ready for sale on the 1st of June at the printing-office. The price of the forty-five volumes is 500 paper rubles.

"By a rescript of the 5th of April last, addressed to the privy-councillor Dashkof, adjunct of the minister of justice and director of that ministry, his majesty the emperor notifies to him the order he has given to furnish copies of the collection to all the departments of the senate, and to all the tribunals and administrations of the government, and directs him to concert with the ministers of finance and of the interior for the prompt delivery of these books in all the governments, so that they may be kept and employed in due manner."

Thus the code of the Emperor Nicholas is, in fact, but a systematic collection of all the laws promulgated within the last 200 years, or thereabouts. It contains not one new idea, not one modification required by the actual situation of the empire, not one thought for the future. Now if we reflect that the study of 3396 books of laws, and the revision of 50,000 laws or ukases, have taken place within the short period of two years, and that the men who had to perform this task, were far from being jurisconsults, we shall perceive that such a work must be very imperfect, and that it must have been totally impossible to fulfil the intentions of the tzar, as expressed in the instructions above cited. The empire, indeed, possesses fifty-five bulky volumes of laws, but the inconveniences resulting from the multiplicity of contradictory ukases, and from others ill adapted to the necessities of the country, have been retained in them to a great extent; and the experience of thirteen years has shown the insufficiency of this collection, and its little influence on the course and conduct of lawsuits. Another defective point in this improvisated legislation, is its pretension to satisfy the requirements of the future by admitting, as a complement to the body of the statutes, all the ukases issued, or to be issued by the emperor. If to these 30,920 laws already existing, this palladium of justice already so formidable, there be added every year a supplementary volume equal in capacity to the average legislative contributions of the last 180 years, every year will then supply its battalion of 172 new laws; and I am at a loss to conceive where there will be found by-and-by a lawyer sufficiently patient to study this new levy of justice, when with all the good will imaginable the most indefatigable reader can hardly once in his life pass in review the body of the veterans. [Pg 126]

In the space of five years since the emperor's manifesto (January 31, 1833), five new volumes have been already added to the collection.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the emperor's performance is extremely meritorious. To him belongs the honour of having been the first to bestow a regular body of laws on his country. Before his time Russia had but a confused and fluctuating legislation, encumbered with an infinity of statutes, the study of which was the more difficult, as no printed collection of them existed. At present it possesses at least a complete digest, within reach of all, and which all may consult and appeal to. Surely a man of the emperor's perseverance and great capacity would not have shrunk from accomplishing a more perfect work, could he have indulged the hope of being seconded by abler and better instructed jurisconsults. But he was compelled of necessity to take the consequences of the want of any thing like a corps of magistrature, and finding he could not do any thing better, he resolved to make no change in the spirit of the laws promulgated during the preceding 200 years, and to follow exactly the course marked out in 1700 by Peter the Great. In this way the codification of the laws became a mere effort of compilation and arrangement, and setting aside the collation of the ukases, the clerks of the second section of the imperial chancery were quite competent to the task.

It will not be altogether uninteresting to place here a detailed table of the population in a governmental chief town. An examination of such documents may lead to very curious comparisons and reflections. The town we have chosen is Kichinev, the capital of Bessarabia, and the figures we give have been extracted directly from the books of the provincial governor's chancery.

| | Men. | Women. |
|---|---|---|
| Monks | 16 | |
| Priests | 89 | 126 |
| Servants | 114 | 59 |
| Military officers[A] in active service | 139 | 53 |
| Superior officers in the civil service, ditto | 339 | 236 |
| Officers of the fourteenth class, ditto | 419 | 163 |
| *Military officers on leave.* | | |
| Generals | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Staff-officers of every grade | 42 | 31 |
| *Civil officers on leave.* | | |
| Generals | 2 | 2 |
| Superior officers and others | 107 | 104 |
| Persons employed in the theatre | 15 | 9 |
| First guild merchants | 6 | 10 |
| Second guild merchants | 35 | 31 |
| Third guild merchants | 736 | 623 |
| Foreigners | 194 | 144 |
| Burghers | 18,092 | 15,973 |
| Government employés of all kinds | 2,121 | 237 |
| Young people reared at the expense of the crown | 32 | |
| Soldiers on furlough | 31 | 12 |
| Workpeople | 415 | 511 |
| Gipsy slaves | 54 | 63 |
| German colonists | 37 | 24 |
| Pupils of all kinds | 996 | 17 |
| Total | 24,032 | 18,429 |

[A: Neither the officers nor the soldiers of the garrison are included in this list.]

[Pg 127]

**FOOTNOTE:**

[12] The official correspondence of the ministers, and of the civil and military authorities, amounts annually to nearly 15,000,000 of letters, whilst that of all private Russians does not exceed 7,000,000.

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# CHAPTER XV.

PUBLIC INSTRUCTION—CORPS OF CADETS—UNIVERSITIES AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS; ANECDOTE—PLAN OF EDUCATION—MOTIVES FOR ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITIES—STATISTICS—PROFESSORS; THEIR IGNORANCE—EXCLUSION OF FOREIGN PROFESSORS—ENGINEERING—OBSTACLES TO INTELLECTUAL IMPROVEMENT—CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCLAVONIC RACE.

In contemplating the development and organisation of public instruction in Russia from the time of Peter the Great to these days, one cannot help thinking that the Russians attach infinitely more value to the appearance of progress, than to its real existence. One would say they care very little about scientific and intellectual results, provided their universities and schools be complete in all physical details, and provided they have numerous educational halls graced with the names of all the sciences professed in Europe.

Nevertheless, the sovereigns of Russia have all laboured more or less actively for the propagation of public instruction. Unfortunately they would never suffer themselves to admit that civilisation is a long and difficult work; and incapable of forgetting, even amidst the liberal ideas on which they based their projects, that they were before all things absolute princes, they fancied they could civilise their nation as they had disciplined their soldiers; and then, swayed by vanity and self-conceit, they graciously suffered themselves to be deceived by all the brilliant reports laid before them by the administrative departments.

It was in the reign of Feodor Alexievitz that the first academy was founded in Moscow. The Sclavonic, Greek, and Latin languages were taught there. A university was afterwards established in the same city, and in the reign of Catherine II. St. Petersburg possessed an academy of sciences and the fine arts, and a society of rural economy. But even at that period the spirit of ostentation, which forms the substratum of the Russian character, already revealed itself; and while forming those grand institutions, not a thought had been given to the opening of a single elementary school in either capital. Some writers indeed allege that Peter I. left behind him, at his death, fifty-one schools for the people, and fifty-six for the military; but I have always been disposed to think that those establishments existed but in name, and my researches have but confirmed that opinion.

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The first elementary institution of any importance founded in the new capital, dates only from the beginning of the eighteenth century: it is the school of the cadet corps, exclusively reserved

for the young nobility, and intended to form officers for the land and sea service, and for the engineers. In order to judge of the instruction afforded in it, one ought to be able at least to mention some of its pupils who have been distinguished for their talents, and who have acquired a certain degree of celebrity; but it is as difficult to name any such, as to discover men of learning and science among the members of the various academies mentioned above. Be this as it may, we cannot help entertaining a very mean opinion of the spirit and organisation of all these establishments founded by Peter the Great, and by the sovereigns who succeeded him during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

The first institution in favour of the people was created in St. Petersburg in 1764: it was an educational establishment for the daughters of burghers and gentlemen of scanty fortune. It was founded by Catherine II., who in taking measures by preference for the education of women, seems to have intended to prepare them for usurping in their domestic circle the same absolute sway which she was herself about to exercise over the whole empire.

Elementary schools were not actually opened to the public until 1783, and that only in some of the great towns of the empire. As all these ill-contrived early institutions possess little interest, I will pass on to the consideration of the present state of public instruction. The existing system dates from Alexander's reign. The course adopted in the beginning was on all points similar to that pursued by Peter the Great and Catherine II. The first thing thought of was the establishment of universities; those of Dorpat and Vilna were re-established; that of Moscow was reformed, and new ones were founded in Kasan and Kharkof. As for elementary schools, they were completely overlooked. The following anecdote will give an idea of the primitive state of the great colleges of the empire.

A German gentleman in the Russian service travelled in the Crimea, in 1803. On passing through Kharkof, curiosity induced him to visit the university, which had been opened in the town about a year before. While looking over the cabinet of natural philosophy, he perceived with amazement that the professor of that branch of science did not even know the names of the few instruments at his command. Unable to conceal his surprise, he asked his guide where he had been professor before he became attached to the university. "I never was a professor before," was the reply. "Where did you study?" "I learned to read and write in Moscow." "How did you obtain the rank of professor of natural philosophy?" "I was an officer of police; my age no longer [Pg 129] allowed me to support the fatigues of my duty; so hearing that a place which would suit me better was vacant in the academy, I applied for it. Thirty years' service, good certificates, and the influence of a patron, enabled me to obtain it." "And what are the duties belonging to your place?" "I have to inspect the instruments, and keep them in order, and I am directed to show them to such persons of distinction as may please to visit the university."

This happened, it is true, in 1803, and I only mention the fact to show the spirit that prevailed in the establishment of these learned institutions. The university of Kharkof is now in a better condition, and I know many professors there of real merit, distinguished among whom are Doctor Vancetti, equally remarkable for his acquirements and his philanthropy, and Professor Kalenitchikov, who devotes himself with success to all branches of natural history.

At last, however, it was felt that universities were insufficient, and could not exist without elementary schools. Some years after the accession of Alexander, gymnasiums were therefore established in all the governmental chief towns; and the district towns had their primary institutions, in which were to be taught reading and writing, the elements of grammar and arithmetic, the history of Russia, sacred history, geography, geometry, and the rudiments of Latin.

The course of instruction in the gymnasia was more extensive, and embraced special mathematics, logic, rhetoric, and physics. Lastly, the pupil was advanced to the university, where he went through a complete course of study, comprising the sciences, the liberal arts, literature.

At first sight it would appear that this well conceived plan of studies ought to have had the most satisfactory results; but this was not altogether the case. The nobiliary system of the empire, and certain regulations of detail and discipline combined to destroy the reasonable hopes founded on such liberal institutions.

The Russian universities unquestionably number among their professors some distinguished men, equally devoted to science and to the duties of their calling; but the social ideas prevalent in the country render their efforts almost always unavailing, and they find themselves compelled to restrict their course of instruction within the narrow routine prescribed to them.

Now and always the universities and gymnasia are and have been for the most part attended only by pupils of the class of petty nobles, or of those of the priests and burghers. As for the sons of the aristocratic families, they are generally educated at home by private tutors, and as they are almost all intended for the army, they enter at once into the corps of cadets established in St. Petersburg.

According to a table published by the ministry of the interior, all the first class establishments for public instruction, that is to say the universities, the two medico-chirurgical academies, the pedagogic institute and the three lycea, contained in 1840 only 612 functionaries and professors, [Pg 130] and 3809 pupils, the numbers being thus made up:

| Functionaries and Teachers. | Students. |
|---|---|
| 59 | 433 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| St. Petersburg | | |
| Moscow | 82 | 932 |
| Dorpat | 66 | 530 |
| Kharkof | 79 | 468 |
| Kasan | 74 | 237 |
| St. Vladimir (Kiev) | 55 | 140 |
| Richelieu (Odessa) | 25 | 52 |
| Demidof ditto | 20 | 33 |
| Bezborodko ditto | 15 | 19 |
| Medico-chirurgical academies of Moscow and Vilna | 94 | 797 |
| Pedagogical institute of St. Petersburg | 43 | 68 |

According to the same report the Russian empire possessed at the close of the year 1840, 3230 establishments under the superior direction of the ministry of public instruction, and containing 103,450 pupils.

The young men who attend the university courses, have all but one single object in view, that of acquiring a grade of nobility; and the examinations are too slight to make industry and proficiency in their studies really requisite to the attainment of their purpose. Besides, they are most of them educated at the cost of the government, and as the latter does not like to lose its money, they must all enter the imperial service, whether well taught or not. In this manner are formed all the physicians, surgeons, and subordinate professors of gymnasia.

As for the civil departments the sole condition required for admission into them, is the knowledge of writing and arithmetic; accordingly the common class Russian thinks he has completed his education when he can read, write, and cypher; and he is indeed sufficiently erudite to get a footing in some chancery office, a common clerkship in which admits him to the first grade as a civil officer, and from thence he may arrive at the highest rank in the service.

Many young men on leaving the universities, are of course employed in the public offices; but then, whatever talents they may possess, and whatever fruit they may have gathered from their studies become utterly useless to them. From the moment they enter any office whatever, they perceive with astonishment that they know nothing of what it is essential they should know. They have stepped into a new world of which they do not even know the language. They hear nothing talked of around them but forms, rules, tricks for evading the laws and ordinances, artifices for giving a legal colouring to abuses and extortions, and all sorts of inventions for squeezing money out of those who have the misfortune to need the help of the *employés*.

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They soon see that the greatest adepts in those frauds which are conveniently styled office usages, the least scrupulous, or, in plain terms, the greatest rogues, are considered clever fellows, and make their way rapidly; whilst those who still retain some sense of honesty and a lingering respect for the principles of morality, are laughed at as fools. What then does the novice, who has perhaps carried off the prize of eloquence at the university? Finding himself obliged to defer to the lowest pupil of an elementary school, who has already gained some knowledge of office practice, he tries to forget all he has learned, and applies himself to a new course of study. His conscientious scruples are soon silenced; prompted by emulation he gradually becomes as accomplished as his mates, and by dint of this second education the clever fellow at last quite effaces the honest man.

It is also from the universities that the young men are taken who are designed for the business of public instruction; and as we have already stated, they are for the most part educated at the expense of the state. When their studies are completed they are appointed professors in the gymnasia and other schools. The government has neglected no means of making their calling as advantageous as possible, both as to salary and honorary advancement. These encouragements would have the happiest effect anywhere else than in Russia, but there they have quite the contrary result. It follows from the existing system of nobility with its graduated scale, the privileges it confers, and the means of fortune its offers, that a man's whole status in life resolves itself into a question of official rank. Now, as no calling presents a greater chance of rapid advancement than that of the public instructor, in which capacity a young man rarely fails to obtain the rank of major (hereditary nobility) after five or six years' service, the consequence is that all the sons of the petty nobles, burghers, and priests, eagerly rush into this thriving profession. This, however, is not the real mischief; on the contrary, the great number of competitors might produce a very salutary rivalry; but unfortunately the little power and influence exercised by the professors, who after all, can only command boys, and still more than this, their want of opportunity to enrich themselves under cover of their office, strip the business of public instruction of all prestige, and cause it to be considered, notwithstanding its high pay, as much less advantageous than many other posts the fixed salary of which is almost nothing, but which enable the holders to levy almost unlimited contributions on those who come under their hands. What follows? As soon as the professors have obtained the rank of major, they quit the universities and enter the civil administrations, where they can fatten on law suits, chicanery, and exactions, and all the countless means by which the law enables them to make fraudulent fortunes. And here we may remark that this state of things is another consequence of the want of definite callings and professions in Russia. The career of official rank is the only one known to the Russian; for him there exists none other.

We must not wonder, therefore, if the instruction given in the elementary schools, and the [Pg 132] gymnasia is incomplete and almost barren of good effect. The teachers are almost always mere boys without experience or sound knowledge. They content themselves with going through their routine of business according to the letter of the rules, and the military discipline imposed on them; but once escaped from their classes, they think of nothing but enjoying themselves, eating, drinking, and playing cards. I have visited many gymnasia in Russia, and I have always seen in them the same effects flowing from the same causes.

Besides the great universities and high schools, all the leading towns of the empire formerly contained numerous boarding schools, most of them kept by strangers; but these were suppressed by ukase in the year 1842. The means of instruction are at present confined to the imperial establishments, from which all foreigners not naturalised in Russia are excluded. These new regulations dictated by false vanity, will infallibly have a disastrous influence, and render the progress of education more and more difficult.

There still exist in Russia several establishments for the education of officers and civil and military engineers. The Institute of Ways and Communications was established in the reign of Alexander, under the superintendence of four pupils of the Ecole Polytechnique of France, MM. Potier, Fabre, Destrême, and Bazain, who entered the service of Russia, at the request to that effect preferred by the tzar to Napoleon. This school (which I have not visited) might have rendered great service to the empire, had the government been discreet enough to leave it its foreign professors, and not subject it to the absurd interference of the Russian military drill. Very few able men have issued from this institution, and the profound ignorance I have seen exhibited in all the great works executed at a distance from the capital, attests the decay of a school which at first promised so fairly. Again, it must be owned, that from the time when engineers enter on active service, they have no leisure to complete their studies; as soon as they receive an appointment, their whole time is taken up with reports, accounts, writings without end, and all the countless formalities devised by the quibbling and captious spirit of the Russians. I have known several engineers at the head of important works; they had not a moment to themselves, their whole day being spent in writing and signing heaps of paper. The same observations apply to the military, for whom secondary manœuvres and minute costume observances form a never relaxing and stultifying slavery. Under such a system, all the germs of instruction implanted in the schools, soon disappear in service.

Besides, it must be admitted that the generality of Russians have a natural indifference to the sciences and the arts, which will long defeat the efforts of sovereigns desirous of effecting an intellectual regeneration. Though I have gone over a large portion of the empire, I have found very few persons, young or old, who were really studious and well-informed, and too often I have [Pg 133] met with nothing but the most utter apathy, where I had a right to expect interest and enthusiasm. It matters not that the emperor showers tokens of favour and respect on his *savans*, the Russians themselves continue, notwithstanding, to treat them with great disdain. The reason is, that the arts and sciences do not lead to fortune in Russia, and as they fall exclusively to the lot either of foreigners, or of the petty nobles, they cannot enjoy high consideration in a form of society which respects only might and authority, and consequently recognises but two vocations worthy of ambition, viz., the military profession and the civil service.

But independently of the influence of a bad social organisation, the Russians seem to me to be at this day the least apt by nature of all the nations of Europe to receive solid instruction. The Sclavonic race may be divided into two great branches: the first of these, which contains the Poles among others, has felt the influence of the west, with which it has been in long and immediate contact, and so enabled to adopt its civilisation more or less closely; the second, on the contrary, has acknowledged the paramount influence of Asia, and the Russians who compose it, are still in our day under the action of the Mongol hordes, to which they were enslaved for more than three centuries. Again, Russia is absolutely and entirely a novice in civilisation; go over her whole history, and you will not find a single page which gives proof of a really progressive tendency. It is a very remarkable fact that her political and commercial relations with the Lower Empire were entirely barren of result upon her civilisation, which remained completely stationary, even in circumstances most favourable to its development: it is therefore by no means surprising, that despite all the efforts of her sovereigns, she has been unable to place herself on the level of the other nations of Europe within the space of a hundred years.

The results of our civilisation, more than twenty centuries old, are not to be inculcated so rapidly: there needs we think, a long series of progressive initiations, so that the moral constitution reacting on the physical, may render the perceptions and the organs of the latter more delicate, and more suited to intellectual development: and this period of transition must necessarily be very long for a nation to which the past has bequeathed only reminiscences of slavery and destruction. Look, on the other hand, at Greece, Moldavia, and Wallachia, countries which have all had glorious periods in history; they have made great strides within ten years, and have in that short space of time established their claim to rank as members of the European family of nations. To their past history belongs in part the honour of their present advancement. That thirst for instruction, that incredible aptitude to seize and understand every thing, which is characteristic above all of the Greeks, are evidently but old faculties long sunk in torpor under the pressure of slavery, and which waited but for a little freedom to break forth with new energy.

# CHAPTER XVI.

ENTRY INTO THE COUNTRY OF THE DON COSSACKS—FEMALE PILGRIMS OF KIEV; RELIGIOUS FERVOUR OF THE COSSACKS—NOVO TCHERKASK, CAPITAL OF THE DON—STREET-LAMPS GUARDED BY SENTINELS—THE STREETS ON SUNDAY—COSSACK HOSPITALITY AND GOOD NATURE—THEIR VENERATION FOR NAPOLEON'S MEMORY.

Beyond Nakhitchevane, several valleys abutting on the basin of the Don, isolated hamlets, and a few stanitzas, diversify the country, and make one forget the sterility of the steppes, that spread out their gray and scarcely undulating surface to the westward. The banks of the Don which are seldom out of sight, are enlivened by clumps of trees, fishermen's huts, and herds of horses that seek there a fresher pasture than the desert affords. But except these animals, we saw not a single living creature; the heat was so intense, and the country is still so little inhabited, that most of the fields appeared to us in a state of wild nature. Nothing around us indicated the presence of man. In the country of the Don Cossacks, as elsewhere throughout Russia, the post road is barely marked out by two ditches so called, which you often drive over without perceiving them, and by distance posts two or three yards high. This is all the outlay the government chooses to incur for the imperial post roads leading to the principal towns of the empire.

Before arriving in Novo Tcherkask, the capital of the Cossacks, we encountered another wandering party at least as curious as our gipsies.

Imagine our surprise when having passed through a wide ravine, which for a long while shut in the road, we saw defiling over the steppes a countless string of small cars, escorted by I know not how many hundreds of women. We advanced, puzzled and curious to the last degree; and the more we gazed the more the numbers of these women seemed to multiply. They were everywhere, in the cars, on the road, and over the steppes; it was like a swarm of locusts suddenly dropped from the sky. Most of them walked barefoot, holding their shoes in one hand, and with the other picking up fragments of wood and straw, for what purpose we could not conceive. Their carts were just like barrels with two openings, and were driven by themselves, for there was not the shadow of a beard among them. They were all returning, as they told us, from the catacombs of Kiev, to which they had been making a pilgrimage. Among them I remarked some old women who had scarcely a breath of life remaining. They seemed dreadfully fatigued, but at the same time very well pleased with their pious expedition.

Further on we met another procession of the same kind, which had already arranged its encampment for the night. Two fires, fed with those little chips of wood that had so much perplexed us, served to prepare the evening meal. All the pilgrims were busy, and formed the most varied groups. Some were fetching water in earthen pitchers, which they carried on their heads; others were kneeling devoutly, making the sign of the cross; and the genuflexions so frequent among the Russians and Cossacks; the oldest were feeding the fire and telling stories. It was an indescribable scene of bustle and noise, displaying a variety of the most picturesque attitudes and physiognomies.



All the women were of Cossack race. There is much more of pious fervour in this nation than in the Muscovites. A slight difference of text between the Bibles of the two people has occasioned a very great one in their religious sentiments. The Cossacks call themselves the true believers, and abstain on religious grounds from the pipe, and from many other things which the Muscovites allow themselves without scruple. The natural integrity of their character is rarely sullied by hypocrisy. They love and believe with equal ardour and sincerity.

At the extremity of a plateau, on the verge of a wide and deep valley, the town of Novo Tcherkask suddenly appeared to us, rising in an amphitheatre, and embracing in its huge extent several hills, the broad slopes of which descend to the bottom of the valley. All the towns we had previously seen, and which had shocked us by the extravagant breadth of their streets and their dearth of houses, were nothing in comparison with what now met our eyes. Seen from the point where we then stood, the whole town was like an enormous chess board, with the lines formed by avenues broader than the Place du Carousel in Paris. These lines, bordered at intervals by a few shabby dwellings, and separated from each other by open spaces in which whole regiments might manœuvre quite at their ease, some churches, and a triumphal arch erected in 1815 in honour of Alexander, are the only salient points of this desert which they call a capital, and the superficial dimensions of which are, without exaggeration, as great as those of Paris.

Novo Tcherkask, now the seat of all the public offices of the Don country, was founded in 1806 by Count Platof, who became so celebrated through the unfortunate French campaign of Moscow. Its very ill-chosen position forbids all chance of future prosperity. It is situated nearly eight miles from the Don, on a hill surrounded on all sides by the Axai and the Touzlof, small confluents of the river from which it is so fatally remote. Platof is said to have selected this site for the purpose of building a fortress; but his intentions have not been realised. Another most serious inconvenience for the town is the absolute want of good water. Wealthy persons use

melted ice to make tea.

In the great square there are two very large bazaars with wooden roofs, in which are found all sorts of goods, and especially an abundant collection of military equipments for the use of the Cossacks. There is also a great arsenal, but quite destitute of arms. As for the other edifices, they are not worth mentioning, notwithstanding all the fine descriptions given of them by geographers.

But Novo Tcherkask has one precious thing to boast of—a thing unique in Russia—and that is an excellent hotel kept by a Frenchman, in which the traveller finds all the comforts he can desire. The nobility who have strongly encouraged this establishment, have formed in it a casino, in which many balls are given in the winter. [Pg 136]

The Emperor Nicholas visited the Don Cossacks in 1837, and to this auspicious event the capital owed the good fortune of being supplied with lamps in the streets. But the lights went out when his majesty departed; and it is said, that in order to save the lamps from being stolen, the authorities had been obliged to make an armed Cossack stand sentry over each of them.

The population of Novo Tcherkask, formed by the union of four stanitzas, amounts to about 10,000. Staro Tcherkask, the old capital, now abandoned, has nothing to attract the traveller's attention, though Dr. Clarke has bestowed on it the pompous title of the Russian Venice.

Our arrival in the Cossack capital fell on a Sunday. As the windows of our hotel looked full on the only promenade in the town, the greater part of the population passed in review before us. Every thing here bespeaks the nomade and warlike temper of the Cossacks. There is no copying of European fashion, no Frank costumes, no mixed population; every thing is Cossack, except a few Kalmuck figures, telling us of the vicinity of the Volga.

The Cossacks we had seen at Taganrok, had given us but a poor opinion of the beauty of the women of the country; we were, therefore, agreeably surprised at the sight of all the pretty girls that passed continually before our windows. Even their costume, which we had thought ugly, now seemed not wanting in originality, and even in a certain piquancy. The young girls let their braided hair fall on their shoulders, and usually tie the braids with bright ribbons, that hang down to their heels. Some of them confine their tresses in a long bag made of a silk handkerchief, a style of head-dress by no means unbecoming.

It was really a very pretty sight to see the crowd of elegant officers and young women in gala attire that filled the footways, exchanging looks, smiles, and even soft discourse, as if they were in a ball-room. The men are tall and handsome, and look remarkably well in uniform. Bravery and noble pride are legible in their features and their eyes, as if they were still those fiery children of the steppes, who, before the days of Catherine II. acknowledged no other power than that of their ataman, freely chosen by themselves. Arms are at this day their sole occupation, just as they were a hundred years ago, and their organisation is still altogether military, as we shall see by and by.

What erroneous notions are entertained in France, of these good-natured, inoffensive, and hospitable Cossacks! The events of 1814 and 1815, have left a deep repugnance towards them in all French minds, and indeed it could hardly be expected it should be otherwise. But speaking of them as we found them in their own land, they do not deserve the aversion with which our countrymen regard them. There is no part of Russia where the traveller is more safe than in their country, nor does he anywhere meet with a more kindly welcome. The name of Frenchman, especially, is an excellent recommendation there. The portrait of Napoleon is found in every house, and sometimes it is placed above that of the great St. Nicholas himself. All the old veterans who have survived the great wars of the empire, profess the greatest veneration for the French emperor, and these sentiments are fully shared by the present generation. [Pg 137]

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# CHAPTER XVII.

ORIGIN OF THE DON COSSACKS—MEANING OF THE NAME—THE KHIRGHIS COSSACKS—RACES ANTERIOR TO THE COSSACKS—SCLAVONIC EMIGRATIONS TOWARDS THE EAST.

The origin of the Don Cossacks has, like that of the Tatars of Southern Russia, given rise to interminable discussions. Some have represented this people as an offshoot of the great Sclavonic stock; others consider it as only a medley of Turks, Tatars, and Circassians. Vsevolojsky adopts the former of these opinions, in his Geographical and Historical Dictionary of the Russian Empire. M. Schnitzler boldly decides the question, in his Statistics of Russia, by declaring that the Cossacks of the Don have proceeded from the Caucasus, and belong for the most part to the Tcherkess or Circassian nation.

Constantino Porphyrogenitus, a writer of the ninth century, mentions a country called *Kasachia*. "On the other side of the Papagian country," he says, "is Kasachia, and immediately afterwards are discovered the tops of the Caucasus." The Russian chronicles likewise mention a Circassian people subjugated in 1021 by Prince Mstizlav, of Tmoutarakan. These, it must be owned, are very vague data, and the resemblance between two names is not warrant for our concluding that the Cossacks of our day and the Kasachians of the ninth century, are one and the same nation. Except the few words we have just cited, we have no other information respecting the latter people, and all the historical researches hitherto made, have failed to determine the real situation of Tmoutarakan. This town has been placed sometimes at Riazan, sometimes at the mouth of the Volga, on the site of Astrakhan, sometimes on the Asiatic shore of the Bosphorus. A stone, with a Sclavonic inscription, discovered at Taman, seemed for a while to have solved the [Pg 138] problem. But it was afterwards fully demonstrated, that this grand historical discovery was only a hoax practised on the credulous antiquarians.

The Kasachia of the ninth century is thus but very imperfectly known to us; even with the help of Constantino Porphyrogenitus, it would be difficult to determine its position with any real precision; and when the Cossacks, now known to us, appear for the first time, 600 years afterwards, it would be rash and arbitrary in the extreme to declare them the descendants of a people so briefly mentioned by the Byzantine writer. This opinion will appear the less admissible, when it is considered that the country of the Cossacks, situated around the Sea of Azov, lay directly in the route of all those conquering hordes that issued from Asia to overrun and ravage Europe, and afterwards disappeared successively, without leaving any other trace of their existence than their name in the pages of history.

Is it likely that Kasachia was more fortunate? Is there any probability that its people, after 600 years of absolute obscurity, again arose out of the chaos of all those revolutions, to produce the Cossacks of our day? We cannot think so. Historical inquiries, and above all a knowledge of the regions extending between the Sea of Azov and the Caspian, prove beyond question that all those countries were never occupied by a nation having fixed habitations. We have ourselves traversed those Russian deserts, up to the northern foot of the Caucasus; and except the somewhat modern remains of Madjar, on the borders of the Kouma, we nowhere found any vestige of human occupancy, or any trace of civilisation. It is, therefore, by no means likely, that amidst all the convulsions of the Asiatic invasions, from the ninth to the fifteenth century, whilst so many races were disappearing completely, that a little remote nomade people shall have preserved for 600 years its nationality and its territory, without being swept away and absorbed by all those warlike hordes that must have passed over it in torrents. This would be an historical fact perfectly unique in that part of the world; to us it appears in flagrant contradiction with historical experience. We are of opinion then, that the Cossacks of our day have nothing in common with the Kasachia of Constantino Porphyrogenitus, and that we must look elsewhere for their origin and for the reason of their appellation.

Let us in the first place examine this word *Cossack*. According to the use in which it was formerly and is still employed, it seems evidently not to belong to a special people, but simply to express the generic character of every nation, having certain distinct manners and customs. Thus in Russia, at this day, the name of Cossacks is given to all those persons who are under military organisation: there are Turcomans, Kalmuks, and Tatars so called in the steppes of the Caspian; and in Bessarabia, some gipsies and a medley of nondescript people constitute the Cossacks of the Dniestr. The Don Cossacks, themselves, attach no historical significance to their designation, [Pg 139] which they seem to regard merely as a by-name given to them in former times, and they readily share it with the nomade tribes around them, whose organisation is the same as their own. The only appellation they assume among themselves, is that of true believers.

The existence of the Khirghis Kaissacks of our day, can be traced back to more remote times; but there is certainly no analogy between this Mussulman people and our Cossacks. Furthermore, it seems proved that the Tatars before their invasions of Europe, used to give the appellation of Cossacks to all those individuals of their own race, who, having no property, were obliged to subsist by pillage, or to sell their services to some military leader. *Cossack* then, according to our apprehension, signifies only a nomade and a vagabond people, and it is likely that the Tatars on their arrival in Europe, gave that name to all the wandering tribes they found in the steppes of Azov and of the Don. What tends still more to confirm this opinion is, that no mention of Cossacks is made by Rubruquis and Du Plan de Carpin, who traversed all the regions of Southern Russia, on their embassy to the grand khan, in the beginning of the thirteenth century.

And now let us ask whence came those nomade people that preceded the modern Cossacks in the steppes of the Don and the Sea of Azov? Here again we must dissent from the views of Dr. Edmund Clarke and Lesur which have been generally adopted in Schnitzler's statistics.

According to the testimony of all historians the Slaves already occupied various parts of Southern Russia, during the first period of the decadence of the Lower Empire: every one knows indeed that the descendants of Rurik often carried their attacks on the emperors of the East up to the very gates of their capital. The annals of Russia also demonstrate the existence of the Slaves at the same period, in all Little Russia, and even in the country of the Don. This region was then called Severa. Its inhabitants, after a long contest with the Petchenegues, emigrated in part, and we now find their name attached to one of the principalities of the Danube, viz., Servia.

Again, it is universally admitted even by the adversaries of our opinions that the Don country was occupied previously to the Tatar invasions by a nomade and warlike people, the Polovtzis, who, there is every reason to think, were no other than Slaves.[13]

It may well be conceived that the dissensions and continual wars between the numerous chieftains, among whom the Russian soil was formerly parceled out, must naturally have produced numerous emigrations; and these partial emigrations being too weak to act against the west, must of course have turned eastward towards those remote regions of the steppes where the fugitives might find freedom and independence. It would be difficult then to disprove that a Slavic people existed on the banks of the Don when the Tatars arrived; and that people was apparently the Polovtzis, an agglomeration of fugitives and malcontents, who, during the convulsions of the Russian empire, under Vladimir the Great's successors, seem to have laid the first foundations of the Cossack power in the steppes of the Sea of Azov and the Don.[14] [Pg 140]

The name of the Polovtzis disappeared completely under the Tatar sway; but it would be illogical thence to infer that the people itself utterly perished, and did not share the destiny of the other Sclavonic tribes of Russia. We agree, therefore, with some historians in thinking that the Polovtzis merely exchanged their appellation for that of Cossacks, imposed on them by the Tatars, and made permanent by a servitude of more than three centuries. We have besides already remarked that the Tatars used among themselves to call all adventurers and vagabonds Cossacks: it is not, therefore, surprising that they should on their arrival in Russia, have given this designation to the nomade hordes of the Polovtzis. This historical version seems far more rational than the supposition that the Polovtzis completely disappeared, and were entirely supplanted by a Caucasian race, which had taken part in the expeditions of Batou Khan.

The traveller, who has studied the Cossacks and the mountaineers of the Caucasus, can never admit the doctrine that would make but one nation of these two. Our notions on this subject are corroborated in every point by physiological observations. In the first place, considerations founded on religion and language, are not so lightly to be rejected as Clarke and Lesur assert. The conversion of the Cossacks would not certainly have been passed over unnoticed in the history of the Lower Empire; the Byzantine writers would have been sure to record such a triumph of their creed; but they say not a word about it; and every one knows perfectly well in what manner Christianity was categorically introduced into Russia. Moreover, if the Cossacks had been nothing but Circassians at the beginning of the thirteenth century, it would be hard to account for their ready adoption of a foreign language and religion, at a time when that language and that religion were, if not proscribed, at least much discredited under the Tatar sway. The last [Pg 141] Russian expeditions into the Caucasus, towards the sources of the Kouban, have, it is true, given birth to new historical ideas as to that part of Asia. Thus, there have been discovered two churches in a perfect state of preservation, the origin of which is evidently Genoese or Venetian, and we can scarcely fail to recognise in the Circassians some traces of Christianity in the profound respect they bear to the cross. But, on the other hand, nothing indicates that this people was ever Christian; on the contrary, every thing proves that its primitive religion, if its religious notions may be so called, has undergone no alteration. Those Christian edifices, too, which we have alluded to, belong to a later period than the inroads of the Tatar hordes, consequently they can only testify in favour of our views.

No chronicle speaks of the emigration of a Tcherkess people in the middle ages. The only tradition relating to any thing of the kind, is that of a strong tribe from the Caucasus, which, after occupying the plains of the Danube, is said to have settled at last in Pannonia. Every one is aware that mountain tribes are the least migratory of all, and the most attached to their native soil; it is, therefore, natural to suppose that the Circassians, so proud of their independence and so often ineffectually attacked, did not receive the warriors of Genghis Khan as friends, or take part in their sanguinary expeditions.[15] Hence M. Schnitzler appears to me to propound a more than questionable fact when he alleges, following Karamsin, that the Circassians entered Russia with Batou Khan, and so formed by degrees that new people, which, to borrow the language of this statician, *on the breaking up of the Tatar rule and the dispersion of the clouds, which till then had hung over their country, appears to us as Russian and Christian, but with Circassian features, with Tatar manners and customs, and hating the Muscovites*.

How can we assign such an origin to the Don Cossacks when there exists neither among them, nor among their supposed brethren, any tradition of so modern a fact? Besides, if the Cossacks had really come from the Caucasus, would they not have retained some neighbourly relations with the mountaineers? Is it not a singular notion to take Circassians, the most indomitable of all men, and the most attached to their hereditary usages and manners, to subject them to the Tatars for more than 300 years, and then to transform them at once, and without transition, into a people speaking pure unmixed Sclavonic, and professing the Greek religion? This is certainly one of the most curious of metamorphoses; before it could happen there must have been a combination of circumstances exactly the reverse of those which have really existed. The Circassians, one would think, would have been much more disposed to adopt the religion of the victors, than of the vanquished, the more so as islamism having already at that period made [Pg 142] considerable progress in Eastern Caucasus, would give them a much stronger bias towards the Tatars, than towards the wandering hordes of the Polovtzis, from which we derive the Cossacks.

Notwithstanding the assertions of Dr. Clarke, it is not easy to trace much resemblance between the Circassians and the Cossacks. At present we see all the people who dwell at the foot of the Caucasus, generally adopting the habits of the mountain tribes. A great number of Nogai Tatars have become completely blended with them. The Cossacks of the Black Sea have borrowed from them their costume and their arms. The Muscovites and the German colonists themselves have not escaped the energetic influence of the Caucasian tribes; and yet some would have us believe that the Don Cossacks, a Tcherkess tribe, separated from the parent stock not more than 400 years, have undergone a contrary impulse during all that time, and now present, in a manner, no

resemblance to their ancestors. The two peoples differ in costume, arms, industry, and every other particular. The Circassians are extremely apt in manufactures, and excel in all sorts of handicraft productions, to which they give a very marked and original character. The Cossacks, on the contrary, have little or no turn for manufactures; in this respect they exhibit no trace of what characterises the Caucasian tribes in so high a degree. As for the Tatar habits, of which M. Schnitzler speaks, I know not where to look for them, unless they consist in the trousers generally worn by the Cossack women. After all, the Tatars must necessarily have left some traces of their habits in the countries over which they ruled for so many centuries.

The real point of contact between the Cossacks and the Circassians, consists in their love of freedom, and their intense hatred for every thing Russian. But these sentiments evidently flow from their ancient and primitive constitution; and if they detest the Russians, it is because the Muscovite sovereigns, who have never ceased to attack their privileges, have at last succeeded in annihilating their whole political existence.

Undoubtedly the Cossacks are not pure Sclavonians, like the people of Great Russia, but are mixed up with many other races. The Don country long remained a soil of freedom, a real land of asylum for all refugees. The Circassians have probably not been strangers to their past history, and the adventurous life of the Cossack must have fascinated many a mountain chief. History, too, informs us that the Sclavons of Poland have mingled their blood with that of the inhabitants of the Don country. It is this medley of races, and the combination of all these various influences, added to the thoroughly republican character of their primitive constitution, that give the Cossacks their intellectual superiority, and make them a nation apart. But the principle stock is nevertheless Sclavonic.

The partisans of the Circassian origin have also dwelt on the resemblance between the name of the capital of the Don country, and that of a Caucasian tribe. But really when a historical [Pg 143] question of this importance is under discussion, such a resemblance cannot be of much weight. We know that some fugitives from the Boristhenes, about the year 1569, fell in with Cossacks on the Don, and joined with them in an attack on Azov, which then belonged to the Turks. It was just about this period, 1570, that Staro Tcherkask was founded. We should hence be disposed to believe that the fugitives from the Ukraine had a great share in the creation of that town, and that they called it Tcherkask, in memory of the name of the old capital of their native land.

The Don Cossacks appear to us for the first time in the thirteenth century, on the ruins of the Tatar empire. Not till then did they begin to make a certain figure in the history of the Muscovite empire. In the reign of Ivan IV. the Terrible, they put themselves under the protection of Russia. From that time until near the end of the last century, we see them sometimes marching under the banners of the Muscovite sovereigns, sometimes rising against them, and often bringing the empire to the very verge of ruin. Their political condition was in those days a real republic, founded on a basis of absolute equality. The head of the government, styled ataman, was selected by the whole assembled nation, and retained his office but for five years; but his power was dictatorial, and no one could call him to account for his acts, even after the expiration of his office. All the subaltern leaders were likewise elected, and retained their posts for a greater or less time, according to circumstances. Equality, however, resumed its sway at the end of each military campaign; each officer, on returning into private life, enjoyed only the rights common to all; and the colonel or starshine often made the ensuing campaign as a private soldier. Aristocracy was totally unknown to the Don Cossacks in those days; if some families were distinguished from the rest by their greater influence, they owed this solely to their courage and their exploits. So strong was then the sense of independence, that the Cossacks despised as vile mercenaries those who took permanent service under the Russian sovereigns. As for the imperial suzerainty, it was limited to the right of calling for a military contingent in case of war, and of disposing of a small body of troops to defend the frontiers against the nomades of the steppes.

Cossack freedom was doomed to perish when brought into collision with the principles of absolutism and servitude which rule in the Russian empire; accordingly, as soon as the Empress Catherine II. felt strong enough to make the attempt, she decided on a radical change in the political constitution of the Don country.

The first of her ukases to this effect enacted that all the Cossack officers in the service of Russia should retain their rank and privileges on their return to their own country; a regulation directly opposed to the habits and usages of that republican people. How, indeed, could that [Pg 144] haughty soldiery have endured that slave-officers, as it called them, should be put on the same footing with its own, elected by the acclamations of the nation? A revolt ensued, but it was promptly put down. The illustrious Potemkin could not understand that insurrection, for it seemed to him incredible that the Cossacks should rebel because they were granted almost all the privileges of Russian officers. After these unhappy troubles, their elections were abolished, and their political system was gradually changed, until it came to resemble that of a Russian government. Count Platof was the last ataman of the Cossacks, and he owed the authority he was allowed to enjoy, in a great measure to the peculiar circumstances in which he was placed by the wars of the empire.

The Don country continued through the last century as before, to be a land of asylum and freedom for all refugees. This led to the settlement of a great number of Russians among the Cossacks. The Emperor Paul took advantage of this circumstance to secure the attachment of the principal families by publishing an ukase, in which he at once, and without warning, declared all the Russian fugitives slaves of the landowners, whose patronage they had accepted. This first partition of the people was not the last; another ukase of the same sovereign completed the work of Catherine II., abolished equality, and constituted an aristocracy by ennobling all the officers

and *employés* of the government. The nobility at present amount to a considerable number, and all the officers are taken from that body. The young Cossacks, like the Russians, enter the St. Petersburg corps as cadets, at ten or twelve years of age; after some years they join a regiment as *junker*, and two or three months afterwards they become officers.

The political power of the Cossacks being annihilated, active means were taken to deprive them of all military strength, by dispersing them all over the empire, and stationing them wherever there were quarantines, custom-house lines, and hostile frontiers to guard. Cossack posts were simultaneously established on the frontiers of Poland, and at the foot of the Caucasus. Lastly, every means of enfeeblement was largely employed, and after the death of Platof, under pretext of rewarding the nation for its devotedness during the campaign of Moscow, the functions of ataman-in-chief were suppressed, and the title was conferred on the heir-apparent.

All these arbitrary measures, which, after all cannot be blamed, have naturally excited the most violent discontent in the country of the Don, and the Cossacks would undoubtedly cause the empire serious uneasiness in case of war. The government is not ignorant of this hostile temper. In recent times it did not dare to trust the Cossacks with real pieces of artillery, and the regiments were compelled to exercise with wooden cannons. It is certain that the campaign of 1812 would not have been so disastrous for France, if Napoleon had taken care to send [Pg 145] emissaries among the inhabitants of the Don with promises to re-establish their ancient political constitution. I have questioned a great number of military men on this subject, and all were unanimous in assuring me of the alacrity with which the Cossacks would then have joined the French army. Nothing can give an idea of the antipathy they cherish to their masters; the feeling pervades all classes, in spite of every effort of the government. The Russians affect so much disdain for the Cossack nobles, that the latter, notwithstanding their epaulettes and their decorations, cannot but bitterly regret the old republican constitution. Furthermore, the military service is so onerous, that it checks all agricultural and industrial activity; for be it observed, that the Cossacks of the present day are far from being the plunderers they were in former times. The service is to them but a profitless task, and they all long eagerly for a sedentary life, which would allow them to attend to rural occupations, and to trade.

The country of the Don Cossacks is now definitively a Russian government. All the laws of the empire are there in full force, and the administrative forms are the same, under other names. Nevertheless, the still free attitude of the Cossacks has not hitherto permitted the installation of the Russian *employés* among them. Within the last three years only, the government has succeeded in having itself represented at Novo Tcherkask, by a general placed at the head of the military staff of the country. The Cossacks regard this innovation with dislike, and spare their new military superior no annoyance. The following is the present organisation of the Don Cossacks:—

The ataman (*locum tenens*) holding the grade of lieutenant-general, is the military and civil head of the government, and at the same time the president of the various tribunals of the capital. The functions of vice-president having been conferred since 1841 on the general of the staff before mentioned, the latter is in fact the sole influential authority in the country.

The province of the Don Cossacks is divided into seven civil and four military districts; the courts are similar to those of the other governments.

The army amounts at present, to fifty-four regiments, of 850 men each (not including the two regiments of the emperor and the grand duke) and nine companies of artillery, having each eight pieces of cannon. In 1840, there were twenty-eight regiments in active service, fifteen of them in the Caucasus, with three companies of artillery. At the same time, nine other regiments were under orders to march for the lines of the Kouban.

All the Cossacks are soldiers born: their legal term of service is twenty years abroad, or twenty-five at home. But no regard is paid to this regulation, for most of them remain in active service for thirty or even forty years. They pay no taxes, but are obliged to equip themselves at their own expense, and receive the ordinary pay of Russian troops only from the day they cross their native [Pg 146] frontiers.[16]

The organisation of the regiments is effected in rather a curious manner. When a regiment is to be sent to the Caucasus, each district receives notice how many soldiers and officers it is to supply, and then the first names on the military books are taken without distinction. The place of muster is usually near the frontier, and every one arrives there as he pleases, without concerning himself about others. When all the men are assembled, they are classed by squadrons, the requisite officers are set over them, and the detachment begins its march. Hence we see there is nothing fixed in the composition of the regiments. The Cossacks are subjected nevertheless to the European discipline, and formed into regular corps; but this innovation seems likely to be fatal to them, by completely destroying their valuable aptitude for acting as skirmishers. The Emperor Nicholas visited the Don country in 1837, and reviewed the Cossack troops at Novo Tcherkask, but it appears that he was exceedingly displeased with the condition of the regulars. Accordingly, that he might not expose them to the criticism of foreigners, he took care not to be accompanied by the brilliant cortège of European officers who had been present at the grand military parades of Vosnecensk.

The population of the Don Cossacks amounts to about 600,000, occupying 14,000,000 hectares of land, and divided into four very distinct classes: 1. The aristocracy founded by the Emperor Paul; 2. The free Cossacks; 3. The merchants; 4. The slaves. The free Cossacks form the mass of the population, and furnish the horse soldiers; they have however the opportunity of acquiring nobility by military service, but to this end, they must serve for twelve years as non-

commissioned officers.

The merchants form a peculiar class, which can hardly exceed 500 in number. They are not bound to do military service, but in lieu of this, they pay taxes to the government. The slaves, whose origin we have described, amount to about 85,000 souls.

The revenues of the government of the Cossacks, are about 2,000,000 rubles, more than sufficient for the expenditure, that is to say, for the payment of the *employés*. The spirit duties produce 1,500,000 rubles, the rest is made up by the salt works of the Manitch, and the pasturage dues.

The country of the Don Cossacks is bounded on the north by the two governments of Voroneje and Saratof; on the east by the latter, and that of Astrakhan; on the south by the government of the Caucasus, the country of the Cossacks of the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov; on the west, by the governments of Voroneje and Iekaterinoslav and the Ukraine slobodes. All this territory forms [Pg 147] a vast extent, no part of which is detached as M. Schnitzler asserts; on the contrary, the regency of Taganrok is completely encompassed by it.

The country of the Cossacks may be divided into two very distinct parts: that situated to the north and west, presenting lofty plains intersected by many rivers and ravines, is admirably adapted for agriculture, and possesses excellent pastures. Among its numerous rivers, are the Donetz, the Mious, and the Kalmious, which marks its frontier on the west, and the Khoper and the Medveditza on the north-east. It is principally along the two latter streams, that the Cossacks have established their most celebrated studs, among the foremost of which, are those of Count Platof. The second division of the country, consists of all the steppes that extend along the left bank of the Don, to the confines of the government of the Caucasus, and along the Manitch to the frontier of Astrakhan. The soil is here unvaried; it is the Russian desert in all its uniformity, and the basin of the muddy and brackish Manitch, is perfectly in harmony with the regions it traverses. But those monotonous plains are a source of wealth to the Cossacks, who rear vast herds of horses and other cattle; several thousands of Kalmucks too find subsistence in them.

Until 1841, the government of the Cossacks exhibited one very singular peculiarity. Its whole territory formed but one vast communal domain, without any individual owners or ownership. After several fruitless attempts, the Russian government finally determined on dividing the lands, and the work must by this time have been completed. Besides the new arrangements adopted, there have been granted to each family thirty hectares of land for each male, and fifteen additional for each slave. After this distribution, there will remain to the government, 2,000,000 hectares of land, on which it will no doubt establish Muscovite colonies. This division of the land is a final blow to the old Cossack institutions, and ere long the population will consist only of nobles and peasants, just as in the rest of Russia. The peasants are free it is true, but their properties will soon be absorbed by the wealthier and more powerful: and then an ukase will do the work of establishing slavery in the country. The community of landed property was hitherto the only obstacle to a complete severance between the new nobles and the other Cossacks. It was another remnant of the old republican equality, and was naturally doomed to fall before the principles of unity and centralisation of the Russian government. When we see Russia laying her hand on all the free populations of the southern part of the empire, and bringing them gradually under the yoke of serfdom, we cannot but be struck with astonishment, and compare the revolution it is now effecting before our eyes, with that which so deplorably signalised the Roman sway.

It may easily be conceived how fatal the military organisation of the Cossacks must be to their [Pg 148] prosperity and well-being. Never sure of what the morrow may bring forth, and liable at any moment to be called to arms, they have of necessity fallen into indifference and sloth. Their domestic ties are broken, for they are often many years without seeing their wives and children. Under such a system, all intellectual improvement becomes impossible; and there has also resulted from it an incipient demoralisation, compressed as yet by the force of primitive manners, but which will not fail at last to spread over the whole population. Yet the Cossacks are eminently intelligent. I saw thirty young men at Novo Tcherkask execute topographical plans extremely well, after a few weeks' study. The Russian generals themselves could not refrain from expressing their surprise to me at so rapid a progress. Let Russia renounce the oppressive system she is forcing on the Cossacks; let the latter, on their part, make up their mind to admit that their ancient constitution is in our day become an utopia; and the Don country will soon make rapid advances in colonisation, and exhibit all that constitutes the prosperity and wealth of a nation.

The means of instruction enjoyed by the Cossacks are still extremely limited. In the whole country there is but one gymnasium, very recently established in Novo Tcherkask; but the wealthier Cossacks have long been used to have their children educated in the neighbouring governments, particularly in Taganrok, where the private schools kept by foreigners afford them great advantages.

The rearing of cattle, especially of horses, is now the chief source of gain to the Cossacks. Count Platof's studs, as we have already said, are reputed the best: they are descended from the trans-Kouban races, crossed by Persian and Khivian stallions, procured by the late count during the war of 1796 with Persia. Very good cavalry horses are also produced by Platof's stallions out of Tatar and Kalmuck mares. Count Platof's horses fetch from 250 to 350 rubles; but in the steppes of the Manitch, where there are very extensive herds, the price seldom exceeds 150. The care of the herds is chiefly committed to Kalmucks; usually 100 horses are kept by one family, five hundred by three, a thousand by five, and from 1500 to 2000 by six. Except a few

proprietors, who are careful about the improvement of the breed, the Cossacks allow their vast herds to wander about the steppes without any care or superintendence. The horses of the Don never enter a stable; summer and winter they are in the open air, and must procure their own food, for which they have often to strive against the snow; hence they become extremely vigorous, and support the most trying campaigns with remarkable hardiness. Nothing can be more simple and expeditious than the way in which they are broken in. The horse selected is caught with a noose; he is saddled and bridled; the rider mounts him, and he is allowed to gallop over the steppe until he falls exhausted. From that moment he is almost always perfectly tamed, and may be used without danger. I rode a mare thus broken, in one of my longest journeys on horseback. Six days before my departure she was completely free; yet I never rode a more docile animal. [Pg 149]

The Cossacks have three sorts of horned cattle, the Kalmuck, the Hungarian, and the Dutch breeds. The first is generally preferred because it does not require to be stalled either winter or summer, or to receive any particular care, and always can pick up its feed in the steppes. At the same time the loss of cattle is enormous in long and severe winters, for the proprietors can never procure hay for more than six weeks' consumption, on account of the great numbers of their herds. At the end of the year 1839, the Don country possessed in cattle:

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|---|---|
| Horned cattle | 1,013,106 |
| Sheep | 2,310,445 |
| Goats | 53,221 |
| Camels | 1,692 |
| Horses | 326,788 |
| Total | 3,705,252 |

In that year the sheep produced 5,698,000 kilogrammes of wool, which was exported. Of the above number of sheep, only 308,652 are merinos. The wool of the latter fetched 156 rubles the 100 kilogrammes, whilst that of the native sheep did not sell for more than 58 to 62. But the merinos require too much care, and I much doubt that they will ever be reared on a large scale by the Cossacks. Besides, as we have already seen, the breeding of merinos is far from being as profitable at this day as it was formerly.

Agriculture, properly so called, must naturally be in a depressed condition in a country of which the tenth part of the population is continually either in active service, or in readiness to be called out. No more corn is cultivated than is sufficient for the subsistence of the inhabitants. The crop of 1839 was 6,953,814 hectolitres, a quantity considerably too small for seed, and for the consumption of a nation that annually consumes 6.18 hectolitres per head. The Cossacks were, therefore, obliged to draw on the reserved stores and on the neighbouring governments. In general, whatever M. Schnitzler may say to the contrary, their agriculture produces no more than is barely necessary; notwithstanding the advantages of a great navigable river, and its position on the Sea of Azov, the Don country has not yet been able to export any corn.

The cultivation of the vine is the only one that has prospered in any remarkable degree among the Cossacks; it prevails in the southern regions on the banks of the Don and of the Axai. They now reckon 4514 vineyards, yielding annually, on an average, from 20,000 to 25,000 hectolitres of wine, and 300 to 400 of brandy. In 1841, the production amounted to nearly 62,500; and when I was in Novo Tcherkask, grapes were selling there for three rubles the 100 kilogrammes. Sparkling wines are made, of which the Don country now exports more than a million of bottles yearly. The best wine of a certain Abrahamof is usually charged for at the rate of six rubles in the inns of Novo Tcherkask. The reader will, no doubt, be surprised to hear of such quantities of sparkling wines; but Russia is unquestionably the country in which that sort of beverage is most esteemed; and as the petty nobles and the *employés* cannot afford to drink champagne, they have recourse to the Cossack vintage. The latter is consumed in incredible quantity, principally in the fairs, where no bargain can be concluded without a case of Don wine. It is very agreeable, and is much liked, even by foreigners. It is to Frenchmen the Cossacks owe this branch of industry. [Pg 150]

Fishing also forms an important source of income for the Cossacks. It is carried on chiefly at the mouths of the Don. In 1838, it produced 304,000 kilogrammes of sturgeons yielding caviare, and more than 20,000,000 of fish of different kinds, which they salt and send to the neighbouring governments. Bees must also be enumerated among the sources of wealth in the country. The Mious district, which possesses nearly 31,000 hives, produced in 1839, 124,336 kilogrammes of honey, and 21,056 kilogrammes of wax.

From these hints it will be seen how rich is the country of the Cossacks, and how high a degree of prosperity it might reach under an enlightened and liberal administration. Manufacturing industry is the only one that, as yet, has made no progress in it. It is said not to possess a single manufactory, which is natural enough, considering the military organisation of the nation. There is an extreme want of workmen; the few found in the country, who come from the neighbouring governments, demand very high pay, as much as two rubles and a half a day, which is exorbitant in Russia. As for mineral wealth, the Don country possesses abundance of coal and anthracite, the latter of which is worked in the neighbourhood of Novo Tcherkask.

Among the tribes incorporated with the Don Cossacks, the Kalmucks demand especial mention. In the reign of the Emperor Paul, an ukase was issued, commanding a census to be taken of all the nomade tribes subject to Russia. This certain presage of some tax or other, spread consternation among the Kalmucks; their hordes began to break up, and great numbers of them took refuge with the Cossacks. But the fatal ukase soon pursued them to their new asylum,

whereupon some returned to the steppes of the Caspian, whilst the rest being retained by the Cossacks, were put under the same military and civil system of administration as the inhabitants of the Don. These Kalmucks now form a population of about 15,000, and encamp on both banks of the Manitch, about 100 miles from the confluence with the Don. In order to give some notion of the manners and customs of this people, I will here copy some fragments from an account of a scientific journey I made along the Manitch, to determine the difference of level between the Black Sea and the Caspian.

It was towards the end of May, 1841, I set out from Novo Tcherkask, to explore the Manitch, a [Pg 151] paltry stream, but which, nevertheless, had for a long while the honour of marking the boundary between Europe and Asia. I was accompanied by my friend, Baron Kloch, a German by birth, and a most agreeable man, lately arrived for the first time in Russia. His intelligent conversation was a great source of enjoyment to me. Six hours' travel brought us to Axai, a charming stanitza, built like an amphitheatre on the right bank of the Don. It is the great trading place of the Cossacks, and but for the vicinity of Rostof, a Russian, and of course a privileged town, it would have been made the capital of the Don country, and the general entrepôt of all the traffic from the north of the empire. The project was even entertained at first, but it was defeated partly by intrigue, and partly I believe by the obstinacy of Count Platof. Axai is, nevertheless, the handsomest stanitza in the country. Its balconied houses, painted in different colours, its port, the activity prevailing in it, its lively and bustling population, all excite the traveller's attention and curiosity. When I arrived in the town the inundations of the Don were at their height, and as far as the eye could reach the waters covered the low plain that stretches along its left bank. We were soon furnished with a boat having on board a pilot and four excellent rowers, and at nine in the evening, we embarked to cross the river. The evening was perfectly calm and beautiful; and I shall never forget the lodkas with bellied sails, gliding down with the current, the melancholy songs of the Russian boatmen, the sounds from Axai gradually dying away in the distance, and our boat skimming across the smooth surface of the water, which broke in thousands of sparks from the oars. At midnight we landed before Makinskaia, where we passed the remainder of the night on heaps of hay, in the court-yard of a paltry inn.

At daybreak next morning, the saddle horses were ready, and we started for Manitchkaia on the confluence of the Manitch with the Don. After some hours' riding we were brought to a halt by the overflow of the latter river; and for want of a better road to reach the stanitza, we were obliged to betake ourselves to wading through the temporary lake. This was the most unpleasant part of our journey. For a distance of more than four leagues our horses plodded on through thick mud with the water up to their bellies; and sometimes they were forced to swim. Besides this, we were tormented by clouds of gnats. At last our situation became quite intolerable; for in the very middle of this passage we were assailed by a violent hurricane, the rain came down in torrents; our baggage waggon broke down, and we very nearly lost all its contents. The whole day was consumed in making the six leagues to Manitchkaia. Our Kalmucks only succeeded in extricating the waggon from the hole in which it was stuck fast, by yoking one of their horses to it by the tail. This is an infallible means as we often found by experience; nothing can resist the violent efforts [Pg 152] of the unfortunate horse when he finds himself in that predicament.

Leaving Manitchkaia, we skirted along the basin of the Manitch. The first dwellings we descried were some miserable Tatar cabins, surrounded with brambles and thistles. We found in them an old Tatar captain, a relic of the French campaign. He amused us a good deal by his pompous encomiums on the valour and tall stature of the Prussians. A Frenchman, said he, does not fear ten Russians, but a Prussian would settle at least ten Frenchmen.

For three days our journey was without interest. No traces of buildings were to be seen; at intervals there appeared in the middle of the steppes, a Kalmuck tent, the inhabitants of which kept a large herd of horses; then here and there some strayed camels, and these were the only objects that broke the dreary monotony of the wilderness. But on the fourth day, we reached the vicinity of the great Khouroul of the Kalmucks, the residence of their high priest. One of our Cossacks was sent forward to announce our visit, and an hour after his departure two priests came galloping up to us. After complimenting us in the name of the grand Lama, they presented us with brandy distilled from mare's milk, in token of welcome, and fell in to line with our party. Some minutes afterwards we descried the white tents of the Khouroul. Our party was every moment swelled by fresh reinforcements, and we had soon fifty horsemen caracoling by our sides. Having reached the centre of the Khouroul, we alighted, and then walking between two lines of priests dressed in garments of the most glaring colours, we were conducted to the high priest's tent. This venerable representative of the great Dalai Lama, was an old man upwards of seventy, entirely bald, and with features of a much less Kalmuck cast than his countrymen. He was wrapped in a wide tunic of yellow brocade, lined with cherry red silk, and his fingers were busy with the beads of his chaplet. After many salutations on both sides we sat down on a sofa, and then, according to the invariable Kalmuck usage, we were helped to brandy and koumis, a beverage at which my friend Kloch made very queer faces. Next, I presented the high priest with two pounds of bad tobacco, purchased at Novo Tcherkask, which I passed off as genuine Latakieh. He was so delighted with my present that he did honour to it on the spot, with every mark of extreme satisfaction. This high priest will have the honour to be burned after his death, and his ashes, formed into a paste with a certain ingredient, will be worked into a little statue, which will adorn the temple to be erected to his memory. His successor is already nominated; he looks like a stupid fanatic, puffed up with the importance of his future dignity; we afterwards saw him acquit himself of his religious duties, with a conscientiousness quite rare among the Cossack Kalmucks. All the priests of this khouroul, appeared to us incomparably less devout than those of the Volga and the Caspian. They have very little reverence for their spiritual chief; they seem

fully aware of the absurdities of their religious notions and ceremonies, and if they set any value by their functions, it is because they enable them to lead a life of indolence and sensuality, and exempt them from military service. The laity seems to be very indifferent as to religious matters. The women alone seem attached to their ancient principles; one of them burst into a fury because her husband allowed us to see and touch the leaves of her prayer-book. It is to their intercourse with the Cossacks that we must attribute the lapse of these Kalmucks from the strictness of the primitive rule, which has been preserved almost unimpaired among the Kalmucks of the Caspian. [Pg 153]

After leaving the high priest's tent we attended the religious ceremonies, in which there was nothing very striking. A sheep was afterwards killed in honour of our visit, and was served up, cut into small pieces, in a huge cast-iron pan. The ragout was black and detestable, but hunger made it seem delicious.

The women of the vicinity arrived in the evening, and began to sing in chorus, parading round the khouroul. Their strains were profoundly melancholy; nothing like them had ever yet struck my ears. Their voices were so sonorous and vibrating, that the sound was like that of brazen instruments; and heard in that vast solemn wilderness, it produced the most singular impression. After walking half-a-dozen times round the khouroul the singers halted, and forming line with their faces towards the temple, they stretched out their arms and prostrated themselves repeatedly. The women having ended, next came the mandjis or musicians, who made the air resound with the braying of their trumpets at the moment when the sun was descending below the horizon.

Next day we left the khouroul to return to the banks of the Manitch; I then continued my levelling along the course of that stream up to the point, where eighteen months before, on my way back from the Caspian, I had been stopped by want of water and pasture. In our return journey we passed through numerous Kalmuck camps on the right bank of the Manitch, and were everywhere received with the liveliest delight. As all these nomades are exclusively engaged in rearing cattle, our curiosity was greatly excited by the prodigious herds of camels, horses, and oxen that covered the plain.

Before we reached the Don we spent the last two nights in the lonely steppe, under the open sky. But six hours afterwards we were in Taganrok, in the drawing-room of the amiable English consul, surrounded by all the comforts of civilised life.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[13] We are quite convinced that the Comans mentioned by the Byzantine writers, are identical with the Kaptschaks of the Oriental historians. Rubruck's narrative supplies proof of this; moreover both peoples spoke Turkish. But in spite of all Klaproth's assertions, we do not believe that the Polovtzis of the Slavic chroniclers were Comans; for it seems to us far more rational to look for the descendants of the Comans among the Mussulman inhabitants of the south of the empire, who, as we learn from historic records, were already established in the same regions under the name of Kaptschak, at the arrival of Genghis Khan's Mongols.

[14] Note that in our day the Cossack population though augmented during a succession of ages, by numerous emigrations, does not exceed 600,000 souls; it must, therefore, in all probability, have been much less considerable in the fifteenth century, a supposition which further confirms our opinion that the Cossacks never formed a distinct nation.

[15] According to Du Plan de Carpin, the Circassians do not appear to have escaped unscathed from the attacks of the Mongols; but there seems no reason to think that they were really subjugated.

[16] Since we left Russia it has been proposed to equip the Cossack regiments at the cost of the government. The country would, of course, in that case be taxed, and would cease to differ in any respect from the other provinces.

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# CHAPTER XVIII.

JOURNEY FROM NOVO TCHERKASK ALONG THE DON—ANOTHER KNAVISH POSTMASTER—MUSCOVITE MERCHANTS—COSSACK STANITZAS.

Beyond Novo Tcherkask the road to Astrakhan runs northward along the right bank of the Don; the country still continuing the same naked and monotonous appearance; it is only in the neighbourhood of the river that its desolation is here and there relieved by a few clumps of trees in the ravines.

It is certainly not without reason that the Russians boast of the rapid travelling in their country; its posts would be unrivalled in Europe were it not for the vexations practised by the *employés* at

the stations. On the whole we had hitherto had no great reason to complain; the official papers with which we were furnished smoothed many difficulties; but at the first station beyond Novo Tcherkask we endured the common fate of all who travel without titular grade or decoration, and were mercilessly fleeced. We arrived towards evening followed by another carriage of which we were but a few minutes in advance. A caleche without horses seemed a bad omen to us as we entered the court-yard; and the first answer given to our Cossack was, that we could not have horses until the next morning. The prospect of passing the night in a miserable hovel was disagreeable enough; but what remedy had we with a postmaster, who opening all his stables, showed that he had no horses? After waiting a full half hour to no purpose our interpreter explored the vicinity of the station, and on his return, some rubles bestowed on the head of the establishment procured us all the horses we wanted. We put to and started immediately, leaving our companions behind us; but they overtook us an hour afterwards, having done like ourselves; and so it appeared at last, that there were horses enough for us all.

The travellers who followed us were young Muscovite merchants returning from some fair in the Caucasus. They amused themselves all night with letting off rockets and all kinds of fireworks, the sudden flash of which, lighting up the deep darkness of the steppes, produced a most striking effect.

We passed on the following day through several stanitzas. These Cossack hamlets have a far more pleasing appearance than the Russian villages. The houses of which they consist are small, almost all of them built of painted wood, with green window-shutters. They have only a ground-floor, surrounded by a miniature gallery, and look as if they were merely intended for pretty toys. The interiors are extremely neat, and show an appreciation of domestic comfort of which the Russians betray no trace. You find in them table-linen, delf plates, forks, and all the most necessary utensils. The Cossacks have usually two dwellings adjoining each other. One of these, that which we have been speaking of, is occupied in summer, and almost always contains one [Pg 155] handsome apartment, adorned with stained paper, images, flowers, and groups of arms; it is the room used on grand occasions, and for the accommodation of strangers. The other dwelling is built of earth, and resembles the *kates* of the Muscovite peasants; it contains but one room, in which the whole family huddle themselves together in winter for the more warmth.

In general, only women and children are to be seen in the stanitzas. The whole male population is under arms, with the exception of some veterans who have purchased, by forty years' service, the right of returning home to die. All the burden of labour falls on the women; it is they who must repair the houses, whitewash them, dress the furs, take care of the children, and tend the cattle. It is really inconceivable how they can accomplish so many laborious tasks.

At Piatisbanskaia, a charming stanitza, shaded by handsome trees, and rising in an amphitheatre on the banks of the Don, we turned off from the post-road, and after crossing the river, entered on a sea of sand, through which we worked our way with immense difficulty. The peasants' horses are less used than those of the post to such toilsome marches, and it was really piteous to see their panting distress. The reflected glare of the sun, and the absence of any breath of wind, made this day's journey one of the most oppressive we encountered. It took us four hours to get over nine versts (less than six English miles). Though I wore a thick veil and blue spectacles, my eyelids were so swollen I could scarcely open them. Towards noon we at last reached a poor lonely village, where we rested until nightfall.

The country from Piatisbanskaia is dreary, and void of vegetation. The stanitzas are few and far between, the land lies waste, and the sand-hills and hot winds betoken the approach to the deserts of the Caspian. Nothing is more saddening to the imagination, than the lifeless aspect and uniform hues of these endless plains. One is surprised to meet in them, from time to time, some miserable Cossack villages, and cannot tell how the inhabitants can exist amidst such desolation. This sad sterility is the work of men, rather than of nature. The present system of government of the Don Cossacks is an insuperable bar to agricultural improvement; and so long as it exists, the land must remain uncultivated.

But, as we have already remarked, all is contrast in Russia. Extremes of all kinds meet there without any transition: from a desert you pass into a populous town, from a cabin to a palace, from a Tatar mosque into an ancient Christian cathedral, from an arid plain into the cheerful German colonies. Surprises follow one upon the other without end, and give a peculiar zest to travelling, scarcely to be experienced in any other part of Europe.

It is particularly in approaching Sarepta that one feels the force of these reflections: the novel impressions that there await the traveller who arrives benumbed in soul from the dreary [Pg 156] wilderness, come upon him with the bewildering effect of a marvellous dream. Even were Sarepta whisked away, and set down in the middle of Switzerland, one could not fail to be delighted with so charming a place; but to feel all its real excellence, one should come to it weary and worn as we were, one should have known what it was to long for a little shade and water, as for manna from the skies, and have plodded on for many days through a country like that we have described, under the unmitigating rays of a roasting sun.

Picture to yourself a pretty little German town, with its high gabled houses, its fruit trees, fountains, and promenades, its scrupulous neatness, and its comfortable and happy people, and you will have an idea of Sarepta: industry, the fine arts, morality, sociability, commerce, are all combined in that favoured spot.

The Moravian colony, shut in within a bend of the Volga, in the midst of the Kalmuck hordes, eloquently demonstrates what miracles decision and perseverance can effect. It is the first shoot planted by Europe in that remote region, amidst those pastoral tribes so jealous of their

independence; and the changes wrought by the Moravian brethren on the rude soil they have fertilised, and on the still ruder character of the inhabitants, give striking evidence of the benefits of our civilisation.

Every thing breathes of peace and contentment in this little town, on which rests the blessing of God. It is the only place I know in Russia in which the eye is never saddened by the sight of miserable penury. No bitter thought mingles there with the interesting observations gleaned by curiosity. Every house is a workshop, every individual a workman. During the day every one is busy; but in the evening the thriving and cheerful population throng the walks and the square, and give a most pleasing air of animation to the town.

Like most Germans, the Moravian brethren are passionately fond of music. The piano, heard at evening in almost every house, reminds them of their fatherland, and consoles them for the vicinity of the Kalmucks.

We visited the establishments of the Moravian sisters, where, by a fortunate chance, we met a German lady who spoke French very well. The life of the sisters is tranquil, humble, and accordant with the purest principles of morality and religion. They are forty in number, and appear happy, as much so at least as it is possible to be in a perfectly monastic state of existence. Consummate order, commodious apartments, and a handsome garden, make the current of their lives flow with unruffled smoothness, as far as outward things are concerned. Music, too, is a great resource for them. We observed in the prayer-room three pianos, with which they accompany the hymns they sing in chorus. They execute very pretty work in pearls and tapestry, which they sell for the benefit of the community. There would be nothing very extraordinary in these details, if any other country were in question; we are afraid they will even be thought too [Pg 157] commonplace; but if the reader will only reflect for a moment on the position of this oasis of civilisation on the far verge of Europe, in the midst of the Kalmucks and on the confines of the country of the Khirghis, he will think our enthusiasm very natural and excusable.

The only thing that rather offended our eyes was the would-be finery of the women's dress. Would any one imagine that in this remote little corner of the earth they should be ridiculous enough to ape French fashions and wear bonnets with flowers? How preferable are the simple demure costume of the Mennonite women and their little Alsacian caps, to the mingled elegance and shabbiness of the Moravian sisters. Their dress is quite out of character, and makes them look like street ballad-singers.

To give an idea of it, here follows an exact description of the costume of a fashionably-dressed young lady of Sarepta (our host's daughter.):—A flowered muslin gown, short and narrow; a black apron; a large Madras handkerchief on the neck; a patch-work ridicule carried in the hand; thick-soled shoes, bare arms, and a pink bonnet with flowers. To complete the portrait, we must add a very pretty face, and plump, well-rounded arms. The women here are much handsomer than in any other part of Russia; many of them are remarkable specimens of the North German style of beauty.

On the evening of our arrival we were advised to attend the funeral music performed as a last honour to one of the principal inhabitants of Sarepta. The body was laid out in a mortuary chapel, with the family and numerous friends around it, and was not to be removed to the cemetery until the fourth day; an excellent custom, which may prevent horrible accidents.

It would be difficult to imagine any thing more melancholy than the harmony produced by the voices and the brass instruments that alternately answered each other, and seemed the echoes of the saddest and most profound emotions of the heart. A great number of persons were present, and all the solemnity of the occasion did not hinder those worthy Germans from gathering round us with the liveliest curiosity, and putting a thousand questions to us about the purport of our travels.

The association of the Moravian brethren dates from the celebrated John Huss, who was burnt at Constance, in 1419. Their history is but a long series of persecutions. The issue of the Thirty Years' War, so disastrous for Frederick, the elector palatine, and king of Bohemia, was particularly fatal to them. At that period most of the Protestants of Bohemia fled their country, and spread themselves through Saxony, Brandenburg, Poland, and Hungary. The vengeance of the Emperor Frederick II. pursued them without ceasing, and great numbers of them perished in want and wretchedness. In 1722, Christian David, a carpenter, and some others of the proscribed, obtained permission from the Count of Zinzendorf, in Lusace, to settle on his lands. [Pg 158] They reached their place of refuge in secret, with their wives and children, and David struck his axe into a tree, exclaiming: "Here shall the bird find a dwelling, and the swallow a nest." His hopes were not disappointed. The new establishment assumed the name of *Herrenhut* (The Lord's Keeping), and its members were soon known in Germany only by that appellation. Such was the beginning of the new evangelical society of the Brethren of the Unity of the Confession of Augsburg. Herrenhut, the central establishment, throve rapidly, and became known all over Europe for its industry and its manufactures; and by and by, when the proselytising spirit had possessed the brethren, they extended their relations over all parts of the world.

Shortly after the Empress Catherine II. had made known to Europe that Russia was open to foreigners, and that she would bestow lands the immigrants, a deputation from Herrenhut to St. Petersburg decided on the formation of a Moravian colony in the government of Astrakhan. Five of the brethren visited the banks of the Volga in 1769, and on the 3rd of September of the same year, the colony was settled at the confluence of the Sarpa with the Volga, and consisted at that time of thirty persons of both sexes. Its name was borrowed from the Bible, and an olive and a wheatsheaf were chosen for its arms.

It was only by dint of courage and perseverance that these first colonists succeeded in their enterprise, surrounded as they were on all sides by the savage hordes of the Kalmucks, having no knowledge of the language of the country, and situated at more than 120 versts from any Russian town. But after the first difficulties were surmounted, their prosperity was rapid. As we have already said, the Moravian brethren form a vast society, spread throughout all parts of the world for the propagation of the Gospel; but, moreover, for the better fulfilment of their mission they are all required by the rules of their order to know some trade, so as to be able to support themselves by the work of their own hands. Hence Sarepta soon became a seat of manufactures of all sorts, and an industrial school for the surrounding country, and Catherine's intentions were realised.

As for the brethren themselves, the establishment of an industrial town in a land so remote and so destitute of resources and markets, was for them but a secondary object. Their chief aim was the conversion of the Kalmucks, to accomplish which they thought rightly that it was indispensable to have a permanent settlement among those people. All their proselytising efforts, however, remained fruitless; the Kalmucks were deaf to their instruction. It was not till 1820 that they succeeded in converting a few families, and inducing them to receive baptism. But now the Russian clergy interposed, and insisted on the converts being baptised according to the Greek rite, and finally, all the Moravian missions were suppressed. Ever since then Sarepta has been a purely manufacturing town.

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The colony of Sarepta endured great calamities in the beginning. In 1771, the period of the famous emigration of the Kalmucks, the brethren had a narrow escape of being carried into captivity, and were saved only by the mildness of the winter, which prevented their enemies from crossing the Volga and joining the great horde. The Cossack Pougatchef ravaged the whole country in 1773, and the colonists, 200 in number, including women, were obliged to retreat to Astrakhan. The defeat of the rebel shortly afterwards enabled them to return home. Their town had been destroyed, but they were not disheartened, and it soon rose again from its ruins. A whole street was burned down in Sarepta in 1812, and in the same year they lost their warehouses in Moscow, containing an immense stock of goods, in the great conflagration. But the most terrible disaster was that of 1823, when two-thirds of the colony and the largest establishments were reduced to ashes; the loss was estimated at upwards of 40,000*l.* The Emperor Alexander and the Moravian Association afforded the poor colonists generous aid, but they could never restore the old prosperity of Sarepta.

All these heavy blows falling successively on the unfortunate community, did not, however, prevent the development of its industry. Great activity prevailed in its very various manufactories down to the beginning of the present century, and their productions continued to be in request in all parts of Russia. Some of the brethren established in the great towns of the empire were the active and honest correspondents of the Volga colonists. The silks and cottons of Sarepta were so successful that the weavers of that town formed establishments at their own cost among the German colonies of the government of Saratof.[17] But all these elements of wealth were annihilated by the new customs' regulations; most of the manufactories were closed; as for the rest, with one or two exceptions, being obliged to confine themselves to the production of a small number of articles, they can only subsist by dint of great economy and skill. The difficulty, too, of procuring workmen makes labour extremely dear in Sarepta; and besides this the colonists instead of importing the raw materials direct from the foreigner, are obliged to purchase them in the markets of St. Petersburg and Moscow. The decrease in the waters of the Sarpa has also been disastrous to the trade of Sarepta. The brethren had set up a great number of saw and other mills on the banks, and these brought them large profits; but the want of water caused them all to be abandoned in 1800. In noticing this continual struggle of man against nature and events, we cannot but pay the tribute of our admiration to those intrepid colonists, who, on the furthest verge of Europe, in the arid steppes of the Volga, have never suffered themselves to be overcome by their mischances, but have always found fresh resources in their own energy and perseverance.

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The manufacture of mustard is at present the most important branch of business in Sarepta, producing nearly 16,000 kilogrammes yearly, besides 4800 kilogrammes of oil. This trade is not unimportant to the neighbouring villages, since it uses upon an average every year 160,000 kilogrammes of mustard seed, for which the manufacturer pays the peasant at the rate of 1.60 rubles the poud or thirty-three pounds.

The other trades that are still carried on with some degree of success are the manufactures of silk and cotton tissues, stockings and caps, tobacco and tanned leather, but these are all upon a greatly reduced scale and at a greatly diminished rate of profit. There is also a very clever optician in Sarepta, and there are several confectioners who travel to Moscow. The colony possesses also warehouses of manufactured goods, and offers almost all the resources and conveniences of a good European town.

Agriculture can only be a secondary matter in the colony; of the 17,000 deciatines of land possessed by it 2000 are quite unfit for cultivation, 10,000 are salt, and only 4000 are really good. There is, however, a little village named Schönbrunn, not far from the town, in which there are some families engaged in agriculture and cattle rearing. Merino sheep have not done well with them hitherto. They had a large stock some years ago, but it dwindled away either from mismanagement, or from the severity of the climate, and at present does not exceed 1000 head.

The brethren possess also numerous gardens along the Sarpa, irrigated by water wheels, and producing all sorts of fruits and plants, but chiefly tobacco, and latterly indigo, which will no doubt become of great importance to the colony.

The little town of Sarepta has not changed much within the last eighty years: its buildings still present the same appearance as they did some years after the foundation of the colony; but the great industrial movements of former times have deserted it, and its streets are become lonely and silent. The fountain still flows on the same spot, and is still shaded by the same trees; but the blackened walls of the two finest manufactories, burnt down in the terrible fire of 1823, and which the colonists have never been able to rebuild, make a singularly painful impression on the beholder, and tell too plainly that in spite of their courage and industry, events have been too strong for the Moravians. All travellers who visit Sarepta, and have an opportunity of appreciating the worth of its inhabitants, will certainly desire from their hearts a return of prosperity to this interesting colony: unhappily it is not probable that these wishes will be very speedily realised.

The Moravian community has augmented but little since 1769; for in 1837 it comprised but 380 souls, viz., 160 men and 220 women; and even of these, only one half were natives of Sarepta, the remainder being immigrants from abroad. Many causes combine to keep down the population. In the first place, no colonist is allowed to marry, until he can prove the sufficiency of his means; both men and women, therefore, marry late in life, and large families are extremely rare. Again, [Pg 161] no brother can marry, if his doing so would cause any detriment to another; and all those who, by their misconduct, in any degree disturb the order and tranquillity of the colony, are banished and put out of the association. A sort of passport is given them for the government of Saratof, and then they are at liberty either to enrol themselves as government colonists, or to enjoy their privileges as foreigners. Lastly, after the great fire of 1823, many of the brethren, discouraged by the loss of their all, left Sarepta, and went to reside elsewhere. All these reasons, sufficiently account for the stationary condition of the population. Of strangers to the association, there are in Sarepta, thirty families of work people from the German colonies of Saratof, forty Russians, and twenty Tatars; some fifty Kalmuck kibitkas (tents) supply labourers for the gardens and for other works.

There are now fifty-six stone and 136 wooden houses in Sarepta, and outside it, one stone and forty-nine wooden. Its public buildings, are a church, with an organ and a belfry, and three large workhouses for bachelors, widows, and girls. These serve at the same time as asylums for orphans, and for all persons who have no families. There are also schools for the young of both sexes, in which the course of instruction is rather extensive, and includes the German, Russian, and French languages, history, geography, and elementary mathematics.

At first, Sarepta was surrounded with ditches and ramparts, supplied with artillery and defended by a detachment of Cossacks; but these military displays have long disappeared, and the worthy Moravians are left alone to their own peaceful pursuits. In describing this interesting colony, we must not forget its numerous and delicious fountains. Every street, every house has its own, the water being conveyed by wooden pipes underground into a common reservoir, whence it is distributed to all parts. Nor will it be without a keen feeling of satisfaction that the weary traveller will stop at the Sarepta hotel, where he will find a good bed and a good table, excellent wine, and all the comforts he can desire.

The Moravian brethren of Sarepta justly enjoy much more extensive privileges than all the other colonists of Russia: they pay to the crown but a slight tax per deciatine of land; and they have the right of trading in all parts of the empire and to foreign parts, as first guild merchants without paying any dues. They have their own perfectly separate administration, and all litigated affairs among them are settled by themselves, without the interference of any Russian tribunal: if any disputes arise between them and their neighbours, they have recourse to the general committee of the German colonies of Saratof, or in matters of weight, to the ministry in St. Petersburg, through one of their brethren, who resides there as their agent. In cases of murder alone, they deliver over the criminal to the Russian authorities. Banishment is usually the sentence pronounced for other offences by the tribunal of the association, which consists of a [Pg 162] mayor and two assistants, elected by the community, and who act also as administrators of the colony, and have under their orders an officer, who is responsible for all things pertaining to the town and country police. The public revenue is 20,000 rubles, produced by the rent of the fisheries and by special taxes; this money is spent in keeping up the public buildings, the schools, workhouses, &c.

The habits of these colonists, their amount of education, and their religious principles, make a marked distinction between them and all the other Germans in Russia. We have seen few sectarians whose religious views are characterised by so much sound sense. While discharging their duties with the most scrupulous exactness, they avail themselves of the good things granted them by Providence, live in a liberal and commodious manner, and surround themselves with all that can render life easy and agreeable. What struck us most of all, was to find invariably in the mere workman as well as in the wealthy manufacturer, a well-bred, well-informed man, of elegant manners and appearance, and engaging conversation. We spent but a few days in the colony, but our knowledge of the German language, enabled us quickly to acquire the friendship of the principal inhabitants; and when we left the town, our carriage was surrounded by a great number of those worthy people who came to bid us a last farewell, and to wish us a pleasant journey through the wild steppes of the Kalmucks.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[17] The German colonies of the government of Saratof consist of 102 villages, with a population of 81,271; in 1820 they produced 242,830 hectolitres of wheat, worth 555,263

paper rubles, and tobacco to the value of 260,485.

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# CHAPTER XIX.

FIRST KALMUCK ENCAMPMENTS—THE VOLGA—ASTRAKHAN—VISIT TO A KALMUCK PRINCE—MUSIC, DANCING, COSTUME, &c.—EQUESTRIAN FEATS—RELIGIOUS CEREMONY—POETRY.

At eight in the evening we left Sarepta, delighted in the highest degree with the good Moravian brethren, and the cordial hospitality they had shown us.

At some distance from the colony, a dull white line, scarcely distinguishable through the gloom, announced the presence of the Volga. We followed its course all night, catching a glimpse of it from time to time by the faint glimmering of the stars, and by numerous lights along its banks; these were fishermen's lanterns. There was an originality in the whole region that strongly impressed our imaginations. Those numerous lights, flitting every moment from place to place, were like the will o' the wisp that beguiles the benighted traveller; and then the Kalmuck encampments with their black masses that seemed to glide over the surface of the steppe; the darkness of the night; the speed with which our troïka bore us over the boundless plain; the shrill [Pg 163] tinklings of the horse bells, and above all, the thought that we were in the land of the Kalmucks, wrought us up to a state of nervous excitement that made us see every thing in the hues of fancy.

At daybreak, our eyes were bent eagerly on the Volga, that gleamed in the colours of the morning sky. From the plateau where we were, we could see the whole country, and it may easily be conceived with what admiration we gazed on the calm majestic stream, and its multitude of islands clothed with alders and aspens. On the other side of the river, the steppes where the Khirgises and Kalmucks encamp, stretched away as far as the eye could reach, till bounded by a horizon as even as that of the ocean. It would have been difficult to conceive a more majestic spectacle, or one more in harmony with the ideas evoked by the Volga, to which its course of more than six hundred leagues assigns the foremost rank among the great rivers of Europe.

The post-road, which skirts the river as far as Astrakhan, is difficult, and often dangerous. Our driver was constantly turning his horses into the water, to prevent their sinking in a soil that undulates like the sea with every breath of wind. At intervals we encountered Cossack villages almost buried under sandy billows, and many cabins entirely abandoned. This encroachment of the sands, which increases every year in extent, will soon change the already dreary banks of the Volga into a real desert. No one can behold the sterility and desolation of these regions, without marvelling at the patience with which the Cossacks endure a visitation that from year to year drives them from their cabins, and compels them to build new ones. For a length of more than sixty versts, the traveller finds his route shut in between the bed of the river, and moving hills of sand, whose dead monotony has a most depressing effect on the spirits. It is still worse at night, for then he seems surrounded with perils. No wonder if fear possesses him when he thinks that a plundering nomade horde may be lying in ambush behind those defiles which the darkness renders still more menacing; the Cossack posts, however, which he meets from time to time along his road, contribute greatly to quiet his apprehensions.

These Cossacks were originally from the Don, and were sent by the government to defend the frontiers of the Volga against the incursions of the nomades. Settling with their families, they founded several villages, and afterwards peopled Samara, Saratof, and other towns. There remains of these colonists only a military population, whose duty is limited to watching the movements of the Khirgises from a distance, and protecting travellers. The soil affords them no means of practising agriculture, but they supply their wants by fishing.

Since our departure from Sarepta, we were much surprised to find on this little frequented route much better horses than are met with on the main post-roads; the stations too seemed larger, more commodious and elegant, and every thing about them betokened attentive care on [Pg 164] the part of the government.

As we approached Astrakhan, the sand-hills diminished insensibly in height, until they no longer confined the view. All this part of the steppe is bare of wood, and the salt sandy waste is only spotted here and there with pools of water and patches of wormwood. No sound is heard but the shrill cries of the petrels and wild geese that haunt the edges of the pools. Here and there only we encountered numerous herds of camels going to drink the clear water of the Volga, or wandering among the Kalmuck kibitkas scattered over the steppes.

At the last station but one, we were startled from our breakfast by the sound of military music, which for a moment threw the whole house into a state of revolution. We were ourselves very much puzzled to know what it meant, and jumping up from table we ran and saw—what? A steamer, no less, puffing and smoking, and lashing the astonished waters of the calm Volga into

foam. Gay flags flaunted over its deck, which was crowded with passengers, and whence proceeded the sounds that had so surprised us. It passed before us, I will not say proudly, but very clumsily, by no means skimming along the water like a swallow.

When we saw the crowded state of the deck, a thought struck us that the matter in some degree concerned ourselves, for as the steamer was from Astrakhan, it was to be presumed that it carried several persons we had expected to see there. But our conjectures fell short of the reality, and our consternation was extreme, when the postmaster told us that the boat was conveying all the good society of Astrakhan on a visit to a Kalmuck prince, whose custom it was to give splendid entertainments at that season of the year. What made the thing still more vexatious, was, that many persons had already talked to us about the said prince, and strongly recommended us to go and see him.

There could not have been a more favourable opportunity for indulging our curiosity; but we were compelled to forego it for want of a *podoroshni*[18] entitling us to have horses on our way back. The Russians are such rigid sticklers for forms, that nothing but strong motives of interest can make them swerve from the letter of their instructions. Now it happened by a singular piece of ill-luck that our postmaster was an honest man after his fashion; that is to say, he would not depart a hair's breadth from his regulations to please any one. His stupid obstinacy was proof against all solicitations and bribes, and we gave up the tempting project of visiting the prince, whose palace we had passed a few hours before, about forty versts from the station.

Our best course under the circumstances would have been to hail the steamer, and go on board [Pg 165] of it, but we did not think of this until we had lost much time with the postmaster, and then it was too late to overtake the steamer, notwithstanding its slow rate of moving. When we afterwards related our mischances to the governor of Astrakhan, he blamed us much for not having at once thought of so simple an expedient.

About four o'clock P.M. the same day, we came in sight of Astrakhan. I cannot describe our sensations when from a large boat in which we embarked, we beheld the fine panorama of the city, its churches, cupolas, and ruined forts gradually coming forth to the view. Situated in an island of the Volga, its environs are not covered like those of most great cities, with villages and cultivated fields: no, it stands alone, surrounded by water and sand, proud of its sovereignty over the noble river, and of the name of Star of the Desert, with which the poetic imagination of the Orientals has graced it.

We had great difficulty in finding a lodging after we had landed, and though assisted by a police officer, we spent more than two hours in wandering from place to place, everywhere meeting with refusals. We were about cutting short our perplexities by taking refuge in a Persian caravanserai, when chance came to our aid. A Polish lady whom we fell in with, offered us the accommodation of her house, and with such good grace, that we could not hesitate to accept her civility. Besides, our travels in Russia had accustomed us to the sympathy with which every thing French is greeted by the Poles. The last political events have not yet been able to weaken their good will towards us; they regard us as brethren, and are ready to prove it on all occasions.

Except some crown buildings occupied by the *employés*, there is nothing in Astrakhan to remind us of its being under foreign sway. The town has completely preserved the Asiatic physiognomy it owes to its climate, its past history, and its diversified population. It is built partly on a hill, partly on the plain, and several of its oldest portions stand on low spots intersected with marshes, and are exposed to very unwholesome exhalations during the summer, after the river floods. A canal with quays runs through its whole length.

My husband's first proceeding after a hurried installation in our new quarters, was to call on M. Fadier, the curator-general of the Kalmucks, and try to obtain a *podoroshni* as quickly as possible. He came back in an hour, and told me that we were to start that evening in a boat belonging to the admiralty, which was placed at our disposal. The governor, M. Fadier, the port-admiral, and all the superior society of the place were visiting the prince, as we had before been told; but Madame Fadier had been kept at home by indisposition, and that lady, whose name will frequently appear in our reminiscences of Astrakhan, obligingly removed all our difficulties.

We embarked in the evening in the boat, with a crew of six stout Kalmuck rowers and a Tatta [Pg 166] pilot. We expected to arrive at the prince's in the morning; but by some unaccountable chance I was seized all at once with a dread that obliged us to halt, in spite of our eager desire to reach our journey's end. The night was very dark, and the river, the waves of which made our boat reel, seemed to me boundless; yet all this was not enough to account for the insurmountable terror that took hold of me so capriciously. Many sea-voyages and long excursions on the Bosphorus in those light caïques that threaten to upset with the slightest movement, ought to have seasoned me against such emotions; but fear is a sentiment that cannot reason, and that comes upon us unawares, without any real danger to justify it. I must add, however, in palliation of my conduct, that the frequent lightning and the heaviness of the atmosphere foretold a storm; and no doubt had something to do with the nervous state in which I found myself.

Be this as it may, I could not rest until I had heard my husband give orders to put back into port, and the sequel proved that this was really the best thing we could do. The night was horrible: one of those terrific squalls that are so frequent and so dangerous on the Volga, came on soon after we landed, and made me bless that terror of which I was at first ashamed, and which I was now tempted to regard as a secret presentiment of the danger that threatened us.

At sunrise next day we set out by the post, and travelled till evening along that river on which I had been so much agitated. Its appearance in the fresh, calm morning was little in accordance

with my terror on the preceding day. The weather showed that brilliancy that always follows a storm in southern lands, and our spirits were such as to make our little trip exceedingly agreeable. The postmaster who had annoyed us so much the preceding day, could not help showing great surprise at our reappearance. He examined our new *podoroshni* with scrupulous care, and having satisfied himself that it was quite as it ought to be, he was suddenly seized with great respect for us. The quickness with which we had obtained the paper, was plain proof to him that we were persons of importance.

We left our post-carriage in the evening, and embarked; for we had still a dozen versts to travel on the river before reaching the prince's; but all the phantoms of the previous night had fled before the bright sun, and I stepped gaily into the boat thinking only of the pleasure of a long row over the limpid waves of the Volga. But now a last vexation befel us; one would have fancied some evil genius was amusing himself with baffling all our arrangements, merely for the purpose of preventing our paying that visit on which we were so eagerly bent.

Our whole desire was to arrive at the prince's before the departure of the steamer; for as for the fêtes, we had already given up all thought of them. From what Madame Fadier had told us we [Pg 167] were quite at ease, and never doubted but that we should find the whole company assembled in the Kalmuck palace. Fancy our dismay then, when our boatman suddenly called out 'the steamer!' pointing at the same time to a light smoke that rose above the trees. I am not very prone to superstition, but this obvious fatality was too much for my philosophy. Here was the best part of the pleasure we had anticipated from this unlucky trip, struck from us at one blow, and that at the very moment when we flattered ourselves we had overcome all obstacles! the steamer passed proudly and triumphantly at a little distance from us, with its joyous music that seemed to insult our disappointment, and our poor little boat, tossed about like a nutshell by the surge of the confounded vessel, had not even the honour of being seen at first. Some one at last condescended to notice us; a telescope was pointed in our direction, and we afterwards learned that our appearance gave rise to a multitude of conjectures, which, of course, were solved only in Astrakhan.

Nothing remained for us but to bear our fate with philosophical composure; and we did so with the confident belief that luck, which had hitherto run so decidedly against us, must soon take a turn in our favour. Forgetting, therefore, the steamboat, its music, and its brilliant company, we applied all our attention to the spectacle before us, which was certainly much better worth seeing than the prosaic steamer.

The little island belonging to Prince Tumene stands alone in the middle of the river. From a distance it looks like a nest of verdure resting on the waves, and waiting only a breath of wind to send it floating down the rapid course of the Volga; but, as you advance, the land unfolds before you, the trees form themselves into groups, and the prince's palace displays a portion of its white façade, and the open galleries of its turrets. Every object assumes a more decided and more picturesque form, and stands out in clear relief, from the cupola of the mysterious pagoda which you see towering above the trees, to the humble kibitka glittering in the magic tints of sunset. The landscape, as it presented itself successively to our eyes, with the unruffled mirror of the Volga for its framework, wore a calm, but strange and profoundly melancholy character. It was like nothing we had ever seen before; it was a new world which fancy might people as it pleased; one of those mysterious isles one dreams of at fifteen after reading the "Arabian Nights;" a thing, in short, such as crosses the traveller's path but once in all his wanderings, and which we enjoyed with all the zest of unexpected pleasure. But we were soon called back from all these charming phantoms of the imagination to the realities of life? we were arrived. Our boatman moored his little craft in a clump of thornbroom; and whilst my husband proceeded to the palace with his interpreter, I remained in the boat, divided between the pleasure I anticipated from the extraordinary things to be seen in a Kalmuck palace, and the involuntary apprehension awakened [Pg 168] in me by all the incidents of this visit.

The latter feeling did not last long. Not many minutes had elapsed after the departure of my companions, when I saw them returning with a young man, who was presented to me as one of the princes Tumene. It was with equal elegance and good breeding he introduced me to the palace, where every step brought me some new surprise. I was quite unprepared for what I saw; and really in passing through two salons which united the most finished display of European taste with the gorgeousness of Asia, on being suddenly accosted by a young lady who welcomed me in excellent French, I felt such a thrill of delight, that I could only answer by embracing her heartily! In this manner an acquaintance is quickly made.

The room where we took tea was soon filled with Russian and Cossack officers, guests of the prince's, and thus assumed a European aspect which we had not at all expected after the departure of the steamer. But was this what we had come to see? was it to look at Russian officers, and articles of furniture of well known fashion, to take caravan tea off a silver tray, and talk French, that we had left Astrakhan? These reflections soon yielded to the secret pleasure of meeting the image of Europe even among the Kalmucks, and being able without the aid of a dragoman to testify to the charming Polish lady who did the honours of the drawing-room, the gratification her presence afforded us. The old Prince Tumene, the head of the family, joined us by and by, and thanked us with the most exquisite politeness for our obliging visit.

After the first civilities were over, I was conducted to a very handsome chamber, with windows opening on a large verandah. I found in it a toilette apparatus in silver, very elegant furniture, and many objects both rare and precious. My surprise augmented continually as I beheld this aristocratic sumptuousness. In vain I looked for any thing that could remind me of the Kalmucks; nothing around me had a tinge of *couleur locale*; all seemed rather to bespeak the abode of a rich

Asiatic nabob; and with a little effort of imagination, I might easily have fancied myself transported into the marvellous world of the fairies, as I beheld that magnificent palace encircled with water, with its exterior fretted all over with balconies and fantastic ornaments, and its interior all filled with velvets, tapestries, and crystals, as though the touch of a wand had made all these wonders start from the bosom of the Volga! And what completed the illusion was the thought that the author of these prodigies was a Kalmuck prince, a chief of those half-savage tribes that wander over the sandy plains of the Caspian Sea, a worshipper of the Grand Lama, a believer in the metempsychosis; in short, one of those beings whose existence seems to us almost fabulous, such a host of mysterious legends do their names awaken in the mind.

Madame Zakarevitch soon made me acquainted with all I wished to know respecting the [Pg 169] princes Tumene and herself. Her husband, who had long been curator of the Kalmucks, died some years ago, a victim to the integrity with which he discharged his office. The employés, enraged at not being able to rob at their ease, combined together to have him brought to trial and persecuted him to his last moment with their base intrigues. His wife, who has all the impassioned character of the Poles, has ever since been actively engaged in vindication of his memory, devoting time, money, and toilsome journeys, with admirable perseverance to that sacred task. A friendship of long standing subsists between her and Prince Tumene, with whose daughter and a lady companion she usually passes part of the summer.

Prince Tumene is the wealthiest and most influential of all the Kalmuck chiefs. In 1815 he raised a regiment at his own expense, and led it to Paris, for which meritorious service he was rewarded with numerous decorations. He has now the rank of colonel, and he was the first of this nomade people who exchanged his kibitka for an European dwelling. Absolute master in his own family (among the Kalmucks the same respect is paid to the eldest brother as to the father), he employs his authority only for the good of those around him. He possesses about a million deciatines of land, and several hundred families, from which he derives a considerable revenue. His race, which belongs to the tribe of the Koshots, is one of the most ancient and respected among the Kalmucks. Repeatedly tried by severe afflictions, his mind has taken an exclusively religious bent, and the superstitious practices to which he devotes himself give him a great reputation for sanctity among his countrymen. An isolated pavilion at some distance from the palace is his habitual abode, where he passes his life in prayer and religious conference with the most celebrated priests of the country. No one but these latter is allowed admission into his mysterious sanctuary; even his brothers have never entered it. This is assuredly a singular mode of existence, especially if we compare it with that which he might lead amidst the splendour and conveniences with which he has embellished his palace, and which betoken a cast of thought far superior to what we should expect to find in a Kalmuck. This voluntary sacrifice of earthly delights, this asceticism caused by moral sufferings, strikingly reminds us of Christianity and the origin of our religious orders. Like the most fervent Catholics, this votary of Lama seeks in solitude, prayer, austerity, and the hope of another life, consolations which all his fortune is powerless to afford him! Is not this the history of many a Trappist or Carthusian?

The position of the palace is exquisitely chosen, and shows a sense of the beautiful as developed as that of the most civilised nations. It is built in the Chinese style, and is prettily seated on the gentle slope of a hill about a hundred feet from the Volga. Its numerous galleries afford views over every part of the isle, and the imposing surface of the river. From one of the angles the eye looks down on a mass of foliage, through which glitter the cupola and golden ball [Pg 170] of the pagoda. Beautiful meadows, dotted over with clumps of trees, and fields in high cultivation, unfold their carpets of verdure on the left of the palace, and form different landscapes which the eye can take in at once. The whole is enlivened by the presence of Kalmuck horsemen, camels wandering here and there through the rich pastures, and officers conveying the chief's orders from tent to tent. It is a beautiful spectacle, various in its details, and no less harmonious in its assemblage.

After learning the reasons why we had not arrived two days sooner, Madame Zakarevitch very agreeably surprised us with the assurance that it was the prince's intention to have the *fêtes* repeated for us. Couriers had already been despatched to bring back the priests who had been engaged in the solemnities of the occasion, in order that we might have an opportunity of seeing their religious ceremonies. The day being now far advanced, we spent the remainder of it in visiting the palace in detail, and resting from the fatigues of our journey.

At an early hour next day, Madame Zakarevitch came to accompany us to the prince's sister-in-law, who, during the fine season, resides in the kibitka in preference to the palace. Nothing could be more agreeable to us than this proposal. At last then I was about to see Kalmuck manners and customs without any foreign admixture. On the way I learned that the princess was renowned among her people for extreme beauty and accomplishments, besides many other details which contributed further to augment my curiosity. We formed a tolerably large party when we reached her tent, and as she had been informed of our intended visit, we enjoyed, on entering, a spectacle that far surpassed our anticipations. When the curtain at the doorway of the kibitka was raised, we found ourselves in a rather spacious room, lighted from above, and hung with red damask, the reflection from which shed a glowing tint on every object; the floor was covered with a rich Turkey carpet, and the air was loaded with perfumes. In this balmy atmosphere and crimson light we perceived the princess seated on a low platform at the further end of the tent, dressed in glistening robes, and as motionless as an idol. Some twenty women in full dress, sitting on their heels, formed a strange and parti-coloured circle round her. It was like nothing I could compare it to but an opera scene suddenly got up on the banks of the Volga. When the princess had allowed us time enough to admire her, she slowly descended the steps of the platform,

approached us with dignity, took me by the hand, embraced me affectionately, and led me to the place she had just left. She did the same by Madame Zakarevitch and her daughter, and then graciously saluting the persons who accompanied us, she motioned them to be seated on a large divan opposite the platform. No mistress of a house in Paris could have done better. When every one had found a place, she sat down beside me, and through the medium of an Armenian, who [Pg 171] spoke Russian and Kalmuck extremely well, she made me a thousand compliments, that gave me a very high opinion of her capacity. With the Armenian's assistance we were able to put many questions to each other, and notwithstanding the awkwardness of being obliged to have recourse to an interpreter, the conversation was far from growing languid, so eager was the princess for information of every kind. The Armenian, who was a merry soul, constituted himself, of his own authority, grand master of the ceremonies, and commenced his functions by advising the princess to give orders for the opening of the ball. Immediately upon a sign from the latter, one of the ladies of honour rose and performed a few steps, turning slowly upon herself; whilst another, who remained seated, drew forth from a balalaika (an Oriental guitar) some melancholy sounds, by no means appropriate to the occasion. Nor were the attitudes and movements of her companion more accordant with our notions of dancing. They formed a pantomime, the meaning of which I could not ascertain, but which, by its languishing monotony, expressed any thing but pleasure or gaiety. The young *figurante* frequently stretched out her arms and knelt down as if to invoke some invisible being. The performance lasted a considerable time, during which I had full opportunity to scrutinise the princess, and saw good reason to justify the high renown in which her beauty was held among her own people. Her figure is imposing, and extremely well-proportioned, as far as her numerous garments allowed me to judge. Her mouth, finely arched and adorned with beautiful teeth, her countenance, expressive of great sweetness, her skin, somewhat brown, but remarkably delicate, would entitle her to be thought a very handsome woman, even in France, if the outline of her face and the arrangement of her features were only a trifle less Kalmuck. Nevertheless, in spite of the obliquity of her eyes and the prominence of her cheek-bones, she would still find many an admirer, not in Kalmuckia alone, but all the world over. Her looks convey an expression of the utmost gentleness and good-nature, and like all the women of her race, she has an air of caressing humility, which makes her appearance still more winning.

Now for her costume. Over a very rich robe of Persian stuff, laced all over with silver, she wore a light silk tunic, reaching only to the knee and open in front. The high corsage was quite flat, and glittered with silver embroidery and fine pearls that covered all the seams. Round her neck she had a white cambric habit shirt, the shape of which seemed to me like that of a man's shirt collar. It was fastened in front by a diamond button. Her very thick, deep black hair fell over her bosom in two magnificent tresses of remarkable length. A yellow cap, edged with rich fur, and resembling in shape the square cap of a French judge, was set jauntily on the crown of her head. But what surprised me most in her costume was an embroidered cambric handkerchief and a pair of black mittens. Thus, it appears, the productions of our workshops find their way even to the [Pg 172] toilette of a great Kalmuck lady. Among the princess's ornaments I must not forget to enumerate a large gold chain, which, after being wound round her beautiful tresses, fell over her bosom, passing on its way through her gold earrings. Her whole attire, such as I have described it, looked much less barbarous than I had expected. The ladies of honour, though less richly clad, wore robes and caps of the same form; only they had not advanced so far as to wear mittens.

The dancing lady, after figuring for half an hour, went and touched the shoulder of one of her companions, who took her place, and began the same figures over again. When she had done, the Armenian urged the princess that her daughter, who until then had kept herself concealed behind a curtain, should also give a specimen of her skill; but there was a difficulty in the case. No lady of honour had a right to touch her, and this formality was indispensable according to established usage. Not to be baffled by this obstacle, the Armenian sprang gaily into the middle of the circle, and began to dance in so original a manner, that every one enthusiastically applauded. Having thus satisfied the exigency of Kalmuck etiquette, he stepped up to the curtain and laid his finger lightly on the shoulder of the young lady, who could not refuse an invitation thus made in all due form. Her dancing appeared to us less wearisome than that of the ladies of honour, thanks to her pretty face and her timid and languishing attitudes. She in her turn touched her brother, a handsome lad of fifteen, dressed in the Cossack costume, who appeared exceedingly mortified at being obliged to put a Kalmuck cap on his head, in order to exhibit the dance in all its nationality. Twice he dashed his cap on the ground with a most comical air of vexation; but his mother rigidly insisted on his putting it on again.

The dancing of the men is as imperious and animated as that of the women is tame and monotonous; the spirit of domination displays itself in all their gestures, in the bold expression of their looks and their noble bearing. It would be impossible for me to describe all the evolutions the young prince went through with equal grace and rapidity. The elasticity of his limbs was as remarkable as the perfect measure observed in his complicated steps.

After the ball came the concert. The women played one after the other on the balalaika, and then sang in chorus. But there is as little variety in their music as in their dancing. At last we were presented with different kinds of koumis and sweetmeats on large silver trays.

When we came out from the kibitka, the princess's brother-in-law took us to a herd of wild horses, where one of the most extraordinary scenes awaited us. The moment we were perceived, five or six mounted men, armed with long lassoes, rushed into the middle of the *taboun* (herd of horses), keeping their eyes constantly fixed on the young prince, who was to point out the animal they should seize. The signal being given, they instantly galloped forward and noosed a young [Pg 173] horse with a long dishevelled mane, whose dilated eyes and smoking nostrils betokened

inexpressible terror. A lightly-clad Kalmuck, who followed them on foot, immediately sprang upon the stallion, cut the thongs that were throttling him, and engaged with him in an incredible contest of daring and agility. It would be impossible, I think, for any spectacle more vividly to affect the mind than that which now met our eyes. Sometimes the rider and his horse rolled together on the grass; sometimes they shot through the air with the speed of an arrow, and then stopped abruptly, as if a wall had all at once risen up before them. On a sudden the furious animal would crawl on its belly, or rear in a manner that made us shriek with terror, then plunging forward again in his mad gallop he would dash through the taboun, and endeavour in every possible way to shake off his novel burden.

But this exercise, violent and dangerous as it appeared to us, seemed but sport to the Kalmuck, whose body followed all the movements of the animal with so much suppleness, that one would have fancied that the same thought possessed both bodies. The sweat poured in foaming streams from the stallion's flanks, and he trembled in every limb. As for the rider, his coolness would have put to shame the most accomplished horsemen in Europe. In the most critical moments he still found himself at liberty to wave his arms in token of triumph; and in spite of the indomitable humour of his steed, he had sufficient command over it to keep it almost always within the circle of our vision. At a signal from the prince, two horsemen, who had kept as close as possible to the daring centaur, seized him with amazing quickness, and galloped away with him before we had time to comprehend this new manœuvre. The horse, for a moment stupefied, soon made off at full speed, and was lost in the midst of the herd. These performances were repeated several times without a single rider suffering himself to be thrown.

But what was our amazement when we saw a boy of ten years come forward to undertake the same exploit! They selected for him a young white stallion of great size, whose fiery bounds and desperate efforts to break his bonds, indicated a most violent temper.

I will not attempt to depict our intense emotions during this new conflict. This child, who, like the other riders, had only the horse's mane to cling to, afforded an example of the power of reasoning over instinct and brute force. For some minutes he maintained his difficult position with heroic intrepidity. At last, to our great relief, a horseman rode up to him, caught him up in his outstretched arm, and threw him on the croup behind him.

The Kalmucks, as the reader will perceive, are excellent horsemen, and are accustomed from their childhood to subdue the wildest horses. The exercise we had witnessed is one of their greatest amusements: it is even practised by the women, and we have frequently seen them vying with each other in feats of equestrian daring. [Pg 174]

The lateness of the hour recalled us to the palace where a splendid dinner was prepared for us. Two large tables were laid in two adjoining rooms, and at the head of each sat one of the princes. We took our places at that of the elder brother, who did the honours in the most finished style.

The cookery, which was half Russian, half French, left us nothing to desire as regarded the choice or the savour of the dishes. Every thing was served up in silver, and the wines of France and Spain, champagne especially, were supplied in princely profusion. Many toasts were given, foremost among which were those in honour of the Emperor of Russia and the King of the French.

I remarked with much surprise, that during the whole dinner, the princess seemed very ill at ease in presence of her brother-in-law; she did not sit down until he had desired her to do so, and her whole demeanour manifested her profound respect for the head of her family. Her husband, the prince's younger brother, had been absent upwards of two months. The repast was very lengthened and great animation prevailed; whilst for our parts, we could hardly reconcile to our minds the idea that the giver of so sumptuous and so well-appointed an entertainment was a Kalmuck. The prince put many questions to us about France, and talked with enthusiasm of his residence in our country, and the agreeable acquaintances he had made there. Though he did not much make our current politics his study, he was not ignorant of our last revolution, and he expressed great admiration for Louis Philippe.

After dinner we went in his carriage to visit the mysterious pagoda which had so much excited our curiosity.

The moment we set foot on the threshold of the temple, our ears were assailed with a *charivari*, compared with which a score or two of great bells set in motion promiscuously, would have been harmony itself. It almost deprived us of the power of perceiving what was going on around us. The noise was so piercing, discordant, and savage that we were completely stupified, and there was no possibility of exchanging a word.

The perpetrators of this terrible uproar, in other words the musicians, were arranged in two parallel lines facing each other; at their head, in the direction of the altar, the high-priest knelt quite motionless on a rich Persian carpet, and behind them towards the entrance stood the *ghepki*, or master of the ceremonies, dressed in a scarlet robe and a deep yellow hood, and having in his hand a long staff, the emblem, no doubt, of his dignity. The other priests, all kneeling as well as the musicians, and looking like grotesque Chinese in their features and attitudes, wore dresses of glaring colours, loaded with gold and silver brocade, consisting of wide tunics, with open sleeves, and a sort of mitre with several broad points. Their head-dress [Pg 175] somewhat resembled that of the ancient Peruvians, except that instead of feathers they had plates covered with religious paintings, besides which there rose from the centre a long straight tuft of black silk, tied up so as to form a series of little balls, diminishing from the base to the summit. Below, this tuft spread out into several tresses which fell down on the shoulders. But

what surprised us most of all were the musical instruments. Besides enormous timbrels and the Chinese tamtam, there were large sea-shells used as horns, and two huge tubes, three or four yards long, and each supported on two props. My husband ineffectually endeavoured to sound these trumpets; none but the stentorian lungs of the vigorous Mandschis could give them breath. If there is neither tune, nor harmony, nor method in the religious music of the Kalmucks, by way of amends for this every one makes as much noise as he can in his own way and according to the strength of his lungs. The concert began by a jingling of little bells, then the timbrels and tamtams struck up, and lastly, after the shrill squeakings of the shells, the two great trumpets began to bellow, and made all the windows of the temple shake. It would be impossible for me to depict all the oddity of this ceremony. Now indeed we felt that we were thousands of leagues away from Europe, in the heart of Asia, in a pagoda of the Grand Dalai Lama of Thibet.

The temple, lighted by a row of large windows, is adorned with slender columns of stuccoed brickwork, the lightness of which reminds one of the graceful Moorish architecture. A gallery runs all round the dome, which is also remarkable for the extreme delicacy of its workmanship. Tapestries, representing a multitude of good and evil genii, monstrous idols and fabulous animals, cover all parts of the pagoda, and give it an aspect much more grotesque than religious. The veneration of the worshippers of Lama for their images is so great, that we could not approach these mis-shapen gods without covering our mouths with a handkerchief, lest we should profane them with an unhallowed breath.

The priests showed how much they disliked our minute examination of every thing, by the uneasiness with which they continually watched all our movements. Their fear as we afterwards learned, was lest we should take a fancy to purloin some of those mystic images we scrutinised so narrowly; certainly they had good reason to be alarmed, for the will was not wanting on our part. But we were obliged to content ourselves with gazing at them with looks of the most profound respect, consoling ourselves with the hope of having our revenge on a more favourable occasion.

When we returned to the palace, we found the old prince in a little room, of which he is particularly fond, and where he has collected a great quantity of arms and curiosities. Among other things, we admired some Circassian chaskas (sabres), richly adorned with black enamelled silver; Damascus swords, no less valuable for the temper of the blades, than for the rich incrustations of the hilts and scabbards; Florentine pistols of the fifteenth century; a jaspar cup [Pg 176] of antique form, purchased for 4000 rubles of a Persian nobleman; Circassian coats of mail, like those of our knights of old, and a thousand other rarities, the artistic worth of which testify the good taste of a prince, whom many persons might consider a barbarian. He also keeps in this cabinet, as a thing of great price, the book in which are inscribed the names of those travellers who visit him. Among the names, most of them aristocratic, we observed those of Baron Humboldt, some English lords, and sundry Russian and German savans.

We finished our *soirée* with an extemporaneous ball that lasted all night. The Armenian, who first proposed the scheme, had to undertake the business of getting up an orchestra. I know not how he set about it, but in a few minutes he brought us triumphantly a violin, a guitar, and a flageolet. Such instruments among the Kalmucks—is it not really prodigious? We had quickly arranged a *soirée dansante*, as complete as any drawing-room could exhibit; and the merriment soon became so contagious, that the princess and her daughter, after much hesitation, at last overcame all bashfulness, and bravely threw themselves into a heady gallop, in which, by the by, one of them lost her cap. The wondering and delighted princess, stuck to me for the rest of the night, like my shadow, and incessantly assured me, through the Armenian, that she had never in her life passed so pleasant an evening, and that she would never forget it. She expressed a strong desire to hear me sing, and found the French *romances* so much to her taste, that I had to promise I would copy out some of them for her. On her part, she gave me two Kalmuck songs of her own composition, and transcribed with her own hand.[19] According to Russian custom, the officers did full justice to the champagne, which was sent round all night at a fearful rate.

We spent the next day in promenades about the island, and in hawking. This sport is a great favourite with the Kalmucks, and they practise it in as grand a style as the châtelains of the [Pg 177] middle ages. Prince Tumene has a very well appointed falconry, and his hawks are trained by the same methods as were adopted by our ancestors. The hawk we had that day was a small one, of astonishing spirit. The Kalmuck who held it hoodwinked on his fist had the utmost difficulty in restraining it when its head was uncovered. He let it fly at a magnificent grey heron, which it struck down in less than a minute. Several wild ducks were also killed by it with incredible rapidity.

The succeeding days were filled up with varied and novel amusements; nor can I describe the assiduous efforts of our entertainers, to let us see every particular of their manners and customs that might be interesting to us. Every day some new surprise was adroitly brought forward to delay our departure. But, alas! every thing must have an end in this world, and we felt at last constrained to bid adieu to those brilliant and varied scenes which we found so much to our taste.

On the day fixed for our departure we all breakfasted together, while the final preparations were going on. The party was a sad one, for all were occupied with the same thought. Our host's elegant four-in-hand equipage, lined with white satin, was drawn up before the door, with an escort of fifteen horsemen. There was a large crowd assembled, who looked up eagerly to the large balcony, where we were receiving the stirrup-cup from the old prince. The whole formed a striking and splendid picture. The refinements of western luxury, mixed up with Kalmuck faces and costumes, the officers in brilliant uniforms, the handsome horses champing the bit, and, above all, the noble figure of the old prince waving a last farewell to us from the balcony, left an

indelible impression on our memories. Young Tumene put himself at the head of the cavalcade, and continued during all the while he was with us to astonish us with his feats of horsemanship. The day was splendid, and every thing concurred to awaken in us a throng of sensations, such as we shall never, perhaps, experience again.

Madame Zakarevitch and her daughter, whom we had carried off from Prince Tumene, embarked with us, opposite the posting station, in the boat provided for us. On the shore, too, we found our carriages ready to receive us, horses having been ordered by an express sent forward the day before by the prince.

On finding ourselves again on that route which we had twice already traversed within less than twenty-four hours, the recollection of our past annoyances after recurred to us, and we could not help thinking how unwisely many travellers allow themselves to be swayed by what they call inauspicious omens; a person, for instance, with a slight leaning to superstition, would have given up all thoughts of a visit which seemed forbidden by such a run of unlucky accidents, and would have lost the opportunity of seeing the extraordinary things I have endeavoured to describe, and which so much exceeded our expectations.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[18] A sort of passport licensing you to hire post-horses. You pay a sum for it proportioned to the distance you wish to travel, and the number of horses to your carriage.

[19] Here is a translation of one of these songs, which will certainly not give a high idea of the poetic talents of a Kalmuck princess:—

"Mon cheval roux qui dispute le prix de la course au chameau, bronte l'herbe des champs du Don. Dieu notre seigneur, tu nous feras la grace de nous retrouver dans une autre contrée. Et toi charmante herbette agitée par le vent, tu t'étends sur la terre. Et toi, o coeur le plus tendre volant vers ma mère, dis lui: qu'entre deux montagnes et des vallées, dans un vallon uni demeurent cinquante braves qui s'approchent avec courage pour tuer une outarde bien grasse. Et toi, tendre mère nature, sois nous propice."

[It is with much hesitation and doubt, that I venture to translate this incomprehensible translation:—*Tr.*]

"My bright bay horse, which vies in swiftness with the camel, browses on the grass of the Don. God, our Lord, thou wilt grant us of thy grace to meet in another country. And thou charming little grass shaken by the wind, thou stretchest thyself out on the ground. And thou, O fondest heart, flying to my mother, tell her that between two mountains and valleys, in an even strath, dwell fifty braves, who draw together courageously to kill a very fat bustard. And thou, fond Mother Nature be propitious to us."



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# CHAPTER XX.

HISTORICAL NOTICE OF ASTRAKHAN—MIXED POPULATION; ARMENIANS, TATARS —SINGULAR RESULT OF A MIXTURE OF RACES—DESCRIPTION OF THE TOWN —HINDU RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES—SOCIETY.

The history of Astrakhan is so well known that the reader will no doubt thank us for not recapitulating the various political revolutions that have taken place in the regions of which this town has been for so many ages the brilliant metropolis. After having made part of the empire of the Kaptshak, founded by Batou Khan, and after a long series of intestine commotions, Astrakhan at last became an independent state in the beginning of the fifteenth century. One hundred and fifty years later there broke out between the Russians and the Tatars that obstinate strife which was to end by delivering the country of the tsars from the yoke of its oppressors. In 1554, Ivan the Terrible, partly by treachery, and partly by force of arms, possessed himself of the khanat of the Caspian, and was the first to assume the title of King of Casan and Astrakhan. This valuable conquest was incorporated with the empire, and led to the submission or emigration of all the adjacent tribes. Astrakhan has ever since belonged to Russia; but it soon lost the prosperity that had rendered it so celebrated of yore under the Tatars of the Golden Horde. Fifteen years after the Russian conquest, the Turks directed an expedition against Astrakhan, in concert with the Tatars of the Crimea; but the effort was abortive, and the bulk of the Ottoman army perished in the deserts of the Manitch. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, Astrakhan again underwent a brief but bloody revolution: the rebel Stenko Razin, made himself master of the town, gave it up to horrible massacres, and for a while caused serious alarm to Russia. At present the ancient capital of the Tatar kingdom is merely the chief town of a government, which though presenting a surface of more than 4000 geographical square miles, yet possesses only 285,000 inhabitants, of whom 200,000 are nomades. It contains a great number of squares, churches, and mosques. Its old embattled towers and its walls, which still include a considerable space of

ground, remind the traveller of its ancient warlike renown. Its population, a medley of all the races of Asia, amounts in number to 45,703, the bulk of whom are Russians, Kalmucks, and Tatars. The Armenians are shopkeepers here, just as they are in all countries in the world; notwithstanding their religion, which should make them coalesce with the Westerns, they retain in their manners and customs every thing belonging to the East. The Armenian carries everywhere with him that spirit of traffic which is common to him with the Jew; always at work on some stroke of business, always ready to seize a flying opportunity; discounting, computing, figuring, with indefatigable patience. Meet him where you will, in the fertile valleys of Armenia, in the snowy North, or beneath a southern sky, everywhere he exhibits that intense selfishness [Pg 179] which stands him in lieu of the patriotic feelings so potent in most other branches of the human family. This nation, dispersed over the whole world like the Jews, presents one of those distinctive types of feature characteristic of an unmixed race, which are to be found in full preservation only among Eastern nations. The brown mantle in which the Armenian women wrap themselves at Constantinople, is here replaced by long black veils that cover them from head to foot. This garment, which displays the shape very well, and falls in graceful folds to the feet, when well put on, reminds one of the elegant lines of certain Grecian statues; and what makes the resemblance the more striking, is that the Armenian women are particularly remarkable for their stately carriage and the severe dignity of their features.

The Tatars, upwards of 5000 in number, are engaged in trade, and chiefly in that of cattle. The numerous mosques and the cupolas of their baths contribute to give Astrakhan quite an oriental appearance.

The Indians who were formerly rather numerous in this city, have long since abandoned the trade for which they frequented it, and none of them remain but a few priests who are detained by interminable lawsuits. But from the old intercourse between the Hindus and the Kalmucks has sprung a half-breed now numbering several hundred individuals, improperly designated Tatars. The mixed blood of these two essentially Asiatic races has produced a type closely resembling that of European nations. It exhibits neither the oblique eyes of the Kalmucks, nor the bronzed skin of the Indians; and nothing in the character or habits of the descendants of these two races indicates a relationship with either stock. In striking contrast with the apathy and indolence of the population among which they live, these half-breeds exhibit in all they do, the activity and perseverance of the men of the north. They serve as porters, waggoners, or sailors, as occasion may require, and shrink from no kind of employment however laborious. Their white felt hats, with broad brims and pointed conical crowns, their tall figures, and bold, cheerful countenances, give them a considerable degree of resemblance to the Spanish muleteers.

This result of the crossing of two races both so sharply defined is extremely remarkable, and cannot but interest ethnologists. The Mongol is perhaps above all others the type that perpetuates itself with most energy, and most obstinately resists the influence of foreign admixture continued through a long series of generations. We have found it in all its originality among the Cossacks, the Tatars, and every other people dwelling in the vicinity of the Kalmucks. Is it not then a most curious fact to see it vanish immediately under the influence of the Hindu blood, and produce instead of itself a thoroughly Caucasian type? Might we not then conclude that the Caucasian is not a primitive type, as hitherto supposed, but that it is simply the result of a mixture, the two elements of which we must seek for in Central Asia, in those mysterious [Pg 180] regions of the great Tibetan chain which have so much occupied the inventive genius of ancient and modern writers?

The Persians, like the Indians, are gradually deserting Astrakhan. The prohibitive system of Russia has destroyed all their commercial resources, and now only some hundreds of them, for the most part detained by penury, are to be found in their adopted country, employed in petty retail dealings. We went over the vast Persian khans of Astrakhan, but saw none of those gorgeous stuffs for which they were formerly so celebrated. The ware rooms are empty, and it is but with great difficulty the traveller can now and then obtain cashmeres, silky termalamas, or any other of those productions of Asia which so much excite our curiosity, and which were formerly a source of prosperity to the town.

Astrakhan has for some years had a lazaret on the mouths of the Volga at seventy-five versts from its walls. The history of this establishment is curious enough. Before it was built on the site it now occupies, building had been carried on to a considerable extent at two other spots which were successively abandoned as unsuitable. It was not until much time and money had been spent, that an engineer took notice of a little island exceedingly well adapted to the purpose, and on which the lazaret was finally erected. Some years afterwards there was found in the town archives a manuscript note left by Peter the Great at his departure from Astrakhan, and in which he mentioned that very island as well suited for the site of a lazaret. A glance had enabled the tsar to perceive the importance of a locality which many engineering commissions discovered only after repeated search.

Paving is a luxury quite unknown in Astrakhan, and the streets are as sandy as the soil of the environs. Though they are almost deserted during the day, on account of the intense heat, few spectacles are more lively and picturesque than that which they present in the evening, when the whole town awakes from the somnolency into which it had been cast by a temperature of 100. Every one then hastens to enjoy the refreshing air of the twilight; people sit at the doors amusing themselves with the sight of whatever passes; business is resumed, and the shops are in a bustle; a numerous population of all races and tongues spreads rapidly along the bridges and the quays bordered with trees; the canal is covered with caïques laden with fruit and arbutus berries; elegant droshkies, caleches, and horsemen rush about in all directions, and the whole town wears

a gala aspect that astonishes and captivates the traveller. He finds there collected into a focus all the picturesque items that have struck him singly elsewhere. Alongside of a Tatar dwelling stretches a great building blackened by time, and by its architecture and carvings carrying you back to the middle ages. A European shop displays its fashionable haberdashery opposite a caravanserai; the magnificent cathedral overshadows a pretty mosque with its fountain; a Moorish balcony contains a group of young European ladies who set you thinking of Paris, whilst [Pg 181] a graceful white shadow glides mysteriously under the gallery of an old palace. All contrasts are here met together; and so it happens that in passing from one quarter to another you think you have but made a short promenade, and you have picked up a stock of observations and reminiscences belonging to all times and places. The Russians ought to be proud of a town which did not spring up yesterday, like all the others in their country, and where one is not plagued with the cold, monotonous regularity that meets you without end in every part of the empire.

The churches in Astrakhan are not built in the invariable Greek style of all the other religious buildings of Russia: they have carvings, spires, and balustrades, something to attract the gaze, and details to fix it. The cathedral, built towards the end of the seventeenth century, is a large square edifice, surmounted by five cupolas, gilded and starred with azure, and presenting a style midway between those of Asia and Europe. The interior is hung with pictures of no value in point of art, but attractive to the eye from the richness of their frames, most of which are of massive silver curiously chased. The most interesting monument in Astrakhan is a small church concealed in Peter the Great's fort. It is attributed to Ivan IV. Its architecture is purely Moorish, and it is fretted all over with details exceedingly interesting to an artist. Unfortunately, it has long been abandoned, and is now used as a warehouse.

The climate of Astrakhan is dry, and very hot. For three months the thermometer seldom falls in the day below 95. This great heat enervates both mind and body, and sufficiently accounts for the extreme sloth of the inhabitants. But in consequence of its dryness the atmosphere possesses a transparent purity that would enchant a painter, giving as it does to every object a warmth and lucidity worthy of Italy.

A very serious source of annoyance to the Astrakhaners, and still more to the foreigner, is the swarm of gnats and other insects that fill the air at certain seasons. Their pertinacious attacks baffle all precautions; it is in vain you surround yourself with gauze at night, and resign yourself to total darkness during the day, you are not the less persecuted by them, and you exhaust yourself with ineffectual efforts against an invisible enemy.

They are sinking an artesian well in the upper part of the town. They had reached, when we were there, a depth of 166 yards; but instead of water there escaped a jet of carburretted hydrogen, which had been burning for three weeks with great brilliancy.

Astrakhan now contains 146 streets, 46 squares, 8 market-places, a public garden, 11 wooden and 9 earthen bridges, 37 churches (34 of stone, 3 wooden), 2 of which are cathedrals; 15 mosques, 2 of them of stone; 3883 houses, 288 of which are of stone, the rest of wood. All narratives of travels tell of the gardens of Astrakhan, and the magnificent fruit produced in them. Unfortunately, these are pure fictions, for there are but 75 gardens or vineyards around the [Pg 182] town, and it is only by means of irrigation with Persian wheels that they are rendered productive. All the fruit of the place, moreover, is very poor, if not decidedly bad. The grapes alone are tolerable and of very various kinds, suitable for the table, but none of them fit for making wine. As for the celebrated water-melons, they are held in very low esteem in the country, and the people of the town talk only of those of Kherson and the Crimea. It is very possible, however, that the fruit of Astrakhan may have deserved its high reputation previously to the Muscovite domination. Here, as everywhere else, the Russian population, in taking the place of the Tatars, can only have destroyed the agricultural resources of the country. The Russian townspeople being exclusively traders and shopkeepers, and never engaging in rural pursuits, the gardens almost all belong to Tatars and Armenians.

As for the government of Astrakhan, its territory is one of the most sterile in the empire. Agriculture is there wholly unproductive; in general nothing is sowed but a little maize and barley, provisions of all kinds being procured from Saratof, by way of the Volga. It is this that gives some little briskness to the navigation of that river; for besides the corn consumed by Astrakhan, and the towns dependent on its jurisdiction, Saratof and the adjoining regions send supplies also to Gourief, on the mouth of the Ural, to the army cantoned on the Terek, and even to the Transcaucasian countries. Nevertheless, there are no boats plying regularly on the Volga; it is only at the period of the fair of Nijni Novgorod, that the clumsy steamer we saw proceeding to Prince Tumene's condescends to dawdle up the stream.

The day after our arrival in Astrakhan we were taken to the house of some Hindu brahmins, where we were to be present at the evening prayers. We were received by the chief among them in the most courteous and obliging manner. The room into which he led us looked to the west, and had no other furniture than large Turkish divans, and the only thing capable of attracting our attention was a little chapel let into the wall, and which two priests were in the act of arranging for the ceremony. One of them kept his eyes constantly turned towards the west, watching with religious attention the descent of the sun's disc to the horizon. These brahmins were dressed in long brown robes, crossed in front by a white scarf, the two ends of which swept the ground. Their bronzed and antiquely moulded visages were surmounted by white muslin turbans with large folds. The leader, who was much less absorbed in his devotions than the rest, was continually smiling upon us, and waving a monstrous Persian fan that had the effect of a smart breeze. Meanwhile the sun was fast declining; at last its total disappearance was announced by the harsh sound of a conch-shell, whereupon one of the priests lighted several tapers and placed

them before an image in the chapel. Another began to wash curiously-shaped vessels, filled them [Pg 183]
with water of lustration, and prostrated himself before them with great unction. A large grey stone set in the wall, appeared to be the principal object of their adorations. According to the explanation given to us by the chief priest, the soul of a celebrated saint, grown weary of the world and of men, had retired within that mystical covering; hence the stone is sacred in the eyes of the Hindus, and the mere sight of it, as they declare, is capable of working miracles. After worshipping in silence for some minutes, the chief priest began to burn perfumes, and the room was soon filled with a cloud of smoke, seen through which every object assumed a vaguer and more mysterious form, the pungent aromatic odour, combined with the heat and the strangeness of the scene before our eyes, acted so strongly upon us that we were soon unable to distinguish what was real from what was fantastic. In fact, our semi-ecstatic condition was in remarkable accordance with the moral state of our brahmins. Their religious enthusiasm soon ceased to content itself with mere prostrations. Hitherto every thing had passed in complete silence, but at a given signal two priests knelt down before the holy stone and recited a prayer, in slow and guttural accents. Another with his arms crossed on his breast, stood a few steps off from the chapel, and now and then blew upon a shrill whistle. The fourth, armed with a conch-shell, stood upon one of the divans, and added his voice to the sounds which his companions gave out with increasing loudness. Presently their eyes kindled, the muscles of their frames grew tense, the conch vibrated, a bell was rapidly agitated by the leader, and then began so strange and infernal a din, a scene so grotesque and wild, that one would really have thought the brahmins were all possessed by devils. Their attitudes and frantic gestures conveyed the idea of exorcism rather than of prayer. What we felt it would be impossible to describe; it was a mixture of surprise, curiosity, disgust, and fright. Had not fatigue compelled the actors in this sabbat to stop after ten minutes' exertion, I doubt that we should have been able to support a longer continuance of such a spectacle. One would almost be disposed to say that men take pains to worship God in the least religious manner possible. I have seen the whirling and howling dervishes at Constantinople, whose strange and frightful performances can be compared only to those of the medieval convulsionaries. The religious music of the Kalmucks is not behind-hand with these aberrations of the human mind; and here is the Hindu, worship, which seems to vie with whatever is most demented and extravagant in other religions.

When the abominable concert was ended, the leader took a handful of yellow flowers, like marigolds, dipped them in Ganges water, and presented one to each of us. Then he kneaded a piece of dough in his hands, and gave it a symbolic form, stuck seven small tapers in it, waved it in every direction before the chapel, and then turning towards us, repeated the same ceremony. Lastly, he took a small white shell, which had been lying until then on the sacred stone, filled it [Pg 184]
with sacred water from the Ganges, and sprinkled us with it very devoutly. Meanwhile, his companions were setting out a table with a collation of fine fruit and pastry, of which the leader did the honours to us with much politeness and gallantry. So ended a scene as difficult to describe well as to forget.

Now let us leave the Indians and their odd ceremonies, and recur to the European usages, which, to our great surprise we found in many *salons* of Astrakhan.

A singular thing, and one which must strike the traveller strongly, is the moral influence which France exercises in all countries of the world. Wherever you find any trace of civilisation, you are sure to discern the effect of that influence, whether in manners, dress, or political opinions, and that, even among rulers the most distant.

Most of our romance-writers are probably not aware that their works are read with avidity even on the banks of the Caspian, and are criticised there with as much acuteness as in the great capitals of Europe. All who call themselves Russians, in Astrakhan, speak French, and receive every month our newest publications from Brussels. In many of the libraries I found Lamartine, Balzac, Alexandra Dumas, Eugène Sue, George Sand, De Musset, &c., and many other names less known perhaps in Paris than in Astrakhan.

The Russian ladies read a great deal; they are generally gifted with natural talent, and converse with tact and to the purpose. Their only fault in this respect is, that they confine their reading to romances and novels, which almost always warp their judgment, and give them quite erroneous notions of our habits and our literature. Paul de Kock and Pigault Lebrun are especial favourites throughout the empire, and their pictures of low life are read much more eagerly than the elegant and chastened pages of our best writers. I must acknowledge, however, that many Russian ladies are capable of appreciating the gravest works. I saw on many a table in Astrakhan, "Les Ducs de Bourgogne," "L'Histoire du Bas Empire," "La Conquête des Normands," and even treatises on geology. It is needless to add, that our fashions and the prodigies of our civilisation are adopted with the same avidity as our literature.

I had some difficulty in believing myself on the verge of the Caspian, when listening to conversation on the fine arts, and on industrial economy, just as in Vienna or Paris. Music, too, is in high vogue in Astrakhan, and many of Donizetti's pieces are sung there by brilliant and cultivated voices. Our quadrilles, too, are all the rage there, and so are the charming melodies of Loïza Puget.

On the faith of some travellers who have been, or are reported to have been in Astrakhan, we expected to find a good many English, Italians, and even French in the town; but the fact is, it does not even contain a single individual of those nations, and its society consists solely of Russians and Germans, sent thither as *employés*. I could hear of but one Belgian, formerly a prisoner of war, who became a tailor, and now enjoys a very handsome fortune. Astrakhan [Pg 185]
pretends to have a theatre, but I have little to say for it. Imagine a very ugly and very black hall

furnished with some thirty niches in double row; a pit adorned with a few dirty caftans; an orchestra composed of a paltry violin and half-a-dozen trumpets, the whole lighted up by a row of candles on the proscenium, and you have an idea of what presumes to call itself a theatre on the Caspian shores. As for the pieces and the actors, they are altogether beneath criticism.

The governor gave a grand ball and some soirées during our stay in Astrakhan. Though the heat was intolerable, the rooms were every time filled with a fashionable throng, always eager for pleasure. The Russian governors of provinces play the part of petty kings, and exercise over all classes an influence, which has its source in the very constitution of the country. Under an absolute government, every superior employé exercises unbounded authority in his own sphere. He has his courtiers, his favourites, his numerous chancery, his orderly officers, and his etiquette modelled on that of St. Petersburg, in short all that constitutes the outward tokens of power. But all these appearances of grandeur and might are but relative, for above these petty kings stands a sovereign will, that can by one word strip them of their privileges, and send them to Siberia. We must not imagine that slavery exists in Russia only for the people; whether you go east or west, into the brilliant salons of St. Petersburg, or into the isbas of the Muscovite peasant, you find it everywhere; only it is commonly disguised under forms that deceive many travellers, whose judgments are beguiled by the glittering varnish with which the Russian contrives to invest himself, by his numerous staff, his princely abode, and the pomp of his official life. And yet what is all this in reality? Something like the soap bubbles that glisten with all the colours of the rainbow, but vanish with the least breath.

The magnificence of the governor's palace astonished us. On our arrival for the ball, after passing through several rooms sumptuously furnished, we were led into a boudoir, where we found Madame Timirasif, the governor's lady, surrounded by all the *élite* of the place. She introduced me to several ladies who spoke French very well, and with whom I was soon engaged in a conversation as frivolous and varied as the chit-chat of the Parisian world of fashion. But the music soon began, and we repaired to a very large ball-room, most splendidly lighted, and already thronged with officers. The orchestra, placed on a raised platform, played French quadrilles in excellent style. I took advantage of an interminable mazurka, to learn the names of various personages: General Brigon, a Livonian, hetman of all the Cossacks; Count Pushkin, curator of the university of Casan; Admiral Lazaref; the Kalmuck prince, Tondoudof; the Princess Dolgoruky; and a young Persian, who occupied the attention of all the ladies during the ball. His handsome Oriental countenance, his rich costume, the grace with which he danced French quadrilles and mazurkas, and above all, his title of traveller, gave him an extraordinary éclat, which seemed in no wise to astonish him. I will say nothing of a collection of colonels and aides-de-camp, an inevitable and always profuse element of every Russian party, nor of a battalion of excellencies loaded with more stars and decorations than are commonly seen in the court balls of France or England. [Pg 186]

The governor's wife is a specimen of the Russian lady in the highest perfection of the class. Elegant, lively, fascinating, and *pleine de distinction*, she possesses all the qualities requisite in the queen of a drawing-room. She did the honours of that remarkable *soirée* with charming grace. The ball ended with a grand supper, which was prolonged until morning.

We passed fifteen well-spent days in Astrakhan. Notwithstanding the heat, we were running about from morning till night, escorted by an aide-de-camp, whom his excellency had assigned to us as cicerone. This very obliging officer being perfectly well acquainted with the country, and being incessantly on the look-out for any thing that could interest us, it came to pass that in eight days we had a much better knowledge of the town than the governor himself. One thing alone escaped our search, namely, one or two families of Parsees, who still inhabit Astrakhan, but whom our guide could not succeed in ferreting out. It was in vain he hunted about and questioned every body; no one could give him any precise information on the subject. *Soirées*, cavalcades, numerous dinners, and above all, a pleasing intimacy with many agreeable families, filled up our tourist existence in the most charming manner, and made us postpone as long as possible a departure, which was to snap asunder such pleasing social ties.

It would be impossible to surpass the active kindness shown us by the governor and all the best society of Astrakhan. During our whole stay the governor put his caleche at our disposal, and was imitated in this by many other persons. But notwithstanding all these temptations to prolong our abode, we were obliged at last to set in earnest about arrangements for our journey across the Kalmuck steppes. Our first care was to provide all that was indispensable to prevent our dying of hunger on the way. An expedition of this kind is like a long sea voyage; the previous cares are the same; one must enter into the same sort of details as the sailor who is bound for a distant shore.

We laid in a great stock of biscuits, rice, oil, candles, dry fruit, tea, coffee, and sugar, and sent them forward with our escort to Houidouk, a post station near the Caspian, where my husband was to begin his series of levels.

This escort, consisting of ten camels with their drivers and some Cossacks fully armed, had been selected by the governor and M. Fadiew, with a carefulness that proved how much they were both concerned for our safety. I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude for all the kindness they showed us on this occasion; their anxiety about the result of so hazardous a journey betrayed itself by numberless precautions and recommendations, which might have had some influence on our determination if it had not been irrevocably fixed. [Pg 187]

The governor chose from among his best officers, a Tatar prince to command our escort. This young man, who was an excellent sportsman, had a hawk, from which he was inseparable, and to this circumstance was owing the orders he received to accompany us. General Timirasif, always

mindful of the privations that awaited us, thought he could not do better than furnish us with so clever a purveyor; who, indeed, proved to be of immense assistance to us. When he presented the officer to us, with his hawk on his fist, his face beamed with satisfaction. "Now," he said, laughing, "my conscience is at ease; here I give you a brave soldier for your champion, and a travelling companion, who will not let you be starved to death in the wilderness."

Orders were sent forward in advance, along all the line we were to traverse as far as Haidouk, that we should be supplied with horses at every station without delay.

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# CHAPTER XXI.

COMMERCIAL POSITION OF ASTRAKHAN—ITS IMPORTANCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES —ITS LOSS OF THE OVERLAND TRADE FROM INDIA—COMMERCIAL STATISTICS—FISHERIES OF THE CASPIAN—CHANGE OF THE MONETARY SYSTEM IN RUSSIA—BAD STATE OF THE FINANCES—RUSSIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY.

There is no city, perhaps, of eastern Europe, which has played a more important part than Astrakhan in the commercial relations between Europe and Asia. Situated at the lower extremity of the largest navigable river of Europe, it communicates on the one side by the Caspian with Turcomania and the northern regions of Persia; on the other side, by means of the Volga and the Don, it is in direct intercourse with the central provinces of the Muscovite empire, and the whole coast of the Black Sea. With such facilities for traffic, Astrakhan would naturally be one of the chief points of transit for Indian goods during the middle ages, when the passage by the Cape of Good Hope was unknown, and European navigators had not yet appeared in the Persian Gulf. It was towards the middle of the thirteenth century, after the foundation of the Kaptshak empire, and of the kingdom of Little Tartary, that the Caspian Sea became a highway for the Indian trade, with which, in still earlier times, the Petchenegues, the predecessors of the Tatars in the Tauris, appear not to have been altogether unacquainted. Astrakhan on one side, and Soldaïa on the [Pg 188] Black Sea on the other, became the two great maritime places of the Tatars, and exchanged between them the merchandise of Europe and Asia, by means of the caravans of the Kouban and the Volga.[20] From Soldaïa the Indian goods were next conveyed to Constantinople, where they were sold either for the provinces of the empire, or to foreigners trading in that capital. Afterwards, about 1280, when the Genoese took possession of the coasts of the Tauris, Soldaïa lost its commercial importance, and the splendid colony of Caffa became the centre of all the Asiatic commerce. Mercantile relations with India assumed fresh activity at that period, particularly when, after the dissolution of the empire of the Kaptshak, in the reign of Hadji Devlet Cherii, the Genoese became masters of Tana, on the Don. The whole trade in spices, aromatic and medicinal drugs, perfumes, silks, and other productions of the East in request in Europe, fell thus into the hands of those intrepid Italian speculators, whose connexions by way of the Caspian, the Persian Gulf, and the caravans, extended as far as the Indies.

But soon a new tempest burst forth, more terrible than any of those which had before shaken the soil of the East. In 1453, Mahomed II. seized Constantinople, and twenty years later all the Genoese colonies fell one after another into the power of the Ottomans. It was in vain the Venetians strove to appropriate the commerce of the Black Sea and the East; their efforts were fruitless, and the closing of the Dardanelles was peremptorily declared. The old communications between Europe and Asia were thus severed, and for many years the precious commodities of the East ceased to find their way towards Europe. But as they were in great demand, and were very costly, merchants contrived to find a new passage for them, and Smyrna became their entrepôt. The situation of that town, however, was far from compensating for the disadvantage of a long, perilous, and expensive land carriage. Hence the Indian trade remained in a languid state, until Vasco de Gama's discovery opened a new route for the people of the West.

Smyrna retained the monopoly of the Eastern trade for more than 250 years; and until the [Pg 189] middle of the seventeenth century, Persia was the first entrepôt for Indian productions, which arrived there by way of the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and Beloochistan. They were partly consumed in the country, and the rest was conveyed either to Smyrna by Erzeroum and Bagdad, or into Russia by the Caspian Sea and Georgia. In consequence of this great commercial revolution, the regions now constituting the south-eastern provinces of Russia, lost all their importance with regard to the traffic between Europe and Asia. The great entrepôts of Caffa and Tana having fallen into decay, all the routes leading to them were forsaken. The great caravans of the Volga and the Kouban disappeared, the navigation of the Caspian was almost annihilated, and Astrakhan was reduced exclusively to local commerce with the adjoining districts of Russia.

A hundred years after the taking of Constantinople, Ivan the Terrible planted his victorious banner on the shores of the Caspian, and the old city of the Tatars of the Golden Horde fell under

the Muscovite sway. Ever since that event, historians have had to record but a long series of disasters, mistakes, and decadence. It appears, however, that under the reign of Ivan the Terrible and his next successors, Astrakhan still continued to supply Russia with the productions of Persia, and with some of those of Central Asia. An English company even attempted, about the year 1560, to open up a commercial intercourse with Persia and Turcomania by way of the Caspian, but failed completely; and subsequently the appearance of the Dutch and British flags in the Persian Gulf, and the immense development of the maritime commerce with India, for ever extinguished, for Astrakhan, the hope of recovering its former position. The navigation of the Caspian was completely abandoned, and the few Asiatic goods which Russia could not dispense with were conveyed to that country by expensive and perilous overland routes. Accordingly, when Alexis Michaelovitz ascended the throne about the middle of the seventeenth century, how to arrive at Persia by sea was almost become an unsolved problem. To this prince belongs, however, the honour of the first effort made by Russia to re-establish the commerce of the Caspian. A maritime expedition was undertaken from Astrakhan in 1660, under the direction of Dutch seamen; but it failed completely, in consequence of the revolt of the Cossacks, and the successes achieved by their leader, Stenko Razin. After this ineffectual attempt, things reverted to their old state, and the commercial history of this part of the empire presents nothing remarkable until the accession of Peter the Great.

The trade with Asia was not forgotten under that illustrious regenerator of the Muscovite nation, who bent all the force of his genius upon the affairs of the East. Filled with the grand design of making the merchandise of Asia pass through his dominions, he repaired in person to [Pg 190] Astrakhan, inspected the mouths of the Volga, selected a site for a quarantine establishment, and set Dutchmen to work to turn the shores of the Caspian to profitable account, until such time as political circumstances should enable him to found establishments by force of arms on the Russian coast. But the brilliant expeditions beyond the Caucasus subsequently made by Russia led to no commercial result. Central Asia continued as of old to communicate with Europe by way of Smyrna and the Indian Ocean; and after Peter's death Russia gave up all her pretensions to the southern shores of the Caspian, over which she had entertained strong hopes of establishing her dominion.

Eventually the extension of the Russian possessions southward to the Kouban and the Terek, and eastward to the Ural, was not without its fruits. The safety secured to travellers caused the trade with Persia by way of Georgia to revive in some degree. Astrakhan was again visited by Persian and Hindu merchants, and by caravans from Khiva and Bokhara; the western and eastern shores of the Caspian were again frequented by vessels, and the numerous nomade hordes, of Asiatic habits, that then occupied the steppes of the Volga and the Kouma, contributed not a little to give animation to the commercial interchange between Russia and the Transcaucasian regions.[21]

In the reign of Catherine II. the Russians reappeared once more beyond the Caucasus on the Caspian shores; but it was not until Alexander's time that their sway was definitively established in those Asiatic regions. Once mistress of a vast country conterminous with Persia and Turkey, and washed both by the Caspian and the Black Sea, Russia evidently commanded every possible means for developing to her own advantage a trade between Europe and most of the western regions of Asia. By way of the Caspian and the Volga she could supply all her central provinces with Persian silks and cottons, dye-stuffs, and drugs; besides which she could monopolise the profit on the transit of goods to the fairs of Germany and down the Danube.

At first the Russian government seemed disposed to favour the establishment of all these great mercantile relations; but it did not long persist in its liberal course. It soon began to practise restrictive measures, thus paving the way for the grand system of proscription which it afterwards adopted. In the beginning of Alexander's reign the old trade with Persia still subsisted, and the Russians continued to buy cottons of excellent quality, at very low prices, in Mazanderan, a province situated on the Caspian.[22] The merchants used then to make their [Pg 191] payments in ducats, that gold coinage being a *sine quâ non* in all bargains. But the exportation of ducats was prohibited in 1812 and 1813, and thenceforth the Persians refused to trade, not choosing to accept silver coin. The English merchants, always prompt to seize advantageous opportunities, immediately entered the markets of Mazanderan, the cottons of which, purchased by them at low prices, reached Europe by way of the Persian Gulf. At first they paid in ducats; but England soon substituted for specie cloths, and all other kinds of goods suitable to the inhabitants of that part of Persia. It was especially during the war of 1813 that the English led the Persians to adopt their various manufactures. The stop put to the Russian trade opened the eyes of the ministry, who soon revoked the measure concerning ducats, but the mischief was done; commerce had already run into a new channel. Severe as was this lesson it produced no lasting effect. In order to favour a single Moscow manufacture, a duty equivalent to a prohibition was imposed on foreign velvets *in transitu* for Persia, and thenceforth an article for which there was so important a demand, ceased to be an item in the Russian traffic with Persia.

In 1821, the Russian government seemed to be disposed to wiser views, and allowed European goods free entrance into the ports of Georgia. Thereupon, a great transit trade rapidly sprang up between Turkey, Persia, and the great German fairs, by way of Radzivilov, Odessa, Redout Kaleh, and Tiflis. This new and very promising line of communication had but a brief duration, for ten years afterwards, Russia, in her infatuation, destroyed all these magnificent commercial elements, as we have already shown. She closed the Transcaucasian provinces against European goods, and thus gave an immediate impulse to the prosperity of her formidable competitors in Trebisond, which soon surpassed the establishments on the Persian Gulf, and became the

principal port in Persia and the point of destination for English goods, to the annual value at present of more than two millions sterling.

The Trebisond route having been once adopted, the trade in drugs and dye-stuffs was likewise lost for Russia.

It is scarcely conceivable with what perverse obstinacy the Russian government has persisted in its course, in defiance of all warning; and whilst the people of Persia and Turkey in Asia, were forsaking their old commercial routes for new markets, Russia has gone on making her prohibitive system more and more stringent, even to the extent of excluding the common pottery, an immense quantity of which was formerly sent from Khiva and Bokhara to Astrakhan, for the use of the Tatars and Kalmucks.

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It was through the effect of such measures as these that Astrakhan lost all trace of its former greatness. In 1839 it contained only forty-eight merchants of the first guild, including women and children, and had but forty-eight vessels belonging to its port. Of these forty-eight vessels, having a total tonnage of about nine millions of kilogrammes, eleven belonged to the crown, twenty-five were the property of private individuals, and were employed as government transports; there remained, therefore, for trade only twelve vessels, one-third of which were unemployed. The vessels belonging to the other ports of the Caspian in connexion with Astrakhan, such as Baku and Salian, were eight in number, with a tonnage of 387,000 kilogrammes, besides about sixty coasters, tonnage unknown. Such is the deplorable condition to which the trade and navigation of the Caspian have been reduced by an exclusive government, which would never consent to understand the reciprocal nature of traffic, but foolishly hoped to preserve its commercial intercourse with nations whose productions it rejects, and to which it refuses even the transit of the foreign goods they require. Do what she will, Russia will never succeed in adequately replacing for the Mussulmans of the south of the empire the manufactures of Asia, which are peculiarly adapted to their habits and their wants, or in inducing the Transcaucasian countries to adopt her own sorry manufactures. The spread of English commerce, moreover, in the western regions of Asia is now a historical fact, and Russia cannot possibly check it unless she become mistress, some time or other, of Constantinople. It is true she may compete in some hardware goods with the higher-priced productions of England; but the Asiatics are excellent judges of such matters; they are seldom tempted by mere cheapness; on the contrary, experience proves that they prefer the English goods, the soundness and high finish of which they fully appreciate. But even though the Russian goods were as well made as the English, the prohibitive system of the empire, and the refusal of transit to European merchandise, would still be sufficient to deprive the country of all export trade in the Caspian; for the people of Asia will always give the preference to those commercial relations which afford them opportunities for exchanges suitable to their wants, along with the advantages of a more extensive demand.

The trade of the two Russian ports of the Caspian in 1835, was as follows:—

| | Exports. rubles. | Imports. rubles. | Duties rubles. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Astrakhan | 2,235,514 | 2,235,514 | 127,241 |
| Baku | 556,016 | 1,564,924 | 81,735 |
| | 2,791,530 | 3,800,438 | 208,976 |

Which gives for the whole Caspian a general circulation of about 6,500,000 rubles. The trade has still continued to decline since 1835. We find it stated in the journal of the ministry of the interior, that the whole exports of the Russian Transcaucasian provinces, by the Black Sea, the [Pg 193] Caspian, and overland, amounted in 1839, to but 3,889,707 rubles,[23] whilst the imports by the Caspian, did not exceed 2,896,008 rubles, nearly a million less than in 1835. In the same year Persia supplied, by the overland route, goods to the amount of 8,545,035 rubles to the Caucasian provinces. Now these goods consisted, according to the documents of the government itself, not of raw materials, but almost entirely in silk and cotton fabrics. The fact is, that notwithstanding the high duties of the imperial tariff, the people of Asia, who know nothing of the fantastic changes of fashion, always prefer the durable productions of the Persian looms to the flimsy tissues which Russia offers them, at very high prices, in consequence of the great remoteness of Moscow, the only seat of manufactures in the empire. Again, the Persians, finding that Russia can supply them with but few articles suited to them, keep all the raw materials produced in their country, and those which reach them from Central Asia, to exchange them for the European goods, which are now briskly and abundantly supplied in Trebisond and Tauris. Thus the Ghilan[24] silks, the Mazanderan cottons, the gall-nuts of Kurdistan, the tobaccoes of Shiraz, the gums, dye-stuffs, saffron, &c., have completely deserted the Caspian, and the route from Tiflis to Redout-Kaleh, for that by way of Erzeroum and Trebisond. Another circumstance in favour of this new line is the low rate of carriage and duties in Turkey; the latter never exceed three per cent. for Europeans, and four per cent. for Persians; but in reality merchants seldom pay more than half that amount. Altogether the transit from Constantinople does not augment the first cost of goods by more than ten per cent. Hence it is easy to infer how difficult it is for Russia, whose manufacturing power is still so inconsiderable, to contend with the other European states in the markets of Persia, and how grossly it blundered when it voluntarily annihilated all transit trade through its dominions, in the vain hope of forcing its own productions on the Transcaucasian countries.

One of the most curious things connected with the destruction of all these elements of wealth is the petty artifices practised by the ministry to make Europe, and the head of the government, believe that the extension of commerce is nowhere more sedulously pursued than in Russia. For

instance, the fort of Alexandrof has been built on the north-east coast of the Caspian, under the pretence of providing a receptacle for the imaginary caravans from Khiva and Bokhara. Unfortunately, the locality affords neither fresh water nor wood, nor any one necessary; accordingly, as might have been foreseen, it has not been visited by a single caravan. The garrison consists of 600 men, and requires to be constantly renewed in consequence of its [Pg 194] suffering by scurvy; the commandant is obliged to procure fresh water from the mouths of the Ural, which is conveyed to him in packet-boats. The fort has not even proved of use for the protection of the fishery which is carried on not far from its site. The soldiers cannot venture from their redoubts without incurring the risk of being carried off by the Khirghis. More than eighty Russian fishermen were made prisoners in 1839 by those nomades, and sold in Khiva and Bokhara.

It is well known what hopes Peter the Great built on the Black Sea, the Caspian, and the countries situated beyond the Caucasus. It remains for us briefly to discuss the question, whether it will ever be possible for Russia to make the Indian trade return to its old route.

Now that navigation has made such amazing progress, now that the establishment of steamboats on the Euphrates and the Red Sea, is a solved problem, and the cost of freight by sea is exceedingly reduced, we think there is no longer a chance for Russia to divert the course of the Indian trade, and make it pass through her own dominions. Russia is conterminous with the Chinese empire, and has long enjoyed certain and regular communication with it; and yet the English find it very profitable to sell in Odessa, and all the south of Russia, tea brought them by ships that double the Cape of Good Hope. It is evident that Russia is in a still worse position with regard to India than to China. Should the Russians ever become masters of the Sea of Azof, they might, perhaps, penetrate to Bokhara and Samarkand by way of the rivers Sir Daria (Iaxartes) and Amore Daria (Oxus). This was one of Peter the Great's grand conceptions. But the reiterated attempts that have been made in Khiva, always to no purpose, prove plainly that conquests are not easily to be made in those regions, and that such armies as those of our day are not fitted to traverse the steppes of the Khirghis and Turcomans. And how were it possible, besides, to establish as regular and cheap communications with India, by way of Persia or Bokhara, as those which now exist by sea? It seems, therefore, evident that Peter the Great's projects are become chimerical at this day, and that all the efforts Russia can ever make by herself, will be unable to change the course of the Indian trade. It is only in case of a long maritime war that she could hope to bring the productions of Central Asia to the Black Sea, thence to be distributed over continental Europe. But apart from this trade, there was still a vast field to be wrought: in like manner as the East Indies are become, commercially speaking, dependencies of Great Britain, so Persia and Turcomania might have become tributaries to Russia, had not the latter, blinded by her vanity and jealous ambition, to adopt her deplorable system of prohibition, and destroyed the whole European transit trade which was establishing itself by way of the ports she possesses on the Black Sea.

Our facts and figures have clearly proved that the decay of the navigation of the Caspian has accompanied that of the Asiatic trade; it is important, however, to give some notion of the nature [Pg 195] and employment of the vessels actually in use on the Caspian and the Volga. These vessels are divided into five classes, according to the character of their build. The first comprises ships that visit all the ports of the Caspian indiscriminately; the second, those that ply only in the neighbourhood of Astrakhan; the third, those that confine themselves to the mouths of the Volga from Astrakhan to the sea; the fourth, the river boats that never quit the Volga; and the fifth, those belonging to the Persian provinces.

The ships that visit the ports of the Caspian are called *shkooutes*, and their hulls are not unlike those of Dutch vessels. They are built of bad timber, and in defiance of all rules. Their number, though greatly exceeding the demands of commerce, is not above eighty; they gauge from 1000 to 2000 *hectolitres*. Shipowners generally buy old hulls in Nijni Novgorod, and turn them into shkooutes, without ever reflecting that their craziness and want of regularity makes them exceedingly dangerous as sea-going vessels. And then the command of them is given to ignorant pilots, who fill the office of captains in all but the name. The crews consist of from ten to sixteen, and these being chosen by the sole test of cheapness, the result is that the navigation of the squally and formidable Caspian is in very bad repute among merchants, and will inevitably be abandoned altogether.

The shkooutes are employed in conveying Russian and Persian goods, and the workmen, materials, provisions, and produce, belonging to the fisheries situated between Salian,[25] Siphitourinsk, Akhrabat, and Astrabad,[26] and in carrying victuals and stores to the garrisons in the eastern parts of the Caucasus.

Of all these transports, those of the crown alone afford the shippers any chance of profit. The Russian authorities and merchants themselves confess that there is no longer any thing to be got by conveying merchandise from Astrakhan to Persia. Twenty years ago the freights obtained for heavy goods were from 1.30 rubles, to 3 per pood, and from 6 to 10 rubles for light and bulky goods. Now the freight for the former does not exceed from 40 to 70 copeks, and that of the latter never amounts to one ruble. The return charges cannot be stated with accuracy, since they depend on the quantity of goods to be shipped, and the number of vessels ready to load. It often happens that the captains put up their services to auction, and end with losing instead of gaining. This diminution in the charges for freight is evidently the consequence of the superabundance of vessels, of the frequent shipwrecks which cause a preference for land carriage, and of the small [Pg 196] amount of importation into the Persian provinces.

The vessels that ply on the Caspian in the vicinity of Astrakhan are known in the country by the

name of *razchiva*. They differ very little from the shkooutes, and cost from 1500 to 4000 rubles. Sailors distinguish them into two classes, *manghishlaks* and *aslams*, the former of which take the name from the port[27] whence they formerly carried to Astrakhan the goods brought by the Khiva and Bokhara caravans. This traffic was monopolised by Tatars, who alone had nothing to fear from the Khirghis and Turkmans, when they landed. In 1832, there were but eight manghishlaks, half of which were unemployed. These little vessels carry from 700 to 1200 hectolitres.

The other class of razchivas, designated by the Tartar word *aslam* (carrier—*voiturier*), are used to convey household vessels, victuals, timber, and articles requisite for the fisheries. They ply to Kisliar,[28] Gourief,[29] and Tchetchenze,[30] and traverse all the north-western parts of the Caspian, from the Volga to Terek, their principal cargoes being commissariat stores for the troops in the Caucasian provinces. They bring back wine, rice, and Kisliar brandy, which is much esteemed in the country. The number of these razchivas does not, however, exceed fifty. They can make five trips in the year.

These vessels are much more profitable to their owners than are shkooutes. In reality they are but coasters, and as they seldom venture out of sight of the shore, they are much less exposed to wreck. Moreover, in addition to their Astrakhan freights, they keep up an exchange trade in eatable commodities with the nomades of the Caspian shores. They are also employed in the fisheries of the Emba and of Tchetchenze, though the fishermen generally prefer smaller vessels.

The vessels that ply in the mouths of the Volga are some of them decked, some open. The former, which need to be of a certain strength, carry goods directly on board the shkooutes in the offing, whereas the latter stop a little distance from the mouth of the river. Both are really lighters. The water is so low near the mouths of the Volga, as well as in all the northern part of the Caspian, that the shkooutes are obliged to put to sea empty from the port of Astrakhan. About twenty miles from the shore they take in half their cargo, which is brought to them in open lighters, nor can they complete their loading until they are 100 or 120 miles from the embouchure, where they are met by decked vessels whose draught of water does not exceed [Pg 197] thirteen feet. The lighters generally belong to petty captains, who realise a good profit by them; but a large proportion of them are lost every year.

The boats that float down the Volga to Astrakhan from the interior, are of extreme diversity of construction. The most remarkable are the *kladnyas*, which are distinguished above all the rest by their solidity and their Dutch build. They have but one enormously tall mast with two sails, one of which is attached to a boom twice as long as the hull of the vessel. Next after them come the *beliangs*, flat boats built entirely of deal, and not pitched either within or without. Besides these there are an infinity of smaller boats, which it is unnecessary to describe. All these boats convey goods from Astrakhan to Nijni Novgorod, Saratof, and other places, and *vice versa*, charging for freight from ten to thirty kopeks per pood, according to distance. They arrive at Astrakhan at stated times, namely, in May, July, and September. The steamboat that makes one trip every year between Astrakhan and Nijni Novgorod, takes from forty to fifty days to ascend the river, and a fortnight to return. The navigation of the Volga, appears by the sailors' accounts, to be growing more difficult every year; some parts of the river are already impracticable for boats of a certain draught. Indeed the fact seems clearly ascertained that the Volga has undergone a great diminution of volume within the last century.

The vessels belonging to the Persian provinces resemble the Russian shkooutes, with this difference, that no pitch is used in their construction, but their timbers are so accurately joined as to admit no water. It is superfluous to say that the Persian shipping is in a still worse position than that of Russia. If to these statistical details we add that all the Russian goods are conveyed by land to the Caucasian provinces of the empire, no more will be wanting to show how deserted is the Caspian Sea.

The manual industry of Astrakhan shares, of course, the decay of its commerce. The metropolis reckoned fifty-two manufacturing establishments in 1838, viz.: one for silks, two for cotton cloths, twenty dyeing-houses, ten tanyards, two candle manufactories, three soap manufactories, twelve tile manufactories, one tallow melting-house, one rope-walk; 615 workmen were employed in all these establishments. It was the fisheries of the Volga that in reality furnished the population with all the means of subsistence; they are still the chief resource of the country, and it would seem as though nature had wished to compensate Astrakhan for the sterility of its soil, by rendering the waters that wash it more prolific than any others in fish.[31] The waters in which the fishing is carried on are private property, or farmed out by the crown and the towns, or they are free to all comers. The most productive spots belong to the princes Kourakin, Youssoupof, [Pg 198] Besborodko, &c. The crown fisheries were formerly commercial property; they are now leased to one individual, along with those belonging to the district capitals of the government of Astrakhan. The waters of Astrakhan, though belonging to Prince Kourakin, have nevertheless been gratuitously conceded to the town. They yield for the most part only small kinds of fish, which are consumed by the inhabitants themselves.

The fisheries of the Emba have been free since 1803. They comprise 300 miles of the Caspian coast, from the mouth of the Ural to Mentvoi Koultouk, and take their name from the river Emba. They belonged formerly to the counts Koutussof and Soltykov.

By virtue of a decree, dated March 31, 1803, fishery of all sorts, including that of seals, is free in the maritime waters of Tchetchenze. The island of that name, lying not far from the gulf and cape of Agrakhan, contains vast establishments for smoking, salting, and drying fish, and numerous dwellings occupied by the fishermen. The fishery here lasts all the year through, and

yields beluga,[32] common sturgeon, salmon trout, silurus,[33] and two varieties of carp. It has been the custom of the seal-fishers from time immemorial not to destroy any of those animals before the 13th of April; whoever infringes this rule is deprived of all his booty by his comrades, who divide it among themselves. War is waged upon the seals in five different ways. In summer they are hunted on the islands and netted in the sea; in winter they are shot, or killed with clubs on the ice, or at the breathing-holes they break through it. In summer the seals weigh thirty pounds, in autumn about sixty, and in winter often ninety-six.

The permanent fisheries are called *vataghis* and *outshoughis*; the places where they are temporary are called *stania*. An outshoughi consists in a barrier of stakes planted across the river, and sometimes wattled. Below this barrier the apparatus called in Russian *samoloff*, is placed in the current. It is a cord hung with short lines and hooks, and the business of the fisherman consists in examining the lines, and taking off the fish that are hooked. These are immediately taken to a shed built on piles at the waterside, where they are cut up; the roes, the fat, and the nerves are afterwards conveyed to places where they undergo the processes necessary to fit them for commerce.

As the lines of stakes hinder the fish from ascending the river, the government has for some time prohibited the use of outshoughis, and also of the lines and hooks, by which it is found that scarcely one fish is taken out of a hundred that swallow the bait; the rest escape though wounded, and thus perish uselessly.

The invention of these barriers is ascribed to the Tatars of the khanat of Astrakhan. As fish was [Pg 199] an important article of commerce between them and the Russians, it may be presumed that they adopted this means to keep the fish from ascending to the upper portions of the Volga.

The vataghis, usually placed on the heights above the shore, are cellars in which fish is salted and dried. Before the door there is always a platform sheltered by a screen of reeds, where the fish are cut up and cleaned. Nets, some of them several hundred yards in length, are exclusively used in these establishments. It is forbidden, however, to stretch them across the entire width of the river.

The fishing season is divided into several distinct periods. The first, which extends from March till May, that is from the breaking up of the ice to the time of flood, is called the caviar season; it is the most important and most productive of the caviar and isinglass. The second occurs in July when the waters have sunk within their ordinary bed, and the fish having spawned, are returning to the sea. The third, from September to November, is the season when the beluga, sturgeon, and sevriuga[34] return to the deepest parts of the river. These fish are also taken in winter by nets of a peculiar form. At that time of year the fishermen of the coasts often travel over the ice for dozens of miles from the land. Every two men have a horse and sledge, and carry with them 3000 yards of net, with which they capture belugas, sturgeons, silures, and even seals under the ice. These expeditions are very dangerous. The wind often drives the ice-blocks on a sudden out to sea, and then the loss of the fishermen is inevitable, unless the wind chops round and drives them back to land. Old experienced fishermen allege that the instinct of the horses forewarns them of these atmospheric changes, and that their uneasiness puts their masters on their guard against the danger; according to the same authorities, the moment the animals are yoked they turn of their own accord towards the shore, and set off thither with extraordinary speed.

The fishermen of Astrakhan reckon three classes of fish. The first they call red fish, which includes the beluga, the sevriuga, and the sturgeon. The second consists of white fish, such as the salmon-trout, the bastard beluga, the sterlet,[35] the carp or sazan, the soudak,[36] and the silure. To the third class belong all those designated by the general name of *tchistia*, *kovaya* or *riba*, either on account of the closeness of the nets employed to take them, or of their habits of entering rivers in very dense shoals. They are small fish, which are little prized, and are salted for the consumption of the interior of the empire.

The government fishing board has the general control of the fisheries, grants the requisite licences, superintends the election of the headmen, sends out inspectors to maintain order, and collects information as to the produce of the fisheries. In 1828, 8887 men employed in fishing, [Pg 200] and 254 in taking seals, with 3219 boats, brought in 43,033 sturgeons, 653,164 sevriugas, and 23,069 belugas: these yielded 330 tons of caviar, and about 34 tons of isinglass. There were also taken 8335 soudaks, and the enormous quantity of 98,584 seals. The sturgeon fishery alone produces about 2,000,000 of rubles annually, but the expenses are very considerable. The revenue derived by the government from the fisheries of the Volga amounts to 800,000 paper rubles.

The celebrated imperial ukase appointing a uniform monetary system throughout the empire, was promulgated during our stay in Astrakhan, and afforded us a fresh opportunity of beholding the amazing impassiveness of the Russians, and their extreme incapability of self-assertion. The change was certainly excellent in itself, and loudly called for by the circumstances of the country, but the manner of carrying it into effect caused a loss of eighteen per cent, to all holders of coin. In Astrakhan, the voice of the public crier sufficed at once, and without warning, to reduce the 4 ruble piece to 3.5, that of 1.20 to 1.05, that of 1 ruble to 0.87, and that of 0.62 to 0.52; and immediately after beat of drum, the law was carried into full force on all commercial transactions. It must not be supposed, however, that this inert resignation of the tzar's subjects is merely the result of their profound reverence for whatever emanates from the omnipotence of their sovereign. Every one of them is fully and keenly sensible of his loss, and if no voice is uplifted against such ministerial spoliations, the cause abides in that total absence of will and reflection which we have already had many occasions to point out as a distinguishing trait of the

Russian character. For our own part we cannot but highly approve of the idea of establishing a complete uniformity in the value of coinage, for the variations of value which the same coin formerly underwent in passing from one government to another were exceedingly injurious to trade. We think, however, that the change might have been accomplished by more legal and less violent means. It is true, that by acting as he did, Count Cancrine was sure of realising a gain of eighteen per cent., and this, it may be presumed, was the principal motive that actuated him. Be this as it may, this was not the first time the Russian government took such a course; every one knows that in 1812, the silver ruble fell abruptly to the value of a paper ruble, entailing a loss of seventy-one per cent. on all holders of government bills, who received but a paper ruble for every silver ruble represented by the bills. This state of things lasted until 1839, when the old system was restored. The present government paper, having for its basis a real coin, the silver ruble, worth 3.50 paper rubles (about 3*s.* 2*d.*), consists of notes for 5, 10, 20, and even 10,000 rubles. These notes are extremely small, and the government must inevitably realise a large profit annually by their wear and tear and loss. It is likewise very possible that the ministry of finance had no other motive for creating these new notes, than that of preparing means to repeat the [Pg 201] bankruptcy of 1812; and seeing the actual state of the imperial treasury, there is no doubt that such an act of bankruptcy would be committed in case of war. Never was the state so oppressed with debt as it is at this day. The war in the Caucasus, the grand military parades, and the payment of a countless host of diplomatic agents, avowed and secret, all absorb immense sums, and the ministry is consequently reduced to miserable shifts to make up the deficit, and restore the balance of the finances. The proposal of a great military expenditure was discussed in the imperial council of 1841, and was opposed with reason by Cancrine, on the too real ground of want of money. The emperor, chafed by an opposition to his wishes such as he was not used to, ordered the grand treasurer to produce all his accounts, that the matter might be investigated in council. Next day the accounts were examined in presence of the tzar and his ministers. One item excited great surprise; an enormous sum was set down as expended, but how or wherefore it was spent was not stated. The emperor yielding without reflection to a sudden impulse of anger, commanded Cancrine to explain what had become of the money, and the minister, who had taken his precautions beforehand, instantly laid before his master a note in which were revealed some singular mysteries. It was, they say, after this memorable sitting that all public works were immediately stopped, the stamp duties were quadrupled, the charge for passports centupled, and new notes payable to the bearer, were issued for more than 100,000,000 of silver rubles. Such are the expedients that constitute the genius of the ministry, and which Count Cancrine thought it right to employ to augment the financial resources of the country. I recollect an anecdote that exactly typifies the notions of that statesman. I was once in the house of a Moldavian landowner of Bessarabia, whose lands bring him in about 10,000 rubles a year. The conversation turned on agriculture. "What!" exclaimed a Russian who was present, "your estate yields you but 10,000 rubles a-year? Nonsense; put it into my hands and I warrant you twice as much."—"That would be a very agreeable thing, if it could be done," said the landlord; "I flatter myself I am tolerably well versed in these matters, and yet I have never been able to discover any possible means of increasing my income."—"How many days do your peasants work?" said the Russian. —"Thirty."—"That's not enough: make them work sixty. What breadth of land do they till for you?"—"So much."—"Double it." And so he went on through the other items of the inquiry, crying, "Double it! double it!" We could not help heartily laughing. But the Russian remained perfectly serious, and I am sure he thought himself as great a man as Cancrine himself; I really regret that I did not ask him, had he taken lessons in economics in the office of that illustrious financier.

## FOOTNOTES:

[20] Notwithstanding the assertions of most geographers, we are of opinion that the communications between Soldaïa, Kaffa, and Astrakhan generally took place by way of the Don and the Volga. Many reasons seem to confirm this opinion. Had it been otherwise, the Genoese would not have attached so much importance to the possession of Tana, on the mouth of the Don. Furthermore, the route by the banks of the Terek and the Kouban, skirting the northern slope of the Caucasus, being much longer as well as more dangerous, by reason of the neighbourhood of the Caucasian tribes, preference would naturally have been given to the route by the Don and the Volga, which passed only through Tatar countries, inhabited by the same people as the traders, and subjected to the same government. It seems confirmatory of this opinion that in the expedition of Sultan Selim against Astrakhan, in 1560, part of the Turkish army marched by that very route. The line of the Manitch must have been little frequented on account of its almost total want of drinkable water.

[21] Among the various nomade hordes then encamped on the soil of Southern Russia, the Kalmucks alone numbered more than 120,000 families; at the same period the Crimea alone had a population of more than 600,000. But these regions have undergone a remarkable change since Peter the Great's time. A large portion of the Kalmucks have emigrated to China, and the Mussulman tribes have lost at least nine-tenths of their population. It may easily be conceived how injurious to the trade with Persia and Central Asia has been the disappearance of these Asiatic races.

[22] The best cotton of Persia is grown on the slopes of the Elbrouz. These regions might easily supply Russia annually with an average of 1,500,000 kilogrammes of cotton, at 65 to 70 centimes the kilogramme on the spot.

[23] Among the articles exported by Russia, the following are to be estimated at the approximative values annexed to them: cotton cloths, 700,000 rubles; woollens, 40,000; linens, 30,000; iron, 200,000 to 400,000; various metal wares, 200,000, and wheat 100,000.

[24] In 1836, Ghilan exported more than 9,000,000 rubles worth of silk to Trebisond.

[25] Salian is a port on the Caspian, at the mouth of the Coura (the ancient Cyrus). The roadstead is tolerably good, and the fisheries are important. An immense quantity of sturgeons are caught.

[26] Astrabad on the southern coast of the Caspian, between Persia and Turkistan, is in regular and easy communication with all the regions of Persia, Khiva, and Bokhara. It is the true key to all the commerce of Asia by way of the Caspian; hence it was an object of special attention for Peter the Great and Catherine II.

[27] Manghishlak is not a town but merely a port, at which vessels used formerly to touch to trade with the nomades of that part of the coast. It is now entirely abandoned; the few vessels which still visit these parts, stop at Tuk Karakhan, near the old landing place, whence goods are conveyed on camels to Khiva in twenty-eight days.

[28] A town on the Caspian, at the mouth of Terek, celebrated for its brandy.

[29] A town at the mouth of the Ural. It belongs to the Cossacks of the Ural, and contains upwards of a hundred houses.

[30] An island not far from the Gulf of Agrakhan.

[31] The particulars that follow as to the fisheries of the Caspian, were communicated to us at Astrakhan. Neither the weather nor the season allowed us to be present at those interesting operations.

[32] The *beluga* of the Russians is the great sturgeon (*Piscis ichthyocolla, Accipenser Huso*), its weight often amounts to 1400 lbs.

[33] *Silurus glanis*, a fish unknown in France. I have found it in the Danube, the Volga, and the Dniepr, where its voracity and strength make it formidable to bathers.

[34] Accipenser stellatus.

[35] A. ruthenus.

[36] Perca asper.



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# CHAPTER XXII.

DEPARTURE FROM ASTRAKHAN—COAST OF THE CASPIAN—HAWKING—HOUIDOUK—THREE STORMY DAYS PASSED IN A POST-HOUSE—ARMENIAN MERCHANTS—ROBBERY COMMITTED BY KALMUCKS—CAMELS—KOUSKAIA—ANOTHER TEMPEST—TARAKANS—A REPORTED GOLD MINE.

We left Astrakhan at eight in the evening, and were ferried across the Volga in a four-oared boat. It took us more than an hour to cross the river, its breadth opposite the town being more than 2000 yards. When we reached the opposite bank we might have fancied ourselves transported suddenly to a distance of a hundred versts from Astrakhan. Kalmucks, sand, felt tents, camels, in a word, the desert and its tenants were all that now met our view. We found our britchka waiting for us; our officer and the dragoman got into a telega or post chariot, and the bells began their merry jingling.

Nothing can be more dismal than the route from Astrakhan to Kisliar. For two days and two nights our journey lay through a horrid tract of loose sand, with nothing to be seen but some half-buried Kalmuck kibitkas, serving for post stations, and a few patches of wormwood, the melancholy foliage of which was in perfect harmony with the desolate aspect of the landscape. The heaps of sand we passed between exhibited the most capricious mimicry of natural scenery. We had before our eyes hills, ravines, cascades, narrow valleys, and tumuli; but nothing remained in its place; an invisible power was ceaselessly at work, changing every shape too quickly for the eye to follow the rapid transformation.

On the evening of the day after our departure, we had an opportunity of testing the prowess of our travelling companion, the hawk. The first theatre of his exploits was a little pond covered with wild ducks and geese, that promised a rich booty.

At a signal from my husband the Tatar officer unhooded the bird, and cast him off. Instantly the hawk darted off like an arrow, close along the surface of the ground, towards the pond, and was soon hidden from us among the reeds, where his presence was saluted with a deafening clamour, and a scared multitude of wild geese rose up out of the sedges. Their screams of rage and terror, and their bewildered flight backwards and forwards, and in all directions, were utterly indescribable, until the arrival of the officer put them to the route, and delivered their assailant from their obstreperous resentment. The moment the hawk flew off, the Tatar followed him at a gallop, all the while beating a small drum that was fastened to his saddle. When he reached the pond he found the bird planted stoutly on the back of a most insubmissive victim, and waiting with philosophic patience until his master should come and release him from his critical position.

The officer told us, that but for his presence, and the noise of the drum, the geese would in all [Pg 203] probability have pummelled the hawk to death with their beaks, in order to rescue their companion. In such cases, however, the hawk braves the storm with imperturbable coolness, and adopts a curious expedient when the attacks are too violent, and his master is too slow in appearing. Without quitting hold of his victim, he slips himself under the broad wings of the goose, which then become his buckler. Once in that position he is invincible, and the blows aimed at him fall only on the poor prisoner, whose cruel fate it is to be forced to protect its mortal enemy. When the falconer comes up, the first thing he does is to cut off its head and give the brains to the hawk. Until that operation is completed, the latter keeps fast hold on the quarry, and no efforts of its master can induce it to relax its gripe.

The hawk made two or three more successful flights before we reached Houidouk, and supplied us with a good stock of provisions, which were not a little needful to us in that miserable post station.

During this journey we passed several times very close to the Caspian, but without perceiving it.

At Houidouk, on the mouth of the Kouma, we found our escort, which had been waiting two days for us. Every thing was ready for our departure, but a violent fall of rain detained us three mortal days in the most detestable cabin we had yet entered. Two rooms, one for travellers, and the other for the master of the station and his family, composed the whole dwelling. We installed ourselves as well as we could in the former, the whole furniture of which consisted of a long table and two benches. The walls of this wretched hole were made of ill-jointed boards, that gave admission to the wind and the rain, and to add to our discomfort, it served as an ante-chamber to the other room, and was thus common to the whole household. Hens, children, and the master of the house, were perpetually passing through it, and left us not a moment's rest. Our situation was intolerable; the violence of the tempest increased at such a rate, that we knew not how the miserable wooden fabric could stand against it. All the elements seemed confounded together; there was no distinguishing earth or sky; but the terrible disorder of nature appeared to me more tolerable than the scene within doors. Outside there was at least something for the imagination; the mind was exalted in contemplating the swelling uproar that threatened a renewal of chaos; but the scene within was enough to drive us to despair—children fighting and screaming, fowls fluttering and perching on the table and benches, squalor all around us, and a frowsy atmosphere! To complete our distress, some Armenian merchants on their way to the fair of Tiflis, finding it impossible to continue their journey, came to share with us the den in which we were already so uncomfortable.

But this new incident was a sort of lesson in philosophy for us. When we saw these men conversing quietly as they smoked their tchibouks, without the least show of impatience, and talking of the heavy losses the unseasonable weather might occasion them, as calmly as if their [Pg 204] own interests were not concerned, we could not help envying the stoic resignation of which the men of the East alone possess the secret. There is nothing like their fatalism for enabling one to take all things as they come; is not that the acme of human wisdom?

Our escort passed the three days of this deluge in a corner of the shed adjoining the house. Wrapped up in their sheep-skins, those iron men slept as quietly through wind and rain as if they had been in a snug room. One must have lived among the Russians to have any idea of the apathy with which they bear all kinds of privations. Their bodies, inured to the rigours of their climate, to the coarsest food, and most Spartan habits, grow so hardened, that what would be mortal to others makes no injurious impression on them.

At last the rain ceased towards the end of the third day. A west wind followed it, and dispersed the dark threatening clouds that had so long obscured the sky. Though the weather seemed still unsettled, we determined to make for the Caspian, which lay but thirty versts from us. My husband's anxiety to commence his surveying operations, and our eagerness to quit our detestable abode, gave us courage to risk the chance of another storm in the open steppe.

But a very unexpected incident threw the station into confusion just as we were departing, and delayed us some hours longer. A Kalmuck Cossack, mounted on a camel, arrived in great haste and informed us that the Armenian merchants, who had started the day before, had been attacked some distance from the station by a band of Kalmucks and plundered of the greater part of their merchandise.

Our Cossack officer, after listening with great indignation to this story, asked permission of my husband to pursue the robbers. The whole escort set off with him at a hard gallop, but the pursuit was ineffectual. The robbers, having had some hours' start, had already reached the sedges of the Caspian. In consequence of this delay it was the afternoon before we could make a start, and even then we had great difficulty in getting away, for the terrified postmaster entreated us not to forsake him at a moment so critical. His dismay, for which indeed there was little reason, almost infected me too, and it was not without some apprehension of disaster that I left the station.

The appearance of our caravan was curious and grotesque. Our britchka was drawn by three camels, taken in tow by a man on foot, and several other animals of the same species, besides sumpter-horses, were mounted by Kalmucks and Cossacks. Our escort followed, and all the men composing it, armed with sabres, guns, and pistols, looked martial enough to scare away the most daring thieves. The leader of the troop, the Tatar prince, rode with his falcon on his fist, every now and then showing off his skill in horsemanship and venery. Thinking no more of the morning alarm, I gave myself up to the liveliest anticipations of the extraordinary things which [Pg 205] this excursion promised us. At last I was about to behold that Caspian Sea which, ever since men

have been engaged with geographical questions, has been the object of their researches and conjectures. Besides, it had a much more potent interest for us, for it was in a manner the sole aim and end of our journey; it was to solve an immemorial question concerning it, that we had abandoned the comforts of civilised life, and encountered so many annoyances and privations. Notwithstanding my ignorance of science, I felt that in sharing my husband's toils, I was in some sort a partner in his learned researches, and that I too, like him, had my claims upon the Caspian. I was, therefore, impatient to see it; but our camels, who had no such motives for hurrying themselves, crawled along at a provokingly slow rate. They did not at all correspond with what we had read of the ships of the desert, creatures insensible to hunger, thirst, and fatigue, and as obedient to the will of man as the dry leaf is to the breath of the wind. In spite of a thick cord passed through one of their nostrils, which caused them sharp pain whenever they were unruly, our camels scarcely marched more than two hours at a stretch without lying down. The men had to battle with them continually to rouse them from their torpor, or hinder them from biting one another. Whenever one of the drivers pulled the halter of his camel roughly, we heard loud cries, the more hideous from their resemblance to the human voice. In short our camels behaved so badly during this short trip, as largely to abate the good opinion of their species, which we had conceived in reading the more poetical than true descriptions of our great naturalist.

At some distance from Houidouk we met two camps of Kalmucks, improperly called Christians. These tribes are reputed to be addicted to theft, and are generally despised by the other Kalmucks. We will speak of them again in another place. This whole region, as far as the Caspian, is extremely arid, with only here and there a few pools of brackish water, the edges of which swarm with countless birds, the most remarkable of which are the white herons, whose plumage forms such beautiful *aigrettes*. Unfortunately, these birds are so wary, that our companion could not take one of them, notwithstanding all his address and the power of his falcon.

A ludicrous misadventure that befel our dragoman, Anthony, amused us a good deal. Curiosity prompting him to ride a camel, he asked one of the Kalmucks to lend him his beast, and the request being complied with, he bestrode the saddle, pleased with the novelty of the experiment, and quite at a loss to know why the Cossacks and camel-drivers laughed among themselves as he mounted. But as soon as the beast began to move, a change came over his face, and he speedily began to bawl out for help. The fact is, one must be almost a Kalmuck to be able to endure the trotting of a camel; the shaking is so violent as to amount to downright torture for those who are not accustomed to it. The unlucky Anthony, left in the rear of the party, strove in vain to come up [Pg 206] with us, and was obliged, in spite of himself, to continue his ride to the Caspian, where we arrived two hours before him. I never saw a man so cut up. He groaned so piteously when he was lifted down, that we began to be really alarmed for him.

There are in nature two opposite types, beauty and ugliness; the elements of which vary infinitely, though imagination always erroneously supposes it can fix their boundaries. How often are we fully persuaded we can never meet again an object so beautiful as that before us; yet no sooner have we lavished all our enthusiasm upon it, than a more charming face, a sublimer landscape, or a more graceful form makes us forget what we had regarded as the model of perfection; and itself is soon, in turn, dethroned by other objects which we declare superior to all our former idols. Just so it is with ugliness. It matters not that we have before us the lowest grade we believe it can attain, we have but to turn our heads another way to be amazed and confounded by new discoveries revealing to us the inexhaustible combinations of nature. These reflections occurred to me more and more strongly as we approached Koumskaia. The aridity of the steppes round Odessa, the wilderness of the Volga, the parched and dismal soil of the environs of Astrakhan, in a word all we had heretofore seen that was least engaging, seemed lovely in comparison with what met our view on the banks of the Caspian.

A grey, sickly sky, crossed from time to time by heavy black clouds, threw an indescribably sad and revolting hue over the lonely, sandy plain, and low, broken shore. The same funereal pall seemed to hang over the wooden houses, the gangs of Turkmans and Kalmucks loading their carts with salt, and the camels that roamed along the shore mingling their dismal cries with the sound of the waves.

Yet hideous as it seemed to us, this part of the coast is not unimportant in a commercial point of view. It supplies large quantities of salt, and has a port where vessels unload their cargoes of corn for the army of the Caucasus. We counted at least a score of vessels which had been driven in there by the late storm.

The population of Koumskaia consists of a Russian functionary, a Cossack post, and a few Kalmuck families, that appear very miserable. The *employé* gave us the use of his house; that is to say, of two dilapidated rooms without glass windows or furniture. One can scarcely conceive how the mind can have strength to endure so very wretched an existence. An unwholesome climate, brackish water, excessive heat in summer, rigorous cold in winter, huts and kibitkas buried in the sand, the Caspian Sea with its squalls and tempests—all these things combine to make this region the most horrible abode imaginable. The major, who welcomed us to Koumskaia, had a slow fever, which he owed still less perhaps to the insalubrity of the climate than to the hardships and mortal ennui he had endured for eighteen months. His wife, more [Pg 207] stout-hearted, and amused in some degree by her household occupations, had still preserved a certain cheerfulness, which was no less than heroic in her situation. Their exile was to last in all two years. The government, perceiving that many *employés* died in Koumskaia, has limited the time of service there to that short period, and as some compensation for what those suffer who are sent thither, their two years are counted as four of ordinary service.

The weather had been louring since we left Houidouk, and we had a regular hurricane the

evening we reached the Caspian. It lasted four-and-twenty hours, and such was the noise of the wind and waves, that we could hardly hear each other speak in our room. We saw two or three kibitkas blown away into the sea, and we expected every moment to share the same fate, for our frail tenement creaked like the cabin of a ship; the boarded window let in such a current of air, as soon drove into the room all the garments with which we strove to stop the chinks.

But the saddest chapter of our history remains to be narrated. As soon as our servant had prepared the samovar, and lighted the candles, a multitude of black creatures crept out of the chinks of the walls and ceilings, and dropped from all sides like a living rain. Imagine our consternation at the sight of that legion of black demons swarming around us, and leaving us no alternative but to put out the candles that attracted them. These insects, called in the country *tarakans*, though disgusting in appearance, are very inoffensive, and seldom climb on the person; but they are fond of light and heat, and hence they are a grievous nuisance in these regions, where their number is prodigious. I had already seen them in some post-houses, but in small numbers, and though I had always disliked them, I had never been so horrified by them as in the house of the major, where they kept me awake all night.

Next morning, the wind having fallen somewhat, we went, in spite of the rain, to gather shells on the shore. The vessels in the harbour all showed signs of having suffered severely by the storm. The waters of the Caspian had a livid, muddy colour I never observed in any other sea in the most boisterous weather.

When we returned to our cabin, the Cossack officer presented to us a Tatar, who asserted he had found gold in a spot forty versts from Koumskaia. Having heard of our arrival, he had walked all that horrible night to ask my husband to accompany him to the spot where he had made the discovery. But in spite of the gold ear and finger-rings he exhibited as tokens of his veracity, my husband was not tempted to lose four or five days in a search that would have led to nothing, to judge from the nature of the ground in which the Tatar reported that the precious ore was to be found.



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# CHAPTER XXIII.

ANOTHER ROBBERY AT HOUIDOUK—OUR NOMADE LIFE—CAMELS—KALMUCK CAMP—QUARREL WITH A TURCOMAN CONVOY, AND RECONCILIATION—LOVE OF THE KALMUCKS FOR THEIR STEPPES; ANECDOTE—A SATZA—SELENOI SASTAVA—FLEECED BY A LIEUTENANT-COLONEL—CAMEL-DRIVERS BEATEN BY THE KALMUCKS—ALARM OF A CIRCASSIAN INCURSION—SOURCES OF THE MANITCH—THE JOURNEY ARRESTED—VISIT TO A KALMUCK LADY—HOSPITALITY OF A RUSSIAN OFFICER.

On returning to Houidouk, we found the postmaster in still greater perturbation than he had been cast into by the disaster of the Armenian merchants. One of his postillions had been seized but two versts from the station by Turkmans, who, after robbing him of his sheep-skin and his tobacco, had beaten him and left him half dead, and then made off with the three horses he was taking back to the station. The strangest part of the adventure was, that on the morning of the next day, which happened to be that of our arrival, the three horses returned quietly to their stable, as if nothing extraordinary had befallen. This proved, at least, that the robbers were not very confident, but chose rather to lose their booty than expose themselves to the vengeance of the Cossacks.

Though such stories were not very encouraging to us, we nevertheless set out early next morning, entirely forsaking the post road we had till then pursued, and striking across the steppes with a weak escort, very insufficient to resist a serious attack. My husband, who had already begun his course of levels, resumed his operations from the station at Houidouk. Having to make one every ten minutes, he proceeded on foot, as well as the Kalmucks and Cossacks who carried the instruments and measured the distances. All the men were occupied except the camel drivers and the officer, who amused himself with flying his falcon now and then at wild ducks and geese. Besides its positive and gastronomic results, this sport did me the further service of withdrawing my mind from the monotony of a slow march across the desert, in which I had often no other pastime than watching the grotesque movements of the three camels that drew my carriage, or the capricious evolutions of the flocks of birds that were already assembling for their autumnal emigration.

Yet the impression made on me by this first day did not tend much to alarm me at the prospect of wandering, like a veritable Kalmuck, for several weeks across the steppe. The novelty of my sensations, and the secret pleasure of escaping for awhile from the round of prescribed habits that make up the chief part of civilised life, banished from my mind every sombre thought. The excursion was an experimental glimpse of those natural ways of life which are no longer possible

in our thickly-peopled lands; and in spite of my prejudices, a nomade existence no longer seemed to me so absurd or wearisome as I had supposed it to be. The quiet and the immensity of space around us imparted a deep serenity to my mind, and fortified it against any remains of fear occasioned by the late events at Houidouk.

We made our first halt about noon, not at all too soon for our Cossacks, a race not accustomed [Pg 209] to long walking. They immediately made a great fire, whilst our camel-drivers were busy setting up the tents and arranging a regular encampment. The sun had reappeared with more force than before, as usually happens after violent storms. The heat of the vertical sunshine, increased by the bare parched soil and by the extraordinary dryness of the air, had so overcome us that we could scarcely attend to the picturesque group presented by our halt in the desert, over which we appeared to reign as absolute masters.

The britchka, unyoked and unladen, was placed a little way from, the tent, on the carpet of which were heaped portfolios, cushions, and boxes, in a manner which a painter would have thought worth notice. Whilst we were taking tea our men were making preparations for dinner, some plucking a fine wild goose and half-a-dozen kourlis, others attending to the fire, round which were ranged two or three pots for the pilau and the bacon soup, of which the Cossacks are great admirers; and Anthony with a little barrel of brandy under his arm, distributed the regular dram to every man, with the gravity of a German major-domo. As for the officer, he lay on his back under the britchka, for sake of the shade, amusing himself with his hawk, which he had unhooded, after fastening it with a stout cord to the carriage. Though the creature's sparkling eyes were continually on the look out for a quarry, it seemed by the continual flapping of its wings to enjoy its master's caresses. The camels, rejoicing in their freedom, browsed at a little distance from the tent, and contributed by their presence to give an oriental aspect to our first essay in savage life; wherein I myself figured in my huge bonnet, dressed as usual in wide pantaloons, with a Gaulish tunic gathered round my waist by a leathern belt. By dint of wondering at every thing, our wonderment at last wore itself out, and we regarded ourselves as definitively naturalised Kalmucks.

Three hours before we halted, the last kibitkas had disappeared below the horizon: we were absolutely alone on the whole surface of the vast plain. There was no vestige to tell us that other men had encamped where we were. The steppe is like the sea; it retains no trace of those who have traversed it.

At two o'clock Hommaire gave the word to march: the tent was struck; the camels knelt to receive their burdens; the officer was in the saddle with his hawk on his fist; and I was again alone in the carriage, slowly following our little troop as it resumed its operations.

My first night under a tent proved to me that I was not so acclimated to the steppe as my vanity had led me to suppose. The felt cone under which I was to sleep; the Kalmucks moving about the fire; the camels sending their plaintive cries through the immensity of the desert; in a word, every thing I saw and heard, was so at variance with my habits and ways of thought, that I almost [Pg 210] fancied I was in an opium dream.

We spent part of the night seated before the tent, our reveries unbroken by any inclination to sleep. The moon, larger and more brilliant than it ever appears in the west, lighted the whole sky and part of the steppe, over which it cast a luminous line like that which a vessel leaves in its wake at sea. Absolute silence reigned in the air, and produced upon us an effect which no words can describe. Hardly did we dare to break it, so solemn did it seem, and so in harmony with the infinite grandeur of the waste. It would be in vain to look for a stillness so complete, even in the most sequestered solitudes of our regions. There is always some murmuring brook there, some rustling leaves; and even in the silence of night, some low sounds are heard, that give an object to the thoughts. But here nature is petrified, and one has constantly before him the image of that eternal repose which our minds can so hardly conceive.

We marched for several days without meeting one living creature. This part of the steppes is inhabited only in Winter; for during the rest of the year it is completely destitute of fresh water. At last, towards the close of the fourth day, we saw a black object in motion on the horizon. The officer instantly galloped off to reconnoitre, waving his cap in the air, for a signal of command. In a few seconds we were sure he was perceived, for we distinguished the form of a Kalmuck mounted on a camel approaching us. He was hailed with shouts of joy by our men, who soon fastened on him, and overwhelmed him with questions. The eagerness of nomades to hear news is unbounded, and it is wonderful with what rapidity the knowledge of the most trivial event is conveyed from one tribe to another. The new comer told us that our journey was already known all over the steppes, and that we should soon fall in with an encampment of Kalmucks, who had moved forward on purpose to see us.

The presence of this man put all our men in the gayest humour. Desirous of doing due honour to his arrival, they deputed Anthony to solicit from us a double ration of spirits. They passed all the early part of the night sitting round the fire, smoking their tchibouks, and telling stories, as grave and as entranced in the charms of conversation as Bedouins.

Next day our little caravan was in motion before sunrise; the Kalmuck set off alone for the fair of Kisliar, and we took the opposite direction, pursuing the invisible line which science traced for us across the desert, and which was to lead us to the sources of the Manitch.

It was on this morning I took my first ride on the back of a camel, and I vowed it should be the last. Decidedly the camel is the most detestable quadruped to ride in the world. From the moment you mount until you descend from that murderous perch you have to endure an [Pg 211]

incessant series of shocks, so violent and sudden, that every joint in your body feels dislocated. I could now feel for the sufferings of our poor dragoman during his long trot from Houidouk to the Caspian. Though my experiment was limited to a trip of two versts at the most, I was totally exhausted when I dismounted.

Not long afterwards I had an opportunity of observing a curious instance of the vindictive temper of these rough trotters. The camel, as every one knows, is a ruminating animal, but few, perhaps, are aware that he has the cunning to make his rumination subservient to his vengeance in a very extraordinary and ingenious manner.

I had noticed in the morning that one of our camel-drivers seemed to be on very bad terms with his beast. In vain he strove to master it by severity, and by pulling the cord passed through its nostril; the brute was obstinate, and threw itself every moment rebelliously on the ground. At last the Kalmuck, incensed beyond endurance, took advantage of a general halt, and alighted to give the camel a sound drubbing. But the creature, disdainfully lifting up its long neck, followed all its master's movements with so spiteful an eye, that I was sure it had some wicked scheme in its head. It waited patiently till the Kalmuck stood in front of it, and then, opening its great mouth, it let fly a charge of chewed grass mixed with mucus and all sorts of nastiness, and hit the poor driver full in the face. To tell with what an air of satisfied vengeance the camel again reared its neck and turned its head from side to side, as if looking round for applause, would be totally impossible. But what astonished me the most was the moderation of the master after such an outrage. He wiped his face very coolly, got into the saddle again, and patted the neck of his ill-bred brute, as if it had played the most amiable and innocent little trick imaginable. Good fellowship was thenceforth re-established between them, and they jogged peaceably along together, without thinking any more of what had happened.

It happens by a rare good fortune, that no noxious insect is found in the steppes between the Caspian and the Caucasus. Of course it was not until I was quite sure of this that I could sleep in peace. Our tent, made of felt like those of the Kalmucks, was at most five feet high and as many wide. It was supported by a bundle of sticks tied together at the ends; the interior, furnished with a carpet and cushions laid on the ground, contained, besides, some boxes belonging to the britchka. A flap of felt formed the door. As the tent narrowed toward the top, we could not stand within it, but were obliged to kneel. Such was our dwelling for six weeks; and I can aver, that notwithstanding the hardness of our bed on the ground, and the strangeness of our situation, I never slept so soundly as during that period of my life. Nothing is better for the health than living in the open air; the appetite, the sleep, the unutterable serenity of mind, and the free circulation of the blood which it procures, sufficiently attest its happy influence on our organisation. Few [Pg 212] functional maladies, I suspect, would resist a two or three months' excursion like that which we accomplished.

As the Kalmuck had foretold, we arrived at night in a Kalmuck camp, consisting of a score of tents. All the men came to meet us, took the camels from the britchka, and would not allow our people to lend a hand; then having pitched our tent a little way off from their own, at the foot of a tumulus, they began to dance with their women, in token of rejoicing. One of the latter went down on her knees and begged some tobacco of my husband, and when she had got it she became an object of envy to her companions, before whom she hastened to display and smoke it.

When night had fallen, the camp was lighted up with numerous fires, which gave a still more curious aspect to the kibitkas, and the dancing figures of the Kalmucks and Cossacks, whose exuberant gaiety was in part owing to an extraordinary distribution of food and brandy. The women advanced in their turn, and several of them forming a circle, danced in the same manner as the ladies of honour of the Princess Tumene. But they all seemed to me extremely ugly, though some of them were very young.

Two days afterwards we arrived at the edge of a pond, where we arranged to pass the night. The sight of the water, and of the thousands of birds on its surface, afforded us real delight; there needed but such a little thing, under such circumstances as ours, to constitute an event, and occupy the imagination! All that evening was spent in shooting and hawking, bathing, and walking round and round the pool. We could not satiate ourselves with the pleasure of beholding that brackish mud, and the forest of reeds that encompassed it. No landscape on the Alps or the Tyrol was probably ever hailed with so much enthusiasm.

Beyond this pond, the appearance of the steppes gradually changed; water grew less rare, the vegetation less scorched. We saw from time to time herds of more than five hundred camels, grazing in freedom on the short thick grass. Some of them were of gigantic height. I shall never forget the amazement they manifested at beholding us. The moment they perceived us they hurried towards, then stopped short, gazing at us with outstretched necks until we were out of sight.

The eighth day after our departure from Houidouk our fresh water was so sensibly diminished, that we were obliged to use brackish water in cooking. This change in our kitchen routine fortunately lasted but a few days; but it was enough to give me a hearty aversion for meats so cooked: they had so disagreeable a taste, that nothing but necessity and long habit can account for their ordinary use. The Kalmucks and Cossacks, however, use no other water during a great part of the year.

That same day we had a very singular encounter, which went near to be tragical. Shortly before encamping, we saw a very long file of small carts approaching us; our Kalmucks recognised them [Pg 213] as belonging to Turkmans, a sort of people held in very bad repute, by reason of their quarrelsome and brutal temper. Every untoward event that happens in the steppes is laid to their

account, and there is perpetual warfare between them and the Cossacks, to whom they give more trouble than all the other tribes put together. As we advanced, an increased confusion was manifest in the convoy, and suddenly all the oxen, as if possessed by the fiend, exhibited the most violent terror, and began to run away in wild disorder, dashing against each other, upsetting and breaking the carts loaded with salt, wholly regardless of the voices and blows of their drivers. Some moments elapsed before we could account for this strange disaster, and comprehend the meaning of the furious abuse with which the Turkmans assailed our escort. The camel-drivers were the real culprits in this affair, for they knew by experience how much horses and oxen are frightened by the sight of a camel, and they ought to have moved out of the direct line of march, and not exposed us to the rage of the fierce carters.

The moment immediately after the catastrophe was really critical. All the Turkmans, incensed at the sight of the broken carts and their salt strewed over the ground, seemed, by their threatening gestures and vociferations, to be debating whether or not they should attack us. A single imprudent gesture might have been fatal to us, for they were more than fifty, and armed with cutlasses; but the steady behaviour of the escort gradually quieted them. Instead of noticing their hostile demonstrations, all our men set to work to repair the mischief, and the Turkmans soon followed their example; in less than an hour all was made right again, and the scene of confusion ended much more peaceably than we had at first ventured to hope. All parties now thought only of the comical part of the adventure, and hearty laughter supplanted the tokens of strife. To seal the reconciliation, Hommaire ordered a distribution of brandy, which completely won the hearts of the fellows, who a little before had been on the point of murdering us.

The more we became accustomed to the stillness and grandeur of the desert, the better we understood the Kalmuck's passionate love for the steppes and his kibitka. If happiness consist in freedom, no man is more happy than he. Habituated as he is to gaze over a boundless expanse, to endure no restriction, and to pitch his tent wherever his humour dictates, it is natural that he should feel ill at ease, cribbed, cabined, and confined, when removed from his native wastes, and that he should rather die by his own hand than live in exile. During our stay at Astrakhan, every one was talking of a recent event which afforded us an instance of the strong attachment of those primitive beings to the natal soil.

A Kalmuck chief killed his Cossack rival in a fit of jealousy, and instead of attempting to escape punishment by flight, he augmented his guilt by resisting a detachment which was sent to arrest him. Several of his servants aided him, but numbers prevailed; all were made prisoners and [Pg 214] conveyed to a fort, where they were to remain until their sentence should have been pronounced. A month afterwards, an order arrived for their transportation to Siberia, but by that time three-fourths of the captives had ceased to exist. Some had died of grief, others had eluded the vigilance of their gaolers, and killed themselves. The chief, however, had been too closely watched to allow of his making any attempt on his own life, but his obstinate silence, and the deep dejection of his haggard features, proved plainly that his despair was not less than that which had driven his companions to suicide.

When he was placed in the car to begin his journey, some Kalmucks were allowed to approach and bid him farewell. "What can we do for thee?" they whispered; the chief only replied, "You know." Thereupon one of the Kalmucks drew a pistol from his pocket, and before the bystanders had time to interpose, he blew out the chief's brains. The faces of the two other prisoners beamed with joy. "Thanks for him," they cried; "as for us, we shall never see Siberia."

I have not yet spoken of the Kalmuck *satzas*, and the desire we felt to become acquainted with them. From the moment we had entered the waste, we had never ceased to sweep the horizon in hopes to discover one of these mysterious tombs, from which the Kalmucks always keep aloof, in order not to profane them by their presence. These satzas are small temples erected on purpose to contain the remains of the high priests. When one of them dies, his body is burned, and his ashes are deposited with great pomp in the mausoleum prepared to receive them, along with a quantity of sacred images, which are so many good genii placed there to keep watch eternally over the dust of the holy personage.

Before we left Astrakhan, we had taken care to collect all possible information respecting these satzas, in order to visit one of them during our journey through the steppes, and rifle it, if possible, of its contents. But as the religious jealousy of our Kalmucks had hitherto prevented us from making any researches of the kind, we determined at last to trust to chance for the gratification of our wishes.

It was at one day's journey from Selenoi Sastava that we had for the first time the satisfaction of perceiving one of these monuments. Great was our delight, notwithstanding the difficulty of approaching it, and eluding the keen watch of our camel-drivers; nay, the obstacles in our way did but give the more zest to our pleasure. There were precautions to be taken, a secret to be kept, and novelty to be enjoyed; all this gave enhanced interest to the satza, and delightfully broke the monotony that had oppressed us for so many days. All our measures were therefore taken with extreme prudence and deliberation. We halted for breakfast at a reasonable distance from the satza, so that our camel-drivers might not conceive any suspicion; and during the repast [Pg 215] Anthony and the officer, who had received their instructions from us, took care to say that we intended to catch a few white herons before we resumed our march. The Kalmucks, being aware of the value we attached to those birds, heard the news as a matter of course, and rejoiced at the opportunity of indulging in a longer doze.

The satza stood in the midst of the sands, five or six versts from our halting-place. To reach it we had to make a long detour, in order to deceive the Kalmucks, in case they conceived any

suspicion of our design. All this was difficult enough, and extremely fatiguing; still I insisted on making one in the expedition, and was among the first mounted.

After two hours' marching and countermarching over the sands, in a tropical temperature that quite dispirited our beasts, we arrived in front of the satza, the appearance of which was any thing but attractive, and seemed far from deserving the pains we had taken to see it. It was a small square building, of a grey colour, with only two holes by way of windows. Fancy our consternation when we found that there was no door. We all marched round and round the impenetrable sanctuary in a state of ludicrous disappointment. Some means or other was to be devised for getting in, for the thought of returning without satisfying our curiosity never once entered our heads. The removal of some stones from one of the windows afforded us a passage, very inconvenient indeed, but sufficient.

Like conquerors we entered the satza through a breach, like Mahomet entering the capital of the Lower Empire; but we had not thought of the standard, which was indispensable for the strict accomplishment of the usual ceremonies. Instead thereof, Hommaire had recourse to his silk handkerchief, and planting it on the summit of the mausoleum, he took possession of it in the name of all present and future travellers.

This ceremony completed, we made a minute inspection of the interior of the tomb, but found in it nothing extraordinary: it appeared to be of great antiquity. Some idols of baked clay, like those we had seen at Prince Tumene's, were ranged along the wall. Several small notches, at regular intervals, contained images half decayed by damp. The floor of beaten earth, and part of the walls were covered with felt: such were the sole decorations we beheld.

Like generous victors we contented ourselves with taking two small statues, and a few images. According to the notions of the Kalmucks, no sacrilege can compare with that of which we were now guilty. Yet no celestial fire reduced us to ashes, and the Grand Llama allowed us to return in peace to our escort. But a great vexation befel us, for one of the idols was broken by the way, and we had to supplicate the Boukhans of the steppe to extend their protection to the other, during the rest of the journey.

Anthony and the officer were questioned at great length by the Kalmucks, who seemed possessed by some uneasy misgivings. On awaking, they had seen us return in the direction that [Pg 216] led from the satza, and this circumstance had much annoyed them. The display of some game, however, with which we had taken care to furnish ourselves, and the peremptory tone of the officer, cut short all their observations.

On the day after this memorable adventure, Anthony informed us that there was no more bread. The news obliged my husband to suspend his scientific operations, and proceed to Selenoi Sastava, from which we were distant only thirty-five versts. I cannot express the delight with which the Kalmucks and Cossacks again took possession of their camels. We need not wonder at any eccentricity of taste when we see men preferring the dislocating torture of riding those detestable trotters to the fatigue of walking fifteen or twenty versts a day. Hommaire, too, did not seem at all dissatisfied at taking his place again in the britchka. In short, we were all like a set of schoolboys that had got an unexpected holiday.

Before reaching the salt-works, where we intended to ask for hospitality, we passed some Kalmuck camps; carts loaded with salt appeared in different directions. The desert was assuming a more animated aspect, and we were no longer alone between the sky and the steppe.

On arriving at Selenoi, we were taken to the house of the sub-inspector of the salt-works (the inspector was absent). We found that functionary in a most miserable hole, compared with which the hut at Houidouk was a palace. We had never seen such horrid deficiency of all needful accommodation even among the poorest Russian peasants.

We were received by a little weasel-faced man in a uniform so old and tarnished, that neither the colour of the cloth nor the lace was distinguishable. His manifestations of bewildered joy—his volubility that savoured almost of insanity—and his incessant importunity, completed our disgust. The house, a heap of ruins, kept from falling by a few half-rotten posts, was abominably filthy. We were assigned the least dilapidated chamber, but it took more than two hours to clear away the clouds of dust raised by Anthony in sweeping it. The windows were without frames, the doors were broken, and furniture there was none. How we regretted that we had not encamped as usual on the steppe. We tried to quit the house, but the lieutenant-colonel (for our host bore that title in addition to that of sub-inspector) made such an outcry, that we were obliged, whether we would or not, to resign ourselves to his singular hospitality. To make up for the want of furniture, we did like the Turks, and made a carpet and cushions on the ground serve us for a bed and a divan.

Having completed these first arrangements, we proceeded to ask our host if he had bread enough to spare us some. Having learned from our escort the reason of our coming, he was prepared with his answer. Our presence was too great a piece of good luck for a man in his extreme state of destitution to allow of our escaping out of his hands until he had made the most [Pg 217] of us. Accordingly, he protested he could not possibly provide what we wanted in less than three or four days, and we had every reason to think we should be fortunate enough if we got out of his clutches so cheaply. The event proved that our suspicions were not unjust, and his conduct towards us, his indecorous demands, his cupidity and his thefts sufficiently explained the motives of his extravagant delight at our arrival.

On the first day of our sojourn with him, tempted by a fine wild goose which Anthony had roasted in the tent of his Kalmuck cook, he sent to beg permission to dine with us, and presently

arrived, holding in his hand a plate of paltry crusts dried in the oven, which he presented to us as excellent *zouckari*. During all the time of dinner he diverted us exceedingly by his insatiable gluttony and continual babbling: nor was it the least amusing part of the performance to see him despatch to his own share a half mouldy loaf he had sold us that morning for a ruble and a half.

The camel-drivers proceeded, during our stay at Selenoi, to a neighbouring camp to get fresh camels instead of their own, which had been fatigued by more than a fortnight's marching. They promised to return within twenty-four hours, but we did not see them again till two days had elapsed, and then in a very sorry plight. According to the account given by one of them, who was the first to arrive in great tribulation, they had behaved rather roughly to the Kalmucks who were to furnish them with the camels, and the latter had retaliated by beating them, tieing them hand and foot, and carrying them before one of their inspectors, who kept them in confinement until the next day. I never saw a more woe-begone set than these unfortunate camel-drivers appeared on their return: one of them had his head bandaged, another wore his arm in a sling, a third limped, and all had been very roughly handled. This adventure, and the gross cupidity of the lieutenant-colonel, were not the only things that occurred to amuse or interest us at Selenoi. On the third day of our stay, a great number of Kalmuck families suddenly arrived in strange disorder, and announced that the Circassians had just shown themselves three versts from the salt-works, on the borders of the Kouma.

Terrible was the consternation produced by this news. Both Kalmucks and Cossacks were terrified at the thought of having the Circassians so near them. Our whole escort came and implored us on their knees not to set out until something positive was known of the matter. But after many inquiries we were satisfied that the alarm was groundless, and we did not delay our preparations to depart.

Our host was surely the oddest being this world ever produced. In spite of ourselves, he was the sole object of our thoughts every moment in the day. Anthony, who had taken no little aversion to him, lost no opportunity of informing us of what he called his turpitudes. For instance, every morning he was sure to be seen in ambush behind the door until our samovar was [Pg 218] ready, when he would come in smiling with his cup and spoon in his hand, without even waiting for an invitation, seat himself at the table, and wash down his zouckaris with three or four cups of tea.

One day he begged a few spoonfuls of rum of my husband, for a sick person, as he said; but that evening his jollity and the redness of his face told us plainly what had become of our liquor. He even found it so much to his taste, that he entreated Anthony next day to give him a few more spoonfuls on the sly, telling him very seriously that the cat had spilled the first cup.

He gave us no peace night or day. Not content with deafening us by his incessant babbling, not a word of which we understood, the whim would sometimes seize him to sing all the Malorussian airs that came into his head. Long after we were in bed one night, we heard him pacing up and down the corridor like a sentinel. We tried hard to guess what might be the meaning of this new freak; but next day we discovered that it proceeded from his excessive vigilance and forethought. He failed not himself to tell us, that feeling uneasy at the news that the Circassians were abroad, he had kept guard over us with his musket shouldered, and that he was ready to perform the same duty every night.

Could we remain untouched by such conduct? Could we refuse such a man the parcels of coffee, tea, and sugar he had been so long soliciting with looks and hints? Unfortunately his requests followed so close on each other, that our gratitude was worn out at last. Anthony was furious every time we yielded to his importunities, and ceased not in revenge to torment him in a thousand ways.

One day the jealous dragoman, of his own authority, served up dinner an hour before the usual time, in order to baffle our host, who accordingly did not arrive until we were just quitting the table. I never saw a man more disappointed; he stood at the door, not knowing whether to enter or not; at last, doomed to forego his dinner, he knew nothing better to do in his despair than to go and cudgel his Kalmuck.

On the eve of our departure we learned that he had charged us for the bread he sold us more than double the price paid at the barracks. This occasioned a very lively altercation between him and Anthony, who was delighted to have such an opportunity of speaking out his mind. But the honourable functionary was not to be disconcerted by such a trifle; after listening with imperturbable coolness to the dragoman's reproaches, he replied in a very off-hand manner that the thing was not worth talking about, for when people travel, they must make up their minds to pay a ducat in most cases for what is not worth more than twenty copeks.

He became extremely sulky when he observed our preparations to depart. He no longer talked, but contented himself with restlessly watching all that was going on in the room; peering at every article of our baggage, as if he would look through and through it. Whenever our men carried any [Pg 219] thing to the carriage, he followed them with angry looks, as if they were committing a robbery upon him. At last, on the sixth day after our arrival at Selenoi Sastava, we had the pleasure to turn our backs on the lieutenant-colonel and his miserable cabin. I doubt if the fear of the Circassians would have been able to detain us longer in such a spot.

The dryness of the atmosphere, which had lasted from the time we left Houidouk, was succeeded by heavy rain when we reached Selenoi, and this was the chief cause of our long stay there. On the day of our departure the sky looked rather threatening, notwithstanding which we stepped into the carriage with inexpressible delight. I would rather have taken my chance of ten

deluges in the open steppe, than have spent twenty-four hours more in Selenoi; but fortune was pleased to compensate us in some degree for our recent vexations by affording us the most agreeable weather that travellers could desire. The rain had given the sand a pleasant degree of solidity, and had, besides, spread a mild and subdued tone over the steppes that was peculiarly agreeable. Autumn was now come, with its sharp morning air and its melancholy tints; and accustomed as we had been to the scorching reverberation of the sunshine, we felt as if an earthly paradise was opening before us. In one day more the sky was cleared of its last vapours, and reappeared in all its azure purity, streaked only with a few rich and warm-coloured clouds, that seemed to take away the aridity of the desert. But the sun had lost much of its power, and though it shone down on us without obstruction, we reached the sources of the Manitch without being much inconvenienced by the heat.

These sources are formed by a depression of about twenty-five versts in diameter, towards which converge several small ravines. They were quite dry when we arrived at them, and all the vicinity, intercepted by small brackish lakes, displayed no kind of vegetation. The total want of water and fodder hindered us from proceeding to the Don, as we had intended, and my husband was obliged to suspend his levelling operations. It was not, of course, without sore regret that he put off the solution of his great scientific problem until the following year. Our men were in good spirits, our health excellent, and we were by no means prepared to expect such an obstacle as that which now stopped us in a course we had pursued with such perseverance; but nature commanded, and we were forced to obey.

We passed the night near the sources in the midst of a total solitude, and early next morning we retraced our steps, and proceeded towards the Kouma, distant about seventy-five versts; the men were all mounted again on their camels, and seemed well pleased to have no more pedestrian labours in prospect; for with all their willingness, they had not been able to accustom their limbs to that sort of service. We encamped for two nights successively among Kalmucks, for the steppes grew less lonely as we departed from our first course. These good people heard the [Pg 220] story of our journey through their plains with eager curiosity. As soon as supper was over they squatted themselves round our kibitka, lending a religious attention to the most improbable tales, for our men, who took upon them the office of historiographers, paid very little respect to truth in their compositions. One of our camel-drivers, especially, had been endowed by Heaven with an imagination of extraordinary fecundity. It was his peculiar office to amuse the whole escort during the bivouac, and when he had to do with a new audience, his captivating eloquence attained the utmost limits of possibility, enchanting even those who heard him every day.

The last encampment in which we passed the night was one of the most considerable we had seen up to that time. The country, indeed, had entirely changed its aspect; we had left the dreary sands behind us, with the Caspian and the Manitch. An abundant vegetation, and undulations of the ground that became more and more decided as we proceeded, gladdened the sight, and accounted for the numerous encampments we discovered in all directions. Herds of horses, camels, and oxen spotted all the surface of the steppe, and bespoke the wealth of the hordes to which they belonged. We were not in the least molested by the latter. These good Kalmucks were delighted to receive us in their tents, and never attempted to steal the least thing from us. Their desires and their wants are so very limited! To tame a wild horse, to roam from steppe to steppe on their camels, to smoke and drink koumis, to shut themselves up in winter in the midst of ashes and smoke, and to addict themselves to the superstitious practices of a religion they cannot understand,—such is the whole sum of their lives.

I had the curiosity frequently to enter their kibitkas, but I never saw in any of them the dirt I had been told of. The Russian kates are infinitely more untidy and squalid that the interiors of these tents. Among other visits we made one to the wife of a subaltern chief, and as she had been warned of our coming, she was dressed in her best finery. She sat with her legs tucked under her on a piece of felt, with a child before her, and a servant-woman motionless at her side. She was delighted to receive us, and thanked us with much cordiality. We complimented her on the neatness and good order of her tent, at which she seem gratified in the highest degree.

We remarked with surprise that there was not one priest in all the camps we passed through, but we afterwards learned that they were all gone northwards to the Sarpa, where there were much finer pastures, and where one was not tormented by the myriads of gnats that abound in those countries in autumn. We ourselves had much to endure from those terrible insects all the way to Vladimirofka, and we were often so annoyed by them as to wish ourselves back among the sands of the Manitch.

Even if the want of water had not put a stop to our journey, the state of our provisions was such that I hardly know what we could have done. Our bacon, rice, coffee, and biscuits had long [Pg 221] disappeared; we had nothing left but a small stock of tea and sugar, and for the rest we were dependent on the hawk, which did wonders daily in supplying the deficiencies of our commissariat. Our last repast under the tent consisted only of game cooked in all sorts of ways. Anthony, who to his functions as dragoman, added those of butler, cook, and scullion, put forth all his powers on that occasion: but we had been surfeited with game; we had lived upon it so long that the sight of a wild goose was enough to give us a fit of indigestion. It was, therefore, with exceeding joy that on reaching the house of an inspector of Kalmucks, we found ourselves seated at a table covered with vegetables and pastry.

The house of that officer (a very agreeable young Russian who spoke Kalmuck like a native) was situated at a little distance from the Kouma in a magnificent meadow. For a long while we had beheld no such landscape, and though we were still on the verge of the desert, that little white house with green window blinds, and the two or three handsome trees around it,

completely changed the physiognomy of the country in our eyes.

The inspector gave us a good deal of information respecting the proprietor of Vladimirofka, of whom we had already heard at Astrakhan, and he offered to accompany us to the establishment, which was barely ten versts distant. It was there we proposed to rest and recruit ourselves after the fatigues of our journey, and to take a final leave of our escort.

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# CHAPTER XXIV.

## REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE KALMUCKS.

The account we have given of our journey on the banks of the Volga, and the steppes of the Caspian, will have afforded the reader an idea of the strange and striking habits of the nomade hordes that wander with their flocks over those vast deserts, and worship their Llamite deities with all the pomp and fervour of the nations of Thibet. Our historical and political sketch will serve as a complement to those primary notions. It is by no means our intention, however, to give a complete history of the Kalmucks; such a work would be too extensive, and would require too long and arduous researches to be compressed within our limits. At present we shall only cast a rapid glance over the past history of the great Mongol families; we shall dwell principally upon their actual condition, and then comparing our own observations with the statements of preceding writers, we shall try to cast some new light on the history of the Asiatic races that occupy the south of Russia. [Pg 222]

Pallas and B. Bergmann, the only travellers who have taken pains to investigate the history of the Kalmucks in the government of Astrakhan, have left us some valuable details respecting their manners and customs, and their religion. But Pallas travelled in 1769, and circumstances have greatly changed since his day. B. Bergmann visited the Kalmucks in the early part of this century, and it is to be regretted that his work, which contains such important information respecting the languages and the religious books of the Mongols, takes no notice whatever of any matter connected with their political administration and organisation.

It is not surprising that so little is yet known of the Kalmuck hordes, for excursions through the remote Steppes of the Caspian Sea present difficulties and hardships which few travellers can withstand. One must unquestionably be impelled by a strong motive, to traverse those immense plains which are almost everywhere destitute of fresh water, where one often marches 100 leagues without seeing a trace of human life, and where the soil, bare of vegetation, offers no other variety than sands and brackish lakes. Yet in order to form an exact idea of the inhabitants of these deserts, of their character, and ways of life, it is necessary to dwell beneath their tents. It is in the vicinity of Sarepta that the traveller arriving from the north meets the first Kalmuck kibitkas. The camps then stretch away across the Manitch and the Kouma towards the foot of the great Caucasian chain. We have explored all that extent of country, have visited the remotest parts of the steppes, and seen the Kalmucks in an advanced social stage at Prince Tumene's, and in a primitive condition beneath their tents. It is thus we have been enabled to collect our information respecting the history and present condition of this unique people of Europe.

According to the unanimous opinion of all historians, the regions adjoining the Altai mountains, and especially those south of that great chain, appear to have been from time immemorial the cradle and domain of the Mongol tribes. At first divided into two branches, always at war with each other, the Mongols were at last united into one great nation under the celebrated Genghis Khan, and thus was laid the basis of that formidable power which was to invade almost the whole of eastern Europe. But after the death of Genghis Khan, the old discord broke out with renewed violence, and only ended with the mutual destruction of the two great Mongol tribes. The Mongols proper were forced to submit to the Chinese, whom they had formerly vanquished, and the four nations that formed the Dœrbœn Œrœt, scattered themselves over all the north of Asia. The Koïtes, after long wars, spread over Mongolia and Thibet; the Touemmoites or Toummouts settled along the great wall of China, where they remain to this day; the Bourga Burates, who already in the time of Genghis Khan inhabited the mountains adjacent to Lake Barkal, are now beneath the Russian sceptre; the Eleuthes, the last of the four, are better known in Europe and Western Asia under the appellation of Kalmucks. [Pg 223]

According to ancient national traditions, the greater part of the Eleuthes made an expedition westward, and were lost in the Caucasus, long before the time of Genghis Khan. It is to that epoch that some historians refer the origin of the word Kalmuck, which they derive from *kalimak*, *severed*, *left behind*, and they suppose this designation was applied to all those Eleuthes who did not accompany their brethren westward. According to Bergmann, *kalimak* signifies likewise *unbeliever*, and this name may very naturally have been given by the people of Asia who adhered to the primitive religion, to the Eleuthes, when they had become converts to Buddhism. We leave to competent judges the task of deciding which is the more rational or probable explanation.

The Eleuthes or Kalmucks allege that they dwelt in old times in the countries lying between Koho Noor (Blue Lake) and Thibet. Their division into four great tribes, each under an independent prince, dates probably from the dissolution of the Mongol power. These tribes, whose remains exist to this day, are the Koshotes, Derbetes, Soongars, and Torghouts. The Koshotes, whose chiefs consider themselves to be lineally descended from a brother of Genghis Khan, were partly destroyed in intestine wars with the Torghouts and Soongars, and partly subjugated by China. Only a small remnant of them accompanied the Derbetes to the banks of the Volga.

The Soongars originally united with the Derbetes, constituted the most formidable tribe in Asia, in the beginning of the seventeenth century. Their princes, who resided on the river Ily, had then subdued all the other Kalmucks; they could bring 60,000 fighting men into the field, and the Khirghis and Turkmans paid them tribute. Their pride augmented with their success, and a war they undertook against the Chinese Mongols became the cause of their downfall. The Soongars were enslaved or scattered, and a branch of the Derbetes shared their fate. It was about this period that the first emigration of Kalmucks took place into Russia; 50,000 Soongar or Torgout families encamped on the banks of the Volga, in 1630, and Astrakhan owed its safety only to the death of their prince Cho Orloëk, who was slain in an assault on the town. Subsequently, however, about 1665, Daitchink, the son of Cho Orloëk, was forced to acknowledge himself a vassal of the empire, and to swear fealty. His example was followed by his son. But this submission was merely nominal, and did not at all affect the real independence of the Mongol hordes.

The first Kalmuck emigrations towards the west were speedily followed by others. The Derbetes and other Torghouts arrived in the steppes of the Caspian and Volga to the number of more than 10,000 tents. In 1665, Aiouki Khan, grandson of Daitchink, an enterprising and [Pg 224] ambitious man, succeeded, in defiance of Russia, in extending his sway over all the Kalmuck tribes. This chief pushed his excursions up to the foot of the Caucasus, and being opposed on his march by the Nogais of the Kouban, he completely defeated them in a general engagement. The bodies of his slain foes were cast by his orders into a pit dug under a great tumulus, situated on the field of battle, and still known in the country by the name of *Bairin Tolkon* (Mountain of Joy), bestowed on it by the victorious khan in memory of his triumph.

Aiouki's forces then took part in Peter the Great's famous expedition against Persia, in which they rendered great services to Russia. The Kalmuck prince had a brilliant interview on this occasion with the Tzar. Peter received him on board his galley on the Volga, near Saratof, and treated him and his wife with all the honours due to sovereigns. Aiouki was then at the height of his power, and cared little for the oath of allegiance to Russia taken by his predecessors. Peter required 10,000 men of him, and he furnished 5000. It was about this period that an embassy, under the special protection of Russia, arrived from China, by way of Siberia, and waited on Aiouki Khan, ostensibly for the purpose of treating with him for the restoration of one of his nephews, who was detained at the imperial court for reasons unknown to us. But we believe that the principal object of the embassy was to keep up political relations with the Kalmucks, whom the Chinese government wished to bring back under its own sway. Aiouki, following the example of his predecessors, had not broken off all communication with the celestial empire, and had even sent rich presents to the emperor in 1698. It was, therefore, important to cherish this favourable disposition, of which the Chinese hoped to avail themselves sooner or later. Of course it is not to be supposed that these views were avowed officially; and we cannot but wonder at the indifference of the Russian government, or the adroitness with which the Chinese availed themselves of the aid of Russia herself to compass their ends. But in the various interviews between Aiouki and Toulichen, the head of the embassy, the question of keeping up an intimacy between the two nations was largely discussed, and all necessary measures were arranged to avoid awakening the suspicions of Russia, and thus closing the only means of communication that lay open to them.[37]

Aiouki reigned about fifty years. After his death, in 1724, the old dissensions broke out again among the Kalmucks; Russia made good use of the opportunity to break down the independence of the hordes by directly interfering in their domestic affairs, and their princes soon became subject to the imperial sceptre. Thenceforth the dignity of khan was conferred only by the [Pg 225] Muscovite tzars, and the tribes were put under the special control of a Russian commander called a *pristof*.

After a long series of contests and intrigues, Dondouk Ombo, the son-in-law of Aiouki, was named khan, to the prejudice of Aiouki's grandson. Under this prince internal peace was restored among the hordes, and the Kalmucks did good service to Russia in the campaigns against the Nogaïs, and other inhabitants of the Kouban. But quarrels broke out again on the death of Dondouk Ombo in 1741. His children, who were minors, were set aside, and his ambitious and intriguing widow contrived to have Dondouk Dachi, her youngest brother, and grandson of the celebrated Aiouki, declared vice-khan. The new chief was entirely devoted to Russia, and his submissiveness was rewarded after the lapse of fifteen years by promotion to the rank of khan; but he enjoyed that dignity only four years. His son Oubacha succeeded him as vice-khan in January, 1761.

In Oubacha's reign new hordes arrived in Europe, and the Kalmucks were reinforced by 10,000 tents, commanded by Chereng Taidchi. The various tribes, which consisted of more than 80,000 families, and possessed innumerable herds of cattle, extended at that time from the shores of the Jaïk to the Don, and from Zaritzin, on the Volga, to the foot of the northern slopes of the Caucasus. Oubacha paid no tribute to Russia; he was regarded rather as an ally than a vassal,

and was only required to supply cavalry to the imperial armies in time of war.

Oubacha vigorously seconded the Russians in their expedition against the Turks and Nogaïs. His army amounted to 30,000 horse, and one of its detachments figured even in the celebrated siege of Otchakof. It was on the return of the Kalmucks from these campaigns that their celebrated emigration took place, when nearly half a million of men, women, and children, headed by their prince, quitted the banks of the Volga with their cattle, and set out across the most arid regions in quest of their old country.

The flight of the Kalmucks has been variously explained. B. Bergmann attributes it solely to the vindictiveness of Zebeck Dorchi, a relation of Oubacha's, who had been frustrated in his attempt to raise himself to sovereign power. After fruitless attempts at the court of the Empress Elizabeth, he had nevertheless been named first *sargatchi*, or councillor at the court of his rival. The imperial government hoped by this means to curb the ambition of Oubacha, whose power it had abridged in 1761, by deciding that the sargatchis, or members of the khan's council, should be attached to the ministry of foreign affairs, with an annual salary of 100 rubles. According to Bergmann, Zebeck Dorchi made no account of his new dignity, and unable to forgive Russia for not having favoured his pretensions, he joined the hordes with a full determination to take signal vengeance. He would induce the Kalmucks to go over to China, and thus deprive the empire of [Pg 226] more than 500,000 subjects, and the army of the greater part of its best cavalry, and make all the neighbouring towns feel severely the loss of their cattle. Such, according to Bergmann, was Zebeck Dorchi's project, to realise which he counted solely on the natural fickleness of the Kalmucks, and his own active intrigues. This was certainly a very extraordinary scheme of vengeance, and one we can hardly credit, notwithstanding Bergmann's assertions. Zebeck Dorchi's aim being to secure the supreme power, it would have been folly for him to choose such means. It would have been much more to the purpose to have informed against Oubacha at the moment when the latter was making his arrangements for quitting Russia. Such a service would have had its reward, and the informer would undoubtedly have supplanted his rival. This whole explanation of the affair given by Bergmann, rests on no one positive fact, and can only have been devised by a man writing under Russian influence, and consequently forced to disguise the truth.

At the period of the Kalmuck emigration Catherine II. filled the throne, and the Russian government was beginning to adopt those principles of uniformity which so highly characterise its present policy. Moreover, it was really impossible to allow that the whole southern portion of the empire should be given up to turbulent hordes, which, though nominally subjected to the crown, still indulged their propensity to pillage without scruple. Placed as they were between the central and the southern provinces, and occupying almost all the approaches to the Caucasus, the Kalmucks were destined, of necessity, to lose their independence, and fall beneath the immediate yoke of Russia. Catherine's intentions were soon no secret, and Oubacha saw that he must escape by flight from the encroachments of his powerful neighbours, if he would save what remained to him of the primitive authority of the khans. If we reflect, moreover, that the power of the Kalmuck princes had been considerably abridged by the new organisation of their administrative council; that Colonel Kitchinskoi, then grand pristof, had excited the general indignation of the tribes by his harsh conduct; that the political and military exigencies of Russia were continually on the increase; we shall have no difficulty in comprehending the real causes of the emigration of these Mongol tribes. Certainly it required all these combined motives to induce the Kalmucks to undertake such a journey through desert regions, the inhabitants of which were their natural enemies. Nevertheless, we believe the Chinese government was not altogether unconcerned in bringing about Oubacha's determination; for, as we shall see by and by, the emperor had already, in Aiouki's time, sent the mandarin Toulischin to the Kalmucks, to assure them of his protection, in case they would return to their native country.[38]

It was on the 5th of January, 1771, the day appointed by the high priests, that Oubacha began [Pg 227] his march, with 70,000 families. Most of the hordes were then assembled in the steppes on the left bank of the Volga, and the whole multitude followed him. Only 15,000 families remained in Russia, because the Volga remained unfrozen to an unusual late period, and prevented them from crossing over to the rendezvous. Oubacha arrived, without impediment, beyond the Jaïk, but was afterwards vigorously assailed by the Cossacks of the Ural and the Khirghis, and lost many men. After two months' marching, the exhausted hordes encamped on the Irguitch, which falls into Lake Aksakal, to the north of the sea of Aral. Next they had to cross the frightful desert of Chareh Ousoun, where they were exposed to all the torments of thirst, and suffered indescribable disasters; after which they arrived at Lake Palkache Nor, where many of them fell in a last encounter with the Khirghis. Oubacha then forced a passage through the country of the Burats, and at last reached China, after a march of eight months. Strange to say, the Muscovite government took no energetic means to arrest the fugitives, and detain them in Russia. General Traubenberg, indeed, who was in command at Orenberg, was sent in pursuit of them, but failed totally, whether from incapacity or otherwise. Thus was accomplished the most extraordinary emigration of modern times; the empire was suddenly deprived of a pastoral and warlike people, whose habits accorded so well with the Caspian steppes, and the regions in which many thousand families had fed their innumerable flocks and herds for a long series of years, were left desolate and unpeopled.

We will now extract that portion of the Memoirs of the Jesuits, Vol. I., in which Father Amiot recounts the arrival of the Kalmucks in China, dated Pekin, November 8th, 1772. I copy this curious document from Father Amiot's original manuscript.[39]

"In the thirty-sixth year of Kien Long, that is to say, in the year of Jesus Christ, 1771, all the

Tatars[40] composing the nation of the Torgouths[41] arrived, after encountering a thousand perils, in the plains watered by the Ily, entreating the favour to be admitted among the vassals of the great Chinese empire. By their own account, they have abandoned for ever, and without [Pg 228] regret, the sterile banks of the Volga and the Jaïk, along which the Russians had formerly allowed them to settle, near where the two rivers empty themselves into the Caspian. They have abandoned them, they say, *to come and admire more closely the brilliant lustre of the heavens, and at last to enjoy, like so many others, the happiness of having henceforth for master the greatest prince in the world*. Notwithstanding the many battles in which they have been obliged to engage, defensively or offensively, with those through whose country they had to pass, and at whose expense they were necessarily compelled to live; notwithstanding the depredations committed on them by the vagrant Tatars, who repeatedly attacked and plundered them on their march; notwithstanding the enormous fatigues endured by them in traversing more than 10,000 leagues, through one of the most difficult countries; notwithstanding hunger, thirst, misery, and an almost general scarcity of common necessaries, to which they were exposed during their eight months' journey, their numbers still amounted to 50,000 families when they arrived, and these 50,000 families, to use the language of the country, counted 300,000 mouths, without sensible error. Among the Russians carried off by them at their departure, were 100 soldiers, at the head of whom was a Monsieur Dudin, Doudin, or Toutim,[42] as the name is pronounced here. This name is probably not unknown in our part of the world. It is not at all like the common Russian names. Is it not that of some expatriated Frenchman, who had found employment among the Russians? Be this as it may, had this officer been still alive in last August, when the emperor gave evidence to the Torgouth princes whom he had summoned to Gé Ho, where he was enjoying the pleasures of the chase, he would certainly have been sent back with honour to Muscovy. His majesty did not disdain to inquire personally as to this fact. 'Is it true,' said he to one of the chiefs of the nation, 'that before your departure you plundered the possessions of the Russians, and carried off one of their officers and 100 of their soldiers?' 'We did so,' replied the Torgouth prince, 'and could not help doing so, under the circumstances in which we were placed. As for the Russian officer and his 100 and odd soldiers, there is every reason to think that they all perished by the way. I remember that when the division was made, eight of them fell to me. I will inquire of my people whether any of these Russians are still alive, and if so, I will send them to your majesty immediately on my return to Ily.'

"This year, 1772, the thirty-seventh of the reign of Kien Long, those of the Eleuths who were formerly dispersed over the vast regions known by the general name of Tartary, some hordes of [Pg 229] Pourouths, and the rest of the nation of the Torgouths, came like the others, and voluntarily submitted to a yoke which no one sought to impose on them. They were in number 30,000 families, which, added to the 50,000 of the preceding year, make a total of 480,000 mouths, who will unite their voices with those of the other subjects of the empire in proclaiming the marvels of one of the most glorious reigns that has been since the foundation of the monarchy.

"So extraordinary and unexpected an event, happening when the empress mother's eighty-sixth year was celebrated here with a pomp becoming all the majesty of him who gives law to this empire, has been regarded by the emperor as an infallible mark of the goodness of that supreme heaven, of which he calls himself the son, and from which he glories in having unceasingly received the most signal favours since his accession to the throne: it is in this spirit he has caused the fact to be enrolled in the private archives of his nation, archives which, in the course of ages, will, perhaps, contrast in many points with those which will be published by the Chinese historians, and with those, too, which some neighbouring nations may publish with reference to the same facts. The latter will, perhaps, impute political views and manœuvres which have had no existence, whilst the former, in spite of certain appearances which may suggest the probability of intrigues and negotiations practised for the accomplishment of a preconcerted design, nevertheless state nothing but the truth, which will be somewhat hard to believe. If the testimony of a contemporary, and, as it were, ocular witness, who has no prejudice or interest in the matter, were necessary to establish that the fact I am about to speak of is among the number of those which are true in all circumstances, I would freely give it without fearing that any man, of the least information, could ever accuse me of error or partiality. Be this as it may, until such time as history shall acquaint posterity with an event which he regards as one of the most glorious of his reign, the emperor has caused the statement and the date to be inscribed on stone in four languages spoken by the various nations subject to him, viz., the Mantchous, Mongols, Torgouths, and Chinese. This lapidary monument is to be erected at Ily before the eyes of the Torgouths, that it may be seen by all those nations I have named. Having had an opportunity of procuring a copy from the original, taken by one of those who were employed in making the Mantchou inscription, I have ventured to translate it. It would doubtless be very acceptable even as a literary specimen, had I been able to preserve in our language that noble simplicity, that energy and precision, which the emperor has given it in his own tongue. Its contents are nearly as follows:

"'*Records of the transmigration of the Torgouths, who voluntarily, and of their own full accord, came bodily as a nation, and submitted themselves to the empire of China.*

"'Those who, after having revolted, reflecting uneasily on a crime which they cannot yet be [Pg 230] made to expiate, but for which they see full well that they will be punished sooner or later, beg permission to return beneath the yoke of obedience, are men who submit through fear; they are constrained subjects; those who having the option to undergo the yoke or not, yet come and submit themselves to it voluntarily, and of their own full accord, even when there is no thought of imposing it upon them, are men who have submitted only because such is their pleasure; they are subjects who have freely given themselves to him whom they have chosen to govern them.

"'All those who now compose the nation of the Torgouths, undismayed by the dangers of a long and toilsome journey, filled with the sole desire of procuring for the future a better manner of life and a happier lot, have abandoned the places where they dwelt far beyond our frontier, have traversed with unshakable courage a space of more than ten thousand leagues, and have ranged themselves, of their own accord, among the number of my subjects. Their submission to me is not a submission inspired by fear, but a voluntary and free submission, if ever such there was.

"'After having pacified the western frontiers of my dominions, I caused the lands of my domain which are on the Ily to be put under tillage, and I diminished the tribute heretofore imposed on the neighbouring Mahometans. I enacted that the Hasacks and the Pourouths should together form the external limits of the empire on that side, and should be governed on the footing of the foreign hordes. As regards the nations of the Antchiyen and the Badakchan, as they are still more remote, I determined to leave them free to pay or not to pay tribute.

"'No one needs blush when he can limit his desires; no one has occasion to fear when he knows how to desist in due time. Such are the sentiments that actuate me. In all places under heaven, to the remotest corners beyond the sea, there are men who obey under the names of slaves or subjects. Shall I persuade myself that they are all submitted to me, and that they own themselves my vassals? Far from me be so chimerical a pretension. What I persuade myself, and what is strictly true, is that the Torgouths, without any interference on my part, have come of their own full accord to live henceforth under my laws. Heaven has, no doubt, inspired them with this design; they have only obeyed Heaven in putting it in force. I should do wrong not to commemorate this event in an authentic monument.

"'The Torgouths are a branch of the Eleuths. Four branches formerly constituted the entire nation of the Tchong Kars.[43] It would be difficult to explain their common origin, respecting which moreover nothing very certain is known. These four branches separated, and each formed [Pg 231] a distinct nation. That of the Eleuths, the chief of them all, gradually subdued the others, and continued until the time of Kang Hi, to exercise over them the pre-eminence it had usurped. Tsé Ouang Raptan then reigned over the Eleuths, and Aiouki over the Torgouths. These two leaders, at variance with each other, had disputes, to which Aiouki, the weaker of the two, feared he should be the unhappy victim. He conceived the design of withdrawing for ever from beneath the sway of the Eleuths.[44] He took secret measures to secure the flight he meditated, and escaped with all his followers to the lands under the sway of the Russians, who permitted him to settle in the country of Etchil.[45]

"'Cheng Tsou Jin Hoang Ty, my grandfather, wishing to be informed of the true reasons that had induced Aiouki thus to expatriate himself, sent him the mandarin Toulichen[46] and some others to assure him of his protection in case he desired to return to the country where he had formerly dwelt. The Russians, to whom Toulichen was ordered to apply for permission to pass through their country, granted it without difficulty; but as they gave him no information as to what he was in quest of, it took him three years and some months to fulfil his commission. It was not until after his return that the desired information respecting Aiouki and his people was at last possessed.

"'Oubacha, who is now khan of the Torgouths, is great grandson of Aiouki. The Russians, never ceasing to require soldiers of him to be incorporated in their troops, having at last taken his own son from him as a hostage, and being besides of a different religion from himself, and making no account of that of the Lamas which the Torgouths profess, Oubacha and his people finally determined to shake off a yoke which was daily becoming more and more insupportable.

"'After having secretly deliberated among themselves, they resolved to quit an abode where they had to suffer so much, and come and dwell in the countries subject to China, where the religion of Fo is professed.

"'In the beginning of the eleventh moon of last year, they began their march with their women and children and all their baggage, traversed the country of the Hasacks, passed along the shores of Lake Palkache Nor and through the adjoining deserts; and towards the close of the [Pg 232] sixth moon of this year, after having completed more than 10,000 leagues in the eight months of their wayfaring, they at last arrived on the frontiers of Chara Pen, not far from the banks of the Ily. I was already aware that the Torgouths were on their march to submit themselves to me, the news having been brought me shortly after their departure from Etchil. I then reflected that Iletou, general of the troops at Ily, having already been charged with other very important affairs, it was to be feared that he could not regulate those of the new comers with all the requisite attention.

"'Chouhédé, one of the general's councillors, was at Ouché, employed in maintaining order among the Mahometans. As he was at hand to attend to the Torgouths, I ordered him to repair to Ily, that he might use his best efforts to establish them solidly.

"'Those who fancy they see danger everywhere, failed not to make their representations to me on this matter. 'Among those who are come to make their submission,' said they, with one voice, 'is the perfidious Chereng. That traitor, after having deceived Tangalou, put him to death miserably, and took refuge among the Russians. He who has once deceived may do so again. Let us beware; we cannot be too much on our guard. To give welcome to one who comes of his own accord to make submission, is to give reception to an enemy.' Upon these representations I conceived some distrust, and gave orders that some preparations should be made to meet every contingency. I reflected, however, with all the maturity required by an affair of such importance, and my reiterated reflections at last convinced me that what I was told to fear could not possibly come to pass. Could Chereng alone have been able to persuade a whole nation? Could he have

put Oubacha and all the Torgouths, his subjects, in motion? What likelihood is there that so many men would willingly have inconvenienced themselves to follow a private individual—would have entered into his views—and run the risk of perishing of hunger and wretchedness with him? Besides this, the Russians, from whose sway they have ventured to withdraw themselves, are like myself, masters of a great realm. If the Torgouths were come with the intention of insulting my frontiers, and settling there by force, could they hope that I would leave them undisturbed there? Can they have persuaded themselves that I would not stir to expel them? And if they are expelled, whither can they retire? Can they dare to hope that the Russians, whom they have treated with ingratitude in abandoning them as they have done, will condescend to receive them back with impunity, and allow them to resume possession of the ground they accorded to them formerly? Had the Torgouths been actuated by any other motive than that of wishing to submit sincerely to me, they would be without support on either side; they would be between two fires. Of ten arguments for and against, there are nine to show that there is nothing in their proceeding to [Pg 233] excite suspicion. Among these ten arguments is there one tending to prove that they entertain any secret views? If so, the future will unmask them, and then I will act as circumstances shall require. What was to happen at the time I made these reflections, has happened at last. It has proved the accuracy of my reasoning, and exactly verified what I had predicted.

"'Nevertheless I neglected none of the precautions that seemed to me necessary. I ordered Chouhédé to erect forts and redoubts in the most important places, and have all the passes strictly guarded. I enjoined him to exert himself personally in procuring necessary provisions of all kinds in the interior, whilst fit persons, carefully chosen by him, should make every arrangement for securing quiet without.

"'The Torgouths arrived; and at once found lodging, food, and all the conveniences they could have enjoyed each in his own dwelling. Nor was this all; the principal men among them, who were to come in person and pay homage to me, were conducted with honour and free of expense by the imperial post-roads to the place where I then was. I saw them, spoke to them, and was pleased that they should enjoy the pleasures of the chase with me; and after the days allotted to that recreation were ended, they repaired in my suite to Ge Ho. There I gave them the banquet of ceremony, and made them the ordinary presents with the same pomp and state as I am accustomed to employ when I give solemn audience to Tchering and the chiefs of the Tourbeths (*the Derbetes of the Russians*), of whom he is the leader.

"'It was at Ge Ho, in those charming scenes where Kang Hi, my grandfather, made himself an abode to which he might retire during the hot season, and at the same time put himself in a position to watch more closely over the welfare of the people beyond the western frontiers of the empire; it was, I say, in that delightful spot, that having conquered the whole of the country of the Eleuths, I received the sincere homage of Tchering and his Tourbeths, who alone among the Eleuths, had remained true to me. It is not necessary to go back many years to reach the term of that epoch; the memory of it is still quite recent.

"'Who would have said it! When I had the least reason to expect it—when I was not even thinking of it—that branch of the Eleuths which had been the first to separate from the trunk, the Torgouths who had voluntarily expatriated themselves to live under an alien and remote dominion, those very Torgouths came of themselves and submitted to me of their own free will; and it was at Ge Ho, near the venerable spot where rest the ashes of my grandfather, that I had the unsought opportunity of solemnly admitting them among the number of my subjects.

"'Now, indeed, it may be said, without fear of overstepping the truth, that the whole nation of the Mongols is subject to our dynasty of Tay Tsing, since it is from it in fact that all the hordes composing it now receive laws. My august grandfather conjectured this result; he foresaw that it [Pg 234] would happen one day; what would have been his delight to know that that day was actually come!

"'It is under the reign of my humble person that the conjectures of that great prince are realised, and what he had foreseen is fully accomplished. What token can I give him of gratitude proportioned to what I owe him! What profound homage, what respectful sentiments can clear my account with Heaven for the constant protection with which it deigns to honour me! I tremble under the apprehension of not bearing sufficiently at heart those obligations with which I ought to be wholly filled, or of not being sufficiently attentive to fulfil them entirely. After all I have no thought of imputing to my own virtue and merits the voluntary submission, or the arrival of the Torgouths in my dominions. I will strive to behave, in this respect, as well as I possibly can. No sooner were the Torgouths arrived than the representations began anew. 'These people,' I was told 'are rebels who have withdrawn from the sway of the Russians; we are not free to receive them. It is to be feared that if we gave them a favourable reception it would occasion animosities and some troubles on our frontiers.' 'Let not that alarm you,' I replied. 'Chereng was formerly my subject; he revolted and took refuge among the Russians, and they received him. Repeatedly did I request them to give him up to me, but they would not. And now Chereng, acknowledging his fault, comes and surrenders voluntarily. What I here say, I have already said to the Russians in the fullest detail, and I have completely reduced them to silence.'

"'What! was it to be supposed that for considerations no way binding upon me, I should have suffered so many thousand human beings to perish, after they had arrived on the verge of our frontiers almost half dead with wretchedness and famine! 'But,' it was objected, 'they have plundered by the way; they have carried off provisions and cattle.' And suppose they have, how could they have preserved their lives without doing so? Who would have supplied them with the means of existence? 'Watch so well,' says an old Chinese proverb, 'that you may never be surprised; keep such careful guard that perfect security may reign even in your deserts.'

"'With regard to the Ily country where I have allowed them to take up their abode, though I have very recently caused a town to be built there, that place is not yet strong enough to protect the frontiers in that direction, and hinder the brigands from continuing to insult them. Those who inhabit the country are employed only in tilling the ground and feeding cattle. How could they protect themselves? How could they secure the peace of those deserts? General Iletou being informed of the approach of the Torgouths, failed not to acquaint me with the fact. If through fear of the uncertain future, or considerations unsuited to the circumstances of the case, I had determined to have the border strictly guarded, and to have a stop put to the march of the Torgouths, what should I have gained thereby? Driven to despair, would they not have rushed [Pg 235] into the most violent excesses? An ordinary private individual would be justly stigmatised as inhuman, were he to behold strangers from a far country exhausted with fatigue, bowed down by wretchedness, and ready to breathe out their last gasp, and not take the trouble to succour them; and shall a great prince, whose first duty it is to try to imitate Heaven in his manner of governing men, shall he leave a whole nation that implores his clemency to perish for want of aid? Far from us be such vile thoughts! farther still be conduct conformable to them! No, we will never adopt such cruel sentiments. The Torgouths came, I received them; they wanted even the commonest necessaries of life; I provided them with every thing abundantly; I opened for them my granaries and my coffers, my stalls and my studs. Out of the former I bestowed on them what was requisite for their present wants; from the latter I desired that they should be supplied with the means of providing for themselves in time to come. I intrusted the management of this important affair to those of my grandees whose disinterestedness and enlightenment were already known to me. I hope and trust that every thing will be done to the entire satisfaction of the Torgouths. It is needless to say more in this place. My intention has only been to give a summary of what has come to pass."[47]

**FOOTNOTES:**

[37] "Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of Torgouth Tartars, in the years 1712, '13, '14 and '15, by the Chinese Ambassador, and published by the emperor's authority at Pekin." London. I am indebted to the kindness of Baron Walckenaer for an acquaintance with this work.

[38] The flight of the Kalmucks has also been attributed to Prince Chereng Taidchi, of whom mention has been made above. This version of the matter seems to us improbable. Chereng had left China as an outlaw, and it is not to be supposed that he was favourable to the emigration, notwithstanding the impatience with which he endured the yoke of Russia. It appears, on the contrary, that he never ceased to protest against the resolution adopted by Oubacha.

[39] The MS. belongs to M. Ternaux Compans, who has obligingly placed at my disposal all the rich stores of his valuable library.

[40] Here again we see that the Chinese give the name of Tatars to the Mongols, which confirms our opinion, that the denomination we give to the Mussulman subjects of Southern Russia is incorrect. We have substituted Tatar for the word Tartar in the MS.

[41] The Chinese doubtless adopted the name Torgouth, because the fugitive Kalmucks consisted, in a great measure, of that tribe. The Kalmucks that remained in Russia are almost all Derbetes and Koschoots.

[42] Russian documents confirm the fact, that a captain of this name commanding a Russian detachment was carried off by the fugitive Kalmucks.

[43] There is here, evidently, a confusion of names. The Soongars, or Tchong-Kars, as the Chinese call them, are a branch of the Eleuths, and are the very nation who played the important part here attributed to the Eleuths in general.

[44] This assertion seems totally erroneous. The Torgouths arrived in Russia in 1630, and Aiouki was not raised to the dignity of khan until 1675; he could not, therefore, have acted the part here ascribed to him. The relation of the Chinese embassy to Aiouki (1712-1715) likewise confirms in all points the inaccuracy of the Emperor Kien Long's historical version. At that period China was a country almost unknown to the Kalmucks, and Aiouki, in all his conferences with the ambassadors, was continually asking for information of all kinds respecting the celestial empire.

[45] The part of southern Russia comprised between the Volga and the Jaïk. The Tatars also gave the name of Etchil to the Volga.

[46] Here the emperor's words are altogether at variance with the report of the Chinese embassy, of which Toulischin was the leader.

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# CHAPTER XXV.

THE KALMUCKS AFTER THE DEPARTURE OF OUBACHA—DIVISION OF THE

HORDES, LIMITS OF THEIR TERRITORY—THE TURKOMAN AND TATAR TRIBES IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF ASTRAKHAN AND THE CAUCASUS—CHRISTIAN KALMUCKS—AGRICULTURAL ATTEMPTS—PHYSICAL, SOCIAL, AND MORAL, CHARACTERISTICS OF THE KALMUCKS.

After the departure of Oubacha, the Kalmucks that remained in Russia were deprived of their special jurisdiction, and for more than thirty years had neither khan nor vice-khan. It was not until 1802, that the Emperor Paul, in one of his inexplicable caprices, thought fit to re-establish the office of vice-khan, and bestowed it on Prince Tchoutchei, an influential Kalmuck of the race of the Derbetes. The administration of the hordes, which had been under the control of the [Pg 236] governor of Astrakhan since 1771, was again made independent, the functions of the Russian pristofs were limited, and they could no longer abuse their power so much as they had done. But upon the death of Tchoutchei, the Kalmucks again came under the Russian laws and tribunals; they lost all their privileges irrevocably, and the sovereignty of the khans and of the vice-khans disappeared for ever.

The complete subjection of the Kalmucks was not, however, effected without some difficulty. Discontent prevailed among them in the highest degree, but their attempts at revolt were all fruitless. Hemmed in on all sides by lines of Cossacks, the tribes were constrained to accept the Russian sway in all its extent. The only remarkable incident of their last struggles was a partial emigration into the Cossack country. This insubordination excited the tzar's utmost wrath, and he despatched an extraordinary courier to Astrakhan, with orders to arrest the high priest and the principal chiefs of the hordes, and send them to St. Petersburg. Before leaving Astrakhan, these two Kalmucks engaged a certain Maximof to act as their interpreter, and plead their cause before the emperor.

But when the two captives arrived in St. Petersburg, the emperor's fit of anger was quite over; they were received extremely well, and instead of being chastised, they returned to the steppes invested with a new Russian dignity. They took leave publicly of the tzar, and this audience was turned to good account by their interpreter. In presenting their thanks to his majesty, that very clever person, knowing he ran no risk of being contradicted, made Paul believe that the Kalmucks earnestly entreated that his imperial majesty would grant him, also, an honorary grade in recompense for his good services. The tzar was taken in by the trick, and Maximof quitted the court with the title of major. The man still lived in Astrakhan when we visited the town, and did not hesitate to tell us the story with his own lips.

Though entirely subjected to the Russian laws, the Kalmucks have an administrative committee, which is occupied exclusively with their affairs. It resides in Astrakhan, and consists of a president, two Russian judges, and two Kalmuck deputies. The latter, of course, are appointed only for form sake, and have no influence over the decisions of the council. The president of the committee is what the Russians call the curator-general of the Kalmucks. In 1840, this post had been filled for many years by M. Fadiew, a man of integrity and capacity, and the tribes owed to his wise administration a state of tranquillity they had not enjoyed for a long while.

To each camp there is also attached a superintendent, called a pristof, with some Cossacks under his orders. All matters of litigation are decided in accordance with the Russian code, but criminal cases are extremely rare, owing to the pacific character of the Kalmucks, and the interposition of their chiefs.

The Kalmuck hordes are divided into two great classes, those belonging respectively to princes [Pg 237] and to the crown; but all are amenable to the same laws and the same tribunals. The former pay a tax of twenty-five rubles to their princes, who have the right of taking from among them all the persons they require for their domestic service, and they are bound to maintain a police and good order within their camp. Every chief, has, at his command, several subaltern chiefs called *zaizans*, who have the immediate superintendence of 100 or 150 tents. Their office is nearly hereditary. He who fills it enjoys the title of prince, but this is not shared by the other members of his family. The zaizans are entitled to a contribution of two rubles from every kibitka under their command.

The hordes of the crown come under more direct Russian surveillance. They paid no tax at first, and were bound to military service in the same way as the Cossacks; but they have been exempted from it since 1836, and now pay merely a tax of twenty-five rubles for each family. The princely hordes, likewise, used to supply troops for the frontier service; but this was changed in 1825, and since then the Kalmucks have been free from all military service, and pay only twenty-five rubles per tent to their princes, and 2.50 to the crown.

Besides the two great divisions we have just mentioned, the Kalmucks are also distinguished into various *oulousses*, or hordes, belonging to sundry princes. Each *oulousse* has its own camping-ground for summer and winter.

The Kalmuck territory has been considerably reduced since the departure of Oubacha; it now comprises but a small extent of country on the left bank of the Volga, and the Khirghis of the inner horde now occupy the steppes between the Ural and the Volga. The present limits of European Kalmuckia are to the north and east, the Volga as far as latitude 48 deg.; a line drawn from that point to the mouths of the Volga, parallel with the course of the river, and at a distance from it of about forty miles; and, lastly, the Caspian Sea as far as the Kouma. On the south, the boundary is the Kouma and a line drawn from that river, below Vladimirofka, to the upper part of

the course of the Kougoultcha. The Egorlik, and a line passing through the sources of the different rivers that fall into the Don, form the frontiers on the west.

The whole portion of the steppes included between the Volga, the frontiers of the government of Saratof and the country of the Don Cossacks, and the 46th degree of north latitude, forms the summer camping-ground of the following oulousses: Karakousofsky, Iandikofsky, Great Derbet, belonging to Prince Otshir Kapshukof; Little Derbet, belonging to Prince Tondoudof, and Ikytsokourofsky, which is now without a proprietor; its prince having died childless, it is not known who is to have his inheritance.

The whole territory comprises about 4,105,424 hectares of land; 40,000 were detached from it in 1838 by Prince Tondoudof, and presented to the Cossacks, in return for which act of generosity the crown conferred on him the rank of captain. He gave a splendid ball on the [Pg 238] occasion at Astrakhan, which cost upwards of 15,000 rubles. We saw him in that town at the governor's soirées, where he made a very poor figure; yet he is the richest of all the Kalmuck princes, for he possesses 4500 tents, and his income amounts, it is said, to more than 200,000 rubles.

The Kalmucks occupy in all 10,297,587 hectares of land, of which 8,599,415 are in the government of Astrakhan, and 1,598,172 in that of the Caucasus. These figures which cannot be expected to be mathematically exact, are the result of my own observations, and of the assertions of the Kalmucks, compared with some surveys made by order of the administrative committee.

Besides the Kalmucks, the only legitimate proprietors of the soil, other nomades also intrude upon these steppes. Such are the Turcomans, called Troushmens by the Russians. They have their own lands in the government of the Caucasus, between the Kouma and the Terek; but as the countless swarms of gnats infesting those regions in summer render them almost uninhabitable for camels and other cattle, the Turcomans pass the Kouma of their own authority, with some Nogaï hordes, who are in the same predicament, encamp amidst the Kalmucks, and occupy during all the fine weather a great part of the steppes between the Kouma and the Manitch. This intrusion has often been strongly resented by the Kalmucks, and the authorities have been obliged to interfere to appease the strife. But as it is absolutely requisite to allot a summer camping-ground to the Turcomans, the government is not a little perplexed how to cut the gordian knot. An expedient, however, was adopted during our stay in Astrakhan. It was determined to take from the Kalmucks a portion of the territory they possess along the Kalaous, and of which they make no use, and bestow it upon the Turcomans. This ground being completely isolated, it was furthermore decided that there should be allowed a road six kilometres wide (three miles six furlongs) for the passage of their flocks. Nothing can convey a more striking picture of these arid regions than this scheme of a road nearly four miles wide, extending for more than sixty leagues.

The Turcomans entered Russia in the train of the Kalmucks, whose slaves they appear to have been. They are now much mixed up with the Nogaïs, like whom they profess Mohammedanism. They reckon 3838 tents. The only obligation imposed on them is to convey the corn destined for the army of the Caucasus. They receive their loads at Koumskaia, where the vessels from Astrakhan discharge their cargoes, and thence they repair to the Terek and often to Tiflis in Georgia. This service is regarded by them as very onerous, and they have long requested permission to pay their taxes in money. They use in this business carts with two wheels of large diameter, drawn by oxen, for camels and horses are scarcely ever employed. The Turcomans have preserved the good old customs of their native country; they are the greatest plunderers in [Pg 239] the steppes, and the only people whom there is any real cause to regard with distrust. Before the end of summer, in the latter part of August, the Turcomans begin to retire behind the Kouma, into the government of the Caucasus.

A Tatar horde called Sirtof likewise encamps on the lands of the Kalmucks, within sixty miles of Astrakhan, on the road to Kisliar. It reckons but 112 tents, and as the lands it occupies are of little importance, no one thinks of troubling it.

Lastly are to be enumerated 500 families of Kalmucks, improperly called Christians, who occupy the two banks of the Kouma, between Vladimirofka and the Caspian. Some Russian missionaries attempted their conversion towards the close of the last century, but their proselytising efforts, based on force, were fruitless, and produced nothing but revolts. Since then these Kalmucks, some of whom had suffered themselves to be baptised, were called Christians, chiefly for the purpose of distinguishing them from those who are not bound like themselves to military service. They are chiefly employed in guarding the salt pools, and belong, under the denomination of Cossacks, to the regiment of Mosdok. The government feeds them and their horses when they are on actual service, but they still pay a tax for every head of cattle, the amount of which goes into the regimental chest. These Kalmucks having no camping-ground of their own, have long been soliciting to have one assigned them. The government offered them ground in the environs of Stavropol, the capital of the Caucasian government, but they refused it for fear of the incursions of the Circassians. These nominal Christians are with the Turcomans the most dangerous people in the steppes. Their attacks are not at all to be feared by day; but at night it is necessary to keep a sharp look out after one's camels and horses; for in these deserts to rob a traveller of his means of transport is almost to take his life.

As will be seen from what we have stated above, the summer encampments of the Kalmuck hordes are situated in the most northern parts of the country, where there is the richest pasture, and where the cattle suffer least from flies in the hot weather. The emigration to the north is almost general; only a few very needy families, who have no cattle, remain in the winter camp,

keeping as near as possible to the post stations and inhabited places, in hopes of procuring employment. In the beginning of the cold season the hordes return to the south, along the banks of the Caspian and the Kouma, where they fix themselves among the forests of rushes that supply them with firing and fodder for their cattle.

In all these regions destitute of forests, reeds are of immense importance, and nature has liberally distributed them along all the rivers of the steppes, and in all the numerous bottom lands that flank the Caspian. The inhabitants of Astrakhan make a regular and systematic use of them, employing them not only for fuel, but also for roofing their houses, and for thatching their waggons laden with salt or fish, which they send into the interior of the country. It is in spring, [Pg 240] before the floods caused by the melting of the snow, that the reeds begin to sprout. Their stalks, which are as thick as a finger, soon shoot up to the height of twelve or thirteen feet. Those that grow on the banks of the Volga are never quite covered in the highest floods. The beginning of winter is the season for laying in a stock of reeds, and it is customary to burn all those that are not cut and carried off, in order that the dead stalks may not hinder the growth of the young shoots.

The ceremony attending the departure of the hordes in spring is not without interest. The Kalmuck chiefs never begin a march without making an offering to the Bourkhan, or god of the river, as an acknowledgment of the protection vouchsafed to their camp during the winter. To this end they repair in great pomp to the banks of the Kouma, accompanied by their families and a large body of priests, and throw several pieces of silver money into the river, at the same time invoking its future favours.

According to the official documents communicated to me, the Kalmuck population does not appear to exceed 15,000 families. On this head, however, it is impossible to arrive at very exact statistics, for the princes having themselves to pay the crown dues, have of course an interest in making the population seem as small as possible. I am inclined to believe, from sundry facts, that the number of the tents is scarcely under 20,000. At all events, it seems ascertained that the Kalmuck population has remained stationary for the last sixty years, a fact which is owing to the ravages of disease, such as small-pox, and others of the cutaneous kind.

The Kalmucks, all of them nomades, are exclusively engaged in rearing cattle, and know nothing whatever of agriculture. They breed camels, oxen, sheep, and above all, horses, of which they have an excellent description, small, but strong, agile, and of great endurance. I have ridden a Kalmuck horse often eighteen and even twenty-five leagues without once dismounting. The Russian cavalry is mounted chiefly on horses from the Caspian steppes: the average price of a good horse is from 80 to 100 rubles. Formerly the Kalmucks used to send their horses to the great fairs of Poland, paying a duty of 1.75 rubles on every horse sold; but the duty was raised to 5.25 rubles in 1828, for every horse arriving in the fair, and this unlucky measure immediately destroyed all trade with Poland. The business of horse-breeding has diminished immensely ever since in the Caspian steppes. The government afterwards returned to the old rate of duty; but the mischief was done, and the Kalmucks did not again appear in their old markets.

It is impossible to know, even approximately, the amount of cattle belonging to the tribes, for the Kalmucks are too superstitious ever to acknowledge the number of their stock. From various data I collected at Astrakhan, and from the superintendents of the hordes, we may estimate that the Kalmucks possess on the whole from 250,000 to 300,000 horses, about 60,000 camels, [Pg 241] 180,000 kine, and nearly a million sheep.

Prince Tumene is the only one of the Kalmucks who has engaged in agriculture, and his attempts have been exceedingly favoured by the character of the soil in his domains on the left bank of the Volga. His produce consists of grain, grapes, and all kinds of fruit. He has even tried to manufacture Champagne wine, but with little success; and when we visited him, he entreated me to send him a good work on the subject, that he might begin his operations again on an improved plan.

Prince Tondoudof is also striving to follow in Prince Tumene's footsteps. He has lately marked out a large space in the steppes for the fixed residence of a part of his Kalmucks, but I greatly doubt that his wishes can ever be realised. He has for many years possessed a very handsome dwelling, but he has not yet been able to give up his tent, so strong is the attachment of all this race to a nomade life. But the most potent obstacle to the establishment of a permanent colony consists in the nature of the soil itself. We have traversed the Kalmuck steppes in almost all directions, and found everywhere only an argillaceous, sandy, or salt soil, generally unsuited to agriculture. Where there is pasture, the grass is so short and thin, that the ground exactly resembles the appearance of the steppes of the Black Sea, when the grass begins to grow again after the conflagrations of winter. Hence the Kalmucks are continually on the move to find fresh pasture for their cattle, and seldom remain in one spot for more than a month or six weeks. But the most serious obstacle to agriculture is the want of fresh water. The few brooks that run through the steppes are dry during the greater part of the year, and the summers are generally without rain. The cold, too, is as intolerable as the heat: for four months the thermometer is almost always steady at twenty-eight degrees of Reaumur in the shade, and very often it rises to thirty-two; then when winter sets in it falls to twenty-eight degrees below zero. Thus, there is a difference of nearly sixty degrees between the winter and the summer temperature. If in addition to these changes of temperature we consider the total flatness of the country, exposed without any shelter to the violence of the north and east winds, it will easily be conceived how unfavourable it must be to agriculture. A nomade life seems therefore to me a necessity for the Kalmucks, and until the development of civilisation among them shall make them feel the need of fixed dwellings, they must be left free to wander over their steppes. Moreover, in applying

themselves exclusively to pastoral pursuits, they render much greater service to Russia than if they employed themselves in cultivating a stubborn and thankless soil. No doubt there are numerous oases scattered over these immense plains, just as in other deserts, and agriculture might have some success in the northern parts; but these favourable spots are all situated amid wildernesses where the cultivators would find no markets for their produce. In spite of all these [Pg 242] drawbacks, the Russian government still persists in its endeavours to colonise the Kalmucks, and strives with all its might to introduce among them its system of uniformity. But its efforts have hitherto been quite fruitless; the hordes are now, perhaps, more than ever attached to their vagrant way of life, in which they find at least a compensation for the privileges and the independence of which they have been deprived.

The Kalmucks, like most other nations, are divided into three orders, nobles, clergy, and commons; the members of the aristocracy assume the name of *white bones*, whilst the common people are called *black bones*. The priests belong indifferently to either class, but those that issue from the ranks of the people do not easily succeed in effacing the stain of their origin. The prejudices of noble birth are, however, much less deeply rooted at this day than formerly, a natural consequence of the destruction of the power of the khans and the princes, and the complete subjection of the hordes to the laws and customs of the empire. Bergmann's account has therefore become quite inapplicable to the present state of things, and can only give false notions of the constitution of the Kalmucks.

Among the Asiatic races there is none whose features are so distinctly characterised as those of the Mongols. Paint one individual and you paint the whole nation. In 1815, the celebrated painter, Isabey, after seeing a great number of Kalmucks, observed so striking a resemblance between them, that having to take the likeness of Prince Tumene, and perceiving that the prince was very restless at the last sittings, he begged him to send one of his servants in his stead. In that way the painter finished the portrait, which turned out to be a most striking likeness, as I myself can testify. All the Kalmucks have eyes set obliquely, with eyelids little opened, scanty black eyebrows, noses deeply depressed near the forehead, prominent cheek-bones, spare beards, thin moustaches, and a brownish yellow skin. The lips of the men are thick and fleshy, but the women, particularly those of high rank, have heart-shaped mouths of no common beauty. All have enormous ears, projecting strongly from the head, and their hair is invariably black. The Kalmucks are generally small, but with figures well rounded, and an easy carriage. Very few deformed persons are seen among them, for with more good sense than ourselves, they leave the development of their children's frames entirely to nature, and never put any kind of garment on them until the age of nine or ten. No sooner are they able to walk, than they mount on horseback, and apply themselves with all their hearts to wrestling and riding, the chief amusements of the tribes.

The portrait we have drawn of the Kalmucks is certainly not very engaging; but their own notions of beauty are very different from ours. A Kalmuck princess has been named to us, who, though frightfully ugly in European eyes, nevertheless, passed for such a marvel of loveliness [Pg 243] among her own people, that after having had a host of suitors, she was at last carried off by force by one of her admirers.

Like all inhabitants of vast plains, the Kalmucks have exceedingly keen sight. An hour after sunset they can still distinguish a camel at a distance of three miles or more. Very often when I perceived nothing but a point barely visible on the horizon, they clearly made out a horseman armed with his lance and gun. They have also an extraordinary faculty for wending their way through their pathless wildernesses. Without the least apparent mark to guide them, they traverse hundreds of miles with their flocks, without ever wandering from the right course.

The costume of the common Kalmucks is not marked by any very decided peculiarity, the cap alone excepted. It is invariably of yellow cloth trimmed with black lambskin, and is worn by both sexes. I am even tempted to think that there are some superstitious notions connected with it, seeing the difficulty I experienced in procuring one as a specimen. The trousers are wide and open below. Persons in good circumstances wear two long tunics, one of which is tied round the waist, but the usual dress consists only of trousers and a jacket of skin with tight sleeves. We have already described the garb of the women. The men shave a part of their heads, and the rest of the hair is gathered into a single mass, which hangs on their shoulders. The women wear two tresses, and this is really the only visible criterion of their sex. The princes have almost all adopted the Circassian costume, or the uniform of the Cossacks of Astrakhan, to which body some of them belong. The ordinary foot gear is red boots with very high heels, and generally much too short. The Kalmucks, like the Chinese, greatly admire small feet, and as they are constantly on horseback, their short boots, which would be torturing to us, cause them no inconvenience. But they are very bad pedestrians; the form of their boots obliges them to walk on their toes, and they are exceedingly distressed when they have not a horse to mount.

They never set out on a journey unarmed. They usually carry a poniard and a long Asiatic gun, generally a matchlock. The camel is the beast they commonly ride, guiding it by a string passed through its nostrils, which gives them complete command over the animal. They have long quite abandoned the use of bows and arrows; the gun, the lance, and the dagger being now their only weapons. Cuirasses, too, have become useless to them. I saw a few admirable specimens at Prince Tumene's, which appeared to be of Persian manufacture, and were valued at from fifty to a hundred horses. In spite of the precepts of buddhism which forbid them to kill any sort of animal, the Kalmucks are skilful sportsmen with hawk and gun. They almost always shoot in the manner of the old arquebusiers, resting the gun on a long fork which plays upon an axis fixed at [Pg 244] the extremity of the barrel.

The Kalmucks, like all pastoral people, live very frugally. Dairy produce forms their chief aliment, and their favourite beverage is tea. They eat meat also, particularly horse flesh, which they prefer to any other, but very well done and not raw as some writers have asserted. As for cereal food, which the natives of Europe prize so highly, the Kalmucks scarcely know its use; it is only at rare intervals that some of them buy bread or oatcake from the neighbouring Russians. Their tea is prepared in a very peculiar manner. It comes to them from China, in the shape of very hard bricks composed of the leaves and coarsest parts of the plant. After boiling it a considerable time in water, they add milk, butter, and salt. The infusion then acquires consistency, and becomes of a dirty red-yellow colour. We tasted the beverage at Prince Tumene's, but must confess it was perfectly detestable, and instantly reminded us of Madame Gibou's incredible preparation. They say, however, that it is easy to accustom oneself to this tea, and that at last it is thought delicious. At all events it has one good quality. By strongly exciting perspiration, it serves as an excellent preservative against the effects of sudden chills. The Kalmucks drink their tea out of round shallow little wooden vessels, to which they often attach a very high value. I have seen several which were priced at two or three horses. They are generally made of roots brought from Asia. It is superfluous to say that the Kalmucks, knowing nothing of the use of teakettles, prepare their infusion in large iron pots. Next to tea there is no beverage they are so fond of as spirituous liquors. They manufacture a sort of brandy from mare's or cow's milk; but as it is very weak, and has little action on the brain, they seek after Russian liquors with intense eagerness, so that to prevent the pernicious consequences of this passion, the government has been obliged to prohibit the establishment of any dram shops among the hordes. The women are as eager after the fatal liquor as the men, but they have seldom an opportunity to indulge their taste, for their lords and masters watch them narrowly in this respect. The Kalmuck kitchen is disgustingly filthy. A housekeeper would think herself disgraced if she washed her utensils with water. When she has to clean a vessel, no matter of what sort, she merely empties out its contents, and polishes the inside with the back of her hand. Often have I had pans of milk brought to me that had been cleansed in this ingenious manner. However, as we have already remarked, the interior of the tents by no means exhibits the filth with which this people has been often charged.

Among the Kalmucks, like most Oriental nations, the stronger sex considers all household cares derogatory to its dignity, and leaves them entirely to the women, whose business it is to cook, take care of the children, keep the tents in order, make up the garments and furs of the family, [Pg 245] and attend to the cattle. The men barely condescend to groom their horses; they hunt, drink tea or brandy, stretch themselves out on felts, and smoke or sleep. Add to these daily occupations some games, such as chess, and that played with knuckle-bones, and you have a complete picture of the existence of a Kalmuck *pater familias*. The women are quite habituated to their toilsome life, and make cheerful and contented housewives; but they grow old fast, and after a few years of wedlock become frightfully ugly. Their appearance then differs not at all from that of the men; their masculine forms, the shape of their features, their swarthy complexion, and the identity of costume often deceive the most practised eye.

We twice visited the Kalmucks, and the favourable opinion we conceived of them from the first was never shaken. They are the most pacific people imaginable; in analysing their physiognomy, it is impossible to believe that a malicious thought can enter their heads. We invariably encountered the frankest and most affable hospitality among them, and our arrival in a camp was always hailed by the joyful shouts of the whole tribe hurrying to meet us. According to Bergmann's book he seems not to have fared so well at their hands, and he revenges himself by painting them in a very odious light. But it must not be forgotten that Bergmann was, above all things, clerical, and that he could not fail to be looked on with dislike by the Kalmucks, who had already endured so many attempts of missionaries to convert them. It is, therefore, by no means surprising if he was not always treated with the deference he had a right to exact. As for that pride of the great men and that impudence of the vulgar, which so deeply stirred the indignation of the Livonian traveller, these are defects common enough in all countries, and even among nations that make the greatest boast of their liberality; it would be unjust, therefore, to visit them too severely in the case of the Kalmucks.

A very marked characteristic of these tribes is their sociability. They seldom eat alone, and often entertain each other; it is even their custom, before tasting their food, to offer a part of it to strangers, or, if none are present, to children; the act is in their eyes both a work of charity, and a sort of propitiatory offering in acknowledgment of the bounty of the Deity.

Their dwellings are felt tents, called *kibitkas* by the Russians. They are four or five yards in diameter, cylindrical to the height of a man's shoulder, with a conical top, open at the apex to let the smoke escape. The frame is light, and can be taken asunder for the convenience of carriage. The skeleton of the roof consists of a wooden ring, forming the aperture for the smoke, and of a great number of small spars supporting the ring, and resting on the upper circumference of the cylindrical frame. The whole tent is light enough to be carried by two camels. A kibitka serves for a whole family; men, women, and children sleep in it promiscuously without any separation. In [Pg 246] the centre there is always a trivet, on which stands the pot used for cooking tea and meat. The floor is partly covered with felts, carpets, and mats; the couches are opposite the door, and the walls of the tent are hung with arms, leathern vessels, household utensils, quarters of meat, &c.

Among the most important occupations of these people are the distillation of spirits, and the manufacture of felts, to which a certain season of the year is appropriated. For the latter operation the men themselves awake out of their lethargy, and condescend to put their hands to the work. They make two kinds of felt, grey and white. The price of the best is ten or twelve

rubles for the piece of eight yards by two. The Kalmucks are also very expert in making leathern vessels for liquids, of all shapes and sizes, with extremely small throats. The women tan the skins after a manner which the curious in these matters will find described by the celebrated traveller, Pallas. The priests, moreover, manufacture some very peculiar tea-caddies; they are of wood, their shape a truncated cone, with numerous ornamental hoops of copper. In other respects industry has made no progress among the Kalmucks, whose wants are so limited, that none of them has ever felt the need of applying himself to any distinct trade. Every man can supply his own wants, and we never found an artisan of any kind among the hordes. At Astrakhan, there are some Kalmuck journeymen engaged in the fisheries, and many of them are in high repute as boatmen. On the whole, it is not for want of intelligence they are without arts, but because they have no need of them.

We frequently questioned the Kalmucks respecting their wintering under a tent, and they always assured us that their kabitkas perfectly protected them from the cold. By day they keep up a fire with reeds and dried dung; and at night, when there remains only clear coal, they stop up all the openings to confine the heat. Their felts, besides, as I know from experience, are so well made, as to shelter them completely from the most furious tempests.

We have little to say of the education of the Kalmucks. Their princes and priests alone boast of some learning, but it consists only in a knowledge of their religious works. The mass of the people grovel in utter ignorance. Nevertheless, a very notable intellectual movement took place among the tribes in the beginning of the seventeenth century, at which period Zaia Pandity, one of their high priests, invented a new alphabet, and enriched the old Mongol language with many Turkish elements. Thereupon the Kalmuck nation had a literature of its own, and soon, under the influence of its numerous traditions, and its historical, sacred, and political books, it exhibited all the germs of a hopeful, nascent civilisation; nor was it rare in those days to find men of decided talent among the aristocracy. But Oubacha's emigration blighted all these fair hopes. The books [Pg 247] were all carried off by the fugitives; the old traditions, so potent among Asiatic nations, gradually became extinct, the natural bond that knitted the various hordes together was broken, and the Kalmucks that remained in Europe soon relapsed into their old barbarian condition.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[47] The emperor subjoins in a note: "The nation of the Torgouths arrived at Ily in total destitution without victuals or clothing. I had foreseen this, and given orders to Chouhédé and others, to lay up the necessary provisions of all kinds, that they might be promptly succoured. This was done. The lands were divided, and to each family was assigned a sufficient portion for its support by tillage or cattle rearing. Each individual received cloth for garments, a year's supply of corn, household utensils, and other necessaries, and besides all this several ounces of silver to provide himself with whatever might have been forgotten. Particular places, fertile in pasturage, were pointed out to them, and they were given oxen, sheep, &c., that they might afterwards labour for their own sustenance and welfare."

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# CHAPTER XXVI.

BUDDHISM—KALMUCK COSMOGONY—KALMUCK CLERGY—RITES AND CEREMONIES—POLYGAMY—THE KHIRGHIS.

The Kalmucks, Like most of the other offshoots of the Mongol stock, are Buddhists, or rather Lamites. According to the opinion of all writers, Buddhism began in India, and Buddha, afterwards deified by his followers under the name of Dchakdchamouni, was its founder and first patriarch. Opposed by the fanaticism of the children of Brahma, the new creed made little progress, and appears to have been cruelly persecuted in the beginning. The learned researches of M. Abel Remusat have, however, demonstrated that there was a succession of twenty-eight Buddhist patriarchs in India. It was not until about A.D. 495, that Bodhidharma, impelled no doubt by the persecutions of the Brahmins, set out for China, where the doctrines of Buddha had already made considerable progress, as well as in Thibet and great part of Tartary. Eight centuries, nevertheless, elapsed before the successors of Bodhidharma emerged from their obscure and precarious condition: it was to the grand fortunes of the celebrated Genghis Khan they owed that royal splendour they afterwards enjoyed under the name of Dalai Lama.

According to Klaproth, the first traces of Buddhism are recorded in a Mongol book, entitled "The Source of the Heart," written in the time of Genghis Khan. It is there related that the conqueror, when about to enter the countries occupied by the Buddhists, sent an embassy to their patriarch with these words: "I have chosen thee for my high priest, and for that of my empire; repair to me; I give thee charge over the present and future weal of my people, and I will

be thy protector." The desires of Genghis Khan were quickly fulfilled; from that time forth the patriarchs often resided at the conqueror's court, and their religion was at last adopted by the greatest Mongol warriors. In the reign of Genghis Khan's grandson, Buddhism was already become a power; and then it was that the high priests, assuming the title of Dalai Lama, fixed their residence in Thibet, where they continued to be treated as actual monarchs, until dissensions and rivalries destroyed all the prestige of their authority, and they became confounded with the other vassals of the empire of China. [Pg 248]

When Buddhism installed itself in Thibet, that country was already peopled with Christians, and the Nestorians had many monasteries there. The religious tolerance of the Mongol monarchs was unlimited: all creeds enjoyed equal protection in their capital. The Christians were especially numerous in the imperial city, where they had a church with bells, and were long presided over by an Italian Archbishop. The effect of this general toleration, and of the potent action of the principles of Christianity, must necessarily have been to modify Buddhism to an important degree; and we believe, with M. Remusat, that we must refer to this period for the origin and explanation of the many points of analogy between it and the doctrines of Christians.

Pallas and Bergmann have written much on the religious cosmogony of the Kalmucks; we will follow them in their investigations, and endeavour to complete them by means of our own observations.

There was in the beginning an immense abyss, called Khoubi Saiagar, exceeding in length and depth 6,116,000 berez (about 12,000,000 leagues), and out of this abyss the Taingairis, or aerial spirits, existing from all eternity, drew forth the world. First rose fiery-coloured clouds, which gathered together until they dissolved into a heavy rain, every drop of which was as big as a chariot wheel, and thus was formed the universal sea. Soon afterwards there appeared on the surface of the waters an immense quantity of foam, white as milk, and out of it issued all living creatures, including the human race. We will say nothing of those hurricanes which, arising from the ten parts of the world, produced in the upper hemisphere that fantastic column, as lofty as the ocean is deep, round which revolve the various worlds of the Buddhist universe. But we cannot forbear to mention the ingenious explanation by which the astronomers of Thibet accounted for the periodical revolutions of the day. According to their sacred books, the mystic column has four faces, of different colours, argent, azure, or, and deep red. At sunrise the rays of the sun fall on the argent side, in the forenoon they are reflected from the azure, at noon from the gold, towards the close of day from the red surface, and the concealment of the orb behind the column is what produces night.

All the books of the Kalmucks speak of four great lands, which are sometimes spoken of as belonging to the same whole, sometimes as forming separate worlds. The first of these, lying eastward, is occupied by giants who are eight cubits high, and live for 150 years; the second, towards the west, has inhabitants eleven cubits high, whose lifetime is 500 years; the third, placed in the north, is still more favoured, for its inhabitants, though devoid of souls, live for 1000 years exempt from all infirmity. Their stature is 230 cubits. When the term of their existence is arrived, they assemble their families and their friends around them, and expire calmly at the call of a heavenly voice summoning them by their name. The fourth earth is that on which we dwell, and on which all the favours of the Deity are profusely lavished. It has four great rivers bearing the mystic names of Ganga, Schilda, Baktschou, and Aipura, which take their rise in the heart of four great mountains, where dwells an elephant two leagues long, white as snow, and named Gasar Sakitschin Koven (protector of the earth). This fabulous animal has thirty-three red heads, each furnished with six trunks, whence spout forth as many fountains, all surmounted with six stars. On each star sits a virgin always young and gracefully attired. These virgins are the daughters of the aerial spirits, one of whom, the most potent of all, sits astride on the middle of the elephant's head, when the animal thinks fit to change his quarters.[48] [Pg 249]

In the beginning the inhabitants of this privileged earth lived 80,000 years, abounding in health, and incapable of forming a desire that was not instantly fulfilled. Their eyes shot forth rays of light that supplied the place of the sun and the stars, and invisible grace stood them instead of all nourishment. It was during this golden age that most of the secondary divinities were born, and 1000 Bourkhans were taken up from the earth to the abode of the blessed. But those blissful times came to an end, for, as in Genesis, an unlucky fruit, for which mankind imprudently conceived a liking, was the cause of their downfal. The human race lost all its precious privileges; its wings failed; physical wants tormented it; its gigantic stature dwindled down, and the span of life was contracted to 40,000 years, whilst the luminous rays of the eyes, the only light of that period, disappeared. Darkness then covered the face of the earth, until four powerful deities, touched with compassion, squeezed the mountain hard, and forced from it the sun and the moon, those two great luminaries which still exist in our day.

The evil did not stop here. To the physical woes that afflicted man was soon added moral depravation; adultery, homicide, and violence supplanted the primitive virtues, and disorder reigned over the whole face of the habitable earth. During this long period of decay the duration of life underwent successive curtailments, and many bourkhans descended on earth to correct and ameliorate mankind. The bourkhan Ebdekchi (the perturber) appeared at the time when the duration of life did not exceed 40,000 years. Altan Dohidakti, the bourkhan of incorruptible gold, appeared to the world when men only lived 30,000 years, and those whose years were but 20,000 were visited by the bourkhan Guerel Sakitchi (the guardian of the world). After him came Massouschiri. Lastly, the term of human, existence had been reduced to 100 years, when the celebrated bourkhan Dchakdchamouni, the founder of the existing sect, came upon the earth and preached the faith to one-and-thirty nations. A great moral revolution then took place in the [Pg 250]

world; but unfortunately the new law was variously interpreted, and thence resulted this great diversity of religions and languages.

Still, however, the degeneration of the human race is far from having reached its utmost limit. The life and stature of man and of all animals, will undergo a further considerable diminution in the course of ages. There will come a time when the horse will be no bigger than the present race of hares, and men but a few palms high, will live but ten years, and will marry at the age of five months. Thus the Buddhists have adopted notions diametrically opposed to those of certain modern philosophers, who think that we began as oysters and will end with being gods. Which is the more absurd of these two opinions? We shall not attempt to decide the question, but leave it to our neighbours beyond the Rhine, who are more competent than we to deal with such matters. The extreme limit of physical decay having been once attained, most living creatures will be destroyed by a mortal malady. But just when the world seems on the point of relapsing into the chaos from whence it issued, the voice of the celestial spirits will be heard, and some of the miserable dwarfs still peopling the earth will seek refuge in dark caverns; it will then rain swords, spears, and all sorts of deadly weapons; the ground will be strewed with corpses and red with blood. Finally, a horrible down-pour of rain will sweep all the corpses and all the filth into the ocean. This will be the last act of the genius of destruction, soon after which a fragrant rain will vivify the earth. All sorts of garments and food will drop from the sky; the dwarfs that have escaped destruction will come forth from their caverns, and men, regenerated and virtuous, will at once recover their gigantic stature and their privilege of living 80,000 years. There will then be a new decay, and when the bourkhan Maidari appears on earth, men will have again become dwarfs; but at the voice of that prophet they will be fully converted, and will attain a high degree of perfection. We will not follow Lamism through its systems regarding the various epochs of the world. The notions of the Kalmucks on this head are so confused, that I have been unable to learn any thing in addition to what is stated by the learned Pallas. Their sacred books speak of forty-nine epochs, ending by fire, or deluges, or hurricanes. They are all divided into four great periods. The first comprises the space of time in which human life begins with being 80,000 years long, and diminishes to 10,000; during the second period man perishes; during the third the earth remains desolate, and in the fourth occurs a hurricane which carries the souls from hell to the earth. [Pg 251]

We have already mentioned that happy epoch in which thousands of holy beings were raised to the heavens, and deified under the name of bourkhans. These bourkhans do not all hold the same rank, but differ from each other both in power and functions. The Kalmucks, who hold them in great veneration, adore them as the most beneficent deities. Their images are found in all the temples. The mighty Dchakdchamouni is most especially worshipped. The bourkhans are supposed to inhabit different worlds; some dwell in the planets, others in the regions of the air, others again in the sky; Dchakdchamouni still inhabits the earth. There is an infinite multitude of legends concerning these secondary divinities, especially the last named. The following adventure is related of him in all the religious books of the Lamites, and is known to all the Kalmucks: One day three bourkhans were praying with great fervour, and while their eyes were piously cast down, an infernal genius deposited his excrement in the sacred cup belonging to one of them. Great was the stupefaction of the bourkhans when they lifted up their heads. They consulted further what they should do. If they diffused the pestiferous matter through the air, it would be the destruction of all the beings that people that element; if they let it fall on the earth, all its inhabitants would, in like manner, perish. They resolved, therefore, for the good of mankind, to swallow the dreadful substance. Dchakdchamouni had the bottom of the cup for his share, and the legend states that so horrible was the taste, the poor bourkhan's face suddenly became blue all over. That god has ever since been depicted with a blue visage.

The aerial spirits are next in importance to the bourkhans; some of them are beneficent, others malignant. The Kalmucks worship these rather than the others, because they alone can do harm to mortals, whilst nothing but good offices are to be expected from the beneficent spirits. These genii are not immortal, and their power is much less than that of the bourkhans. The manner in which their race is propagated is very simple, but singular: an embrace, an exchange of smiles, or of gracious looks is sufficient with them to produce conception. All these spirits have divers abodes in the world and in the air; to the malevolent among them, the Kalmucks attribute all the disorders of the atmosphere, and all pestilential diseases; the evil genii are particularly active in stormy weather, wherefore the Kalmucks greatly dread thunder, and always fire many shots when a storm blows, in order to scare away the demons.

There are also in the Lamite religion a great many fabulous deities represented by monstrous idols, which appear to be old reminiscences of a primitive creed anterior to Buddhism. It is remarkable that these idols have generally female faces. They are almost always decorated with the scarf of honour, or the bell and sceptre, used by the priests in their religious ceremonies, are placed in their hands. The priests are the makers of all these idols, some of which are of curious workmanship. The materials are baked earth, bronze, silver, or even gold. [Pg 252]

Though the Kalmucks address their worship almost exclusively to the host of secondary deities we have just mentioned, still they acknowledge a supreme being, to whom the bourkhans and the good and evil genii are but vassals: if they have no image or idol representing him, it is because the conception of the one eternal creator passes all the bounds of their imagination, and they rather apply their thoughts to beings less incomprehensible and less remote from their own nature. Pallas seems to think that the Kalmucks follow the system of Epicurus, but the conversations I have had with many learned princes and priests, have convinced me of the contrary.

The Kalmucks and the Mongols believe, like the Hindus, in the transmigration of souls; but Bergmann errs greatly in asserting that they have no other idea of immortality. I have investigated the popular notions on this subject, and my conviction is that the Kalmucks consider the transmigration only as a longer or shorter trial which the soul of every man, not acknowledged a saint, must pass through before appearing in presence of the supreme judge. As for those who have been celebrated for their piety and their virtues, Lamism teaches that they are raised to the rank of bourkhans, still preserving their former individuality.

Erlik Khan is the great judge of the Kalmuck hell, and before his awful throne all souls must appear, to be rewarded according to their works. If they are found just and pure, they are placed on a golden seat supported on a cloud, and so wafted to the abode of the bourkhans; if their sins and their good works seem to balance each other, then Erlik Khan opens his great book in which all the good and evil deeds of men are minutely recorded, and having cast the dread balance, he finally pronounces sentence. On the whole this king of hell seems a good-natured devil enough, for very often to avoid condemning an unfortunate sinner who has some good qualities to recommend him, he allows him to go back to earth and live over again in his own form. The Kalmucks, always logical in their mythological notions, allege that they derive from men thus resuscitated all the knowledge they possess of hell and the future life.

The imagination of the Lamite priests has outstripped that of the Christians, and of all other nations; indeed we know nothing that can be compared with the Kalmuck hell. Erlik Khan, the judge of the dead, is likewise sovereign of the realm of the damned. His palace, which always resounds with the clashing of immense gongs, is situated in a great town surrounded with white walls, within which spreads a vast sea of urine and excrement, in which wallow the accursed. An iron causeway traverses this sea, and when the guilty attempt to pass along it, it narrows beneath them to a hair's breadth, then snaps asunder, and the wicked souls, thus tested and convicted, are straightway plunged into hell. Not far from this place of horror is a sea of blood, on which float many human heads; this is the place of torture for such as have excited quarrels and occasioned murders among relations and friends. Further on is seen the punishment of Tantalus, where a multitude of damned souls suffer hunger and thirst on a white and arid soil. They dig and turn up the earth without ceasing; but their unavailing labour only serves to wear down their arms to the shoulders, after which the stumps grow again, and their torments begin afresh. Such is the punishment of those who have neglected to provide for the wants and the jovial habits of the clergy. It would be tedious to pursue these details further; suffice it to say, that in describing the various torments of hell, the Lamites have employed every device which the wildest imagination could conceive. We must, however, give these priests credit for one thing: they do not admit the eternity of punishment;[49] but on the other hand, in the distribution of chastisement they have not forgotten the smallest offence that can possibly be committed against themselves. Hence they have immense power over the people, whom they can induce to believe what they will. Their cupidity is equal to their influence, and they never forego any opportunity of making their profit of the poor Kalmuck.

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From all these particulars of the religious notions of the Kalmucks, it is plain that the popular mythology of Lamism is like many other superstitions, only a potent instrument invented by priests to fascinate and command the multitude. By means of these incredible fables, the Lamite clergy have made themselves masters of the field, and hold great and small under their sway. It is to be remarked that in all religions ecclesiastical supremacy is inseparable from the creation of a hell, and that the one never exists without the other; in fact among nations where the idea of eternal punishments has been abandoned, the ministers of religion have seldom exercised an oppressive power over the people. This proves how large a part selfishness and the lust of sway have had in the construction of many religions; but in none has the priesthood evermore possessed a greater power than in Buddhism; in none has it more violently opposed all who have sought to shake its sway by proclaiming the infinite mercy of God.

As a natural consequence of the great prerogatives attached to the priesthood, the clergy are become extremely numerous among the followers of Lama. Prince Tumene, whose oulousse is very inconsiderable, has at least three hundred priests attached to his pagoda.

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During our stay in Astrakhan, we had opportunities of confirming, by our own observation, the truth of what Pallas remarks, that there is much analogy between the religious ceremonies of the Brahmins and those of the Kalmucks. Indeed, in studying the theological system of the Lamites, it becomes clear that their doctrines have been partly borrowed from religions still in existence. Who can fail to recognise the Biblical allegory in the fruit *shimé*, which the first men were imprudent enough to taste? Again, that period during which man was only unhappy, but not criminal, does it not represent the time that elapsed from Adam's expulsion from Paradise to the murder of Abel? The traditions of the Greek mythology appear also to have been made use of, for the dread Erlik Khan seems very like the Pluto of the ancients; and perhaps the loathsome sea that encompasses his palace is but another form of the Styx. It is unnecessary to remark that all these religious notions are familiar only to the priests and some princes; the common people are content to believe, worship, and submit blindly to the exactions of their spiritual guides.

People begin, however, to observe a certain falling off in the observance of the precepts of Lamism. Thus, although a true follower of Lama has a right to destroy only the carnivorous creatures that hurt his flocks, the Kalmucks, nevertheless, put to death domestic animals, and make no scruple of hunting. They urge, it is true, in defence of these acts, that the prohibition against killing was not made by the gods themselves, but by one of their high priests who lived several centuries ago. Nevertheless, there are many priests who would think themselves guilty of murder if they put to death the smallest insect; and very often it occurred when we were

sporting, that several of them came and earnestly entreated us to liberate the bird we had just caught. In so doing they thought they performed an act of charity, and saved a soul.

The modern Kalmuck clergy are divided into four classes. The backshaus are the chief priests and religious teachers: in the Caspian steppes the eldest of them is improperly styled the Lama. The ghelungs are the ordinary priests, and may be compared in rank and functions to the French country *curés*. The ghetzuls, or deacons, constitute the third class; and the fourth consists of the mandshis, or musicians. Above all these grades stands the Dalai Lama of Thibet, the supreme head of the church. The Russian Kalmucks were formerly in constant communication with him, but since Oubacha's emigration, the government has put a stop to this intercourse, which could not fail to thwart its views by keeping up a spirit of nationality among the Kalmucks, and fostering their attachment to their religion.

Both the clergy and those in their service enjoy all possible immunities. They are exempt from [Pg 255] all taxes and charges, and the people are bound to see that they want for nothing. It is true that the priests are prohibited by the rules of their religion from possessing property, but the restriction is evaded to a great extent, and the backshaus and ghelungs all possess numerous herds: if any one wants to buy a good horse, he must apply to them. The sloth and insolence of these priests passes all comparison; excepting their religious ceremonies, in which they chant some prayers and play on their instruments, they do absolutely nothing but eat, drink, and sleep. The meanest ghelung has always a retinue of some half dozen of deacons, who look after his cattle, his table, and his wardrobe.

The ghetzuls are like our deacons, aspirants for the priesthood, and from their body the chief backshaus select the ghelungs, always having regard to the wealth of the candidates rather than to their good character or capacity. The ordination generally takes place towards the close of the great religious festivals, at which period the new ghelungs pass the whole night in marching round the priest's camp, chaplet in hand, barefooted, and with their shaven crowns uncovered. This is the last exercise preliminary to the commencement of their ministry.

All the members of the clergy of every rank take vows of chastity, which they are far from observing; for there are few priests who do not indulge in illicit intercourse with married women. The poor husband does what he can to prevent this, but when he discovers the actual existence of the evil, instead of resenting it, he appears to accept his mischance as an honour, such is his veneration for his spiritual superiors. The priest, however, is forced to use stratagem for the indulgence of his passion. The reverend personage usually goes by night and pushes against the kibitka of the woman on whom his choice has fallen; whereupon she pretends to believe that some animal is prowling about, gets up, takes a stick, and goes out to drive it away. The priest then absconds with her, and the husband suspects nothing. The princes share these privileges with the priests, only they carry matters with a higher hand. When a woman strikes their fancy, they take possession of her without ceremony, and send her back when they are tired of her company. As for the husband, his resignation under such circumstances is almost always exemplary. He knows, too, that he may count thenceforth on the patronage of the amorous prince, and commit sundry peccadilloes on the strength of it with impunity. The marital policy is the same with regard to the priests. Pallas, therefore, is wrong to express surprise at the fact that the Kalmuck hell provides no punishment for the sin of wantonness. This omission does honour to the sly sagacity of the Lamite priests, and proves how much they distrust their own virtue. As marriage is forbidden them, they are the more liable to sin in this way, and therefore it was not reasonable that in a religious system of their own making, they should inflict punishment on their [Pg 256] own souls.

We have already described the ceremonial garb of the priests, their ordinary costume consists of a wide tunic with sleeves, and a flat broad-brimmed hat of cloth. Yellow and red are their favourite colours.

The priests always pitch their tents at a certain distance from the oulousse to which they are attached, and usually range them in a circle round a large open space, in the centre of which stand the kibitkas that serve them for temples. Such a camp is called a khouroul, and every evening the Kalmucks assemble there in great numbers to perform their religious duties. The temples are generally adorned with rich silk hangings, and with a great number of images. Opposite the door stands the altar with a little bronze image of Dchakdchamouni upon it, and a profusion of votive cups filled with grain and beans, as customary among the Brahmins; and one vessel of holy water in which several peacock's feathers are dipped. Holy water plays an important part in the religious ceremonies of Lamism; the ghetzuls distribute it in the great festivals to the people, who swallow some of it and wash their faces with the rest. It appears to be an infusion of saffron and sugar, but the Kalmucks attribute to it very marvellous properties. A lamp burns day and night before the idol, which is generally clad in brilliant silks, the head and hands alone remaining uncovered. A silk curtain hangs before the other images, and is only raised at the time of prayer.

The priests practise in a most scandalous manner on the credulity of the people. The first thing a Kalmuck does when he falls ill, is to have recourse to the prayers and invocations of his priest. If he is poor he is usually let off for a pelisse or a cloak, which the ghelung carries off on the pretext that it is the abode of some evil genius who has caused all the patient's suffering. But when the sick man is a prince, the proceedings are in accordance with his fortune. In that case it is not in a pelisse or a cloak the demon abides; he is lodged in the very body of the prince, and the business is how to provide him with another dwelling. The backshau must be paid handsomely for finding a man who will take the disaster upon himself. This is usually some poor devil who is brought by fair means or by force into the sick man's tent, where after a multitude of

odd ceremonies, he receives the name of the prince, and so the evil spirit passes into his body. He is then driven out of the oulousse with his whole family, and forbidden ever to set foot within it again. Persons so treated are called *Andin* (fugitives). They may join another oulousse, but are always obliged to set up their tents at a distance from the general camp.

The Kalmucks have three great annual festivals, which they always take care shall last at least a fortnight each. The chief of the three called, *Zackan Zara*, is in celebration of the return of spring; the second (*Urus Zara*), which falls about June, consists in the benediction of the waters; [Pg 257] and the third (*Souloun Zara*, or the feast of the lamp) takes place in December. An altar is then erected in the open air, and on it are set a great number of sacred lamps and candles, which are lighted by the priests at the moment the new moon is visible, in presence of the whole assembled clergy and laity. I borrow from Bergmann a description of the feast of Zackan Zara at which he was present.

"About noon," he says, "the sound of instruments gave token that the ceremony was about to begin, and I hastened to the khouroul, where the priests arranged in classes, and drawn up in line, were ready to begin the procession. The persons who only carried the instruments formed of themselves a considerable group. On the flanks of all those battalions of ghelungs, ghetzuls, and mandshis, floated sundry kinds of flags, some formed of strips of silk of many colours sewn in a ring, resembled the Roman ensigns; others like our banners were fixed to cross rods supported on long poles. We had not long to wait ere the chief priests, carrying with them large chests, came forth from a kibitka, and put themselves at the head of the multitude. They were closely followed by many others dressed in their richest attire, who eagerly pressed forward to assist in carrying the chests, or even to touch them with the tips of their fingers. As for the instruments, the timbrels were fixed on pieces of wood, and the great trumpets were supported by rods carried by some of the common people. The multitude that closed the procession were scarcely more numerous than the priests, and the old women alone testified their piety by sighs drawn from the bottom of their hearts. At some hundred paces from the khouroul, a scaffolding had been erected in the form of an altar thirteen or fourteen feet high, braced with ropes before and behind. In front of the altar was a circular space covered with carpets, and intended for the priests, with an immense red silk parasol to shade the high priest who filled the functions of Lama. The procession having reached the altar, the sacred chests were laid at its foot, and the images it contained were unmuffled. Everything was now ready to begin the ceremony when the Lama should arrive.

"I availed myself of this pause to examine the sanctuary. On a yellow cloth richly embroidered with sacred flowers of a red colour, I saw several votive cups, and the gilded images of some deities. Right and left of the altar stood the banners, and in front of it, but outside the carpeted circle, were the instruments. Suddenly the music struck up, and the Lama arrived, borne in triumph in a palanquin, from which he alighted at a little distance from the altar. A signal was then given; the curtain that hung before the images was raised, and the priests, the princes, and the whole people prostrated themselves three times.

"After this ceremony, the vice-khan Tchoutchei, who was present with his two sons, marched thrice with his whole suit round the circular space where the priests were squatted, and at last took his place beside the Grand Lama under the great parasol. His example was followed by his [Pg 258] wife, only she took up her position outside the clerical circle, under a reserved pavilion where tea was presented to her. Large wooden vessels filled with tea, and cakes, were then set before the priests, and a great number of sheep intended for dinner were slaughtered. The repast, often interrupted by prayers and other ceremonies, was protracted until sunset. The images were then rolled up again, and the chests carried back in procession to the tents whence they had been taken. The same ceremonies were repeated on the two following days, but other bourkhans were exhibited to the worshippers."

This feast of Zackan was instituted in honour of a victory achieved by Djackdjamouni over six false doctors with whom he contended for more than a week. Besides their great festivals, the Kalmucks have also three days in every month (the 7th, 15th, and 30th) on which they kill no sort of animal, but every faithful follower of Lama must live only on milk diet. The priests spend those days in the temple, praying from morning till night, and the people generally attend.

The Kalmucks practise family devotions, consisting of prayers chanted with some degree of harmony, in an alternation of acute and grave sounds and slow and quick measures. They pray with a rosary somewhat like those used in Catholic countries, but oftener they perform that business by a mechanical process that does great honour to the inventive wit of the Lamites. To invoke Heaven in this way they have a drum or cylinder covered with Tangout characters, and containing several sacred writings in its interior, and the whole operation consists in making the cylinder revolve more or less rapidly by means of a cord. This very simple method of praying leaves the mind quite free, and does not hinder the Kalmucks from chatting, smoking, quarrelling, and abusing each other; provided the cylinder turns, the prayer is worked off of its own accord, and the bourkhans are quite satisfied. The followers of Lama believe this manual occupation to be highly meritorious, and imagine that the noise made by the sacred writings, when the cylinder revolves, rises to the throne of the deity and brings down his blessing. The princes have a still easier method of worshipping. Whenever they do not find it convenient to repeat their prayers orally, they plant before their tent a long pole to which is attached a flag inscribed with sacred verses; and thus they leave it to the winds to carry their homage to the throne of the bourkhans.

Lucky or unlucky days are carefully observed by the Kalmucks. If one of the common people dies on a lucky day, he is buried, almost in the same way as among ourselves, and a small banner

with a sort of epitaph is planted on his grave. On the contrary, if he dies on an unlucky day his body is laid on the ground, covered only with a felt or a mat, and the performance of his obsequies is left to carrion beasts and birds. In this case the relations or friends of the deceased [Pg 259] watch to see by what kind of creature the corpse is first attacked, and from that fact they draw inferences as to how the soul fares in the other world. The rule is different with regard to princes, whose bodies are never exposed above ground. If they die on an unlucky day they are buried; otherwise they are burned with great pomp, and on the spot where they have expired a small chapel is erected, in which their ashes are deposited. The priests are still better off than the princes: die when they will they are always granted the honours of burning, provided they have had some reputation for sanctity in their lifetime; and their ashes are moulded into a little statue which is carried with great pomp to one of those small temples, called satzas, of which I have already spoken. The Kalmucks who greatly venerate the tombs of their priests, try as much as possible to keep the lamp in each of them perpetually burning. If it goes out, the first person who passes that way is bound to relight it.

The habits of private life among the Kalmucks are of course in accordance with their state of civilisation and religious belief, and are strongly marked by all their gross superstitions. Yet certain of their customs are serious and affecting, and cannot fail to make an impression on the traveller. Others are curious for their patriarchal simplicity. When a woman is in labour, one or more priests are sent for, and whilst the husband runs round the tent with a big stick to drive away the evil spirits, the ghelungs stand at the door reciting prayers, and invoking the favour of the deity on the child about to be born. When the babe is come into the world, one of the relations goes out of the tent, and gives it the name of the first object he sees. This is the practice among all classes. I have known a prince *Little Dog*, and other individuals bearing the most whimsical names. The women remain veiled for many days after their delivery, and a certain time must elapse before they can be present at the religious ceremonies.

The customs observed in marriages are more interesting, particularly when the young couple belong to the aristocracy. The preliminaries consist in stipulating the amount in horses, camels, and money, which the bridegroom is to pay to the bride's father; this being settled the young man sets out on horseback, accompanied by the chief nobles of his oulousse, to carry off his bride. A sham resistance is always made by the people of her camp, in spite of which she fails not to be borne away on a richly caparisoned horse, with loud shouts and *feux de joie*. When the party arrive at the spot where the kibitka of the new couple is to stand, and where the trivet supporting their great pot is already placed, the bride and bridegroom dismount, kneel down on carpets, and receive the benediction of their priests; then they rise, and, turning towards the sun, address their invocations aloud to the four elements. At this moment the horse on which the bride has been brought home is stripped of saddle and bridle, and turned loose for any one to catch and keep who can. The intention of this practice, which is observed only among the rich, is to signify [Pg 260] to the bride that she is thenceforth to live only with her husband, and not think of returning to her parents. The setting up of the kibitka concludes the whole ceremony. The bride remains veiled until the tent is ready, and her husband taking off her veil, hands her into her new home. There is one curious incident in the marriages of the wealthy which deserves mention. The bride chooses a bridesmaid who accompanies her in her abduction; and when they come to the place for the kibitka, the bride throws her handkerchief among the men; whoever catches it must marry the bridesmaid. For a year after marriage the wife must confine herself to the tent, and during all that time can only receive visits on its threshold, even on the part of her parents. But when the year is out she is free to do just as she likes.

All marriages are not contracted in this peaceable manner among the Kalmucks. When the relations cannot agree on the terms, which is no unusual case, the question is very often settled by force. If the young man is really enamoured he calls together his comrades and by force or cunning carries off the girl, who, after she has once entered his tent, cannot under any pretext be reclaimed by her parents.

Lamism seems in the beginning to have forbidden polygamy and divorce, but these prohibitions have long become obsolete, and both practices are now legalised among all the Kalmucks. In case of infidelity on the wife's part, the repudiation takes place publicly, if the husband requires it. The most broken down horse that can be found is brought out, its tail is cut off, the guilty woman is mounted on its bare back, and hooted out of the oulousse. But these scenes occur very rarely; for the offended husband usually contents himself with sending his wife away privately, after giving her a few head of cattle for her support. The Kalmucks of the Caspian indulge very seldom in polygamy; indeed I never heard of more than one individual who had two wives. The condition of women among them is very different from what prevails in Turkey and great part of Asia; the restrictions of the harem are unknown, and both wives and maids enjoy the greatest independence, and may freely expose their faces to view on all occasions.

I have spoken of the efforts made by the Moravian brethren of Sarepta to convert the Kalmucks, and of the intolerant manner in which the Russian clergy put a stop to them. Though we are by no means partisans of spiritual missions, and are of opinion that the apostles of our day often do more harm than good, still we cannot but regret the decision adopted by the synod. By their position, their industry, the simplicity of their religious notions, and their knowledge of the country, the Moravians are most favourably circumstanced for effecting the civilisation and social improvement of the Kalmucks; and there are some men among them who really understand their task. Buddhism, as practised among the Kalmucks tends to cramp all intellectual growth. [Pg 261] Consisting exclusively in gross and burlesque superstitions, though liberality and equality were its fundamental principles, that religion can now only serve to brutalise the people, and retain

them under the yoke of a grasping and fraudulent clergy. In this point of view a conversion to more rational doctrines would evidently be for the welfare of the Kalmucks; but the change should not be accomplished under the influence of so ignorant and superstitious a clergy as that of the Russian church; for it would be better to leave the Kalmucks to their old creed, and trust to time for their emancipation from the control of their priests. After all, the civilisation of these tribes is a difficult problem. Looking to the arid land in which they dwell, we must confess that it would be fatal to them were they subjected to our rules of life. I resided a considerable time among them, and inured myself in a great degree to their habits; and when on returning to our civilised towns, I was again a witness of the struggles, passions, vices, and evils that torment most of the nations of Europe, I could not but wish from my heart that the Kalmucks may long retain their native habits, and very long remain safe from that ambitious civilisation that gnaws the souls of the various classes of our populations.

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Oubacha's emigration left the plains of the Ural unoccupied for many years, and it was not until the beginning of this century that some Khirghis tribes of the Little Horde entered on possession of them with the consent of the Russian government. Few at first, their numbers rapidly increased by new emigrations, and at last Russia conferred upon the Khirghis colony the entire and authenticated possession of about 7,075,700 hectares of land. More fortunate than the Kalmucks, this people still enjoys a certain degree of independence, in appearance at least if not in reality. They have their sovereign khan, pay no tax, and the only obligation imposed on them is to furnish a corps of cavalry in time of war.

It is hard to know exactly the number of these Khirghis. The Russian government is always solicitous to persuade the world of the prosperity of its subject peoples, and to this end it publishes very fallacious documents. Thus in a supplement to the journal of the ministry of the interior, August 30, 1841, the population of the horde is set down at 16,550 tents, whereas the real number is but 8000, as appears from an extract taken in my presence at Astrakhan from the official documents of the military governor. But as the editor of the St. Petersburg journal judiciously remarks, the tribe cannot but have augmented rapidly under the wise administration of Russia, and it is from his admiration for his government he deduces the best proof in support of his statistical statements. Such arguments have not much weight with us, and we even suspect that the number 8000 is an exaggeration, and that the Khirghis have remained faithful to Russia only because they cannot do otherwise, since the government has taken the precaution of [Pg 262] imprisoning them between two lines of Cossacks, those of the Ural and the Volga. Besides, if I may judge from the facts communicated to me at Astrakhan, the immigration of the Khirghis was not so free as the government is pleased to proclaim it to have been. Both force and fraud were employed to make them settle in regions from which Russia derived no profit since the flight of the Kalmucks.

The Khirghis are nomades, living in felt tents, and employed in cattle rearing, like the Kalmucks. But they profess the Mahometan religion, belong evidently to the Turkish race, and have been from all time implacable foes to the Mongol hordes. Latterly, however, they appear to have lived in harmony with the Kalmucks of the Volga. Their khan often visits Prince Tumene, and in 1836 more than 2000 Khirghis encamped on the banks of the Volga, and took part in the grand entertainments given by the Kalmuck chief to the government authorities. But this state of peace is only the result of imperious necessity; if the hordes were independent, their old animosities would soon break out again.

The present khan of the Khirghis is Giangour Boukevitch, who is reputed to be an able man, and desirous of introducing European civilisation among his people. The Emperor Nicholas had a handsome wooden house erected for him at the foot of the sand-hills called Ryn Peski, but he seldom resides in it. A few paltry buildings have been subsequently erected, through the strenuous intervention of the Russian *employés*, but it would be extravagant to behold in a score of cabins the elements of a future capital, as a certain St. Petersburg journal is pleased to do. The Khirghis will not so readily forsake their nomade ways. Their territory is hardly better than that of the Kalmucks; and their khan himself, obliged to camp out during the greater part of the year, in order to find fodder for his cattle, only returns to his pretended capital when the inclemency of winter drives him from his felt kibitka. It is necessary to exercise extreme caution and rigid criticism respecting all things pertaining to Russia, if we would arrive at the truth; for otherwise we shall be every moment in danger of mistaking for an indication of improvement and increased prosperity what is but the result of arbitrary power. We have repeatedly noticed instances of such mistakes on the part of travellers who have recently visited the southern portions of the empire. Never was any power more prodigal of outward decorations than the Muscovite; Russia is of all countries that which most lavishly expends its money to please the eye. To Potemkin belongs the honour of having been the first to play off these mystifications, when he got up extemporaneous villages and herds of cattle all along the road travelled by Catherine II. in her journey to the Crimea. He has had no lack of successors ever since. Alleys of acacias spring up by enchantment in the new towns; churches and houses with columns and porticoes; magnificent [Pg 263] double eagles bearing the crown and the sceptre; numerous bureaucratic sign-boards with gilded inscriptions, &c., are seen on all hands. This mania of wishing to appear what one is not, which has always characterised the Russians, seems to us one of their greatest obstacles to all real improvement, and to be one of the most dangerous maladies of the empire. Certainly it is a defect not easy to be avoided by a backward people who aspire to put themselves on a level with their more advanced neighbours; but in Russia, unhappily, artificial ostentation has been systematised; not only does it exist among individuals, but it forms the basis of all the acts of the government; from one end of the empire to the other, in the towns and in the steppes of the Caspian, its costly

stage scenery is everywhere to be found; it has become the aim and the fixed idea of every man, from the ministers of state down to the lowest *employé*; and whilst millions are uselessly expended to adorn the drapery of the theatre, the framework of the social edifice is allowed to go to ruin. The future welfare and the real progress of the country are deemed of little moment, provided the vanity of the day be satisfied, and the comedy be well played before his majesty and the strangers whom curiosity induces to visit Russia.

After the Khirghis, we have also on the left bank of the Volga, near its mouths, a small Tatar horde, called Koundrof, an offshoot of the great tribe of the Kouban. These Tatars, who number about 1100 tents, were formerly bestowed by Russia as vassals upon the khans of the Kalmucks, but they were adroit enough to escape from taking part in Oubacha's famous emigration. Unavailing attempts have been subsequently made to colonise them. The governor of Astrakhan made them build two villages thirty years ago; but they soon abandoned those fixed dwellings, and resumed their old roving habits.

Lastly, there are the black Nogais, who occupy the banks of the Terek, to the number of 8432 tents. We shall speak of them in detail in the next chapter.

*Table of the Nomade Population of the Governments of Astrakhan and the Caucasus.*

| | Families. |
|---|---|
| Kalmucks | 15,500 |
| Khirghis | 8,000 |
| Koundrof Tatars | 11,000 |
| Sertof Tatars | 112 |
| Black Nogaïs | 8,432 |
| Turcomans | 3,838 |
| Total | 36,982 |

**FOOTNOTES:**

[48] After the curious researches of M. Ferdinand Denis, respecting the cosmography and the fantastic histories of the middle ages, we can no longer wonder at the singular conceptions of the Kalmucks. The world of Cosmas has likewise its four great sacred rivers, and he, too, like the followers of the Dalai Lama, makes the sun and the stars revolve round a mystic column. We might point out many other analogies between the Mongol myths and those of the medieval writers; but we will rather refer the reader to the enchanted world of M. Denis, to those elegant and poetic pages in which the learned librarian of Sainte Géneviève has so ably demonstrated the historical importance of all those fabulous legends, which at first appear to be only the idle ravings of an extravagant imagination.

[49] The priests, however, have endeavoured to persuade the people that there are five sins which inevitably draw down everlasting punishment: these are irreverence towards the gods, thefts committed in the temples, disrespect to parents, murder, and, of course, offences against the clergy. These ideas are for all that in contradiction to the sacred books; but it is not surprising that the ministers of the Grand Lama have sought to give them vogue amongst the multitude.



# CHAPTER XXVII.

THE TATARS AND MONGOLS—THE KAPTSHAK—HISTORY AND TRADITIONS OF THE NOGAIS.

Perhaps no people has given occasion to more discussions than the Tatars and Mongols, nor is the problem of their origin completely solved in our day, notwithstanding the most learned investigations. Some admit that the Tatars and Mongols formed but one nation, others allege that they are two essentially different races. According to Lesvèque d'Herbelot and Lesur[50] the Tatars are but Turks. Klaproth,[51] while he asserts that the Tatars and Mongols spring from the same stock, nevertheless regards the white Tatars, whom Genghis Khan conquered, as Turks. Lastly, D'Ohson in his remarkable history of the Mongols, treats the Mongols and Tatars as distinct races, but does not admit the theory of the Turkish origin. The same uncertainty that hangs over the Mongol and Tatar hordes of the fourteenth century, prevails with regard to the people who, under the name of Tatars, now dwell in the southern part of the Russian empire; and they have been considered sometimes as descendants of the Turkish tribes that occupied those regions previously to the twelfth century, sometimes as remnants of the conquering Mongol Tatars. Let us try to unravel this tangled web of opinions, and see what may be the least problematical origin of these various nations.

The Chinese writers for the first time make mention of the Tatar people in the eighth century of our era, under the name of Tata, and consider them as a branch of the Mongols. The general and historian, Meng Koung,[52] who died in 1246, and who commanded a Chinese force sent to aid the Mongols against the Kin, informs us in his memoirs that a part of the Tatar horde, formerly dispersed or subdued by the Khitans,[53] quitted the In Chan mountains,[54] where they had taken refuge, and joined their countrymen, who dwelt north-east of the Khitans. The white Tatars and the savage or black Tatars then formed the most important tribes of those regions.

According to D'Ohson, the Chinese comprehended under the name of Tatars all the nomade hordes that occupied the regions north of the desert of Sha No, either because the Tatars were the nearest, or because they were the most powerful of all those tribes. The intercourse of the [Pg 265] Chinese with the west of Asia, would have afterwards served to give currency to the general denomination by which they designated their nomade vassals; and thus from the commencement of the power of the Genghis Khan, those tribes would have been already known by the name of Tatars,[55] which was propagated from nation to nation until it reached Europe, although it was repudiated with contempt by the conquerors themselves, as that of a nation they had exterminated. It is a fact established by the statements of many writers, and by D'Ohson himself, that Genghis Khan annihilated the white Tatars, and thus it has come to pass by a most curious freak of accident, that this extinguished people became celebrated all over the East by the conquests of its very destroyers.

Jean du Plan de Carpin expresses himself still more positively: "The country of the Tatars," he says, "bears the name of Mongal,[56] and is inhabited by four different peoples, the Jeka Mongals, that is to say, the Great Mongals; the Sou Mongals, or the Fluviatile Mongals, who call themselves Tatars from the name of the river that flows through their territory; the Merkit and the Mecrit. All these peoples have the same personal characteristics and the same language, though belonging to different provinces, and ruled by divers princes."[57] He then goes on to speak of the birth of Genghis Khan among the Jeka Mongals, and of his conflicts with the Sou Mongals and the other *Tatar* tribes.

On comparing this author with the Chinese writers mentioned and commented on in the works of de Guignes, Abel Rémusat and D'Ohson, it will appear beyond all question that the Jeka Mongals are none other than the black Tatars, and that the Sou Mongals are the representatives [Pg 266] of the white Tatars. As for the Merkit and the Mecrit, we confess, with M. d'Avezac, that our knowledge of them amounts only to conjecture; but, whatever was their origin, they are of but little importance with regard to the question we are now discussing.

The old Mohammedan authors, such as Massoudi and Ebn Haoucal, who treat of the nations of Asia, appear not to have known the Tatars, for they never speak of them. Their name figures, however, in a Persian abridgment of universal history, entitled "Modjmel ut Tevarikh el Coussas;" and Reschyd el Dyn calls the Tatars a people famous throughout the world; but it would be difficult to extract from these authorities any precise argument for the solution of our problem. After all, as previously to the days of Genghis Khan, the most important tribe of Mongols bore the name of Tatars, it is not surprising that the Mussulman writers included the whole of that people under this denomination. The Chinese, on the contrary, being in close intercourse with the Tatars, their vassals, must of course have known their generic name, and transmitted it to us.

Now let us recapitulate. If we reflect that Genghis Khan, though born in the tribe especially designated as black Tatars, yet adopted the denomination of Mongols for his people; that historians have been unanimous in calling Genghis Khan's soldiers Mongols; that the Chinese chroniclers, De Guignes, and many others, have considered the Tatars as only a branch of the Mongols; that Du Plan de Carpin himself begins his history with these words: "*Incipit historia Mongalorum quos nos Tartaros appellamus*," it will not be easy to deny, that previously to the twelfth century, previously to the great Asiatic invasions, the Tatars and Mongols were parts of one nation, belonging to one race. If subsequently the hordes of Genghis renounced their special name, this circumstance must be ascribed to the sanguinary contest which Jessoukai and his son, Genghis Khan, had to sustain against their oppressors, the white Tatars, then the principal tribe in those regions. But the term Tatar still prevailed in Europe, though it continued to be regarded as synonymous with Mongol by all the Chinese writers, and by most of those of other nations.

The religious and political constitution of the various Mongol or Tatar branches before Genghis Khan, is very imperfectly known to us, and affords us no manner of ground for presuming a positive separation into two races. According to the Mongol work, "The Source of the Heart," written in the beginning of the thirteenth century it appears that Lamism was first adopted by Genghis Khan, and that it became under his successors the prevailing religion of the Mongols proper. Marco Polo's narrative seems nevertheless to prove, that at the end of the thirteenth century the Mongols had not yet entirely adopted the creed and rites of Lamism; we now find it professed by all the Kalmucks of Russia.

In later times, after the invasions by Genghis Khan and his sons, the Europeans, through [Pg 267] ignorance or heedlessness, gave the name of Tatars not only to the tribes who had figured in those Asiatic irruptions, but also to the Mahometans, who had once been masters of the regions adjacent to the Caspian and the Black Sea, and had been subjugated by those conquerors; hence have arisen in a great measure all the mistakes and discussions respecting the origin of the Tatars. After the Mongol torrent had subsided, Europeans persisted in giving the appellation of Tatars to all those Mussulman nations originally of Turkish origin, that to this day occupy the territory of Kasan and Astrakhan, the Crimea and the region called Turcomania, situated between the Belur Mountains, Lake Aral, and the Caspian Sea; and as all these nations exhibited a religious, political, and moral character peculiar to themselves, people were naturally led to

distinguish them from the Mongols, and to attribute to them a special origin. Thus Pallas and many other travellers, after visiting the Mahometans of Southern Russia, and comparing them with the Kalmucks, have made of the Tatars and Mongols two distinct races; and Malte Brun, in his geography, has given the name of Tatar to all the tribes established in our day in Turkistan, applying that of Mongol exclusively to the nations inhabiting the central tableland of Asia, from Lake Palcati and the Belur Mountains to the great wall of China, and to the Siolky Mountains which separate them from the Manchous, a tribe of the great race of the Tongouses. All these writers have failed to observe, that the appellation Tatar lost all signification in Asia under the destroying power of Genghis Khan, and has ever since existed only in the European vocabulary.

Doubtless, Genghis Khan and his successors did not achieve all their conquests by the arms of the Mongols alone; and after having subjugated all the Mahometan nations occupying the vast regions of Turcomania and a part of Western Asia, they of course incorporated them with their hordes, and employed them in their European invasions.

What, then, are we to suppose is the origin of all those tribes who, under the name of Tatars, now inhabit the south of Russia? We agree entirely with the opinion put forth in Courtin's "Encyclopédie Moderne," that these Tatars are nothing but Turks, Comans, or Petshenegues, who having been at the commencement of the thirteenth century masters of all the countries north and west of the Caspian Sea as far the Dniepr, were afterwards subdued by the sons of Genghis Khan, and contributed towards the foundation of a new empire comprised between the Dniepr and the Emba, to which was given the name of Kaptshak, or Kiptshak, a designation which appears to have been originally that of the territory.

The princes of this empire were Mongols or Tatars, but the majority of their subjects were [Pg 268] Turks. It appears even that the latter formed a large portion of the armies of Genghis Khan in his late expeditions. The Turkish language thus remained predominant throughout the Kaptshak, Little and Great Bokhara, and among the Bashkirs and Tchouvaches. A few Mongol words are still found in the Turkish dialect of the Russian Mahometans, but they are extremely rare, and this may be easily explained. The soldiers of the Mongol army were of course bachelors, and when they married Kaptshak women, their children adopted the language of their mothers. The sovereigns themselves of this new empire soon embraced Mahometanism. Bereke, the brother and successor of Batou, set the first example; Usbeck Khan, who reigned in 1305, followed in his steps, and declared himself the protector of Islam, which thenceforth became the creed of the conquerors as well as of the conquered.

It must not be inferred from the preceding statement that the Turks and Mongols may not, in more remote times, have belonged to one and the same race; we are not quite of that opinion; we have considered the Turkish race only under the conditions in which it appeared in Europe and Asia about the twelfth century, that is to say, modified by long contact with the Caucasian nations, and we have left altogether out of view what it may previously have been. Moreover, if De Guignes is rightly informed, the inhabitants of the Kaptshak are really of Mongol origin, and the soldiers of Genghis Khan took pains to prove to them that they were their countrymen.

Towards the close of the fifteenth century, the empire of the Kaptshak was divided into several khanats—Kasan, Astrakhan, and the Crimea, the rulers of which, descended from Genghis, were all Mongols; but then they had no longer armies drawn from the interior of Asia, and the Turkish element finally prevailed throughout the whole population. Still, it cannot be denied that the Mahometan hordes of Russia present some resemblance to the Mongols, and this tends to confirm the ideas we have expressed above. But then it is obvious that two nations that served so long under the same banners, and lived under the same government, must have intermarried with each other, and that their blood must have been frequently mingled. Moreover, it is a most remarkable fact, with what pertinacity the Mongol type maintains its identity in spite of the mixture of many generations; a few marriages are sufficient to spread traces of it in the course of a certain time, over a whole nation. I have seen one example of this in the Cossacks, who have been living amidst the Kalmucks for about two hundred years.

The Tatars in the mountains of the Crimea more rarely exhibit Mongol features; the Greek profile is frequently found among them. This difference is owing to their mixture with the Goths, the Greeks, and the remnants of other nations that have successively overrun the peninsula.

The Nogais, who inhabit the plains of the Crimea, and the steppes of the Sea of Azof, are [Pg 269] unquestionably the nearest in appearance to the Mongols of all the Tatars, and generally their physiognomy is such as cannot be attributed to any other origin. Moreover, according to their own traditions, they never made part of the Kaptshak, nor did they arrive in Europe until subsequently to the death of Genghis Khan, after having dwelt from time immemorial, if not with the Mongols, at least in their vicinity.

According to Lesvèque, the horde of the Nogais, long the most celebrated of the west after that of the Kaptshak, was constituted in the thirteenth century by Nogai, a Tatar general, who, after conquering the countries north of the Black Sea, succeeded in forming a state independent of the Kaptshak. The traditions I collected among the Nogais themselves, make no mention whatever of a general of that name; their chronicles allege that the name of the nation is derived from *neogai* (which may be translated by the phrase, *mayst thou never know happiness*), and that it was bestowed on them in their old country, on account of their precarious and vagabond life.[58] I am inclined to adopt this opinion; for considering the importance which the Nogais attach to nobility and to antiquity of race, it would be very extraordinary that they should not have preserved the name of the founder of their power. The same traditions relate that after the death of Genghis Khan, the horde whence the Nogais of the Crimea are descended, arrived under the command of

Djanibek Khan on the Volga, the left bank of which it kept possession of for many years. Part of this horde afterwards crossed the river, and advancing to the foot of the Caucasus, settled on the Kouma and the Terek. The principal tribe of these Tatars, and the same of which we are about to speak, soon forsook those regions, and after crossing the Don, the Dniepr, and the Dniestr, finally settled in Bessarabia, in the country called Boudjiak. There it remained more than half a century; but being continually harassed by the Turks and Moldavians, it abandoned its new country, retraced its steps, and under the command of Jannat Bey, traversed the Crimea and the Straits of Kertch. After reaching the banks of the Kouban, the horde was broken up, by internal dissensions, into three branches, the largest of which remained on the Kouban, and the others recrossed the straits. One of these tribes fixed itself on the plains of the Crimea, and the other returned to Bessarabia, partly by land, partly by sea.

The Nogais of the Kouban again divided into several tribes, some of which connected themselves with the Kalmuck hordes, others with the mountaineers of the Caucasus. During all these emigrations, they were successively commanded by Jam Adie, Kani Osman, and Kalil Effendi, the Tatar of the Crimea. The latter, at the head of one of the principal tribes the Kouban, [Pg 270] marched along the eastern coast of the Sea of Azof, crossed the Don, and encamped on the banks of the Moloshnia Vodi, where he died; his tomb still exists near the Nogai village of Keneges, on the Berda. He was succeeded by Asit Bey, who ruled for seventeen years, and was the last Tatar chief; he died in 1824. But long before his death, in the time of Catherine II., these Nogai hordes were completely subjected to the laws of the empire, and were under the management of Russian officials. Count Maison, a French emigrant, was appointed their governor in 1808, and he it was, who by dint of perseverance, made them renounce their nomade ways, and settle in villages.

The Nogais now occupy the whole region between the Sea of Azof and the Moloshnia Vodi. They are about 52,000 souls, residing in seventy-six villages. As long as they were vagrants they remained very poor, cultivating no grain but millet, which was their usual food, and of this they could hardly procure a sufficient supply. Turbulent, fickle, and thievish, they had an insurmountable aversion for all steady toil, and particularly for agricultural labour; their occupations were tending cattle, hunting, riding, music, and dancing. They were fond of assembling and sitting in a ring, smoking and hearing the traditions of their forefathers. All the cares of the household fell upon the women. Their clothes, cooking utensils, bread, &c., they procured in exchange for cattle. They seldom remained many months in one spot; an hour was enough for them to pack up wife, children, and goods in their araba,[59] and then moving at random towards some other point of the horizon, they carried with them all they possessed. "Such is the order established by God himself," cried the Nogai, "to us he has given wheels, to other nations fixed dwellings and the plough." There was little wealth among them in those times, though there was a certain overbearing aristocracy that monopolised all the gifts of fortune and power to the detriment of the other members of the community, many of whom, either through ignorance or sloth, became even slaves of the shrewder and braver. Such was the origin of the authority of the Mourzas, or noble chiefs of the *aouls* (villages, encampments).

The Nogais had for their emigrations, like the Kalmucks, circular tents of felt, three or four yards in diameter, and conical at top. In winter, they constructed earthen huts beside their kibitkas. Such cold and damp dwellings were very prejudicial to health, as was proved by the multitude of children that died every year.

Under Count Maison's wise and disinterested administration, all these old habits disappeared by degrees, and the Nogais began to improve their condition. By dint of patience and zeal they were prevailed on to build commodious dwellings, and having once established themselves in villages, their prosperity went on regularly increasing, and every man had the means of procuring subsistence for his family by his own labour. Count Maison is still remembered by the [Pg 271] Nogais with the most lively gratitude, but his honesty did not protect him from malevolence and intrigues; it provoked against him all the subordinate functionaries whose peculations he prevented; and after enduring disgusts and annoyances without number, he sent in his resignation to St. Petersburg in 1821. Since that time the Nogais have had no special governor, but are under the control of functionaries attached to the ministry of the interior, who reside in their villages. They have, however, preserved the judicial authority of their cadis, and the Russian tribunals only take cognizance of those criminal and civil cases which the cadis cannot decide. The Nogais are exempt from military service, but they pay money contributions to the crown, at the rate of thirty rubles for each family.

For about fifteen years past a Mennonite of the German colonies has of his own accord continued the work so judiciously begun by Count Maison. M. Cornies, one of the most remarkable men in New Russia, deservedly exercises the greatest influence over the Nogais, among whom his advice and exertions have already produced some excellent results. The miserable villages of former days have been gradually superseded by pretty houses in the German style, surrounded with gardens, and agriculture has made such progress, that a large number of farmers are now able to export corn.

The Nogais are rather strict observers of the precepts of Islam. Their country contains eleven mosques, and each village has several houses for prayer. Their clergy are subject to the mufti of the Crimea and of his representative, who resides in the aoul of Emmaout; they consist of effendi mollahs, mollas, and cadis. The mollahs take tithe of all grain, and a fortieth of the cattle. Their functions are to call the people to prayer, to pray for the sick, write talismans, preside at sacrifices, marriages, and funerals, and perform all the rites of public worship. The effendi mollahs draw up articles of marriage and divorce; and, in concert with the village elders, they decide all quarrels and suits between husband and wife, and all questions relative to the sale of

the latter. They also fulfil along with the cadis the duties of interpreters of the law, and preceptors of the Koran. Circumcision, which boys undergo at ten or twelve years of age, is performed by the bab (father), whose office is hereditary. Hadjis, or pilgrims, who have visited the kaaba of Mecca, though they have no official duties, still possess great authority, and are consulted on almost all occasions; they are distinguished by a green or white shawl rolled round their woollen caps. The pilgrimage to Mecca, is not quite obligatory on the Nogais, who generally exempt themselves from it by means of offerings and sacrifices. The new measures adopted by the Russians render this journey very difficult, and the Tatars must soon renounce it altogether. Every individual is bound before he sets out to prove that he takes with him at least 120*l.*; his passport costs him nearly 8*l.*, and if he does not return, the whole village where he was born is [Pg 272] bound to pay his quota of taxation until a new census of the population is made.

Expiatory sacrifices are very common among the Nogais: they take place during the Kourban Bairam, on the occasion of a death, for the commemoration of deceased persons, on the celebration of a marriage, on return from a journey, and as an atonement for the omission of any religious duty. Those who offer them up invite to their houses their friends and relations, and the poor of the village, to whom they give a good portion of the victim, which is either a sheep or a cow, according to the wealth of the individual, or the importance of the occasion.

The great forty days fast of Ramazan is strictly observed only by aged persons of either sex. Curiously enough the obligation of prayer is imposed only on persons aged forty or fifty; the seventh day of the Mussulman week, which corresponds to our Friday, is celebrated only by the priests and some devout old men. The prohibition against wine is not at all regarded by the young, especially in travelling. In general the rising generation of Nogais pay very little heed to the commandments of Mahomet, and by no means share this religious fanaticism of the Asiatic Mussulmans. Long and handsome beards are held in great veneration among them. Old men shave the whole head, but the young leave a small tuft growing on the top of the crown. This custom obliges them to wear woollen caps in all seasons.

The Nogais have generally two wives, and some even three, but this is a very rare case. The plurality and sale of wives frequently occasion quarrels, brawls, and acts of bloody vengeance.

Charity, which is regarded in the Koran as one of the greatest virtues, extends only to the poor who beg from door to door, and who are usually given a little bread and millet. Orphans and old people are left to the care of their friends or relations, for the Nogais have no public establishment for the indigent. The fidelity of the Nogais is proverbial; even the most thievish of them would never betray a trust reposed in them. As for the ancient hospitality, it is now only exercised from habit, and very rarely from virtue. Still they invariably afford the most cordial welcome to every aged Mussulman or hadji, and in these cases their hospitality is quite patriarchal. Reverence for the aged is considered by them as a sacred duty.

One of the most striking characteristics of these Tatars is their excessive vanity with regard to every thing that concerns the nobility of their ancestors. It shows itself not only towards strangers, but also in their dealings with each other. They profess likewise the most profound contempt for the Persians, the Turks, and even for the mountain Tatars of the Crimea, and deem it a dishonour to intermarry with those nations, which yet are of the same creed, if not of the same origin with themselves.

The Nogai alternates between total supineness and extraordinary exertion, so that to make any [Pg 273] profit of him he must be employed by task work and not by the day. This sloth, however, is not so much a vice inherent in the character of the nation as a result of its old vagrant and precarious existence, and of its limited wants. On the other hand, the nomade habits of other days have developed the capacity of this people in a remarkable degree, and whether as artisans or journeymen, agriculturists or manufacturers, the Nogais invariably give proof of great ability and skill.

The Nogai is of moderate stature, but well proportioned; his movements are free and unembarrassed, and his attitude is never awkward under any circumstances. The women are, like all those of the East, comely when young; but when old they are horribly ugly. Neither sex exhibits any decided national physiognomy; countenances both of the Circassian and the Mongol type are very common among them.

The Nogai constructs his own cottage with bricks dried in the sun, and whitewashes it regularly once a year within and without. Its dimensions are scarcely more than two or three-and-thirty feet by thirteen. The roof consists of a few rafters on which are laid reeds and branches of trees loaded with earth and ashes. A dwelling of this kind hardly costs more than 100 rubles; others of a larger size, with a floor and ceiling of wood, cost from 400 to 500 rubles. Each dwelling consists of two rooms, the kitchen, which is next the entrance, and the family room. The kitchen contains a fireplace, an iron pot, wooden vessels for milk and butter, harness and agricultural implements; the second room, which serves as a dormitory, is furnished with felt carpets, quilts, a pile of cushions, boxes containing clothes, and a dozen of napkins embroidered with coloured silk or cotton, according to the fortune of the family, and hung round the room. When the Nogai has two or more wives he constructs his house in such a manner that each of them may have her separate room.

The costume of the Nogais is commodious. It consists of wide trousers, a cotton or woollen shirt, and a short caftan, fastened round the waist with a leathern girdle. Their head-dress is a cylindrical cap of lamb's-skin. In the winter they wear a sheep's-skin over the caftan, and in snowy weather they muffle themselves in a bashlik, or hood, which conceals their head and shoulders.

The women wear a shift, a cloth caftan, belted above the hips with a broad girdle adorned with large metal buckles, Turkish trousers and slippers. Their head-dress is a white veil fastened to the crown of the head, with the two ends hanging gracefully on the shoulders. They wear little silver finger and nose rings, and heavy earrings often connected by a chain passing under the chin. Young girls part their hair into a multitude of tresses, and instead of the veil wear a little red skull-cap bedizened with bits of metal and all sorts of gewgaws.

The Nogais eat mutton, beef, mares' flesh, &c., fish, and dairy produce. They prepare koumiss [Pg 274] from mares' milk, and esteem it above all other liquors. They also kill sick horses for food, and very often do not disdain the flesh of one that has died a natural death. Mares' flesh, minced, forms the chief part of a national dish called *tarama*, which the men eat with their friends in token of sincerity and brotherhood. The women are not allowed to partake of these repasts. Their favourite dish is millet boiled in water, with a little sour milk called *tchourtzch*. Kalmuck tea is also much esteemed, and since the improvement of agriculture, the use of bread, which was formerly unknown, is gradually spreading among them.

Their most common diseases are fever, small-pox, ulcers, itch, and syphilis. No one takes any means either to avoid or cure them. Charms are the only medicine known to the Nogais, and they are even quite indifferent to certain maladies which they attribute to fatality. They attribute great medicinal virtues to pepper, alum, sugar, and honey. The mortality of infants is frightful among them, and accounts for the stationary condition in which the population has long remained.

No system of education as yet exists among the Nogais; their children grow up like the young of animals. Every village, indeed, possesses a cabin decorated with the name of school, in which the clergy give some imperfect lessons in the Tatar language and writing; but the rest of their teaching, which is exclusively religious, consists in the reading of Arabic books, which the teachers understand no better than the pupils.

The rearing of cattle, particularly horses, forms the chief occupation of the Nogais. Their horses are of the Kalmuck Khirghis race, nimble and robust, though of moderate size, and usually fetch from 100 to 120 rubles: they pass the whole year in the steppe, and have to find their food under the snow in winter. The horned cattle is small. The cows sell for twenty or thirty rubles; they give little milk, and are generally unprofitable. Camels are little used and seldom seen.

In Count Maison's time the Nogais were required to sow, at least, two tchetverts of corn per head, which made a total of about 40,000 tchetverts for the whole population. A year after the count's retirement, the seed sown in the whole territory did not exceed 19,000 tchetverts, and the quantity went on diminishing from year to year. But since the disastrous winters, for cattle, of 1836 and 1837, the Nogais have been induced, by M. Cornies, to apply themselves again to agriculture, and the women have taken a part with the men in field labours.

Their mode of cultivating the ground is extremely defective; they have bad ploughs drawn by four or five pair of oxen, whilst their neighbours, the Germans, do infinitely more work with but two. The harvest generally takes place in July, and is a season of great jollity. Gipsy musicians stroll over the country at that period, and collect an ample store of wheat and millet. The corn is [Pg 275] trodden out by horses in the open air: the best, which is called *arnaout*, sells at from seven to twelve rubles the tchetvert. The territory of the Nogais is still common property, and the want of finite boundaries occasions many quarrels, especially at harvest time.

As usual, among eastern nations, the Nogai women do all the household drudgery, for the men think it beneath them to take part in it. The poor mother of the family is therefore obliged to prepare the victuals with her own hands, to wash the linen, milk the cows and mares, keep the house in repair, churn butter, &c., and take care of the children. She must also gather the firewood, prepare all the drinkables, make candles and soap, and dress the sheep-skins to make pelisses for all the family. This is hard drudgery, and a few years of such married life suffice to make her old. Under such circumstances it is not surprising that the Nogai cannot content himself with one wife, and that the purchase of young girls is so important and costly an affair among them.

A man usually chooses his wife from a remote village; for every young man makes it a point of honour not to have seen his wife before marriage. The only particulars he is anxious to learn indirectly is whether the lady is plump and has long hair. When his choice is fixed, he bargains with the father or the relations of the girl for the price he is to pay for her. A handsome girl of good family costs four or five hundred rubles, besides a couple of score of cows and a few other beasts. Young widows are cheaper, and old women are to be had for nothing. The bride's price is paid on the spot by the wooer, and a horse and two oxen are reckoned equivalent to a couple of cows. The girl's inclinations are never consulted, and she submits to her lot with stoical indifference; she is given dresses, mattresses, and cushions by way of dower. Matches are often made when the bride is still in her cradle, the bridegroom's father paying down a part of the stipulated sum, and when the girl has attained the age of thirteen or fourteen, the marriage takes place without any opposition on the young man's part. But this traffic in girls often occasions long lawsuits between families. Various accidents occur to prevent the espousals, such as mutilation, loss of health or beauty, and, above all, bad faith, and hence arise animosities that are often transmitted from one generation to another.

The women of the mountain race of Tatars of the Crimea, and the Kalmuck women, cost less than young Nogai girls, and are purchased by the poorer classes.

On the day appointed for the wedding, the young people, who have not yet seen each other, choose each of them a deputy, who exchange hands on their behalf, and thus the marriage rite is

accomplished. The day is spent in merriment, and in the evening the bride is veiled, and escorted by a troop of women to the conjugal abode, where she sees her husband for the first time.

The young wife must remain shut up at home for a whole year, and see no men, conversing only with her husband and his relations. After this her emancipation is celebrated by a grand banquet. The Nogai women are very timid, for the jealousy of their husbands is extreme. When a married man dies, his brothers inherit his widows, and may keep or sell them as they please. A husband may repudiate his wife whenever he chooses, but she is entitled to marry again after the legalisation of the divorce. When a Nogai has many wives, the first retains peculiar privileges so long as she is young and handsome, but when her beauty fades, a younger rival always gains the good graces of the husband. Hence arise interminable quarrels, and domestic peace is only maintained by the kantshouk or whip of the lord of the mansion. On the whole, the women endure a hard slavery; but their ignorance of a better state of things makes their chains set light on them, and they are insensible of the degraded condition in which they are kept by their absolute lords. [Pg 276]

It would be difficult to predict with accuracy the fate reserved for all this Mahometan population. The Nogais have doubtless made great progress within the last twenty years; but their religious notions and their moral and political constitution will long impede their complete reformation, and it will need many a generation to eradicate from among them all those prejudices and all those old habits of a wandering life, which so fatally obstruct their prosperity and their intellectual growth. Besides, it is now impossible to mistake the tendency of the policy adopted by the Russian government towards the foreign races: there is every reason to think that they will at last be entirely absorbed by the Slavic population.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[50] Histoire de la Russie, par Lesvèque. Bibliothèque Orientale, par d'Herbelot. Hist. des Cosaques, par Lesur.

[51] Voyage au Caucase, par Klaproth, en 1807 et 1808.

[52] See Klaproth, Asia Polyglotta, p. 202.

[53] The Kitans occupied the country north of the Chinese provinces of Tschy Li and Ching-Ching, watered by the Charamuin, or Liao Ho and its confluents. Ibid.

[54] The chain of mountains called In Chan, begins north of the country of the Ordos, or of the most northern curve of the Hoang Ho, or Yellow River, and extends eastward to the sources of the rivers that fall into the western part of the Gulf of Pekin.

[55] We have entirely rejected from our discussion the word *Tartar*, which owes its origin only to a *jeu de mots*, of which St. Louis was the author.

[56] *Mongal* is the most frequent reading in the MSS.; and where the more exact reading, *Mongal*, occurs, it is probably a correction by the copyists. *Mongal* is the form prevalent among the Russians; and we have already had occasion to remark, that in transcribing proper names, Du Plan de Carpin generally adopts the Slavonic pronunciation, as he had it from his companion and interpreter, Benedict of Poland. (Extract from the interesting treatise of M. D'Avezac, on the travels of Du P. de C.)

[57] Terra quadam est in partibus Orientis de qua dictum est supra, quæ Mongal nominatur. Hæc terra quondam populos quatuor habuit: unus Yeka Mongal, id est magni Mongali vocabantur; secundus Su Mongal, id est aquatici Mongali vocabantur; sibi autem se ipsos Tartaros appellabant, a quodam fluvio qui currit per terram illorum qui Tatar nominatur. Alius appellabatur Merkit; quartus Mecrit. Hi populi omnes unam formani personarum et unam linguam habebant, quamvis inter se per provincias et principes essent divisi.

In terra Jeka Mongal fuit quidam qui vocabatur Chingis; este incepit esse robustus venator coram domino: dedicit enim homines furari, rapere prædam. Ibat autem ad alias terras et quoscumque poterat capere et sibi associare non demittebat; homines autem suæ gentes ad se inclinavit, qui tanquam ducem ipsum sequebantur ad omnia malefacta. Hic autem incepit pugnare cum Su Mongal sive Tartaris, postquam plures homines aggregaverat sibi, et interfecit ducem eorum, et multo bello sibi omnes Tataros subjugavit et in suam servitutem recepit ac redegit. Post hæc cum omnibus istis pugnavit cum Merkitis, qui erant positi juxta terram Tartarorum, quas etiam sibi bello subjecit. Inde procedens pugnavit contra Mecritas et etiam illos devicit.

[58] The name *Nogaï* appears to me to have occasioned the same mistakes as Tatar; misled by the conspicuous part played for some time by the Nogaï hordes, most writers have comprehended under that name all the Mussulman tribes of the provinces of Astrakhan and Kasan.

[59] A large four-wheeled vehicle covered with felt. The wheels are never greased, and the noise they make can often be heard at a distance of several versts.

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# CHAPTER XXVIII.

BANKS OF THE KOUMA; VLADIMIROFKA—M. REBROF'S REPULSE OF A CIRCASSIAN FORAY—BOURGON MADJAR—JOURNEY ALONG THE KOUMA—VIEW OF THE CAUCASIAN MOUNTAINS—CRITICAL SITUATION—GEORGIEF—ADVENTURE WITH A RUSSIAN COLONEL—STORY OF A CIRCASSIAN CHIEF.

Notwithstanding the dangers and hardships that had attended our desert wanderings, it was not without some degree of regret we bade a final adieu to the Kalmucks, whose patriarchal simplicity of life we had shared for more than a month. But as we approached Vladimirofka, and beheld the clear waters of the Kouma, its wooded banks, and the lovely scenery around, the change was indescribably delightful to eyes long accustomed to the blank and arid wilderness.

In front of us stood a handsome dwelling on a gentle slope, flanked with two turrets, and [Pg 277] surmounted by a belvedere rising above the trees. Behind us lay the Kalmuck camps and their herds of camels, resembling in the distance those effects of the mirage that are so common in the desert. A little to the left, the village, picturesquely situated at the foot of the mansion, descended in terraces to the margin of the Kouma, displaying its pretty workshops, and its houses parted from each other by plantations of mulberries, hazels, and Lombardy poplars, tinted with the varied hues of autumn. All the enchantments that opulence could call forth from a fruitful soil, were there assembled, as a bountiful compensation for our past fatigues. The camel-drivers and the Cossacks of our escort fully shared our delight, and remained like ourselves wonder-stricken before that brilliant apparition.

Soon afterwards we entered the yard of the mansion, which was soon crowded with *employés* and servants, all greatly puzzled to conceive whence could have come so strange a caravan. Our appearance might well excite their astonishment. The britchka, drawn by three camels, preceded a little troop composed of four or five Cossacks, armed to the teeth, and several Kalmucks leading other camels loaded with all our nomadic gear. Our Cossack officer, with his falcon on his fist, and his long rifle slung behind him, rode close to the door of the carriage, ready, with Russian precision, to transmit our orders to the escort, and to gallop off at the slightest signal; whilst our dragoman, lolling on the box-seat with Italian *nonchalance*, looked down with profound disdain on the bustling throng around us, and did not condescend to answer one word to their thousand questions.

M. Rebrof, the proprietor of Vladimirofka, having been waited on by our officer, came out and welcomed us in the most polite and cordial manner, and showed us into delightful apartments on the ground floor, looking out on a large, handsome garden, and containing a billiard-table and several numbers of the *Revue Etrangère*. Then, after empowering us to make free use of his servants, his garden, his horses, and all his property, our host left us to ourselves, with a delicate tact not always displayed even by well-bred persons.

Well, after all, it is a very good thing when one has long been deprived of all the comforts and conveniences of life, to come upon them again in full measure, and slide back into one's old habits; to pass from the Kalmuck kibitka to a lordly mansion,—from the horrible flat cake of unleavened dough to fresh bread every day—from the wearisome march of the camels to the repose of the divan—from the monotony of the steppes to all the comforts of civilised life. It is really a very good thing, especially if one has the rare good fortune to enjoy, in addition to all these pleasures, the hospitality of a most friendly and engaging family. In fact, what gives the most racy zest to travelling is precisely these contrasts that await you at every step, and which enable you to appreciate matters justly by comparison; for after all what is a good dinner to one who dines well every day? What are a divan, books, music, pictures, to the privileged being who [Pg 278] has them always before him? More than half his time is spent in yawning at the chimney corner; music wearies him; reading makes his eyes ache; his cook is a dull blockhead, and has no invention! Oh, the weary dreary lot of the wealthy man! But let some good genius suddenly whisk him off into the heart of the desert; let him be forced to wash down his biscuit with brackish water from the standing pool, to count on his falcon's quarry for his dinner, to lie on the hard ground, to bear rain, wind, and dust, to hear only the cries of camels, and see only Kalmuck faces; and afterwards, when he returns to all the good things he despised before, he will be heard exclaiming in the joy of his heart, "Oh! what a pleasant thing it is to eat, sleep, and dream; what a very comfortable life this is!"

Vladimirofka is one of the finest properties I have seen in Russia. The whole economy of this magnificent establishment bespeaks the enlarged and enlightened views of its master. It is about fifty years since M. Rebrof laid the first foundations of his colony, undismayed by the obstacles and dangers he encountered in all shapes. He wished to make profitable use of the fine waters of the Kouma, which had never before been bridled in their course by man; and now several mills, set up by him, enliven the whole neighbourhood by their continual din. The mildness of the climate has allowed him to make numerous plantations of mulberries, which have perfectly succeeded, and to establish factories, the productions of which may vie with the finest silks of Provence.

Another manufacture which he is carrying on with great spirit is that of Champagne wine. He sends every year at least 10,000 bottles to Moscow, and sells them at the rate of four rubles a bottle. By dint of energy and perseverance he has called up life and abundance in a wild uncultivated spot, which before had served only for the temporary halts of the Kalmucks and Turcomans. Many peasants whom he brought with him from Great Russia, and who had been habituated to an almost savage state of existence, have been transformed by him into good workmen, industrious husbandmen, and, on occasion, into soldiers devoted to their master.

In 1835, some three-score Circassians, tempted by the hope of a rich booty, made a descent from their mountains to sack and pillage Vladimirofka, expecting to surprise the little village population by night, and to find them wholly unprepared. But though M. Rebrof had enjoyed complete security for many years, he had never deceived himself as to the dangers of his position, but always expected to be attacked sooner or later; and, therefore, he had from the first taken all possible precautions against the designs of his formidable neighbours. Two branches of the Kouma served as fosses for the village and the château; there was a small redoubt with two pieces of cannon commanding the most exposed side, and in a room on the ground-floor of the mansion there was a well-stocked armoury, with all things requisite for sustaining a siege. With these means, M. Rebrof felt confident he could resist any attack. [Pg 279]

Every night two sentinels kept watch until dawn, and it was this seemingly superfluous measure that saved Vladimirofka from total destruction. The Circassians, never reckoning on such extreme caution, arrived one night in face of the village, and felt sure that their approach was unsuspected. But the alarm had been already given, and the whole population, suddenly aroused out of their sleep, were ready for the fight. Arms were distributed to the workpeople and servants, the drawbridges were raised, the two cannons were loaded with grape, and the château was transformed into a fortress. All this was done with such rapidity, that when the Circassians came to the banks of the river, they found the village in a perfect state of defence. They attempted, however, to swim their horses over the Kouma, but were repulsed by a brisk fire. Three or four other attempts were equally unsuccessful; all points were so well guarded, and the men did their duty so well, that the Circassians were obliged to retreat at break of day. But enraged at their disappointment, they set fire to the village and the surrounding woods, and escaped unmolested, under cover of the conflagration, without its being discovered what direction they took.

As an economist and administrator, M. Rebrof may be compared with the most eminent men of Europe, and his manufacturing enterprises are the more meritorious, as he is destitute of the aid of books. Knowing only his own language, which is very poor in such practical works as would suit his purposes, he has nothing but a few bad translations of French and German works, which would be of little avail but for his own superior sagacity.

His gardens are filled with all the fruits of Europe, and with several kinds of grapes, from which he derives a large profit. Among these I particularly noticed the Schiras grape, which has no stones. Nor must I forget his excellent *œil de perdrix* wine, which he set before us every day after dinner, with the pride of a manufacturer. Nothing could exceed his satisfaction on hearing us compare it with the best vintages of France, as we did in all sincerity on our first arrival. Afterwards our enthusiasm cooled down a little; but it did not matter; our host was still persuaded that his wine could compete with the best made in Champagne.

It was painful to us to quit Vladimirofka. Had the season been less advanced, we would willingly have remained there another week; but we had still to visit the Caucasus, and September was drawing to a close. We had, therefore, to make haste and profit by the fine weather that still remained for us. M. Rebrof's horses conveyed us to Bourgon Madjar, a property belonging to General Skaginsky. It is situated on the Kouma, about thirty versts from Vladimirofka, like which, it possesses fine woods and beautiful scenery. It was our intention only to change horses there, but the steward, who had been expecting us for two days, determined otherwise, and to please him we were constrained to lose two days in his company. Our complaisance would not have extended so far had our choice been free; but the moment we entered his doors he told us very positively we should have no horses until the day after the morrow. It was to no purpose we raved and entreated; we were forced to submit to a tyranny that was more flattering than agreeable. The difficulty of understanding each other without an interpreter added to our embarrassment and ill-humour. The whole conversation on the first day was made up of two words *mozhna* (you can stay), and *nilza* (it is impossible). But setting aside the loss of two days, which were then very precious, I must allow that our time passed agreeably, and our host did his best to entertain us. [Pg 280]

The first day was spent in seeing the buildings, gardens, vineyards, mills, and all that was under the immediate management of the steward. Every thing was in as excellent order as if the whole of the fine property had been constantly under the master's eye. But General Skaginsky hardly ever visits it, contenting himself with the receipt of the proceeds, which amount to about 20,000 rubles. The stable contains some capital saddle horses, that tempted us to make a long excursion through the forest. We also saw antelopes almost tame, and of exquisite beauty. Whole herds of them are sometimes found in this part of the steppes. The woods adjacent to the Kouma also contain deer and wild boars. The steward pressed hard for one day more that he might get up a hunt for us, but we would not hear of it, and answered with so peremptory a *nilza* that he was obliged to submit to what he called our obstinacy.

His anxiety to retain us may be easily accounted for by the extreme loneliness in which he lives. He is a Pole by birth, and has known a different condition from that of a steward, as his tastes prove. He is a poet, a musician, and a wit—three qualities singularly at variance with his calling. But as he is alone, and has no superior to control his tastes, he may meditate, Virgil in hand, on the charms of rural life. A guitar, a few select books, and the visitations of the muse, enable him to nourish an intellectual existence amidst all his prosaic occupations.

After quitting Bourgon Madjar we passed through the place where formerly stood the celebrated Madjar, whose past is still a problem for historians. Nothing remains of it, not even a few bricks to attest its former existence. The Russians have carried it away piecemeal to build their villages. We now rapidly approached the Caucasus; the Elbrouz (the highest mountain of

the chain) from time to time gave us a glimpse of its majestic head, almost always wrapped in mist, as if to conceal it from profane eyes. Tradition informs us that Noah's dove alighted on its summit, and there plucked the mystic branch which afterwards became the Christian symbol of peace and hope. Hence the mountain is held in high veneration by all the races of the Caucasus: [Pg 281] Christians, idolaters, and Mussulmans, all agree in regarding it as holy.

We were now in an enchanted region, though but just beyond the verge of the steppes. The faint lines discernible in the sky assumed gradually more distinct form and colour; the mountains appeared to us first as light, transparent vapours, floating upon the wind; but by degrees this airy phantasmagoria changed into mountains clothed with forests, deep gorges and domes crowned with mists. We met several horsemen in the Circassian garb, whose manly beauty afforded us examples of the noble Caucasian race. Our minds were almost overwhelmed with a multitude of emotions, excited by the exuberant nature before us, the magnificent vegetation, and the varied hues of the forests and mountains, peaks, crags, ravines, and snowy summits. It was beautiful, superbly beautiful, and then it was the Caucasus! The Caucasus, a name associated with so many grand historic memories, with the earliest traditions and most fabulous creeds; the abode, in the morning of the world, of families whence issued so many great nations. Round it hangs all the vague poetry of the ages visible only to the imagination, through the mysterious veil of antiquity.

What a sad thing it was in the midst of all our ecstatic enthusiasm, to be obliged to descend to the vulgar concerns of locomotion, and to be crossed and thwarted at every step. We were more than ten versts from Georgief, when we were stopped in a village by the perversity of a postmaster, who refused to let us have horses at any price. It was raining in torrents, and the mud in the village was like a quagmire. The Cossack and Anthony ran about among all the peasants, trying to prevail on them to hire us horses; but the Russians are so lazy that they would rather lose an opportunity of earning money than quit their sweet repose. At last, after four hours search, the two men came back with three wretched hacks they had carried off by force from different peasants. For want of a roof to shelter us we had been obliged to sit all that while in the britchka, and when the miserable team was yoked it could hardly draw us out of the mud in which the wheels were embedded. The road all the way to Georgief was the most detestable that could be imagined. The weather cleared up a little, but the rain had converted all the low plains through which we had to pass into marshes, and had rendered the bridges all but impassable. Steep and very narrow descents often obliged us to alight at the risk of leaving our boots in the mud, and for a long while we feared we should not reach Georgief that day. Finally, however, by dint of flogging, our coachman forced the horses up the last hill, and at seven in the evening we reached a wide plateau, at one end of which towered the fortress that commands the road to the Caucasus.

We had been told that we should find a fair going on in Georgief, and this accounted for the number of horsemen we saw proceeding like ourselves in that direction. I must confess in all [Pg 282] humility, that I did not feel quite at my ease whenever one of these groups passed close to our carriage. The bad weather, the darkness, the bold bearing of these mountaineers, and their arms half concealed under their black bourkas, made me rather nervous. We arrived, however, safe and sound in Georgief, where we enjoyed our repose and sipped our tea with a zest known only to way-worn travellers.

Whilst we were thus enjoying ourselves, the tinkling of a pereclatnoi bell in the yard announced a fresh arrival. But we gave ourselves very little concern about the event, for in order to be the more at our ease, we had engaged the travellers' room for ourselves alone. In travelling, people grow selfish, in spite of themselves; and in Russia it is a very lucky chance indeed that enables you now and then to display that quality. We therefore paid no heed to the tinklings that seemed with increasing vehemence to demand shelter for the late coming pilgrim. In a few moments there was a loud hubbub at our door, and we heard Anthony's voice stoutly refusing admission into our sanctuary. The postmaster seemed to play but a negative part, venturing only to say now and then, in the humblest tone, "*Ne mozhna polkovnick*" (it is not possible, colonel). A deluge of *douraks*, and a few fisticuffs distributed right and left, put an end to the discussion; the door was flung open, and a tall individual, muffled up to the nose, rushed in furiously, halted suddenly, made an awkward bow, and skipped out of the room again, without attempting even to profit by his victory. Amazed at this sudden retreat, Anthony hastily closed the door he had so bravely defended, and then told us that this officer had refused to listen to a word of explanation, and had threatened, if they provoked him, to turn us all into the street, and take our places. This did not in the least surprise us, for in Russia it is a matter of course for a colonel to behave thus to his inferiors, and as this officer was not aware of our being foreigners, he had behaved in the usual peremptory fashion; but he had been taken aback on discovering that we were something else than village pometchiks, and his tone became changed accordingly in the comical manner aforesaid. We were highly diverted by his discomfiture, and to punish his blustering, we let him go and seek a lodging elsewhere.

He had not been gone half an hour when another officer drove into the yard, and with more moderation than his predecessor, took up his quarters in the kitchen, which was divided by a thin partition from our room. He was no sooner installed, than the silence was again broken by loud cracks of a whip, and the poor postmaster was at his wits' end. We paid no attention to this incident until our curiosity was excited by hearing some words of French, accompanied by peals of laughter; and on listening we heard the whole of our late adventure narrated in the most amusing manner, the story being interspersed with keen remarks on the unaccountable propensity of some women for travelling, and filling up every hotel. Of course we recognised in [Pg 283] the orator the hero of the adventure himself. Having knocked in vain at all the doors in Georgief,

he found he could do no better than return to the confounded station, and take his chance of sleeping in the stable; but hearing that a comrade had taken up his abode in the kitchen, he had determined to beg leave to join him. All this, be it observed, was said in French, to prevent our understanding it; this was amusing enough; but the conversation soon became so confidential, that we were obliged to raise our voices, as a hint to our neighbours to speak Russian. They did nothing all night but smoke, drink tea, and talk.

Next day, having ascertained that we were French, they sent the postmaster to us, begging we would allow them to come and apologise for the inconvenience they had caused us. We found them well-bred gentlemen, and we had a good laugh together at the strange manner in which our mutual acquaintance had taken place. We all left the station nearly together. After breakfasting with us, they set out, one of them for Persia, the other for the north. For ourselves, as we intended to stop some days in Georgief, until the roads should have become drier, we accepted the invitation of the governor of the fortress to reside with him. The mud was so deep in the yard of the post-house, that we were obliged to have a bridge of planks made for us to the carriage, and the grooms and the persons who had occasion to enter the house, had to cross the yard on horseback. In passing through the street we saw an unfortunate peasant sunk up to his middle, and making prodigious efforts to extricate his cart and oxen.

Our hospitable and obliging entertainer, the general, told us many particulars respecting the tribes of the Caucasus, and we saw at his table a great number of Kabardian chiefs whom the fair had brought to Georgief. There was one among them whose handsome, grave features, and somewhat wild appearance, excited our curiosity; and the general perceiving this, told us all he knew about the man. I will relate the story as nearly as possible in his own words.

"About two years ago I was ordered to make a tour of inspection among the friendly tribes of the Caucasus, and had nearly completed it, when arriving one evening near an aoul situated on a mountain, the summit of which you can see from here, I noticed that the village was in great commotion. Being accompanied by a detachment of Cossacks, I had no need to be apprehensive about the result, happen what might; still I thought it advisable to take some precautions, and settled with the commanding officer of the detachment what was to be done if we were attacked. I then got on a few hundred paces ahead of the party, and advanced softly, like an *éclaireur*, to a place where the whole population was assembled. As it was rather dark, and I was covered with a bourka, no one took any notice of me, and I was allowed to make my observations without impediment.

"When my eyes had grown more familiarised with the objects about me, I perceived that the [Pg 284]
crowd was gathered round the ruins of a house that seemed to have been very recently burned down. Though ignorant of what had happened, I felt certain that the burning was connected with some deed of violence and bloodshed, for I had long known these mountaineers, whose violent passions are kept in constant excitement by the false position in which they are placed both as to the Russians, whom they detest while they submit to their power, and with regard to the free tribes, who cannot forgive them for their compulsory submission. On inspecting the various groups more narrowly, I saw a Kabardian lying on the ground, with his cloak drawn over his face, while every one gazed on him with a respectful pity. Puzzled still more to know what this meant, and not seeing any reason why I might not make myself known, I was about to put some questions to the person next me, when the sound of approaching hoofs called off the attention of the crowd in another direction. It was my party, who had become uneasy about me, and had quickened their march. The mountaineers all clustered round my soldiers, but without any such hostile demonstrations as we had encountered in the other aouls. Every body seemed under the influence of some unusual feeling, that made him forget for the while the hatred which the mere sight of a Cossack awakens among these people.

"I issued the necessary orders for the encampment of my party, and when all was made safe for the night, I returned to the spot where my curiosity had been so strongly excited; and there lay the mountaineer still stretched on the ground, looking like a corpse under the black bourka that covered him. Several women sat round him, and one of them, who was very young, and seemed less distressed than the others, at last satisfied my impatience, and told me a tale which was confirmed by the whole population of the village.

"The person I saw stretched on the ground before the ashes of his own house, was the chief of the aoul, and belonged to a princely family, living independently amidst their own mountains. At the age of twenty he unfortunately became his elder brother's rival, and in order to possess the wife of his choice, he had carried her off, and settled under the protection of Russia. This latter act, the most infamous of which a mountaineer can be guilty when he commits it of his own accord, remained a long while unpunished during the wars between Russia and the tribes. For fifteen years nothing occurred to make the refugee suppose that his brother thought of him at all. The wife had died a few years after the elopement, leaving him a daughter, who grew up so beautiful, that the whole tribe called her the Rose of the Mountain.

"Now on the day before my arrival in the aoul, four independent mountaineers had visited the chief as friends, and told him that his brother was dead, and that he might now return home without any fear of danger. The strangers spent the night under his roof, and did all they could to [Pg 285]
persuade him to accompany them; but next day, finding they could make no impression on his mind, they set fire to his house, stabbed him in several places, and seizing his daughter, galloped away before any one was prepared to pursue them. Most of the inhabitants were a-field at the time, and when I came up at dusk it was too late to think of overtaking the assassins. Although I was assured that the man was dead, I had him carried to a house, where every possible care was bestowed upon him. In about an hour he became conscious, and there appeared some hope of

saving him. Our acquaintance, which began in so dramatic a manner, afterwards became as intimate as it could be between a Russian general and a Caucasian chief.

"But for a long while my influence over the mind of the unfortunate father was totally unable to overcome the despair and thirst of vengeance occasioned by the abduction of his daughter. At the head of the most determined men of his aoul and of some Cossacks, he thrice endeavoured to force his way into that part of the mountain where his kindred resided; but these attempts led to nothing but desperate conflicts and fierce reprisals. He was about making a fourth attempt about two months ago, when we were informed by a spy that the Rose of the Mountain had been sent to Trebisond, to become the ornament of some harem in Constantinople.

"From that time a gradual change took place in the savage temper of the Kabardian; the idea that his daughter was no longer in the hated mountains, was balm to his wounds. He attached himself to the society of the officers of the garrison, who had become warmly interested in his history. At his own request I have solicited an appointment for him in his majesty's imperial guard, and I hope he will soon be far away from scenes that remind him of such terrible disasters."

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# CHAPTER XXIX.

ROAD FROM GEORGIEF TO THE WATERS OF THE CAUCASUS—A POLISH LADY CARRIED OFF BY CIRCASSIANS—PIATIGORSK—KISLOVODSK—HISTORY OF THE MINERAL WATERS OF THE CAUCASUS.

From Georgief we set out for Piatigorsk, the chief watering place of the Caucasus, and travelled for three hours over a dreary plain, with nothing for the eye to rest on but here and there a long conical mound, that scarcely broke the dull monotony of the landscape; and even these were scarcely visible through the foggy atmosphere. We felt, therefore, a depression of spirits we had never known in our previous journeyings, and it was still more increased by the [Pg 286] thought that we might fall in with those Circassians whose very name strikes terror into the Russians.

The two Cossacks whom the commandant of Georgief had given us for escort, were not the sort of men to assuage our fears, for they seemed themselves very much possessed with a sense of the dangers we were incurring. Their visages grew very serious indeed when we had left the plain behind us, and the road began to skirt along a deep valley, with the waters of the Pod Kouma brawling at the bottom. They were constantly peering in every direction, as if they expected every moment to fall into an ambuscade. Presently they stopped, and called our dragoman to show him a spot on which their eyes seemed riveted. One of them began to talk with great volubility, and from his expressive gestures it was evident he was relating some tragic event of which that spot had been witness. And so, indeed, it was. Anthony informed us that on the very spot where we stood, a young Polish lady had been assailed the year before by several mountaineers, who lay in wait for her in the bed of the torrent. She was on her way to the waters of Kislovodsk, accompanied by an escort and two or three servants. Her followers were massacred or dispersed, her carriage was rifled, and she herself was carried off and never heard of again, notwithstanding the most active exertions to ascertain her fate. One of the Cossacks, who had escaped by miracle from the balls of the Circassians, galloped off to Georgief, and returned within a few hours to the scene of the catastrophe, accompanied by a detachment of cavalry. They found the carriage broken to pieces, and plundered of all its contents; and the ground was strewed with bodies horribly mutilated and stripped of their arms, but neither the body of the young lady nor that of her waiting-maid was among them. It is to be presumed that the Circassians carried them off to their aoul, as the richest spoils of their bloody expedition.

The story of this recent tragedy, related on the very spot where it had occurred, made no slight impression upon us; my dismay, therefore, may be imagined, when a sudden clearing up of the fog enabled us to distinguish at a distance of a hundred yards from the road, what seemed but too palpable a realisation of my fearful fancies. There was no room for doubt. The men before us were those terrible Circassians I had trembled at the thought of meeting. The scream that escaped me, when I caught sight of them, was fortunately heard by one of our Cossacks, who immediately relieved my mind by the assurance that these were men of a friendly tribe. Nevertheless, in spite of my conviction that we had no hostilities to apprehend, it was not without some secret uneasiness I saw them defile past us. The troop was a small one, five or six at most, yet they looked dangerous enough. I shall never forget the glances they cast on our Cossacks as they rode by, though it was only in looks they manifested the hatred that rankled in their hearts [Pg 287] against every thing belonging to Russia. They were all fully armed. Their pistols and their damasked poniards glittered from beneath their black bourkas. I confess I was best pleased with their appearance when they were just vanishing from sight on the top of a hill, where their

martial figures were relieved against the sky. Seen through the mist, they set me thinking of Ossian's heroes.

We continued to wind our way slowly up a steep and narrow track, and for half an hour we did not see a cabin or a living creature except some vultures of the largest kind, flying silently above our heads. At last we reached the culminating point of the road, whence we could look down on the valley, Piatigorsk, the villas scattered over the heights, and all the details of a delightful landscape, that seemed as if it had dropped by chance amongst the stern and majestic scenes of the Caucasian Alps. From thence we had a gentle descent of about a verst to the outskirts of Piatigorsk.

It is only within the last ten or twelve years that it has been possible to travel in carriages to Piatigorsk without extreme risk, partly on account of the hostility of the Circassians, and partly in consequence of the state of the roads. The latter have been improved, and a great number of military posts have been established on them, so that now the waters of the Caucasus are annually frequented by more than 1500 persons, who visit them from all parts of the empire for health or pleasure. Catastrophes have become more and more rare, and since that which I have mentioned no other event of the kind has occurred.

On arriving at Piatigorsk we took up our abode with the principal doctor, for whom we had letters, and who received us in the most obliging manner. Unluckily we had abominable weather during the whole time of our stay, and the mountains we had come so far to see were hidden from our eyes by an impenetrable veil of mist. We could just discern from our windows the base of the Bechtau, at a distance of but two versts. Our first visit was to the Alexandra spring, so called after the name of the empress. The waters are sulphurous, and their temperature is above 38 degrees Reaumur. The bathing establishment is on a very large scale, and contains every thing requisite for the frequenters of the waters. Other thermal springs are found on most of the heights about Piatigorsk, and the works that have been constructed to afford access to them do credit to the government. On one of the highest peaks there is an octagonal building, consisting of a cupola supported on light columns, which are surrounded at their base by an elegant balustrade. The interior, which is open to all the winds, contains an æolian harp, the melancholy notes of which descend to the valley, mingled with all the echoes of the mountains. Doctor Conrad, our host, was the author of this pretty design. Being like most Germans passionately fond of music, he felt assured that those airy sounds, coming as it were from the sky, would have [Pg 288] a most salutary influence on the minds of his patients. The little temple, surnamed the pavilion of Æolus, must be a favourite spot for those who are fond of reverie and lonely contemplation of the sublime scenes of nature. The view from it is of great beauty, but in order to judge of it we should have been more favoured by the weather; but the glowing description given us by our good doctor made some amends for our mischance. I must own, too, that the trouble we took in ascending was not altogether unrequited, for the vague and mysterious outlines of mountains and forests clothed in mists were not without their charms.

There are several natural and artificial grottoes in various parts of the mountain, affording cool retreats in the sultry season, and an amusing spectacle to those who sit and watch the company proceeding to and from the baths. The physiognomist may there behold the most varied types of features, from those of the Tatar prince of the Crimea to those of the fair Georgian from Tiflis. Society in Russia has one rare advantage, inasmuch as it is free from that fatiguing monotony which pursues us in almost all European countries.

The handsomest quarter of Piatigorsk is at the bottom of the valley, where there is a promenade, with fine trees and seats, flanked on either side by a line of handsome houses backed against the cliffs. The permanent population consists only of the civil servants of the government, the garrison, and a few incurable invalids. The crown buildings are numerous, including, besides the bathing establishment, a Greek church, a very large hotel for strangers, a concert hall, a charitable institution, a hospital for wounded officers from the Caucasus, barracks, &c.

On the whole, Piatigorsk is not so much a town as a delightful assemblage of country-houses, inhabited for some months of the year by a rich aristocracy. Every thing about it is pretty and trim, and displays those tokens of affluence which the Russian nobles like to see around them. There is nothing there to offend the eye or sadden the heart, no poor class, no cabins, no misery. It is a fortunate spot, intended to exhibit to the ladies and princes, courtiers, and generals of the empire, none but pleasing images, culled from all that is attractive in nature and art. What wonder, then, if the annals of the place abound in marvellous cures! The doctor, who is a shrewd man, having perhaps his doubts of the sole efficacy of the waters, has done his part to render Piatigorsk an earthly Paradise; but it must be admitted that his views have been perfectly understood and promoted by the emperor, who is always disposed to display magnificence in the most superficial things. Luxurious refinement has here been pushed so far, that the fair and exceedingly indolent dames of Moscow and St. Petersburg may repair to their baths without alighting from their stylish equipages; and yet the springs are almost all of them several hundred yards above the valley. What peasants' *corvées*, what an amount of toil and suffering do these [Pg 289] commodious roads represent! None but the Russian government is capable of such acts of gallantry!

Though the watering season was over when we arrived, the doctor had still a few patients residing with him, who added much, to the pleasure of our evening meetings. Among these was a young officer, who had returned with two severe wounds from an expedition against the Circassians. The accounts he gave us of his campaign, and of the terrible episodes he had witnessed, often made us shudder. The Russians paid dearly for the conquest of some burnt villages. They lost half their men, and 120 officers. One of the friends of our invalid picked up a

pretty little Circassian girl, whose mother had been killed before his eyes. Pitying the fate of the poor orphan, the officer carried her away on his horse, and on reaching Piatigorsk, he placed her in a boarding-school kept by some French ladies. We went to see her, and were charmed with her beauty, which promised to sustain her country's reputation in that respect.

As the weather was not favourable to long excursions, we passed a week of quiet social enjoyment in the doctor's house; but one fine morning the sun, which we had completely forgotten, broke out through the fog, and recalled us, perhaps against our will, to our adventurous habits. Next day we set out for Kislovodsk, situated forty versts from Piatigorsk, in the interior of the mountains, and possessing acid waters of great reputation.

The road, on quitting Piatigorsk, passes at first along the wide and deep valley of the Pod Kouma, which is bounded on the right by rocks heaped on each other like petrified waves, and presenting, in their outlines and rents, all the tokens of a *bouleversement*; whilst on the left, beautiful wooded mountains ascend in successive stages to the imposing chain of the Kasbeck. At the distance of about two hours' travelling, the road leaves the valley, which has here become very narrow, and runs on a long sinuous level ledge, parallel with the course of the torrent, up to the point where it begins to enter the mountains, and where the miry soil through which our horses laboured with great difficulty, the grey sky and moist atmosphere that had hitherto accompanied us, were at once exchanged for dryness, cold, dust, and sun. This sudden contrast is a phenomenon peculiar to elevated regions, and had been foretold us by our host, who is very learned in all that concerns the atmospheric variations of his beloved mountains.

Nothing I have before attempted to describe could compare with the wild and picturesque scenery of this part of the Caucasus. At certain intervals we saw conical mounds of earth about sixty feet high, serving as watch-towers, on which sentinels are stationed day and night. Their outlines, relieved against the cloudy sky, produces a singular effect amidst the solitude around them. The sight of these Cossacks, with muskets shouldered, pacing up and down the small platform on the summit of each eminence, made us involuntarily own our gratitude to the Russian [Pg 290] government for having cleared this country, and rendered access to it so easy for invalids and tourists.

Although it was the middle of October, the vegetation was still quite fresh. Rich green swards covering the steep slopes of the mountains, afforded abundant pasture for the scattered flocks of goats. Their keepers, dressed in sheep-skins, and, instead of crooks, carrying long guns slung at their backs, and two or three powder and ball cases at their girdles, gave a half martial, half pastoral complexion to the landscape. Gigantic eagles flew majestically from rock to rock, like the sole sovereigns of those solitary places. Here we had really before us what we had dreamed of in the Caspian steppes, when, with eyes scorched by the hot sand, and with no amusement but the sight of our camels and the sound of their cries, or the encounter of some Kalmuck kibitkas, we tried to beguile the discomforts of our situation by peopling the desert with a thousand fascinating images.

Before we reached the gorge in which Kislovodsk is concealed, we fell in with a second party of Circassians; but fortified by the safety with which we had pursued our journey so far, and by our stay in Piatigorsk, I indulged without apprehension in the pleasure of admiring them. There were eight or ten of them reposing under a projecting rock, and a very picturesque group they formed. Their horses, saddled and bridled, were feeding at a little distance from their masters, who had not disencumbered themselves of their weapons. Some had their heads entirely enveloped in *bashliks*, a sort of hood made of camels' hair, which is worn only in travelling; others wore the national fur cap; their garments, of a graceful and commodious form, glittered with broad silver lace; they all had bourkas, a kind of mantle, indispensable to the Circassian as his weapons. When our carriage approached them, some of them sat up and looked at us with an air of scornful indifference, but showed no disposition to molest us.

Our first business on reaching Kislovodsk was to visit the source of the acid waters, to which the place owes its celebrity. It does not break out like most others from the side of a mountain, or from a cleft in a rock, but at the bottom of a valley. Nature, who usually conceals her treasures in the most inaccessible spots, has made an exception in its favour. A square basin has been constructed for it, and there it seems continually boiling up, though it has no heat. It resembles Seltzer-water in its sparkling and its slightly acid taste.

Kislovodsk consists of about fifteen houses, or rather little Asiatic palaces, adorned with long open galleries, terraces, gardens, and vestibules filled with flowers. All the frequenters of Piatigorsk finish the watering season at Kislovodsk. Behind this aristocratic abode extends a narrow gorge, bounded on all sides by vertical mountain crags that seem to cut it off from the whole world. It would require several days to explore all the charming scenes in the [Pg 291] neighbourhood. Among its natural curiosities is a celebrated cascade hidden in the very heart of the valley. The way to it leads for an hour along the bed its waters have hollowed for themselves through a thick limestone stratum, over a winding path that narrows continually up to the foot of the fall. At that spot you are imprisoned between cliffs so steep that no goat could find footing on them, and you have before you a dazzling sheet of water descending by terraces from a height of more than sixty feet, breaking into snowy foam where it meets with obstacles on its way, and disappearing for a moment under fragments of rocks, beyond which it re-appears as a limpid stream, flowing over a bed of moss and pebbles.

The position of Kislovodsk exposes it much more that Piatigorsk to the assaults of the mountaineers, and one never feels quite safe there, notwithstanding the Cossack detachment that guards the heights. A Circassian aoul, perched like an eyrie on the highest crest of the

adjacent mountains, is a dangerous neighbour for the water drinkers. Its inhabitants, though nominally subdued, forego no opportunity of wreaking their hatred on the Russians.

After our return to the doctor's roof, we went to see the German colony of Karas at the foot of the Bechtau. Its thriving condition does honour both to the colonists and to the government whose protection they have sought. At first it was composed only of Scotchmen, and was founded by one Peterson, a zealous sectarian, whose chief object was the conversion of the Circassians. But his preaching was wholly ineffectual, and by degrees the laborious Germans took the place of the Scotch missionaries. The original intention of the establishments is now scarcely remembered: the colonists are simply agriculturists, and think only of enriching themselves at the cost of the strangers who come to drink the mineral waters.

A short sketch of the history of these waters may not be unacceptable to the reader. It was in the reign of Catherine II., that Russia advanced her frontiers to the Kouban and the Terek, and forced the various tribes established near those rivers to retire into the mountains. In 1780, Potemkin invaded what at present forms the territory of Piatigorsk, and advanced to the Pod Kouma at the foot of the Bechtau. The fortress of Constantinogorsk was erected at that period, and Catherine constrained the neighbouring tribes to acknowledge her sovereignty. But this pacification of the country was hollow and fallacious. The chiefs of the Bechtau had submitted but in outward appearance; they kept up a secret understanding with the inhabitants of Kabarda, and often joined in their marauding expeditions against the common enemy. Hence arose continual conflicts between them and the Russians.

General Marcof took command of the Caucasus in 1798, and adopted the most rigorous measures against the petty tribes of the Bechtau. Their country was invaded by a numerous army and iven up to pillage, and the mountaineers, driven from their villages, were obliged to seek [Pg 292] refuge beyond the Kouban and the Terek. Thenceforth there was more quiet on the line of the Caucasus, and the Kabardians were less frequently seen in the vicinity of Piatigorsk. It was about this time the sulphurous waters were discovered by some soldiers of the 16th regiment of chasseurs in garrison at Constantinogorsk. It appears, however, that they had been long known and used by the people of the country, as proved by some old baths hollowed out of the rock.

The discovery made by the soldiers was quickly turned to account by their officers, and a small house was erected near by the principal spring at the cost of the regiment. The sulphurous waters were soon known in the neighbourhood, and their fame was spread all over the empire through the medium of military intercourse. Several persons of distinction repaired to them in 1799, at which time medical advice was given by the regimental surgeons, and the patients resided in tents given up for their use by the officers and soldiers. The number of visitors increased every year up to 1804, and the government repeatedly sent chemists and physicians to the spot to study the composition and therapeutic qualities of the waters. Unfortunately in 1804, a contagious disease, which soon proved to be the plague, broke out in a Circassian aoul, seven versts from Georgief. It spread rapidly through all the adjacent countries, and caused a frightful mortality. The sanatory measures adopted in consequence, put an end to all communication between the Caucasus and the Russian provinces, and the mineral waters were entirely forsaken even by the inhabitants of the country. Such were the ravages of the plague, that in the space of five years Little Kabarda lost, at least, the twentieth part of its population. The Russian government omitted no means that could stay the contagion from crossing its frontiers, and it was not until 1809, that free intercourse with the Caucasus was again permitted. Multitude of visitors appeared in the following year, the ordinary tents were not sufficient for their accommodation, and it was necessary to make huts for them with branches of trees; several persons even made their abode in their carriages, and under felt and canvass awnings. The want of new wooden bath-rooms was also felt, and several little chambers were erected round the springs.

In 1811, the concourse of visitors was so great that the Kalmucks of the Caspian were ordered to supply them with 100 felt tents. But even these were found insufficient in the following summer, and by this time the profits realised by the soldiers, who let out their quarters, having attracted the attention of some individuals, considerable stone edifices were soon erected. In 1814, the celebrated Greek, Warvatzi, built new bath-rooms at his own expense, and laid down two roads, one for pedestrians, the other for carriages, both leading to the principal spring. Three hundred Polish prisoners were placed at his disposal for the execution of these works. Thenceforth the place grew up rapidly, and under General Yermoloff's administration, nothing [Pg 293] was neglected that could render the various edifices as complete and commodious as possible. Thus was gradually formed the pretty little town of Piatigorsk, which now contains seven principal bathing hotels, and eleven warm sulphurous springs, the temperature of which ranges from thirty to thirty-eight degrees Reaumur.

The waters of Kislovodsk were discovered in 1790, during the war waged by the Russians against the Kabardians, and in 1792, they were numerously frequented under the protection of the imperial troops. The danger was great, however, for attacks were often made by the enemy, who even made repeated attempts to choke up the spring, or divert the waters. It was not until a fort was built in 1803, that the waters could be visited with some degree of security.

The first houses for the reception of invalids were built in 1819; before that time they resided in tents. A magnificent restaurant was built in 1823, and a handsome alley of lindens was planted from the spring to the cataract, the picturesque appearance of which we so much admired. The ferruginous waters, near the site of the Scotch colony, were not made use of until long after the others, in consequence of their remote position, and the woods by which they were surrounded. It was not before 1819, that Yermoloff rendered them easy of access, and they began to be

regularly frequented by invalids.

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# CHAPTER XXX.

SITUATION OF THE RUSSIANS AS TO THE CAUCASUS.

HISTORY OF THEIR ACQUISITION OF THE TRANS-CAUCASIAN PROVINCES—GENERAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE CAUCASUS—ARMED LINE OF THE KOUBAN AND THE TEREK—BLOCKADE OF THE COASTS—CHARACTER AND USAGES OF THE MOUNTAINEERS—ANECDOTE—VISIT TO A CIRCASSIAN PRINCE.

Among the various Asiatic nations which force and diplomacy are striving to subject to the Muscovite sceptre, there is one against which the whole might of Russia has hitherto been put forth in vain. The warlike tribes of the Caucasus have victoriously maintained their national independence; and in thus separating the trans-Caucasian provinces from the rest of the empire, they have protected Persia and Asiatic Turkey, and postponed indefinitely all thoughts of a Russian invasion of India. The cabinets of Europe have generally overlooked the importance of the Caucasus, and the part which its tribes are destined to play soon or late in eastern questions. Great Britain alone, prompted by her commercial instinct and her restless jealousy, protested for [Pg 294] a time against the encroaching career of the tzars; but the singular manifestation of the *Vixen* produced no slackening of the operations of Russia. The war has now been going on for sixteen years, yet few exact notions of its character and details are as yet possessed by Europe. Let us endeavour to complete as far as possible what we already know respecting the situation of the Russians in the Caucasus, and to see what may be the general results, political and commercial, of the occupation or independence of that region.

We know that one of Peter the Great's most cherished schemes, the dream of his whole life, was to re-establish the trade of the East on its old footing, and to secure to himself a port on the Black Sea, in order to make it the link between the two continents. The genius of that sovereign must surely have been most enterprising to conceive such a project, at a time when its realisation required that the southern frontiers of the empire should first be pushed forward from 150 to 200 leagues, as they have since been. Peter began his new political career by the taking of Azof and the foundation of the port of Taganrok in 1695. The fatal campaign of the Pruth retarded the accomplishment of his designs; but when circumstances allowed him to return to them, he began again to pursue them in the direction of Persia and the Caspian. The restitution of Azof, and the destruction of Taganrok, stipulated in the treaty of the Pruth, thus became the primary cause of the Russian expeditions against the trans-Caucasian provinces.

At this period Persia was suffering all the disorders of anarchy. The Turks had possessed themselves of all its western provinces up to the foot of the Caucasus; whilst the mountaineers, availing themselves of the distracted state of the country, made bloody inroads upon Georgia and the adjacent regions. The Lesghis, now one of the most formidable tribes of the Caucasus, ravaged the plains of Shirvan, in 1712, reduced the towns and villages to ashes, and massacred, according to Russian writers, 300 merchants, subjects of the empire, in the town of Shamaki. These acts of violence afforded Peter the Great an opportunity which he did not let slip. Under the pretence of punishing the Lesghis, and protecting the Shah of Persia against them, he prepared to make an armed intervention in the trans-Caucasian provinces. A formidable expedition was fitted out. A flotilla, constructed at Casan, arrived at the mouths of the Volga, and on the 15th of May, 1722, the emperor began his march at the head of 22,000 infantry, 9000 dragoons, and 15,000 Cossacks and Kalmucks. The transports coasted the Caspian, whilst the army marched by the Daghestan route, the great highway successively followed by the nations of the north and the south in their invasions. Thus it was that the Russians entered the Caucasus, and the valleys of those inaccessible mountains resounded, for the first time, to the war music of the Muscovite. The occupation of Ghilan and Derbent, and the siege of Bakou were the chief events of this campaign. Turkey, dismayed at the influence Russia was about to acquire in the [Pg 295] East, was ready to take up arms; but Austria, taking the initiative in Europe, declared for the policy of the tzar, and vigorously resisted the hostile tendencies of the Porte. Russia was thus enabled to secure, not only Daghestan and Ghilan, but also the surrender of those provinces in which her armies had never set foot. In the midst of these events, Peter died when on the eve of consolidating his conquests, and before he had completed his negotiations with Persia and Turkey. His grand commercial ideas were abandoned after his death; the policy of the empire was directed solely towards territorial acquisition, and the tzars only obeyed the strong impulse, that, as if by some decree of fate, urges their subjects towards the south. Thenceforth the trans-Caucasian provinces were considered only a point gained for intervention in the affairs of Persia and Turkey, and for ulterior conquests in the direction of Central Asia. The rise of the celebrated Nadir Shah, who possessed himself of all the ancient dominions of Persia, for a while changed the

face of things. Russia, crippled in her finances, withdrew her troops, gave up her pretensions to the countries beyond the Caucasus, acknowledged the independence of the two Kabardas by the treaty of Belgrade, and even engaged no longer to keep a fleet on the Sea of Azof.

A religious mission sent to the Ossetans, who occupy the celebrated defiles of Dariel, was the only event in the reign of Elizabeth, that regarded the regions we are considering. Hardly any conversions were effected, but the Ossetans, to a certain extent, acknowledged the supremacy of Russia: this satisfied the real purpose of the mission, for the first stone was thereby laid on the line which was to become the great channel of communication between Russia and her Asiatic provinces.

Schemes of conquest in the direction of Persia were resumed with vigour under Catherine II., and were carried out with more regularity. The first thing aimed at was to protect the south of the empire against the inroads of the Caucasians, and to this end the armed line of the Kouban and the Terek was organised and finished in 1771. It then numbered sixteen principal forts, and a great number of lesser ones and redoubts. Numerous military colonies of Cossacks, were next settled on the banks of the two rivers for the protection of the frontiers. While these preparations were in hand, war broke out with Turkey. Victorious both by sea and land, Catherine signed, in 1774, the memorable treaty of Koutchouk Kainardji, which secured to her the free navigation of the Black Sea, the passage of the Dardanelles, the entry of the Dniepr, and, moreover, conceded to her in the Caucasus, the sovereignty over both Kabardas.

Peace being thus concluded, Catherine's first act was to send a pacific mission to explore the country of the Ossetans. The old negotiations were skilfully renewed, and a free passage through the defiles was obtained with the consent of that people. In 1781, an imperial squadron once [Pg 296] more appeared in the Caspian, and endeavoured, but ineffectually, to make some military settlements on the Persian coasts. This expedition limited itself to consolidating the moral influence of Russia, and exciting, among the various tribes and nations of those regions, dissensions which afterwards afforded her a pretext for direct intervention. The Christian princes of Georgia, and the adjacent principalities, were the first to undergo the consequences of the Russian policy. Seduced by gold and presents, and doubtless also, wearied by the continual troubles that desolated their country, they gradually fell off from Persia and Turkey and accepted the protection of Catherine. The passes of the Caucasus were now free to Russia; she lost no time in making them practicable for an army, and so she was at last in a condition to realise in part the vast plans of the founder of her power.

At a later period, in 1787, Russia and Turkey were again in arms, and the shore of the Caspian became for the first time a centre of military operations. Anapa, which the Turks had built for the protection of their trade with the mountaineers, after an unsuccessful assault, was taken by storm in 1791. Soudjouk Kaleh shared the same fate, but the Circassians blew up its fortifications before they retired. Struck by these conspicuous successes, the several states of Europe departed from the favourable policy with which they had previously treated the views of Russia, and the empress thought herself fortunate to conclude the treaty of Jassy in 1792, by which she advanced her frontiers to the Dniestr, and obtained the sovereignties of Georgia and the neighbouring countries. But Turkey had Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh restored to her, upon her engaging to suppress the incursions of the tribes dwelling on the left of the Kouban.

Aga Mahomed Khan marched against Georgia in 1795, to punish it for having accepted the protectorate of Russia. Tiflis was sacked, and given up to fire and sword. On hearing of this bloody invasion Catherine II. immediately declared war against Persia, and her armies were already in occupation of Bakou, and a large portion of the Caspian shores, when she was succeeded by her son Paul I., who ordered all the recent conquests to be abandoned. Nevertheless, this strange beginning did not hinder the eccentric monarch from doing four years afterwards for Georgia what Catherine had done for the Crimea. Under pretext of putting an end to intestine discord, Georgia was united to Russia by an imperial ukase. Shortly after the accession of Alexander, Mingrelia shared the fate of Georgia; the conquests beyond the Caucasus were then regularised, and Tiflis became the centre of an exclusive Muscovite administration, civil and military.

The immediate contact of Russia with Persia soon led to a rupture between these two powers. In 1806, hostilities began with Turkey also, and the campaign was marked like that of 1791 by the taking of Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh, and the establishment of the Russians on the shores of [Pg 297] Circassia. The unfortunate contest which then ensued between Napoleon and Alexander, and the direct intervention of England, put an end to the war, and brought about the signature of two treaties. That of Bucharest stipulated the reddition of Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh; but Russia acquired Bessarabia and the left bank of the Danube; and Koutousofs 80,000 men marched against Napoleon. The treaty of Gulistan, in 1814, gave to the empire, among other countries, Daghestan, Georgia, Imeritia, Mingrelia, the province of Bakou, Karabaugh, and Shirvan. This latter treaty was no sooner ratified than endless discussions arose respecting the determination of the frontiers. War was renewed, and ended only in 1828 by the treaty of Turkmantchai, which conceded to Russia the fine countries of Erivan and Naktchivan, advanced her frontiers to the banks of the Araxus, and rendered her mistress of all the passes of Persia.

It was during these latter wars that the people of the Caucasus began to be seriously uneasy about the designs of Russia. The special protection accorded to the Christian populations, the successive downfall of the principal chiefs of the country, and the introduction of the Russian administration, with its abuses and arbitrary proceedings, excited violent commotions in the Caucasian provinces, and the mountaineers naturally took part in every coalition formed against the common enemy. The armed line of the Kouban and the Terek was often attacked, and many a

Cossack post was massacred. The Lesghis, the Tchetchenzes, and the Circassians distinguished themselves especially by their pertinacity and daring. Thenceforth Russia might conceive some idea of the contest she would have to sustain on the confines of Asia.

We now approach the period when Russia, at last relieved from all her quarrels with Persia and Turkey, definitively acquired Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh by the treaty of Adrianople, and directed all her efforts against the mountaineers of the Caucasus. But as now the war assumed a totally different character, it will be necessary to a full understanding of it that we should first glance at the topography of the country, and sketch the respective positions of the mountaineers and their foes.

The chain of the Caucasus exhibits a peculiar conformation, altogether different from that of any of the European chains. The Alps, the Pyrenees, and the Carpathians, are accessible only by the valleys, and in these the inhabitants of the country find their subsistence, and agriculture develops its wealth. The contrary is the case in the Caucasus. From the fortress of Anapa on the Black Sea, all along to the Caspian, the northern slope presents only immense inclined plains, rising in terraces to a height of 3000 or 4000 yards above the sea level. These plains, rent on all directions by deep and narrow valleys and vertical clefts, often form real steppes, and possess on their loftiest heights rich pastures, where the inhabitants, secure from all attack, find fresh grass for their cattle in the sultriest days of summer. The valleys on the other hand are frightful [Pg 298] abysses, the steep sides of which are clothed with brambles, while the bottoms are filled with rapid torrents foaming over beds of rocks and stones. Such is the singular spectacle generally presented by the northern slope of the Caucasus. This brief description may give an idea of the difficulties to be encountered by an invading army. Obliged to occupy the heights, it is incessantly checked in its march by impassable ravines, which do not allow of the employment of cavalry, and for the most part prevent the passage of artillery. The ordinary tactics of the mountaineers is to fall back before the enemy, until the nature of the ground or the want of supplies obliges the latter to begin a retrograde movement. Then it is that they attack the invaders, and, entrenched in their forests behind impregnable rocks, they inflict the most terrible carnage on them with little danger to themselves.

On the south the character of the Caucasian chain is different. From Anapa to Gagra, along the shores of the Black Sea, we observe a secondary chain composed of schistous mountains, seldom exceeding 1000 yards in height. But the nature of their soil, and of their rocks, would be enough to render them almost impracticable for European armies, even were they not covered with impenetrable forests. The inhabitants of this region, who are called Tcherkesses or Circassians, by the Russians, are entirely independent, and constitute one of the most warlike peoples of the Caucasus.

The great chain begins in reality at Gagra, but the mountains recede from the shore, and nothing is to be seen along the coast as far as Mingrelia but secondary hills, commanded by immense crags, that completely cut off all approach to the central part of the Caucasus. This region, so feebly defended by its topographical conformation, is Abkhasia, the inhabitants of which have been forced to submit to Russia. To the north and on the northern slope, westward of the military road from Mosdok to Tiflis, dwell a considerable number of tribes, some of them ruled by a sort of feudal system, others constituted into little republics. Those of the west, dependent on Circassia and Abadza, are in continual war with the empire, whilst the Nogais, who inhabit the plains on the left bank of the Kouma, and the tribes of the Great Kabarda, own the sovereignty of the tzar; but their wavering and dubious submission cannot be relied on. In the centre, at the foot of the Elbrouz, dwell the Souanethes, an unsubdued people, and near them, occupying both sides of the pass of Dariel, are the Ingouches and Ossetans, exceptional tribes, essentially different from the aboriginal peoples. Finally, we have eastward of the great Tiflis road, near the Terek, Little Kabarda, and the country of the Koumicks, for the present subjugated; and then those indomitable tribes, the Lesghis and Tchetchenzes, of whom Shamihl is the Abd el Kader, and who extend over the two slopes of the Caucasus to the vicinity of the Caspian.

In reality, the Kouban and the Terek, that rise from the central chain, and fall, the one into the Black Sea, the other into the Caspian, may be considered as the northern political limits of [Pg 299] independent Caucasus. It is along those two rivers that Russia has formed her armed line, defended by Cossacks, and detachments from the regular army. The Russians have indeed penetrated those northern frontiers at sundry points, and have planted some forts within the country of the Lesghis and Tchetchenzes. But these lonely posts, in which a few unhappy garrisons are surrounded on all sides, and generally without a chance of escape, cannot be regarded as a real occupation of the soil on which they stand. They are in fact only so many piquets, whose business is only to watch more closely the movements of the mountaineers. In the south, from Anapa to Gagra, along the Black Sea, the imperial possessions are limited to a few detached forts, completely isolated, and deprived of all means of communication by land. A rigorous blockade has been established on this coast; but the Circassians, as intrepid in their frail barks as among their mountains, often pass by night through the Russian line of vessels, and reach Trebisond and Constantinople. Elsewhere, from Mingrelia to the Caspian, the frontiers are less precisely defined, and generally run parallel with the great chain of the Caucasus.

Thus limited, the Caucasus, including the territory occupied by the subject tribes, presents a surface of scarcely 5000 leagues; and it is in this narrow region that a virgin and chivalric nation, amounting at most to 2,000,000 of souls, proudly upholds its independence against the might of the Russian empire, and has for twenty years sustained one of the most obstinate struggles known to modern history.

The Russian line of the Kouban, which is exactly similar to that of the Terek, is defended by the Cossacks of the Black Sea, the poor remains of the famous Zaporogues, whom Catherine II. subdued with so much difficulty, and whom she colonised at the foot of the Caucasus, as a bulwark against the incursions of the mountaineers. The line consists of small forts and watch stations; the latter are merely a kind of sentry box raised on four posts, about fifty feet from the ground. Two Cossacks keep watch in them day and night. On the least movement of the enemy in the vast plain of reeds that fringes both banks of the river, a beacon fire is kindled on the top of the watch box. If the danger becomes more pressing, an enormous torch of straw and tar is set fire to. The signal is repeated from post to post, the whole line springs to arms, and 500 or 600 men are instantly assembled on the point threatened. These posts, composed generally of a dozen men, are very close to each other, particularly in the most dangerous places. Small forts have been erected at intervals with earthworks, and a few pieces of cannon; they contain each from 150 to 200 men.

But notwithstanding all the vigilance of the Cossacks, often aided by the troops of the line, the mountaineers not unfrequently cross the frontier and carry their incursions, which are always marked with massacre and pillage, into the adjacent provinces. These are bloody but justifiable [Pg 300] reprisals. In 1835 a body of fifty horsemen entered the country of the Cossacks, and proceeded to a distance of 120 leagues, to plunder the German colony of Madjar and the important village of Vladimirofka, on the Kouma, and what is most remarkable, they got back to their mountains without being interrupted. The same year Kisliar on the Caspian was sacked by the Lesghis. These daring expeditions prove of themselves how insufficient is the armed line of the Caucasus, and to what dangers that part of southern Russia is exposed.

The line of forts along the Black Sea is quite as weak, and the Circassians there are quite as daring. They carry off the Russian soldiers from beneath the fire of their redoubts, and come up to the very foot of their walls to insult the garrison. At the time I was exploring the mouths of the Kouban, a hostile chief had the audacity to appear one day before the gates of Anapa. He did all he could to irritate the Russians, and abusing them as cowards and woman-hearted, he defied them to single combat. Exasperated by his invectives, the commandant ordered that he should be fired on with grape. The horse of the mountaineer reared and threw off his rider, who, without letting go the bridle, instantly mounted again, and, advancing still nearer to the walls, discharged his pistol almost at point blank distance at the soldiers, and galloped off to the mountains.

As for the blockade by sea, the imperial squadron is not expert enough to render it really effectual. It is only a few armed boats, manned by Cossacks, that give the Circassians any serious uneasiness. These Cossacks, like those of the Black Sea, are descended from the Zaporogues. Previously to the last war with Turkey they were settled on the right bank of the Danube, where their ancestors had taken refuge after the destruction of their Setcha. During the campaigns of 1828-9, pains were taken to revive their national feelings, they were brought again by fair means or by force under the imperial sway, and were then settled in the forts along the Caucasian shore, the keeping of which was committed to their charge. Courageous, enterprising, and worthy rivals of their foes, they wage a most active war against the skiffs of the mountaineers in their boats, which carry crews of fifty or sixty men. The war not having permitted us to visit the independent tribes, and investigate their moral and political condition for ourselves, we shall not enter into long details respecting the manners and institutions of the Circassians, but content ourselves with pointing out the principal traits of their character, and such of their peculiarities as may have most influence upon their relations with Russians.[60]

Of all the peoples of the Caucasus, none more fully realise than the Circassians those heroic [Pg 301] qualities with which imagination delights to invest the tribes of these mountains. Courage, intelligence, and remarkable beauty, have been liberally bestowed on them by nature; and what I admired above all in their character is a calm, noble dignity that never forsakes them, and which they unite with the most chivalric feelings and the most ardent passion for national liberty. I remember that during my stay at Ekaterinodar, the capital of the Cossacks of the Black Sea, being seated one morning in front of a merchant's house in the company of several Russian officers, I saw a very ill-dressed Circassian come up, who appeared to belong to the lowest class. He stopped before the shop, and while he was cheapening some articles, we examined his sabre. I saw distinctly on it the Latin inscription, *Anno Domini*, 1547, and the blade appeared to me to be of superior temper; the Russians were of a different opinion, for they handed the weapon back to the Circassian with disdainful indifference. The Circassian took it without uttering a word, cut off a handful of his beard with it at a stroke, as easily as though he had done it with a razor, then quietly mounted his horse and rode away, casting on the officers a look of such deep scorn as no words could describe.

The Circassians, evermore engaged in war, are in general all well armed. Their equipment consists of a rifle, a sabre, a long dagger, which they wear in front, and a pistol stuck in their belt. Their remarkably elegant costume consists of tight pantaloons, and a short tunic belted round the waist, and having cartridge pockets worked on the breast; their head-dress is a round laced cap, encircled with a black or white border of long-wooled sheep-skin. In cold or rainy weather, they wear a hood (bashlik), and wrap themselves in an impenetrable felt cloak (bourka). Their horses are small, but of astonishing spirit and bottom. It has often been ascertained by the imperial garrisons that Circassian marauders have got over twenty-five or even thirty leagues of ground in a night. When pursued by the Russians, the mountaineers are not to be stopped by the most rapid torrents. If the horse is young, and not yet trained to this perilous kind of service, the rider gallops him up to the verge of the ravine, then covering the animal's head with his bourka, he plunges, almost always with impunity, down precipices that are sometimes from ten or fifteen

yards deep.

The Circassians are wonderfully expert in the use of fire-arms, and of their double-edged daggers. Armed only with the latter weapon, they have been known to leap their horses over the Russian bayonets, stab the soldiers, and rout their squared battalions. When they are surrounded in their forts or villages, without any chance of escape, they often sacrifice their wives and children, set fire to their dwellings, and perish in the flames rather than surrender. Like all Orientals, they do not abandon their dead and wounded except at the last extremity, and nothing can surpass the obstinacy with which they fight to carry them off from the enemy. It was to this [Pg 302] fact I owed my escape from one of the greatest dangers I ever encountered.

In the month of April, 1841, I explored the military line of the Kouban. On my departure from Stavropol, the governor strongly insisted on giving me an escort; but I refused it, for fear of encumbering my movements, and resolved to trust to my lucky star. It was the season of flood, too, in the Kouban, a period in which the Circassians very seldom cross it. I accepted, however, as a guide, an old Cossack, who had seen more than five-and-twenty years' fighting, and was all over scars, in short, a genuine descendant of the Zaporogues. This man, my interpreter, and a postillion, whom we were to change at each station, formed my whole suite. We were all armed, though there is not much use in such a precaution in a country where one is always attacked either unawares, so that he cannot defend himself, or by superior forces against which all resistance is but a danger the more. But what of that? There was something imposing and flattering to one's pride in these martial accoutrements. A Tiflis dagger was stuck in my belt, a heavy rifle thumped against my loins, and my holsters contained an excellent pair of St. Etienne pistols. My Cossack was armed with two pistols, a rifle, a Circassian sabre, and a lance. As for my interpreter, an Italian, he was as brave as a Calabrian bandit, and what prized above all in him was an imperturbable coolness in the most critical positions, and a blind obedience to my orders. For five days we pursued our way pleasantly along the Kouban, without thinking of the danger of our position. The country, broken up by beautiful hills, was covered with rich vegetation. The muddy waters of the Kouban flowed on our left, and beyond the river we saw distinctly the first ranges of the Caucasus. We could even discern the smoke of the Circassian aouls rising up amidst the forests.

On the evening of the fifth day we arrived at a little fort, where we passed the night. The weather next morning was cold and rainy, and every thing gave token of an unpleasant day. The country before us was quite unlike that we were leaving behind. The road wound tortuously over an immense plain between marshes and quagmires, that often rendered it all but impossible to advance. Our morning ride was therefore a dull and silent one. The Cossack had no tales to tell of his warlike feats; he was in bad humour, and never opened his lips except to rap out one of those thundering oaths in which the Russians often indulge. A thin rain beat in our faces; our tired horses slid at every step on the greasy clay soil, and we rode in single file, muffled up in our bourkas and bashliks. Towards noon, the weather cleared up, the road became less difficult, and towards evening we were but an hour and a half from the last fort on that side of Ekaterinodar. We were then proceeding slowly, without any thought of danger, and I paid no heed to the Cossack, who had halted some distance behind. But our quick-eared guide had heard the sound [Pg 303] of hoofs, and in a few seconds he rode up at full speed, shouting with all his might, "The Tcherkesses! the Tcherkesses!" Looking round we saw four mountaineers coming over a hill not far from the road. My plan was instantly formed. The state of our horses rendered any attempt at flight entirely useless; we were still far from the fortress, and, once overtaken, we could not avoid a fight, the chances of which were all against us. The Cossack alone had a sabre, and when once we had discharged our fire-arms, it would be all over with us. But I knew that the Circassians never abandoned their dead and wounded, and it was on this I founded our hope of safety. My orders were quickly given, and we continued to advance at a walk, riding abreast, but sufficiently wide apart to leave each man's movements free. Not a word was uttered by any of us. I had incurred many dangers in the course of my travels, but I had never been in a situation of more breathless anxiety. In less than ten minutes we distinctly heard the galloping of the mountaineers, and immediately afterwards their balls whizzed past us. My bourka was slightly touched, and the shaft of the Cossack's lance was cut in two. The critical moment was come; I gave the word, and we instantly wheeled round, and discharged our pistols at arm's length at our assailants: two of them fell. "Away now, and ride for your lives," I shouted, "the Circassians will not pursue us." Our horses, which had recovered their wind, and were probably inspirited by the smell of powder, carried us along at a sweeping pace, and never stopped until we were within sight of the fortress. Exactly what I had foreseen had happened. On the morning after that memorable day the garrison turned out and scoured the country, and I accompanied them to the scene of action. There were copious marks of blood on the sand, and among the sedges on the side of the road we found a shaska, or Circassian sabre, which had been dropped no doubt by the enemy. The commanding officer presented it to me, and I have kept it ever since as a remembrance of my perilous interview with the mountaineers. It bears the mark of a ball.

It would be difficult to give any precise idea respecting the religious principles of the various nations of the Caucasus. The charge of idolatry has been alleged against several of them, but we think without any good grounds. Paganism, Christianity, and Mohammedanism, have by turns found access among them, and the result has been an anomalous medley of no clearly defined doctrines with the most superstitious practices of their early obsolete creeds. The Lesghis and the eastern tribes alone are really Mohammedans. As for the Ossetans, Circassians, Kabardians, and other western tribes, they seem to profess a pure deism, mingled with some Christian and Mussulman notions. It is thought that Christianity was introduced among these people by the celebrated Thamar, Queen of Georgia, who reigned in the latter part of the twelfth century; but it

is much more probable that this was done by the Greek colonies of the Lower Empire, and [Pg 304] afterwards by those of the republic of Genoa in the Crimea. The Tcherkesses to this day entertain a profound reverence for the crosses and old churches of their country, to which they make frequent pilgrimages, and yearly offerings and sacrifices. It seems, too, that the Greek mythology has left numerous traces in Circassia; the story of Saturn for instance, that of the Titans endeavouring to scale heaven, and several others, are found among many of the tribes. A very marked characteristic of the Circassians is a total absence of religious fanaticism. Pretenders to divine inspiration have always been repulsed by them, and most of them have paid with their lives for their attempts at proselytism. This is not the case on the Caspian side of the mountains, where Shamihl's power is in a great measure based on his religious influence over the tribes.

When two nations are at war, it usually happens that the one is calumniated by the other, and the stronger seeks an apology for its own ambition in blackening the character of its antagonist. Thus the Russians, wishing to make the inhabitants of the Caucasus appear as savages, against whom every means of extermination is allowable, relate the most absurd tales of the ferocious tortures inflicted by them on their prisoners. But there is no truth in all this. I have often met military men who had been prisoners in the mountains, and they unanimously testified to the good treatment they had received. The Circassians deal harshly only with those who resist, or who have made several attempts to escape; but in those cases their measures are fully justified by the fear lest the fugitives should convey important topographical information to the Russians. As for the story of the chopped horsehair inserted under the skin of the soles of the feet to hinder the escape of captives, it has been strangely exaggerated by some travellers. I never could hear of more than one prisoner of war who had been thus treated, and this was an army surgeon with whom I had an opportunity of conversing. He had not been previously ill-treated in any way by the mountaineers; but, distracted with the desire for freedom, he had made three attempts to escape, and it was not until the third that the Tcherkesses had recourse to the terrible expedient of the horsehair. During our stay at the waters of the Caucasus, I saw a young Russian woman who had recently been rescued by General Grabe's detachment. Shortly after our arrival she fled, and returned to the mountains. This fact speaks at least in favour of the gallantry of the Circassians. Indeed, there is no one in the country but well knows the deep respect they profess for the sex. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to mention any case in which Russian female prisoners have been maltreated by them.

The Circassians have been accustomed, from time immemorial, to make prisoners of all foreigners who land on their shores without any special warrant or recommendation. This custom has been denounced and censured in every possible way; yet it is not so barbarous as has been [Pg 305] supposed. Encompassed by enemies, exposed to incessant attacks, and relying for their defence chiefly on the nature of their country, the jealous care of their independence has naturally compelled the mountaineers to become suspicious, and not to allow any traveller to penetrate their retreats. What proves that this prohibitive measure is by no means the result of a savage temper is, that it is enough to pronounce the name of a chief, no matter who, to be welcomed and treated everywhere with unbounded hospitality. Reassured by this slender evidence of good faith, the mountaineers lay aside their distrust, and think only how they may do honour to the guest of one of their princes.

But another and still graver charge still hangs over the Circassians, namely, their slave dealing, which has so often provoked the generous indignation of the philanthropists of Europe, and for the abolition of which Russia has been extolled by all journalists. We are certainly far from approving of that hateful trade, in which human beings are bought and sold as merchandise; but we are bound in justice to the people of Asia to remark, that there is a wide difference between Oriental slavery and that which exists in Russia, in the French colonies, and in America. In the East, slavery becomes in fact a virtual adoption, which has generally a favourable effect both on the moral and the physical weal of the individual. It is a condition by no means implying any sort of degradation, nor has there ever existed between it and the class of freemen that line of demarcation, beset by pride and prejudice, which is found everywhere else. It would be easy to mention the names of many high dignitaries of Turkey who were originally slaves; indeed, it would be difficult to name one young man of the Caucasus, sold to the Turks, who did not rise to more or less distinction. As for the women, large cargoes of whom still arrive in the Bosphorus in spite of the Russian blockade, they are far from bewailing their lot; on the contrary, they think themselves very fortunate in being able to set out for Constantinople, which offers them a prospect of every thing that can fascinate the imagination of a girl of the East. All this, of course, pre-supposes the absence of those family affections to which we attach so much value; but it must not be forgotten that the tribes of the Caucasus cannot be fairly or soundly judged by the standard of our European notions, but that we must make due allowance for their social state, their manners, and traditions. The sale of women in Circassia is obviously but a substitute and an equivalent for the indispensable preliminaries that elsewhere precede every marriage in the East; with this difference alone, that in the Caucasus, on account of its remoteness, it is an agent who undertakes the pecuniary part of the transaction, and acts as the medium between the girl's relations and him whose lawful wife she is in most cases to become. The parents, it is true, part with their children, and give them up to strangers almost always unknown to them; but they do not abandon them for all that. They keep up a frequent correspondence with them, and the [Pg 306] Russians never capture a single Circassian boat in which there are not men and women going to or returning from Constantinople merely to see their children. No one who has been in the Caucasus can be ignorant of the fact that all the families, not excepting even those of high rank, esteem it a great honour to have their children placed out in Turkey. It is to all these relations and alliances, as I may say, between the Circassians and the Turks that the latter owe the great

moral influence they still exercise over the tribes of the Caucasus. The name of Turk is always the best recommendation among the mountaineers, and there is no sort of respectful consideration but is evinced towards those who have returned home after passing some years of servitude in Turkey. After all, the Russians themselves think on this subject precisely as we do, and were it not for potent political considerations, they would not by any means offer impediment to the Caucasian slave-trade. This is proved most manifestly by the proposal made by a Russian general in 1843, to regulate and ratify this traffic, and carry it on for the benefit of Russia, by granting the tzar's subjects the exclusive privilege of purchasing Circassian slaves. The scheme was abortive, and could not have been otherwise, for it is a monstrous absurdity to compare Russian slavery with that which prevails in Constantinople. Nothing proves more strongly how different are the real sentiments of the Circassians from those imputed to them, than the indignation with which they regard slavery, such as prevails in Russia. I will here relate an anecdote which I doubt not will appear strange to many persons; but I can guarantee its authenticity, since the fact occurred under my own eyes.

A detachment of mountaineers, destined to form a guard of honour for Paskewitch, passed through Rostof on the Don, in 1838. The sultry season was then at its height, and two of the Circassians, going to bathe, laid their clothes in the boat belonging to the custom-house. There was certainly nothing very reprehensible in this; but the *employés* of the customs thought otherwise, threw the men's clothes into the river, and assaulted them with sticks. Immediately there was a tremendous uproar; all the mountaineers flocked to the spot, and threatened to set fire to the town, if the amplest satisfaction were not given to their comrades. The inhabitants were seized with alarm, and the director of the customs went in person to the commander of the Circassians, to beseech him not to put his threats in execution; and he backed his entreaties with the offer of a round sum of money for the officer and his men. "Money!" retorted the indignant chieftain; "money! it is good for base-souled, venal Russians! It is good for you, who sell men, women, and children like vile cattle; but among our people, the honour of a man made in the image of God is not bought and sold. Let your men kneel down before my soldiers, and beg their pardon; that is the only reparation we insist on." The chief's demand was complied with, and the [Pg 307] peace of the town was immediately restored. The words we have reported are authentic; they prove that the Tcherkesses do not look on the sale of their children as a traffic, and that in the actual state of their national civilisation, that sale cannot be in anywise considered as incompatible with family affections, and the sentiments of honour and humanity.

The Circassian women have been celebrated by so many writers, and their beauty has been made the theme of so many charming descriptions, that we may be allowed to say a few words about them. Unfortunately we are constrained to avow, that the reputation of their charms appears to us greatly exaggerated, and that in person they are much less remarkable than the men. It is true we have not been able to visit any of the great centres of the population: we have not been among the independent tribes; but we have been in several aouls on the banks of the Kouban, and been entertained in a princely family; but nowhere could we see any of those perfect beauties of whom travellers make such frequent mention. The only thing that really struck us in these mountain girls was the elegance of their shape, and the inimitable grace of their bearing. A Circassian woman is never awkward. Dressed in rags or in brocade, she never fails to assume spontaneously the most noble and picturesque attitudes. In this respect she is incontestably superior to the highest efforts of fascination which Parisian art can achieve.

The great celebrity of the women of the Caucasus appears to have been derived from the bazaars of Constantinople, where the Turks, who are great admirers of their charms, still inquire after them with extreme avidity. But as their notions of beauty are quite different from ours, and relate chiefly to plumpness, and the shape of the feet, it is not at all surprising that the opinions of the Turks have misled travellers. But though the Circassian belles do not completely realise the ideal type dreamed of by Europeans, we are far from denying the brilliant qualities with which nature has evidently endowed them. They are engaging, gracious, and affable towards the stranger, and we can well conceive that their charming hospitality has won for them many an ardent admirer.

Apropos of the conjugal and domestic habits of the Circassians; I will describe an excursion I made along the military line of the North, eighteen months after my journey to the Caspian Sea.

During my stay at Ekaterinodar, the capital of the country of the Black Sea Cossacks, I heard a great deal about a Tcherkess prince, allied to Russia, and established on the right bank of the Kouban, a dozen versts from the town. I therefore gladly accepted the proposal made to me by the Attaman Zavadofsky to visit the chief, under the escort of an officer and two soldiers. Baron Kloch, of whom I have already spoken, accompanied me. We mounted our horses, armed to the teeth, according to the invariable custom of the country, and in three hours we alighted in the middle of the aoul. We were immediately surrounded by a crowd of persons whose looks had [Pg 308] nothing in them of welcome; but when they were informed that we were not Russians, but foreigners, and that we were come merely to request a few hours' hospitality of their master, their sour looks were changed for an expression of the frankest cordiality, and they hastened to conduct us to the prince's dwelling.

It was a miserable thatched mud cabin, in front of which we found the noble Tcherkess, lying on a mat, in his shirt, and barefooted. He received us in the kindest manner, and after complimenting us on our arrival, he proceeded to make his toilette. He sent for his most elegant garments and his most stylish leg-gear, girded on his weapons, which he took care to make us admire, and then led us into the cabin, which served as his abode during the day. The interior was as naked and unfurnished as it could well be. A divan covered with reed matting, a few

vessels, and a saddle, were the only objects visible. After we had rested a few moments, the prince begged us to pay a visit to his wife and daughter, who had been apprised of our arrival, and were extremely desirous to see us.

These ladies occupied a hut of their own, consisting, like the prince's, of but one room. They rose as we entered, and saluted us very gracefully; then motioning us to be seated, the mother sat down in the Turkish fashion on her divan, whilst her daughter came and leaned gracefully against the sofa on which we had taken our places. When the ceremony of reception was over, we remarked with surprise that the prince had not crossed the threshold, but merely put his head in at the door to answer our questions and talk with his wife. Our Cossack officer explained the meaning of this singular conduct, telling us that a Circassian husband cannot, without detriment to his honour, enter his wife's apartment during the day. This rule is rigorously observed in all families that make any pretensions to distinction.

The princess's apartments had a little more air of comfort than her husband's. We found in it two large divans with silk cushions embroidered with gold and silver, carpets of painted felt, several trunks and a very pretty work-basket. A little Russian mirror, and the chief's armorial trophies, formed the ornaments of the walls. But the floor was not boarded, the walls were rough plastered, and two little holes, furnished with shutters, barely served to let a little air into the interior. The princess, who seemed about five-and-thirty or forty, was not fitted to support the reputation of her countrywomen, and we were by no means dazzled by her charms. Her dress alone attracted our attention. Under a brocaded pelisse with short sleeves, and laced on the seams, she wore a silk chemise, open much lower down than decency could approve. A velvet cap trimmed with silver, smooth plaits of hair, cut heart-shape on the forehead, a white veil fastened on the top of the head, and crossing over the bosom, and lastly, a red shawl thrown carelessly over her lap, completed her toilette. As for her daughter, we thought her charming: she was [Pg 309] dressed in a white robe, and a red kazavek confined round the waist; she had delicate features, a dazzlingly fair complexion, and her black hair escaped in a profusion of tresses from beneath her cap. The affability of the two ladies exceeded our expectations. They asked us a multitude of questions about our journey, our country, and our occupations. Our European costume interested them exceedingly: our straw hats above all excited their especial wonder. And yet there was something cold and impassive in their whole demeanour. It was not until a long curtain falling by accident shut out the princess from our sight that they condescended to smile. After conversing for a little while, we asked permission of the princess to take her likeness, and to sketch the interior of her dwelling, to which she made no objection. When we had made our drawings, a collation was set before us, consisting of fruits and small cheese-cakes, to which, for my part, I did not do much honour. In the evening we took our leave, and on coming out of the hut, we found all the inhabitants of the aoul assembled, their faces beaming with the most sincere good will, and every man was eager to shake hands with us before our departure. A numerous body volunteered to accompany us, and the prince himself mounted and rode with us half-way to Ekaterinodar, where we embraced like old acquaintances. The Tcherkess chief turned back to his aoul, and it was not without a feeling of regret that we spurred our horses in the direction of the capital of the Black Sea Cossacks.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[60] For fuller details we refer our readers to the Travels of M. Taitbout de Marigny and of the English agent Bell, and to the works recently published by MM. Fonton and Dubois. There exists also another narrative by Mr. Spencer, which has had the honour of a long analysis in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; but we know most positively that the honourable gentleman only made a military promenade along the coasts of the Black Sea, in company with Count Woronzof, and that he never undertook that perilous excursion into Circassia, with which he has filled a whole volume.

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# CHAPTER XXXI.

RETROSPECTIVE VIEW OF THE WAR IN THE CAUCASUS—VITAL IMPORTANCE OF THE CAUCASUS TO RUSSIA—DESIGNS ON INDIA, CENTRAL ASIA, BOKHARA, KHIVA, &c.—RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH COMMERCE IN PERSIA.

The treaty of Adrianople was in a manner the opening of a new era in the relations of Russia with the mountaineers; for it was by virtue of that treaty that the present tzar, already master of Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh, pretended to the sovereignty of Circassia and of the whole seaboard of the Black Sea. True to the invariable principles of its foreign policy, the government at first employed means of corruption, and strove to seduce the various chiefs of the country by pensions, decorations, and military appointments. But the mountaineers, who had the example of

the Persian provinces before their eyes, sternly rejected all the overtures of Russia, and repudiated the clauses of the convention of Adrianople; the political and commercial independence of their country became their rallying cry, and they would not treat on any other condition. All such ideas were totally at variance with Nicholas's schemes of absolute dominion; [Pg 310] therefore he had recourse to arms to obtain by force what he had been unable to accomplish by other means.

Abkhasia, situated on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, and easily accessible, was the first invaded. A Russian force occupied the country in 1839, under the ordinary pretence of supporting one of its princes, and putting an end to anarchy. In the same year General Paskevitch, then governor-general of the Caucasus, for the first time made an armed exploration of the country of the Tcherkesses beyond the Kouban; but he effected absolutely nothing, and his expedition only resulted in a great loss of men and stores. In the following year war broke out in Daghestan with the Lesghis and the Tchetchenzes. The celebrated Kadi Moulah, giving himself out for a prophet, gathered together a considerable number of partisans; but unfortunately for him there was no unanimity among the tribes, and the princes were continually counteracting each other. Kadi Moulah never was able to bring more than 3000 or 4000 men together; nevertheless, he maintained the struggle with a courage worthy of a better fate, and Russia knows what it cost her to put down the revolt of Daghestan. As for any real progress in that part of the Caucasus, the Russians made none; they did no more than replace things on the old footing. Daghestan soon became again more hostile than ever, and the Tchetchenzes and Lesghis continued in separate detachments to plunder and ravage the adjacent provinces up to the time when the ascendency of the celebrated Shamihl, the worthy successor of Kadi Moulah, gave a fresh impulse to the warlike tribes of the mountain, and rendered them more formidable than ever.

After taking possession of Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh, the Russians thought of seizing the whole seaboard of Circassia, and especially the various points suitable for the establishment of military posts. They made themselves masters of Guelendchik and the important position of Gagra, which commands the pass between Circassia and Abkhasia. The Tcherkesses heroically defended their territory, but how could they have withstood the guns of the ships of war that mowed them down whilst the soldiers were landing and constructing their redoubts? The blockade of the coasts was declared in 1838, and all foreign communication with the Caucasus ostensibly intercepted. During the four following years Russia suffered heavy losses; and all her successes were limited to the establishment of some small isolated forts on the sea-coast. She then increased her army, laid down the military road from the Kouban to Guelendchik, across the last western offshoot of the Caucasus, set on foot an exploration of the enemy's whole coast, and prepared to push the war with renewed vigour.

In 1837 the Emperor Nicholas visited the Caucasus. He would see for himself the theatre of a war so disastrous for his arms, and try what impression his imperial presence could make on the mountaineers. The chiefs of the country were invited to various conferences, to which they boldly repaired on the faith of the Russian parole; but instead of conciliating them by words of peace [Pg 311] and moderation, the emperor only exasperated them by his threatening and haughty language. "Do you know," said he to them, "that I have powder enough to blow up all your mountains?"

During the three following years there was an incessant succession of expeditions. Golovin, on the frontiers of Georgia, Grabe on the north, and Racifsky on the Circassian seaboard, left nothing untried to accomplish their master's orders. The sacrifices incurred by Russia were enormous; the greater part of her fleet was destroyed by a storm, but all efforts failed against the intrepidity and tactics of the mountaineers. Some new forts erected under cover of the ships were all that resulted from these disastrous campaigns. I was in the Caucasus in 1839, when Lieutenant-General Grabe returned from his famous expedition against Shamihl. When the army marched it had numbered 6000 men, 1000 of whom, and 120 officers, were cut off in three months. But as the general had advanced further into the country than any of his predecessors, Russia sang pœans, and Grabe became the hero of the day, although the imperial troops had been forced to retreat and entirely evacuate the country they had invaded. All the other expeditions were similar to this one, and achieved in reality nothing but the burning and destruction of a few villages. It is true the mountaineers are far from being victorious in all their encounters with the Russians, whose artillery they cannot easily withstand; but if they are obliged to give way to numbers or to engineering, nevertheless, they remain in the end masters of the ground, and annul all the momentary advantages gained by their enemies.

The year 1840 was still more fatal to the arms of Nicholas. Almost all the new forts on the seaboard were taken by the Circassians, who bravely attacked and carried the best fortified posts without artillery. The military road from the Kouban to Guelendchik was intercepted, Fort St. Nicholas, which commanded it, was stormed and the garrison massacred. Never yet had Russia endured such heavy blows. The disasters were such that the official journals themselves, after many months' silence, were at last obliged to speak of them, and to try to gloss them over by publishing turgid eulogiums on the heroism of the unfortunate Black Sea garrisons. The following is the bulletin published in the Russian *Invalide* of the 7th of August, 1840:[61]

"The annals of the Russian army present a multitude of glorious deeds of arms and heroic actions, the memory of which will be for ever preserved among posterity. The detached corps of the Caucasus has from its special destination more frequent opportunities than the other troops to gather new laurels; but there had not yet been seen in its ranks examples of so brilliant a valour as that recently manifested by the garrisons of several campaigning fortifications erected [Pg 312] on the unsubjugated territory of the Cossacks of the eastern shores of the Black Sea. Erected

with a view to curb the brigandages of those semi-barbarous hordes, and particularly their favourite occupation, the shameful trade in slaves, these fortifications were during the spring of this year the constant objects of their attacks. In hopes to destroy the obstacles raised against them, at a period when by reason of their position, and the insurmountable difficulty of communication, the forts on the seaboard could not receive any aid from without, they united against them all their forces and all their means. And indeed three of these forts fell, but fell with a glory that won for their defenders the admiration and even the respect of their fierce enemies. The valiant efforts of the other garrisons were crowned with better success. They have all withstood the desperate and often-repeated attacks of the mountaineers, and held out unsubdued until it was possible to send them succours.

"In this struggle between a handful of Russian soldiers and a determined and enterprising enemy, ten and even twenty times their superiors in number, the high deeds of the garrisons of the Veliaminof and Michael redoubts, and the defence of forts Navaguinsky and Abinsky, merit particular attention. The first of these redoubts was taken by the mountaineers on the 29th of last February. At daybreak, taking advantage of the localities, and concealed by the morning mist, their bands, more than 7000 strong, approached the entrenchments unperceived, and rushed impetuously to the assault. Repeatedly overthrown, they returned each time furiously to the charge, and after a long conflict finally remained masters of the rampart. The garrison, rejecting all proposals to surrender, continued with invincible courage a combat thenceforth without hope, preferring to find in it a glorious death; and all fell with the exception of some invalid soldiers, who were made prisoners by the mountaineers. The latter, in token of respect for the defenders of the redoubt, took home with them some of them whom there still appeared a chance of saving. The garrison of the Veliaminof redoubt consisted of 400 men of all ranks. The loss of the mountaineers amounted, in killed alone, to 900 men.

"On the morning of the 22nd of March, the mountaineers, to the number of more than 11,000 men, attacked the Michael redoubt, the garrison of which counted but 480 men under arms. Its brave commander, Second-captain Lico, of the battalion No. 5 of the Cossacks of the frontier line of the Black Sea, having learned the intentions of the enemy, had made preparations for vigorously resisting his attempts. Seeing the impossibility of receiving timely succour, he had nails prepared to spike his cannons, in case the rampart should be carried, and had a *réduit* constructed in the interior of the redoubt, with planks, tubs, and other suitable materials. Then collecting his whole garrison, officers and soldiers, he proposed to them to blow up the powder [Pg 313] magazine, if they did not succeed in repulsing the enemy. The proposal was received with an enthusiasm which the subsequent conduct of the garrison proved to be genuine. The mountaineers were received with a most destructive fire by the artillery of the fort, and could not make themselves masters of the rampart until after an hour and half of fighting, in which they suffered considerable loss. The heroic efforts of the garrison having forced them back into the ditch, they took to flight; but the mountain horsemen, who had remained on the watch at a certain distance, fell with their sabres on the fugitives; and the latter, seeing inevitable death on either hand, returned to the assault, drove the garrison from the rampart, and forced it to retire into the *réduit*, after it had set fire to all the stores and provisions of every kind that were in the redoubt. Sharp-shooting went on for half an hour; the firing then ceased, and the mountaineers were beginning to congratulate themselves on their victory, when the powder magazine blew up. [62] The garrison perished in accomplishing this act, memorable in military annals; but with it perished all the mountaineers who were in the redoubt. The details of the defence of the Veliaminof and Michael redoubts have been divulged by the mountaineers themselves, and by some soldiers who have escaped from slavery among them. The services of the heroes who died thus on the field of honour, have been honoured by his majesty the emperor, in the persons of their families; whose livelihood has been insured, and whose children will be brought up at the expense of the state. These redoubts are now once more occupied by the detachment of troops operating on the eastern coasts of the Black Sea.

"The Navaguinsky fort has often been subjected to the attacks of the mountaineers; but they have always been repulsed with the same valour and steadiness. In one of these attacks, the mountaineers, availing themselves of the darkness of night, and the noise of a tempest, approached the fort without being perceived by the sentinels, surrounded it on all sides, sprang suddenly to the assault with ladders and hooks, made themselves masters of part of the rampart, and got into the fort. Captain Podgoursky, its brave commandant, and Lieutenant Jacovlev, then advanced against them with a part of the garrison. Both were killed on the spot, but their death in no degree checked the ardour of the soldiers, who fell upon the enemy with the bayonet, and drove them into the ditch. The fight was maintained with the same enthusiasm on all the other points of the fortifications, and the invalids themselves voluntarily turned out from the hospital and took part in it. At daybreak, after three hours hard fighting, the fort was cleared of the [Pg 314] enemy, who left in it a considerable number of killed and wounded.

"On the 26th of May, the Abinsky fort, situated between the Kouban and the shore of the Black Sea, was surrounded at two in the morning by a body of mountaineers 12,000 strong, who had assembled in the vicinity, and suddenly assaulted the fort with loud shouts, and discharges from their rifles. The hail of bullets, hand-grenades, and grape-shot with which they were received did not check their ardour. Full of temerity and contempt of death, they descended with marvellous promptitude and agility into the ditch, and began to scale the rampart, thus blindly seeking sure destruction. The warriors, clad in coats of mail, penetrated repeatedly into the entrenchment, but were each time killed or driven back. At last, in spite of all the efforts of the garrison, a numerous party found their way into the interior of a bastion, and flung themselves with flags unfurled into the interior of the fort. Colonel Vecelofsky, the commandant, retaining all his presence of mind at

this critical moment, charged the enemy at the bayonet point, with a reserve he had kept, of 40 men, and drove them out of the entrenchment, after capturing two of their flags. This brilliant feat checked the audacity of the assailants, and inflamed the courage of the garrison to the highest pitch. The enemy, beaten on all points, took flight, carrying off their dead, according to the custom of the Asiatics. Ten of their wounded remained in the hands of the garrison, who found 685 dead in the interior of the fort and in the ditches. The number of those whom the mountaineers carried off to bury at home, was doubtless still more considerable. The loss on our side was nine killed and eighteen wounded.

"At the time of the attack, the garrison of the Abinsky fort consisted of a superior officer, fifteen officers, and 676 soldiers. The numerical weakness of this force, proves of itself the extraordinary intrepidity of all comprised in it, officers and soldiers, and their unanimous resolution to defend with unswerving firmness the ramparts confided to their courage."

It seems to us superfluous to offer any comment on this heroic bulletin. We shall merely observe, that the most serious losses, the destruction of the new road from the Kouban, the taking of fort St. Nicholas, and that of several other forts, have been entirely forgotten in the official statement, and no facts mentioned, but those which might be interpreted in favour of Russia's military glory.

On the eastern side of the mountain the war was fully as disastrous for the invaders. The imperial army lost 400 petty officers and soldiers, and twenty-nine officers in the battle of Valrik against the Tchetchenzes. The military colonies of the Terek were attacked and plundered, and when General Golovin retired to his winter quarters at the end of the campaign, he had lost more than three-fourths of his men.

The Great Kabarda did not remain an indifferent spectator of the offensive league formed by [Pg 315] the tribes of the Caucasus; and when Russia, suspecting with reason the unfriendly disposition of some tribes, made an armed exploration on the banks of the Laba in order to construct redoubts, and thus cut off the subjugated tribes from the others, the general found the country, wherever he advanced, but a desert. All the inhabitants had already retired to the other side of the Laba to join their warlike neighbours.

Since that time fresh defeats have been made known through the press, and in spite of all the mystery in which the war of the Caucasus is sought to be wrapt, the truth has, nevertheless, transpired. The last military operations of Russia have been as unproductive as those that preceded them, and prove that no change has taken place in the belligerents respectively. Thus we see that in despite of the resources of the empire, and of the indomitable obstinacy of the emperor, the position of Russia in the Caucasus has been quite stationary for sixty years.

In considering this long series of disasters and unavailing efforts, we are naturally led to inquire what have been the causes of this want of success? We have already mentioned the topographical character of the country, and the difficulties encountered by an invading army in regions not accessible by the valleys, and we have given such details of the manners and character of the mountaineers as may enable the reader to conceive the obstinate and formidable nature of their resistance. Nevertheless, seeing the absolute power of Nicholas, and the intense importance he attaches to the conquest of the Caucasus, it is difficult to admit that obstacles arising out of the nature of the ground and the character of the population could not have been overcome in a region so limited, if there were not other and more potent causes continually at work to impede the military operations of Russia. These causes reside chiefly in the deplorable state and constitution of the imperial armies.

In Russia there is no distinct commissariat department under disinterested control, whether of the government or of superior officers. It is the colonel himself of each regiment who provides the rations, and as he is subject to no control, but acts really with despotic authority, both he and his contractors have the amplest possible opportunity to cheat the government and enrich themselves at the expense of the troops. There are regiments in the Caucasus that bring in from 80,000 to 100,000 francs to the colonel. As for the subaltern officers, military submission on the one hand, and the scantiness of their pay on the other, make them always ready to participate in their commander's infamous speculations. What is the result of this wretched corruption? It is that, notwithstanding the high prices paid by the government, the contractors continue to send to the Caucasus the most unwholesome stores, and grains almost always heated or quite spoiled; for it is only in this way they can realise sufficient profits to be able to satisfy the cupidity of their confederates, the officers. I knew several merchants of Theodosia in the Crimea, men of honour, [Pg 316] who refused to have any thing to do with military supplies, because they found it impossible to make the colonels and generals accept sound articles.

This official robbery is nowhere carried on in a more scandalous manner than in the Caucasus. It is there regularly established, and one may conjecture the hardships and privations of the soldier from seeing the luxurious tables of the lowest officers, most of whom have but from 1000 or 1200 rubles yearly pay. Certainly there are few sovereigns who take more heed than Nicholas to the physical welfare of their soldiers, and we must give full credit to his generous intentions in this respect; but these are completely defeated by the corruption of his officers and civil servants, by the total want of publicity, and by that base servility which will always hinder an inferior from accusing his superior. I have been present at several military inspections made by general officers in the Caucasus, but never heard the least complaint made by the soldiers; and when the general, calling them by companies round him in a circle, questioned them respecting their victuals, they all invariably replied in chorus, that they had nothing to complain of, and were as well treated as possible. Their colonel's eye was upon them, and they knew what the least word

of complaint would have cost them; yet they were dying by hundreds of scurvy, and other diseases engendered by unwholesome food.

The government usually makes large purchases of butter in Siberia for the army of the Caucasus; but this butter which would be of such great utility in the military hospitals, and which costs as much as sixty-five francs the twenty kilogrammes, very seldom passes further than Taganrok, where it is sold in retail, and its place supplied with the worst substitute that can be had. Nor does the robbery end there. The butter fabricated in Taganrok is again made matter of speculation in the Caucasus, and finally not a particle reaches the sick and drooping soldiers. The other good provisions undergo nearly the same course.

When I was at Theodosia in 1840, there were in the military hospital of the town 15,000 invalids, who were all dying for want of attendance and good medicine. A Courland general (whom I could name) justly incensed at these abuses, sent in a strong report of them directly to the emperor; and twenty days afterwards, a superior officer, despatched by the emperor himself, arrived on the spot. But the people about the hospital were rich; they had taken their measures, and the result of this mission, which looked so threatening at first, was a report extremely satisfactory as to the zeal of the managers and the sanatory condition of the establishment. The general was severely reprimanded, almost disgraced, and the robbers continued to merit official encomiums. I did not hear that they were rewarded by the government.

The most frightful mortality prevails among the troops in the Caucasus; whole divisions [Pg 317] disappear in the space of a few months, and the army is used up and wholly renewed every three or four years. It is especially in the small forts on the seaboard, where the mischiefs of bad food are increased by almost total isolation, that diseases make frightful havoc, particularly scurvy. In the spring of 1840, the twelfth division marched to occupy the redoubts on the coasts of Circassia, and its effective number was 12,000 men, quite an extraordinary circumstance. Four months afterwards it was recalled to take part in the expedition at that time projected against the Viceroy of Egypt. When it landed at Sevastopol it was reduced to 1500 men. In the same year the commander-in-chief, in visiting the forts of the seaboard, found but nine men fit for service out of 300 that composed the garrison of Soukhoum Kaleh. According to official returns, the average deaths on the seaboard of Circassia in 1841 and 1842, were 17,000 in each year.

Is it to be wondered that with such a military administration, Russia makes no progress in the Caucasus? What can be expected of armies in which want of all necessaries and total disregard for the lives of men are the order of the day? The divisions and regiments in the Caucasus are in a state of permanent disorganisation, and the courage and activity of the troops sink altogether under the influence of the diseases by which they are incessantly mowed down. It needs all the force of discipline, all the stoic self-denial of the soldier, and, above all, the incessant renovation of the garrisons, to hinder the Russians from being driven out of all their positions.

People often ask with surprise why Russia does not take the field with 200,000 or even 300,000 men at once. We have already given sufficiently circumstantial details on the topography of the Caucasus, to enable every one to perceive immediately how difficult it is to employ large armies in regions so inaccessible, and so wonderfully defended by nature. Nor, on the other hand, must it be forgotten that the official strength of the army of the Caucasus is always at least 160,000 men. Its real strength, indeed, very seldom exceeds 80,000; but its proportion to the grand total of the imperial forces, paid as if they were at the full, still remains the same, and it is impossible, under existing circumstances, that the government should augment the number of its troops without most seriously increasing the already embarrassed condition of the finances. Another consideration of still greater weight is, that the movements of large armies are attended with extreme difficulty in Russia, to a degree unknown in any other country of Europe. In all the discussions that are held on the subject of the war in the Caucasus, the immense difficulties of the transport of men, military stores, and provisions, have never been taken into account, and people have always reasoned as if the Caucasus was situated in the midst of the tzar's dominions. A glance at the map of Russia will suffice to show, that those mountains lying on the most southern verge of the empire, are separated by real deserts from the great centres of the Russian [Pg 318] population, and that to repair to the banks of the Kouban from the first governments where troops are recruited, they must traverse more than 150 leagues of country inhabited by Cossacks and Kalmucks, in which the nature of the soil and of the inhabitants forbids any cantonment of reserves.

Moreover we must not forget the difficulties of the climate. The fine season barely lasts four months in Russia. The roads are impassable for pedestrians in spring and autumn, and during the winter the cold is too severe, the days too short, the snow-storms often too prolonged to allow of putting regiments on the march, not to say sending them to the Caucasus across the uncultivated and desert plains that stretch between the Sea of Azof and the Caspian. The route by sea is equally impracticable. No use can be made of the Caspian on account of the arid and unproductive steppes that belt it on the Russian side. Astrakhan, the only town situated on that part of the coast, is obliged to fetch its provisions from a distance of 200 leagues. The Black Sea is, indeed, more favourably circumstanced; but it only affords communication with the forts on the Circassian side; and the mountaineers always wait to make their attacks in the season of rough weather, during which navigation is usually suspended, and it is exceedingly difficult to reinforce and victual the garrisons. The tediousness and difficulty of conveying stores is the same by land. With the exception of the forts of Circassia, supplied directly from the ports of Odessa, Theodosia, and Kertch, all the garrisons of the Caucasus receive their supplies from the nearly central provinces of the empire. Thus the materials destined for the army of the Terek and of Daghestan arrive first in Astrakhan, after a voyage of more than 200 leagues down the Volga; and

then they are forwarded by sea for the most part to Koumskaia, on the mouth of the Kouma, where they are taken up by the Turcomans on their little ox-carts, impressed for the service, and reach their final destination after fifteen or twenty days' travelling. The mode of proceeding is still more tedious and expensive for the implements and *matériel* of war which arrive from Siberia only once a year, during the spring floods of the Volga, the Don, and the Dnieper. Such obstacles render it impossible to augment the forces employed on the Caucasus. France is infinitely better circumstanced with regard to Algeria. We have nothing to prevent our keeping up strong military stations on the Mediterranean shore. We can at any moment command the means of rapidly transporting to Africa whatever forces may be required by ordinary or unforeseen circumstances. We will by and by return to the war in Algeria, as compared with that which the Russians are carrying on in the Caucasus.

We have yet to speak of another cause of weakness to the Russian arms, and one which is the more serious as it operates exclusively on the *moral* of the soldiers. Russia has made the Caucasus a place of transportation, a regular Botany Bay for all the rogues in the empire, and for those who by their acts or their political opinions, have incurred the wrath of the tzar. In [Pg 319] reference to this subject, we will mention a fact which may seem hard to believe, but which I attest as an eye-witness. In 1840, the fifteenth division, commanded by Lieutenant-General S——, received orders to march to the Caucasus. On leaving Taganrok, it was about 1200 short of its complement, and its deficiency was supplied from the prisons of southern Russia. Robbers, pickpockets, vagabonds, and soldiers that had been flogged and degraded, were marched into Taganrok, and incorporated with the regiments which were about to begin the campaign. These singular recruits were put under the keeping of the soldiers, and each of them, according to his supposed degree of rascality, was guarded by two, three, or four men. Surely the *moral* of the Russian troops is sufficiently jeopardised by the social and military institutions of the empire, and it cannot be prudent so deeply to debase the soldier by associating him with thieves and highway robbers, and to change the toilsome wars of the Caucasus into a means of punishment, I may say of destruction, for political offenders and real criminals. Furthermore, a conflict so prolonged, so disastrous, and that for so many years has been without any tangible result, must inevitably have the worst effect on the minds of troops who are not actuated either by the sense of glory or honour, or by the feeling that they are defending the right. We have visited the Caucasus at various times, and never did we meet one officer who was heartily attached to the service in which he was engaged. Despondency is universal, and many expeditions against the mountaineers have been marked by a total absence of discipline. The soldiers have often refused to march, and have suffered themselves to be massacred by their officers, rather than advance a foot.

The Caucasus has also become a place of exile for a great number of Poles. After the revolution of 1831, the Russian government committed the blunder of sending to the Kouban most of the regiments compromised in that ill-fated effort. The result was very easy to foresee; desertion soon began in the ranks of the outlaws, and it is now known beyond a doubt that the Tcherkesses have Poles among them, who instruct them in the art of war, endeavour to create an artillery for them with the pieces captured from the Russians, and labour actively to allay the dissensions between the various tribes. General Grabe himself assured me that he had seen in several places fortifications which he recognised as quite modern. He had also in his campaign of 1840 remarked a more compact and better concerted resistance on the part of the Circassians, and often a remarkable degree of combined action in their attacks.

We have not much to say about the military tactics employed by Russia in this war; in point of science it presents no very striking features, but on the contrary, cannot but give a very low idea of the merit of the imperial generals. At first it was expected that the conquest would be effected by hemming in the mountaineers with military lines, and gradually encroaching on their territory; but this very costly system seems to me quite impracticable in a country in which the forts are [Pg 320] always solitary, and cannot protect each other, or cross their fires. I do not know, however, whether it has been quite given up.

Attempts were made in 1837 to set fire to the forests of the Caucasus by means of pitch. Three years afterwards it was hoped to effect their destruction by arming the men of the 15th division with axes; but these strange expedients only produced useless expenditure. I know a general of the highest personal courage, who calls in the aid of natural philosophy to beguile or awe the mountaineers. Whenever he receives a visit from chiefs whose fidelity he is inclined to suspect, he sets an electrical machine in play. His visitors feel violent shocks, they know not how, their beards and hair stand on end, and in the bewilderment caused by these mysterious visitations, they sometimes let out an important secret, and betray themselves to their enemy.

An officer of engineers told me an anecdote of this same general which is worth recording. A mosque which the Russian government had built at its own expense for a tribe of Little Kabarda was to be inaugurated, and as usual there was a grand military parade in honour of the occasion. When the Kabardians had displayed all their address in horsemanship and shooting, the Russian general proceeded to give a sample of what he could do, and to strike the assembled tribes with amazement. He called for his double-barrelled gun, and having himself charged one of the barrels with ball, he ordered a pigeon to be let loose, which he instantly brought down, to the astonishment of the beholders. "That is not all," said he to the chiefs near him; "to shoot a pigeon flying is no very extraordinary feat; but to cut off his head with the ball is what I call good shooting." Then turning to his servant, he said something to him in German. The man went and picked up the bird, and when he held it out to view, it was seen to be beheaded just as the general had said. Unbounded was the admiration of the simple mountaineers; they looked on the

general as a supernatural being, and nothing was talked of for many a day in the aouls, but the beheaded pigeon and the wonderful Russian marksman.

Now to explain the enigma. The inhabitants of the Caucasus are ignorant of the use of small shot, and it was with this the general had accomplished his surprising exploit, having previously loaded one barrel with it. As for the pigeon's head, it was adroitly whipped off by the servant, who had received his orders to that effect in German.

But it would be idle to expect that the shrewd good sense of the mountaineers will long be imposed on by the scientific accomplishments of the Russian generals; on the contrary, these curious expedients only give them increased confidence in their own strength. Yermoloff appears to us to have been the only governor who understood the nature of the war in the Caucasus, and who conducted affairs with the dignified and inflexible vigour which were fitted to make an [Pg 321] impression on the tribes. Several commanders-in-chief have succeeded him in turns: Rosen, Golovin, Grabe, Raiefsky, Anrep, Neughart; but the government has gained nothing by all these changes.

After the details we have given, comments and arguments would be almost superfluous: it is easy to conceive how critical is the situation of the Russians in the Caucasian regions. For twenty years the Emperor Nicholas has expended all the military genius of his empire, shrinking from no sacrifice of men or money, and employing generals of the highest reputation, and yet the might of his sovereign will has broken down before the difficulties we have pointed out. The tribes of the mountain are, on the contrary, growing stronger every day. They are making progress in the art of war; success fires their zeal; the old intestine discords are gradually disappearing, and the various tribes seem to feel the necessity of acting in concert, and uniting under one banner. Now can Russia, under existing circumstances, increase her chances of success? We think not, and the facts sufficiently corroborate our opinion. With his system of war and absolute dominion, the tzar has entangled himself in a hopeless maze, and the Caucasus will long remain a running sore to the empire, a bottomless pit to swallow up many an army and much treasure. It has often been proposed to renounce the present system, but the emperor's vanity will not admit of any pacific counsels. Besides, even if Russia were now willing to change the nature of her relations with the independent tribes, she could not do so. Her overtures would be regarded as tokens of weakness, and the mountaineers would only become so much the more enterprising.

In Alexander's time, when warlike ideas were less in favour, it was proposed to establish a commercial intercourse with the Tcherkesses, and bring them gradually by pacific means to acknowledge the supremacy of Russia. A Genoese, named Scassi, proposed in 1813 to the Duc de Richelieu, governor of Odessa, a plan for a commercial settlement on the coasts of Circassia. His scheme was adopted, and a merchant vessel touched soon afterwards at Guelendchik and Pchiat, without meeting with any hindrance on the part of the inhabitants. A trade was soon established, but the disorderly conduct of the Russians aroused the jealousy of the Circassians, who soon burned and destroyed the factory at Pchiat, and the government, whether justly or not, treated Scassi as a culprit. Since that time there has been no thought of commerce or pacification, and the tribes of the Caucasus have been regarded only as rebels to be put down, not as a free people justly jealous of their privileges. Frequent conferences have taken place between the Russian generals and the mountain chiefs; but as the one party talked only of liberty and independence, and the other of nothing but submission and implicit obedience, hostilities always broke out again with fresh vehemence. It appears, however, from facts recently communicated to me, that the [Pg 322] emperor is at last disposed to give up his warlike system, and that his generals have at last received orders to act only on the defensive.[63] But as the government, whilst adopting these new measures, still loudly proclaims its rights of sovereignty over the Caucasus, it follows that this change of policy is quite illusory, and cannot effect any kind of reconciliation between the Russians and the mountaineers.

We now come to the point at which we may advert to a question which set the whole English press in a blaze in 1837; namely, the blockade of the Circassian coasts, and the pretensions of Russia as to that part of the Caucasus. It is evident that the tzar's government being at open war with the mountaineers, may at its pleasure intercept the foreign trade with the enemy's country. This is an incontestible right recognised by all nations, and the capture of the *Vixen* was not worth the noise that was made about it. As to the proprietary right to the country which Russia affects to have received from Turkey, through the treaty of Adrianople, it is totally fallacious, and is unsupported by any historical document or positive fact. It is fully demonstrated that Turkey never possessed any right over Circassia; she had merely erected on the seaboard, with the consent of the inhabitants, the two fortresses of Anapa and Soudjouk Kaleh, for the protection of the trade between the two countries. Russia herself, in the beginning, publicly acknowledged this state of things; and the evidence of her having done so is to be found in the general depôt of the maps of the empire. Chance threw into my hands a map of the Caucasus, drawn up by the Russian engineers, long prior to the treaty of Adrianople. The Turkish possessions are distinctly marked on it, and defined by a red boundary line; they consist solely, as we have just stated, of the two fortresses on the coast. This map, the existence of which one day sorely surprised Count Voronzof (governor-general of New Russia), was sent to England, and deposited in the Foreign Office during Lord Palmerston's administration. After all, I hardly know why Russia tries to avail herself of the treaty of Adrianople as a justification in the eyes of Europe of her schemes of conquest in the Caucasus. She is doing there only what we are doing in Algeria, and the English in India, and indeed with still greater reason; for, as we shall presently see, the possession of the Caucasus is a question vitally affecting her interests in her trans-Caucasian provinces, and her ulterior projects respecting the regions dependent on Persia and Central Asia.

Here are the terms in which this subject is handled in a report printed at St. Petersburg, and addressed to the emperor after the expedition of General Emmanuel towards the Elbrouz, in 1829:

"The Tcherkesses bar out Russia from the South, and may at their pleasure open or close the passage to the nations of Asia. At present their intestine dissensions, fostered by Russia, hinder [Pg 323] them from uniting under one leader; but it must not be forgotten that according to traditions religiously preserved among them, the sway of their ancestors extended as far as to the Black Sea. They believe that a mighty people, descended from their ancestors, and whose existence is corroborated by the ruins of Madjar, has once already overrun the fine plains adjacent to the Danube, and finally settled in Pannonia. Add to this consideration their superiority in arms. Perfect horsemen, extremely well armed, inured to war by the continual freebooting they exercise against their neighbours, courageous, and disdaining the advantages of our civilisation, the imagination is appalled at the consequences which their union under one leader might have for Russia, which has no other bulwark against their ravages than a military line, too extensive to be very strong."

Reflections like these, printed in St. Petersburg, can leave no doubt as to the dangers to which the southern provinces are exposed. They are not to be mistaken, and the government sees them clearly: the aggressive independence of the Caucasus is perilous to all Russia. Armed, courageous, and enterprising as they are, the mountaineers need only some degree of union among their chiefs, to carry the flames of revolt over a vast portion of the tzar's dominions.

Let any one look fairly and impartially at the immense region comprised between the Danube and the Caspian, and what will he behold? To the east 40,000 tents of Khirghis, Turcomans, and Kalmucks, robbed of all their ancient rights, or threatened with the loss of the remnant yet left them of their independence; in the centre 800,000 Cossacks bound to the most onerous military service, tormented by the recollection of their suppressed constitutions, and detesting a government whose efforts tend to extinguish every trace of their nationality; in the south and west the Tatars of the Crimea and the Sea of Azof, and the Bessarabians, who are far from being favourable to Russia; and lastly, beyond the Caucasus, in Asia, restless populations, ill-broken as yet to the Russian yoke, and possessions with which there exists no overland communication except that by way of Mozdok, a dangerous route, which cannot be traversed without an escort of infantry and artillery, and which the mountaineers may at any moment intercept.[64] Here, assuredly, are causes enough of disorganisation and ruin, that want only a man of genius to set them in action. What wonder is it that with such contingencies to apprehend, the empire recoils from no sacrifice!

No one, we believe, will deny the schemes of conquest which the Muscovite government entertains regarding Turkey, Persia, and even certain regions of India: these schemes are [Pg 324] incontestible, and have long been matter of history. The fact being admitted, what is the position most favourable for these vast plans of aggrandisement? We have but to glance at the map to answer immediately: the regions beyond the Caucasus. There it is that Russia is in contact at once with the Caspian and the Black Sea, with Persia and Turkey; from thence she can with the same army dictate laws to the Sultan of Constantinople, and to the Shah of Teheran; and there her diplomacy finds an ample field to work, and continual pretexts to justify fresh encroachments. But this formidable position will never be truly and securely possessed by the tzars until the tribes of the Caucasus shall have been subjugated.

When the empire acquired all those Asiatic provinces, its situation as to the Caucasus was far from being so critical as it now is. It is, in fact, only within the last fourteen or fifteen years that the fierce struggle has raged between Muscovite domination and the freedom of the mountain. I therefore much doubt that Russia would now venture to act towards Persia as she did in the time of Catherine II., and her successors. Her hostile attitude has been strikingly modified since she has had in her rear a foe so active and dangerous as the Caucasians. This is a consideration that may ease the minds of the English as to their possessions in India, for the road by Herat and Affghanistan will not be so very soon open to their rivals. There can be no question then respecting the great importance of the Caucasus to Russia. The independence of the mountaineers is perilous to her southern governments, compromises the safety and the future destiny of the trans-Caucasian provinces, and at the same time fetters and completely paralyses the ambition of the tzar. It is in this sense the question is likewise regarded by the court of Teheran, which now builds its whole hope of safety on the entanglements of Russia in the Caucasus.

And now let us ask what is the work which Russia is doing beyond the Caucasus for the advantage or detriment of mankind? What, independently of her ambition and her tendencies, is the influence she is called to exercise over the actual and future lot of the nations she has subjected to her sway? It must be admitted that when the imperial armies appeared for the first time on the confines of Asia, the trans-Caucasian provinces were abandoned without defence or hope for the future to all the sanguinary horrors of anarchy. Turkey, Persia, and the mountain tribes rioted in the plunder of Georgia and the adjacent states. The advent of the Russians put an end to this sad state of things, and introduced a condition of peace and quiet unknown for many centuries before. The imperial government, it is true, brought with it its vices, its abuses, its vexations, and its hosts of greedy and plundering functionaries; and then, when the first heyday of delight at the enjoyment of personal safety was past, the inhabitants had other hardships to deplore. Nevertheless, the depredations committed by its functionaries will never prevent the [Pg 325] inevitable tendency of the Muscovite occupation to bring about an intellectual development, which, soon or late, will act most favourably on the future condition of those Asiatic regions.

Christian populations, so active and enterprising as are those of the trans-Caucasian provinces, will infallibly begin a career of social improvement from the moment they find themselves released from the engrossing care of defending their bodily existence. Of course it will need many years to mature a movement which derives no aid from the too superficial and corrupt civilisation of Russia; nor has any thing worth mentioning been done as yet to promote the industry, commerce, and agriculture of a country, which only needs some share of freedom to be productive. Tiflis is far from having fulfilled the prophecy of Count Gamba, in 1820, and become a second Palmyra or Alexandria; on the contrary, every measure has been adopted that could extinguish the very germs of the national wealth. But humanity, mysterious in its ways, and slow in its progress, seldom keeps pace with the impatience of nations; and notwithstanding the new evils that in our day afflict the trans-Caucasian populations, we are convinced that it was a grand step in advance for them to have been withdrawn from the anarchical sway of Persia and Turkey, and to have had the personal safety of their inhabitants secured by the intervention and authority of Russia.[65]

The conquest of India by the Russians has often been the theme of long discussions and elaborate hypotheses. England was very uneasy at the attempts on Khiva, and never meets with a single difficulty in Affghanistan without ascribing it to Muscovite agents. It is, therefore, worth while to consider what are the means and facilities at the command of Russia for the establishment of her dominion in the centre of Turkistan and on the banks of the Indus and the Ganges.

Three points of departure and three routes present themselves to Russia for the invasion of Central Asia. On the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea, Manghishlak, Tuk Karakhan, and the Bay of Balkhan, communicate with Khiva by caravan routes; Orenburg to the north is in pretty regular communication with Khiva and Bokhara; and to the south the Caspian provinces trade with Affghanistan either by way of Meshed, Bokhara, and Balkh, or by Meshed, Bokhara, and Candahar.

The first line that was taken by a Russian expedition was that from Tuk Kharakhan to Khiva. Prince Alexander Bekovitch was sent by Peter the Great to explore certain regions of the Khanat of Khiva, which were supposed to contain rich gold mines, and landed on the Caspian shore with about 3,000 men. The result was disastrous; but the details are too well known to need repetition [Pg 326] here. No new demonstration has since been made in that direction, and it appears to have been with good reason abandoned entirely. The eastern shores of the Caspian have been sufficiently explored to make it clear that they cannot be made the starting point of military operations against Turkistan. From the mouth of the Emba to the vicinity of Astrabad, the shore is without a river; and the whole seaboard, as well as the regions between the Caspian and Khiva, with the exception of a very small tract occupied by the Balkhan mountains, presents only barren desert plains, without water, occupied by nomade Turcomans, and affording no resources to an invading army. "This country," says Mouravief, "exhibits the image of death, or rather of the desolation left behind by a mighty convulsion of nature. Neither birds nor quadrupeds are found in it; no verdure or vegetation cheers the sight, except here and there at long intervals some spots on which there grow a few sickly stunted shrubs." It is reckoned that on an average a caravan employs from twenty-eight to thirty-five days of camel-marching to complete the distance of about two hundred leagues that divides Tuk Karakhan from Khiva. The journey is not quite so long from the Bay of Balkhan. This was the route taken by Captain Mouravief when he was sent by Yermolof to the Khan of Khiva, to propose to him an alliance with Russia. It would certainly be hard to conceive any conditions more unfavourable for an expedition towards the interior than are presented by this part of the coast. On the one side is the Caspian Sea, the navigation of which is at all times difficult, and in winter impossible; on the other side more than a month's march through the desert; and then on the coast itself there is a total impossibility of cantoning a reserved force. Under these circumstances, all schemes of conquest in this direction must be chimerical. The Russians no doubt might, by a clever *coup-de-main*, push forwards some thousands of men on Khiva, and take the town; but what would they gain thereby? How could they victual their troops; or how could they establish any safe line of transport across deserts traversed by flying hordes of warlike plunderers? Russia could not possibly dispense with a series of fortified posts to keep up a regular communication with her army of occupation, and how could she erect and maintain such posts in a naked and wholly unproductive country? The government has already tried to establish some small forts on the north-eastern shore of the Caspian, for the protection of its fisheries, against the Khirghis; but to this day it has effected nothing thereby, but the useless destruction of many thousands of its soldiers, who have perished under the most cruel hardships. Furthermore, the Khanat of Khiva, the state nearest the imperial frontiers, is but a very small part of Turkistan; nor would its occupation help in more than a very limited degree towards the conquest of Bokhara, and *a fortiori* towards that of Affghanistan.

After the line from the eastern coast of the Caspian, that from Orenburg to Khiva and Bokhara [Pg 327] appears to have attracted the particular attention of the tzars. But General Perofsky's fruitless expedition against Khiva, in 1840, has demonstrated that this line is quite as perilous and difficult as the other. The steppes that lie between Russia and the two khanats are exactly similar to those situated north and east of the Caspian, presenting the same nakedness and sterility, an almost total want of fresh water, and nomade tribes perpetually engaged in rapine. When State Councillor Negri was sent on an embassy to the Khan of Bokhara, in 1820, he set out accompanied by 200 Cossacks, 200 infantry, twenty-five Bashkir horsemen, two pieces of artillery, 400 horses, and 358 camels. The government afforded him every possible facility and means of transport, and he took with him more than two months' rations for his men and cattle. Yet though he met with no obstruction on the part of the hordes whose steppes he traversed, he

was not less than seventy-one days in completing the journey of 1600 kilometres (1000 miles) from Orenburg to Bokhara.

Perofsky, who marched at the head of 6000 infantry, with 10,000 baggage camels, could not even reach the territory of Khiva. The disasters suffered by his troops obliged him to retrace his steps without having advanced further than Ac Boulak, the last outpost erected by the Russians in 1839, at 180 kilometres from the Emba. The obstacles encountered by his small army were beyond all description. The cold was fearful, being 40 degrees below zero of the centigrade thermometer; the camels could scarcely advance through the snow; and the movements of the troops were constantly impeded by hurricanes of extraordinary violence. Such an expedition, undertaken in the depth of winter, solely for the purpose of having fresh water, may enable one to guess at the difficulties of a march over the same ground in summer. Spring is a season unknown in all those immense plains of southern Russia; intense frost is there succeeded abruptly by tropical heat, and a fortnight is generally sufficient to dry up the small streams and the stagnant waters produced by the melting of the snows, and to scorch up the thin coating of pasturage that for a brief while had covered the steppes. What chance then has Russia of successfully invading Turkistan from the north, and reigning supreme over Bokhara, which is separated from Orenburg by 400 leagues of desert? All that has been done, and all that has been observed up to this day, proves that the notion is preposterous. As for any compact and amity between Russia and the numerous Kirghis hordes, such as might favour the march of the imperial armies in Bokhara, no such thing is to be expected. A great deal has been said of the Emperor Alexander's journey to Orenburg in 1824, and the efforts then made by the government to conciliate the Kirghis; but these proceedings have been greatly exaggerated, and represented as much more important than they really were. They have not produced any substantial result, and I [Pg 328] know from my own experience how hostile to Russia are all the roving tribes of the Caspian, and how much they detest whatever menaces their freedom and independence.

We have now to consider in the last place the two great Persian routes, which coincide, or run parallel, with each other, as far as Meshed, where they branch off to Bokhara on the one hand, and on the other to Cabul by Herat and Candahar. The former of these routes, travelled over by Alexander Burnes, seems to us totally impracticable. The distance to Bokhara from Teheran (which we will assume for the starting point, though it is still the capital of Persia) is not less than 500 leagues; and it cannot reasonably be supposed possible to effect, and above all to preserve, a conquest so remote, when in order to reach the heart of the coveted country, it is necessary to traverse the vast deserts north of Meshed, occupied by nomade hordes, which are the more formidable, inasmuch as no kind of military tactics can be brought to bear on them. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the occupation of Bokhara by no means infers that of Affghanistan. The distance from the former to Cabul is more than 250 leagues. The regions between the two towns are indeed less sterile and easier to traverse; but, on the other hand, an army marching towards India would have to penetrate the dangerous passes of the high mountain chain between Turkistan and Affghanistan, which are defended by the most indomitable tribes of Central Asia. Here would be repeated those struggles in which Russia has been vainly exhausting her strength for so many years in the Caucasus.[66] In truth, in presence of such obstacles, of ground, climate, population, and distance, all discussion becomes superfluous, and the question must appear decided in the negative by every impartial man who possesses any precise notions as to the regions of Western Asia.

There remains the route by Meshed, Herat, and Candahar. This is incontestably the one which presents fewest difficulties; yet we doubt that it can ever serve the ambitious views attributed to Russia. Along the line from Teheran to Herat lie important centres of agricultural populations; villages are found on it surrounded by a fertile and productive soil. But these advantages, besides being very limited, are largely counterbalanced by uncultivated plains destitute of water which must be traversed in passing from one inhabited spot to another, and by the obstacles of all kinds which would be subsequently encountered in a march through the deserts of Affghanistan, the warlike tribes of which are much more formidable even than the Turcomans who infest the route from Teheran to Herat. Besides, as it is nearly 600 leagues from the capital of Persia to the centre of Affghanistan, it is exceedingly unlikely that Russia will ever succeed in subjugating a [Pg 329] country in which its armies could only arrive by a military road maintained and defended through so huge a space.

No doubt the way would be considerably smoothed for Russia along both the Candahar and the Bokhara lines, if by gradually extending the circle of her conquests she had brought the inhabitants of Khorasan and Turkistan to obey her. But there are obstacles to the achievement of this preliminary task which the empire is not by any means competent to surmount, nor will it be so for a very long time to come. To say nothing of climate, soil, and distance, all the tribes in question are animated with a hatred and aversion for Russia, which will long neutralise the projects of the tzars. We often hear of the great influence exercised by the cabinet of St. Petersburg at Khiva, Bokhara, and Cabul; but we believe it to be greatly exaggerated, and the history of the various Muscovite embassies proves most palpably that it is so. What did Negri and Mouravief effect at Khiva and Bokhara? They were both received with the most insulting distrust, prevented from holding any communication with the natives, and watched with a strictness which is only employed against an enemy. Mouravief even went near to pay for his embassy with his head. Was Russia more fortunate at Cabul? We think not. The remoteness of her dominions may cause her agents to be received with some degree of favour, especially at a time when the sovereign of Cabul finds himself exposed to the hostility of England. Yet it is not the less true that any serious attempt of Russia on Turkistan and the eastern regions of Persia would suddenly arouse the animosity of the Affghans and all their neighbours. We readily admit that the imperial

government has it in its power, by its advice and its intrigues, to exercise a certain influence at Cabul, to the detriment of England; but that this influence can ever serve the extension of the Muscovite sway is what we utterly deny, knowing as we do the intense and unmitigable aversion to Russia which is felt by all the natives of Asia.

The conquests of Alexander the Great and of Genghis Khan have often been appealed to as proving how easy it would be for the tzars to follow in the footsteps of those great captains. Such language bespeaks on the part of the writers who have put it forth the most profound ignorance of the actual condition of the places and the inhabitants. When Alexander marched towards Bactriana to subjugate the last possessions of Persia, he left behind him rich and fertile countries, important Greek colonies, and nations entirely subdued; moreover, he marched at the head of an army consisting of natives of the south, possessing all the qualifications necessary for warfare in the latitudes of Central Asia. Furthermore, at that period the provinces of the Oxus contained numerous rich and flourishing towns, with inhabitants living in luxury, and little capable of resistance. Nevertheless, in spite of all the facilities and all the supplies which the country then offered to an invading army, its physical conformation, broken and bounded by [Pg 330] deserts both on the north and on the south, seems to have aided the efforts of its defenders to a remarkable degree. It was in fact in this remote part of Persia that the conqueror of Darius had to fight many a battle for the establishment of his transient sway. The same circumstances marked his march to India. Invasions have become still more difficult since his day, for all those regions once occupied by wealthy and agricultural nations have been ravaged and turned into deserts; scarcely do there exist a few traces of the ancient towns, and the populations subdued by Alexander have been succeeded by hordes of Khirgis, Turcomans, and Affghans, who would be for the Russians what the Scythians were for the King of Macedon and the other conquerors who tried to enslave their country.

The Mongol invasions can no more than Alexander's be regarded as a precedent for Russia. Inured to the fatigues of emigration, carrying all their ordinary habits into the camp, changing their country without changing their ways of life, unburdened by any *matériel* of war, and never retarded by the slow and painful march of a body of infantry, the hordes of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane were singularly fitted for occupying and retaining possession of the immense plains of Turkistan, and realising the conquest of India.

Russia, on the contrary, is totally devoid of those grand means of sway which Alexander and the Mongols enjoyed. The Russians have nothing in common with the soldiers of antiquity and of the middle ages, and are placed in very different circumstances: they are natives of the coldest regions of the globe; they have no possible opportunity of previous acclimation, and they are separated from the frontiers of India by more than 500 leagues of almost desert country, in which the employment of infantry, wherein alone consists the real superiority of Europeans over Orientals, is impracticable.

And now, if we look to India, and to the people from whom the tzars propose to wrest its empire, we see Great Britain occupying all the towns on the coast and in the interior, mistress of the great rivers of the country, controlling millions of inhabitants by her irresistible political ascendency, having the richest and most productive countries of the world for the basis of her military operations, commanding acclimated European troops, and a powerful native army habituated to follow her banners; in a word, we see Great Britain placed in the most admirable position for defending her conquests, and repulsing any aggression of the northern nations, foreign to the soil of Hindustan and Central Asia. The fears of the English and the schemes of the Russians appear to us, therefore, alike chimerical. Undoubtedly, as we have already said, the intrigues of the government of St. Petersburg, may, like those of any other influential power, create difficulties and annoyances in Affghanistan and elsewhere; but the English rule will never be really in danger, until the time shall come when national ambition and a desire of resistance [Pg 331] shall have been kindled in the Hindu populations themselves.

Let us turn back to the Caucasus, of which we have not spoken in this discussion, though the independence of its tribes is in our opinion one of the most important obstacles to the aggrandisement of Russia in Asia; and let us imagine what are the immediate palpable interests which are at stake in the Trans-Caucasian regions for certain powers of Europe. Every one knows that Persia is become of late years the point of contact between England and Russia, the scene of competition between the two nations for the disposal of their merchandise. Our readers are aware, that since the suppression of the transit trade and free commerce of the Caucasian provinces, the English have established a vast depôt for their manufactures at Trebisond, whence they have not only acquired a monopoly in the supply of Armenia, Eastern Turkey, and the greater part of Persia, but also supply the Russian provinces themselves by contraband. Hence it may be conceived with what wakeful jealousy England must watch the proceedings of Russia beyond the Caucasus, and what an interest she has in impeding any conquest that would close against her the great commercial route she has pursued by way of Erzeroum and Tauris. She cannot, therefore, be indifferent to the independence of the Caucasus, which, while serving as a bulwark to the frontiers of Turkey and Persia, affords also a most effectual protection to her mercantile operations in Trebisond. It may perhaps be said that this is a merely English question, very interesting to the manufacturers of London and Manchester, but of little concern to France. But where our neighbours find means to dispose annually of more than 2,000,000*l.* sterling worth of manufactures, there also we think our own political and commercial interests are concerned. Have not we, too, an influence to keep up in Asia? Do not we, too, possess manufactories and a numerous working population, and is it not carrying indifference and apathy too far, to let other powers engross all those regions of Asia where we could find such ready and profitable markets?

Whose fault is it if the French flag is so seldom seen on the Black Sea, if Trebisond is become an English town, and if the commerce of Asia is monopolised by our rivals? There is much to blame in the indifference of our country, and in the incapacity of some of our consular agents. But if our commercial policy is often vicious, if our trade is misdirected and mismanaged, and we are often outstripped by our neighbours across the channel, is that any reason why we should, in blind selfishness, express our approval of conquests which would only end in the destruction of all European commerce in the Black Sea? Certainly if Russia, modifying her prohibitive system, and frankly abandoning all further designs against Turkey and the coasts of the Black Sea, would seek to extend her dominions solely on the side of Persia, we think it would be good policy not to thwart such a movement; for in case of a struggle between that power and England, France would unquestionably be called on to act as a mediator, which would give her an admirable opportunity for dictating conditions favourable to her policy and her influence in the East. [Pg 332]

The detailed considerations into which we have entered respecting the situation of the Russians, the war in the Caucasus, and the political importance of that region, clearly indicate the differences between the conflict in the Caucasus and that which we have been carrying on for fourteen years in Algeria. The aggressive policy of Russia once admitted, and her possessions north, south, and east of the Caucasus not allowing of contestation, the submission of the mountaineers becomes for her a vital question, with which is connected, not only the fate of her Asiatic provinces, but also that of all the governments that lie between the Danube and the Caspian. In Algeria, on the contrary, we are not urged by any imperious motive to extend our conquests. Our political influence in Europe, and our real strength could at present gain nothing thereby; and it is probably reserved to another generation to derive a grand and useful result from our African conquests.

Of late years some public writers, taking the defeats of Russia for their text, have founded on them an argument against the establishment of French supremacy in Algeria. This reasoning appears to us unsound, and it is even at variance with historical facts. In Asia, Russia has had to deal with two very distinct regions; the trans-Caucasian provinces, and the Caucasus proper. The former, easy of access, and comprising Georgia, Imeritia, Mingrelia, and the other provinces taken from Persia and Turkey, were occupied by disorganised nations, at variance within themselves, and differing from each other in race, manners, and religion; accordingly the Muscovite sway was established over them without difficulty, and without any conflict worth mentioning with the inhabitants. The case has not been the same in that immense mountain barrier erected between Europe and Asia, the inaccessible retreats of which extend from Anapa to the shores of the Caspian. The dwellers in those regions present no analogy with the inhabitants south of the chain. There has never been a moment's pause in the obstinate strife between them and Russia; and all the sacrifices, and all the efforts of the tzars against them, have for sixty years been wholly in vain.

Our situation in Algeria is evidently very different. We have there had for our portion neither the bootless strife of the Caucasus, though having most warlike tribes for adversaries, nor the easy conquests of the trans-Caucasian provinces. It is but fourteen years since our troops landed in Africa, and we possess, not only all the towns of the seaboard, but likewise all those of the interior; numerous bodies of natives share actively in our operations; we are masters of all the lines of communication; our forces command the country to a great distance from the coasts: and in the opinion of all well-informed officers the pacification of the regency of Algiers would, perhaps, have by this time been accomplished, if the government had set its face against the passion for bulletins, and the too martial humour of most of our generals, and tried to pacify the tribes, not by arms and violence, but numerously ramified commercial relations which should call into play the natural cupidity of the Arabs. [Pg 333]

Nor can the topographical difficulties of Algeria be compared with those that defend the country of the Lesghis, the Tchetchenzes, and the Tcherkesses. Intersected by vast plateaux, numerous rich and fertile valleys, and parallel mountain ranges, almost everywhere passable and flanked by long lines of coast of which we possess the principal points, and which present at Algiers, Oran, Philippeville, and Bona, wide openings affording admission into the interior, our possessions afford free course to our armies, and nowhere exhibit that strange and singular conformation in which has consisted from time immemorial the safety of the Caucasian tribes.

There are other circumstances likewise that facilitate our progress in Africa, and enable us to exercise a direct influence over all the tribes south of the Tel of Algiers. As has been very ably demonstrated by M. Carrette, captain of engineers, it is enough to occupy the extreme limits of the cultivated lands, and the markets in which the inhabitants of the oases exchange their produce for the corn and other indispensable commodities of the north, to oblige all the populations of the Sahara, fixed or nomade, immediately to acknowledge the sovereignty of France.

It is only in case our government, impelled by ill-directed vanity, should decide on the absolute conquest of the mountains of the Kabyles, that we might encounter in the country, and in the political constitution of those mountaineers, some of the obstacles that characterise the Caucasian regions. And again, what comparison can there be between Kabylia, the two portions of which east and west of Algiers comprise but 1000 or 1200 square leagues of surface, and the great chain of the Caucasus which extends with a mean breadth of fifty or sixty leagues, over a length of more than 250 leagues?

We say nothing of the superiority of our armies and our military system. It is enough to recall what we have said as to the deplorable situation of the troops in the Caucasus, to be aware how much France has the advantage over Russia in this respect.

The diseases and the frightful mortality incident to our armies have been also dwelt on; but here again all the statistical returns are in favour of France. Out of a force of 75,000 men, our mean annual loss is 7000 or 8000. In 1840, indeed, the most fatal year, it appears to have risen to 12,000; but in that same year, and likewise in the following year, Russia lost more than 17,000 on the coasts of Circassia alone. Thus physically, as well as politically, there is a total difference between the war in the Caucasus and that in Algeria; and instead of suffering ourselves to be disheartened by fourteen years of unproductive occupation, and despairing before hand, because [Pg 334] the actual results do not keep pace with our unreasonable impatience, we ought to take example by that indefatigable perseverance with which Russia, in spite of her disasters and the fruitlessness of her efforts, has gone on in the pursuit of her purpose for upwards of half a century.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[61] M. Hommaire says he has copied the bulletin exactly as it appeared in French in the Russian papers.

[62] "Unfortunately the author of this heroic act is unknown. It is believed from some hearsay accounts to have been performed by a private soldier of the Tenguinisky regiment of infantry. The results of the inquiry instituted on the subject will be published hereafter." (*Note of the Russian journalist.*)

[63] This was written in 1844.

[64] There is indeed a road by way of Daghestan along the Caspian; but it is still more impracticable than that by Mozdok, and besides it is too long to be of use to Russia in her dealings with the Asiatic governments. As for the maritime routes by the Caspian and the Black Sea, their utility is greatly limited by the intense frosts which block up the ports of Odessa, Kherson, Taganrok, Kertch, and Astrakhan during four months of the year.

[65] We do not mean these remarks to apply in any respect to the Mussulman tribes, of whom we will speak hereafter. The Christian and the Mahometan population balance each other in the trans-Caucasian provinces; they both number about 400,000 males.

[66] The mountains that divide Turkistan from Affghanistan are covered with perpetual snow; some of their peaks are 6000 yards high. Hadjigak, which was crossed by A. Burnes, is 4000 yards above the sea.

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# CHAPTER XXXII.

A STORM IN THE CAUCASUS—NIGHT JOURNEY; DANGERS AND DIFFICULTIES—STAVROPOL—HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE CAUCASUS AND THE BLACK SEA COSSACKS.

At four o'clock on a dull morning we left Piatigorsk of charming memory, to strike once more into the mountains, where by the by, in less than an hour, we were met by one of the grandest and most violent storms I remember ever having witnessed. We had to endure its force for two long hours; and our situation was the more critical, since our *yemshik* (coachman), though quite familiar with the road, seemed almost at his wits' end. It was only by the gleam of the lightning he was able to make such brief observations of the ground as enabled him to guide his horses. This was certainly a very precarious resource, but there is a special providence for travellers. Lost in the midst of the mountains, and our sole hope of safety resting on the coolness and skill of a peasant, we escaped, we scarce knew how, from a seemingly inevitable catastrophe. A furious burst of rain, the last expiring effort of the storm, at last cleared the sky, which became coloured towards the west with purple bands, that contrasted gloriously with the darkness of the rest of the firmament. A magnificent rainbow, with one end springing from the highest peak of the Caucasus, whilst the other was lost in the mists of evening, gleamed before us for a few moments, and gradually dissolved away.

At half-past seven we reached the station, wet, weary, stupified, and very much surprised to find ourselves safe and sound after having passed through so many dangers. Nevertheless, this recent alert by no means made us forego our original plan of travelling all night in order to reach Stavropol the next day. Nothing is so soon forgotten in travelling as danger. One is no sooner out of one scrape than he is ready to get into another, and a worse one, without giving a thought to his past alarms. You must get over the ground: that is your ruling thought. As for taking precautions, calculating the good or the bad chances of the journey, or troubling oneself about dangers to come, by reason of those already incurred, all this is quite out of the question. We were quite bent on travelling all night, but the idea was totally discountenanced by the postmaster and the Cossacks whom we fell in with at the station. They told us there was a fair at [Pg 335] Stavropol, and that the road was always somewhat dangerous on such occasions, particularly

after sunset. A night or two before, several persons returning from the fair had been surprised and plundered by the Circassians, in spite of the many military posts along the road. Several other ugly stories were told us, in a tone that at last shook our resolution, and we were beginning very reluctantly to give up our project, when an unexpected incident made us recur to it again.

A Polish officer, who until then had kept aloof in a dark corner, seeing the annoyance we felt at this unforeseen delay, joined in the conversation, and offered to set out at once with us, if his company would be sufficient to restore our confidence. He, too, was going to Stavropol, and it was all the same to him whether he travelled that night or next day. The proposal, which was made with the most obliging frankness, agreed too well with our wishes to allow of any further hesitation, and we at once accepted it. The Pole had with him a servant very well armed, and the two together were such a reinforcement to our little troop as almost insured our safety. With great exultation we set about our preparations for departure, but the more experienced postmaster gave with reluctance the order to put the horses to, and could not help crossing himself repeatedly when he saw us get into the britchka, whilst the two yemshiks failed not to imitate his example, and to lift their fur caps several times in token of devotion. The Russians always find means to mingle crossings with all the other acts of their hands, by which process they set their consciences entirely at rest. I am satisfied they cross themselves even when thieving, partly from habit, and partly in the hope of escaping without detection.

Once out of the yard, the pleasure of travelling on a mild and dim night through an unknown country, that presented itself to our eyes under vague and mysterious forms, so engrossed our minds that we thought no more of Circassians, or broken ground, or danger of any kind. The Pole's carriage preceded ours, and his Cossack began to sing in a low tone one of those sweet melancholy airs which are peculiar to the Malorussians. The plaintive melody, mingled with the tinkling of the horses' bells, and the motion of the carriage lulled me into a dreamy repose, half way between sleeping and waking. I know not how long this state of hallucination lasted; but I was startled out of it by a pistol-shot fired close to me, and before I could collect my senses a second was fired, but at some distance. The carriage had stopped, the night was very dark, and my companions were quite silent. I was a good deal frightened, until my husband explained to me that the Polish officer had lost his way, and that our dragoman had fired his pistol as a signal to him, and that the second shot was an answer to the first. Being now satisfied that we had not half a dozen Circassians about us, I recovered courage enough to laugh at my first dismay. Anthony [Pg 336] left us to look for our travelling companion, after arranging with us that a third shot should be the token of his having found him. We passed half an hour in a state of painful anxiety, teasing ourselves with a thousand alarming conjectures, and dreading lest the report of fire-arms should bring down on us some of the Circassians who might be prowling in the neighbourhood. What would I not have then given to be far away from that road which we had been told was so terrible, and of which my imagination still more magnified the dangers!

At last the preconcerted signal was heard, and Anthony soon afterwards returned, but alone, and told us that we must go on without the Pole, whose pereclatnoi had stuck fast in a bad spot, and could not be extricated until daylight. The night was so dark, and the ground so dangerous, that notwithstanding his wish to ease our minds, the officer could not venture to come to us. This news was not calculated to abate our anxiety; we might in a moment be in the same predicament as the officer, supposing nothing worse should happen. The road, as the yemshik told us, wound round a rock, and what proved that it was dangerous was that it was flanked in places with slight posts and rails. Such a precaution is so rare in Russia, that it may be taken as a certain indication of no common danger. We debated awhile whether it would not be more prudent to remain where we were until daybreak; but the coachman was so terrified at the thought of passing a night in the mountains, that he gave us no peace till we moved forward. The prospect of tumbling down a precipice was decidedly less terrible to him than the thought of having to do with the Circassians. Alighting and leading his horses, he followed Anthony, who carefully sounded one side of the road. As we advanced on our perilous descent, the sound of a torrent roaring at the bottom smote our ears, as if to increase our perplexity; but in an hour's time we found ourselves safe and sound on the plain, and soon afterwards we reached the station, where our arrival excited great astonishment. The postmaster was enraged against his colleague, and could not conceive how he had come to give us horses at night, in defiance of the strict rules of the police. For his part he assured us that his duty forbade him to do any such thing, and that it was useless to ask him. I need not say, however, that this declaration itself was useless, for we had had quite enough of the road for that night. I never enjoyed the most comfortable chamber in a French or German hotel so much as I did the miserable lodging in which I then lay down on a bench covered only with a carpet.

We did not quit the station next day until the arrival of our travelling companion, whom we had reluctantly left in so unpleasant a predicament. He was severely bruised by his fall, but laughed heartily at his mishap. We set out together, very glad to get away from those fine mountains that were then gleaming in the rays of the morning. The events of the preceding night, though after all not very dramatic, had left so painful an impression on our mind, that the very sight of the [Pg 337] mountains still caused us a secret dread. Instead, therefore, of quitting with regret so picturesque a region, the more homely and commonplace the country became, the more we admired it. We were just in the humour to be delighted with the steppes of the Black Sea; so much does the appreciation of scenery depend on the state of the mind.

During all this day's journey the road was covered with carriages, horsemen, and pedestrians, repairing to the fair of Stavropol, and affording samples of all the motley population of the vicinity, Circassians, Cossacks, Turcomans, Georgians, and Tatars; some in brilliant costume,

caracoling on their high-bred Kalmuck or Persian horses, others stowed away with their families in carts covered with hides; others driving before them immense flocks of sheep or swine, that encompassed the carriages and horsemen, and occasioned some very comical incidents. Among all those whom business or pleasure was calling to the fair, we particularly noticed a very handsome young Circassian mounted on a richly caparisoned horse, and riding constantly beside a pavosk of more elegance than the rest, and the curtains of which were let down. This was enough to stimulate our curiosity, for in these romantic regions the slightest incident affords matter for endless conjectures. I would have given something to be allowed to lift one of the curtains of the mysterious pavosk, or at the least to keep it in view until our arrival in Stavropol, but our postilion did not partake in our curiosity, and putting his horses to a gallop, he soon made us lose sight of the group. The last low range of the Caucasus, which gradually diminishes in height to Stavropol, formed an irregular line on our left, in which we caught many hasty glimpses of charming scenery. The vegetation still retained a great degree of freshness, in consequence of the mildness of the temperature, which at this season would have appeared to us extraordinary even in more southern countries.

It was late in the evening when we reached Stavropol, so that we could not avail ourselves of our letters of introduction, and were obliged to hunt for a lodging in the hotels of the principal street. But they were all full, and with great difficulty we succeeded, with the help of our Polish friend, in getting admission to the Great Saint Nicholas, a shabby inn, the common room of which was already tenanted by a dozen travellers. Nevertheless, we secured a little corner, and there we contrived to form a tolerable sort of divan with our cushions and pelisses. I had now an opportunity of remarking how little notice travellers take of each other in this country. In this room, filled with people whose habits were so different from ours, we were as much at our ease as if the apartment belonged to us alone; and neither our language, behaviour, nor dress, appeared to attract any undue attention.

Stavropol, the capital of the whole Caucasus, is a very agreeable town, and appeared to us so much the more so from the animation lent it by the fair. But I perceive that in the course of these travels I have not named one town without immediately joining the word *fair* to it. It must be owned that chance was most bountiful to us in throwing in our way so many occasions for conceiving a high idea of the commerce of Russia. At Stavropol, however, the fair occupied our attention much less than General Grabe, who was just a week returned from an expedition against the Circassians. His staff filled the whole town with the noise of their martial deeds. Every officer had his story of some glorious exploit, whereof of course he was himself the hero. Though so recently returned, General Grabe was already in busy preparation for another campaign, on which he built the greatest hopes. The good gentleman even pressed my husband very strongly to accompany him, as if it were a mere party of pleasure. He offered him his tent, instruments, and every thing necessary to render the excursion beneficial to science. Under any other circumstances my husband would no doubt have yielded to the temptation of visiting the tribes of the Caucasus in the very heart of their mountains, under the protection of a whole army, but it would have been madness to undertake such a journey after those we had but just completed. [Pg 338]

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Before we finally take leave of the Caucasian regions, it will not be amiss to give some historical account of that part of the empire, and of the Cossacks of the Black Sea, to whom is committed the perilous task of protecting the frontiers against the incessant attacks of the formidable mountain tribes.

It was by virtue of an ukase promulgated by Catherine II. in 1783, that Russia took full and entire possession of all the countries north of the Kouban and the Terek, which of yore formed the almost exclusive dominions of numerous hordes of black Nogais, some of them independent, others acknowledging the authority of the Tatar khans of the Crimea. But previously to this period the tzars were already in military occupation of the country, for it was in 1771 that they completed the armed line of the Caucasus, begun by Peter the Great, at the mouth of the Terek.

At first the new conquest was put under the direction of the military governor of Astrakhan; but the state of the southern frontiers soon became so serious in consequence of the war with the mountaineers, that it was found advisable to form all the provinces conquered by Catherine II. north of the Caucasus, into a distinct province. The government of the Caucasus thus constituted, is bounded on the north by the Kouma and the Manitch, which divide it from the territory of Astrakhan and from that of the Don Cossacks; on the west by the country of the Black Sea Cossacks; on the east by the Caspian, and on the south by the armed line of the Kouban and the Terek.

At the foot of the Caucasus, as everywhere else, the Russian occupation occasioned great migrations. All the black Nogais of the right bank of the Kouban, who had fought against Russia, withdrew beyond the river among the tribes of the mountain. The Kabardians forsook the environs of Georgief, and sought refuge deeper in the Caucasian chain, and it was only the black Nogais of the barren plains between the Terek and the Kouma that remained in their old abodes. Cut off from the independent tribes since the erection of the fortresses of Kisliar and Mosdok, they took no part in the events of the war, and so they remained in peaceable possession of their territory. As for the Kalmucks, who had been very bold and active auxiliaries of Russia, they preserved intact all the pasturages they now possess in the government of the Caucasus. [Pg 339]

The Muscovite sway once established, and the frontiers put in a state of defence, the next step was to occupy the country along the northern verge of the Caucasus in some other way than by

light troops. It was therefore determined to form numerous colonies of Muscovites and Cossacks, a project which the absolute power of the tzars enabled them quickly to fulfil. The present villages in the centre of the province along the banks of the Kouban, the Terek, the Kouma, the Egorlik and the Kalaous, were erected, and the military colonies of the Black Sea Cossacks were founded; several large proprietors seconded the efforts of the government, and prompted either by the spirit of speculation, or by the superabundance of their slaves, formed large establishments on the lands that had been gratuitously conferred upon them. Attempts, too, were made to settle some of the German families of Saratof on the Kouma.

But the results were far from realising the hopes of the government. Compressed between the narrow limits in the districts of Stavropol and Georgief, bounded on the north and east by the uncultivated lands of the Turcomans and Kalmucks, on the south by the armed lines, continually attacked and overrun by the mountaineers, the colonies soon ceased to wear a thriving appearance; many sacked and burnt villages never rose again from their ashes, the German colony on the Kouma was destroyed, and now there remains no hope that the number of agricultural inhabitants will ever become sufficient to lend any real aid to the projects of the tzars. We have been in a great many villages on the Kouma, and the confluents of the Manitch, and found them scarcely able to supply their own wants. Their contributions to the commissariat are almost nothing, and the armies are always obliged to procure their stores from the central provinces of Russia.

Some settlements, indeed, such as Vladimirofka and Bourgon Madjar on the Kouma, directed by able men, have attained a high degree of prosperity; but these are exceptions, and they owe their wealth to the cultivation of the mulberry and the pine, and their numerous corn-mills, which constitute for them a virtual monopoly. The cultivation of corn has had no share in the welfare of these colonies, the nature of the climate having always been unfavourable to it: the people of Vladimirofka and the neighbouring villages think themselves fortunate if they can raise corn [Pg 340] enough for their own consumption.

Thus, while we cordially approve of the principle that suggested the foundation of these advanced posts of the Slavic population, and that strives to enlarge their growth, we are nevertheless convinced that in the present state of things, with the war in the Caucasus becoming every day more formidable, these colonies can never be conducive to the progress of Russia; unless, indeed, that should happen, which we think most unlikely, namely, that the government should so extend its conquests as to become undisputed possessor of the fertile regions beyond the Kouban, where the colonist could command sufficient natural resources.

The Cossacks better fulfilled the purpose for which they were settled on the frontier. Active, enterprising, and accustomed to partisan warfare, they were admirably adapted for resisting the incursions of the mountaineers. If they have been less efficient of late years, the blame must be laid on the inordinate demands of the government, the extreme contempt with which they are treated by the Russian generals, and, above all, the extinction of the privileges which had been wisely conferred on them in the beginning, and which alone could guarantee to the empire the maintenance of their vigorous military organisation.

The Black Sea Cossacks, as every one is aware, are descended from the Zaporogues of the Dniepr, whose famous military corporation appears to have been established towards the end of the fifteenth century. Continually engaged against the Tatars of the Crimea, the Ukraine Cossacks founded at this period a sort of colony near the mouths of the Dniepr, consisting exclusively of unmarried men, whose special avocation it was to guard the frontiers. Their numbers rapidly increased, deserters from all nations being attracted to them by the hope of booty, and their setcha, or head-quarters, on an island of the Dniepr, became famous throughout the land for the military services and the valour of its inhabitants. In 1540, such was the importance of these colonies to Poland, that King Sigismund granted a large tract of land above the cataracts to the Zaporogues, in order to strengthen the barrier erected by them between his dominions and the Tatars.

The new settlements on the Dniepr for a long time followed the fortune of the Cossacks of Little Russia. But as their strength augmented continually, they at last detached themselves from the mother country, and became an independent military state. The supremacy of the tzars was imposed on Little Russia in 1664, and from that time the Zaporogues, deprived of their allies, and left entirely to their own resources, owned allegiance, according to circumstances, to the Turks or the Tatars, to Poland or Russia, until the rebellion of Mazeppa, in which they took part, led to the total destruction of their power. Some years afterwards we find them again rallied under the protection of the khans of the Crimea; but Russia soon assumed so formidable an attitude in [Pg 341] those parts, that they were at last constrained, in 1737, to acknowledge themselves vassals of the empire.

But the political decline of the unfortunate Zaporogues did not stop there. During the war that preceded the treaty of Koutchouk Kainardji, a strong desire for independence was excited among them by the arbitrary acts of Russia. Many of their detachments fought even in the ranks of the Turks. Then it was that Catherine determined on completely rooting out the military colony of the Dniepr. The Zaporogues were expelled by force from their territory, which was given to other cultivators; and some of them emigrated beyond the Danube, while others were transported to the neighbourhood of Bielgorod. Ten years afterwards, when war broke out again with Turkey, a great number of the latter volunteered into the Russian armies. After the peace of Jassy, Prince Potemkin, who had formed them into regiments, was so pleased with their valour and fidelity, that he induced Catherine to settle them beyond the strait of the Kertch, and intrust them with the defence of the Circassian border. They were also granted, along with the peninsula of Taman,

the whole territory comprised between the Kouban and the Sea of Azof, and extending eastward to the confluent of the Laba, and northward to the river Eia. The Zaporogues then took the appellation of Cossacks of the Black Sea, and their organisation was assimilated to that of their brethren of the Don. They had an attaman, nominated for life by the emperor, out of a list of candidates chosen by themselves; and the civil and military affairs of the community were directed, under this supreme chief, by two permanent functionaries, and four assessors changed every three years. Other privileges were likewise accorded to them, consisting chiefly in exemption from all taxes, the free use of the salt-pools, the right of terminating all litigations without having recourse to the St. Petersburg courts of appeal, and in the pledge given to them by the government, that their regiments should never be required to serve beyond their own territory.

Under the influence of Catherine's liberal institutions, the military colony completely fulfilled the hopes of the government, and made rapid progress. The rich pastures of the Kouban were covered with immense multitudes of cattle, and agriculture, too, attained some degree of importance. The population also augmented considerably. The lands of the Kouban, as formerly those of the Don, became an asylum for a great number of fugitives, and the neighbouring provinces had often to complain of the escape of their slaves. But for the last twenty years the Black Sea Cossacks have been suffering from the effects of the new measures for equalisation and uniformity, and, like the Cossacks of the Don, they are now on the eve of being subjected to the ordinary laws and institutions of the provinces of the empire. The first encroachment on their privileges, was their employment on active service during the late wars with Turkey and Persia. [Pg 342] They were obliged to furnish four regiments, which lost an enormous number of men, and nearly all their horses. This first step taken, the government advanced rapidly in its course of reform, and in a few years the Cossacks were deprived of their right of electing their own functionaries, who were thenceforth nominated by the emperor alone. These administrative changes, conjoined with the military duties, which have increased to a most onerous extent in the course of the war against the mountaineers, have had a very depressing effect on the spirits of the population; and at this day the Cossacks of the Kouban are far different men from those fiery Zaporogues, whose vigorous aid was so eagerly sought by Russia, Poland, and Turkey. The military life is become a loathsome burden to them, and they now only fight by constraint or in self-defence. The Russians, accordingly, accuse them of cowardice; but the government, by destroying their privileges, and the commanders-in-chief by the scorn with which they treat them and the continual activity they impose on them, do all that in them lies to dishearten and debase them. It is they who are always put foremost in every expedition; every commanding officer sacrifices them without scruple, and makes targets of them for the balls of the mountaineers. Is it reasonable, then, to expect alacrity and high courage on the part of men for whom military service is the breaking of every family tie, the destruction of all domestic prosperity, and who have not been left, in exchange for so many sacrifices, even the shadow of national independence?

At the time of my last journey to the Caucasus in 1840, the Cossacks of the Black Sea numbered about 112,000 souls, of whom 68,000 were males, residing in sixty-four villages, and on 36,000,000 hectares of land held in common property, like the country of the Don in former times. The colonial army counted at that period according to the registers, eleven regiments of cavalry, ten of infantry, of 800 men each, and two batteries of artillery, one of them mounted, making altogether a total of 20,000 men, nearly the third of the male population. No doubt, the army can never in any case reach the official amount of force, its ranks being continually thinned by disease and war; and although young men are forced to enter the service at the age of seventeen, and are often kept in it thirty or forty years, still it would be quite impossible to bring more than 12,000 or 14,000 into the field at once, without endangering the total destruction of the population. In a pecuniary point of view, no men could well be more unfortunate than the Cossacks of the Kouban, whether in campaign against the mountaineers, or merely cantoned as reserves in their villages, they receive absolutely nothing for their services. The regulations, indeed, declare that the regiments actually called out shall receive pay at the rate of six rubles annually for each private, thirty-five rubles for every non-commissioned officer, and 250 for every subaltern officer; but infallible means have been found for preventing these moderate allowances from ever reaching those to whom they are promised. The posting establishment throughout the [Pg 343] Cossack country costs the government just as little as the maintenance of the troops, since horses, harness, hay, and corn are all furnished gratis by the colony. The postilions even receive no pay whatever; they are only allowed a little flour and groats, and for every thing else they and their families must shift for themselves during their whole term of service. As for the progon (the posting-money paid by travellers), it belongs to the Cossack exchequer, and composes, with the proceeds of the farm of brandy, salt, and the fisheries, the sole revenues of the country.

When I was at Ekaterinodar, the capital of the country, during the season of field-work, and in a time of quiet, they reckoned fourteen regiments on active service. Accordingly, as might have been expected, agriculture had been long neglected, and the country was in a miserable state. Nothing was to be seen in the villages but infirm old men, invalids, widows, and orphans; and the existence of the colony depended on the toil of the women alone. The distress then became so great as to excite the uneasiness of the government, and commissioners were sent to examine into the state of things; but unfortunately the mission, like every thing of the kind, did no good. The truth remained completely concealed from the emperor. The blame was cast entirely on the Cossacks themselves, and nothing was done to remedy the sufferings of the population.

We do not know what measures have been adopted since our departure by the imperial government with respect to the present and future situation of the military colony of the Kouban. For our own parts, having had opportunities of appreciating the good qualities of the

Tchornomorskie Cossacks, and all the capabilities which a wise administration would find in them, we cannot but heartily wish that the government may, with a better understanding of its own true interests, at least adopt towards them a line of conduct more in accordance with their wants and their laborious services.

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# CHAPTER XXXIII.

RAPID JOURNEY FROM STAVROPOL—RUSSIAN WEDDING—PERILOUS PASSAGE OF THE DON; ALL SORTS OF DISASTERS BY NIGHT—TAGANROK; COMMENCEMENT OF THE COLD SEASON—THE GERMAN COLONIES REVISITED.

It would have been impossible to travel more rapidly than we did from Stavropol to the Don. The steppe is as smooth as a mirror, and the posting better conducted than in any other part. We no sooner reached a station, than horses, which had been brought out the moment we were descried, were put to, and galloped away with us without a moment's check to the next station. A temperature of at least 20° Reaumer, the beauty of the sky, and something light and joyous in the [Pg 344] atmosphere, kept us in the highest spirits. In no country have I ever seen such multitudes of gossamer threads. The carriage, the horses, and our clothes were covered with those glistening prognostics of fair weather.

As we advanced towards the abodes of civilisation, our thoughts were all about the pleasure of arriving at Taganrok, to find our letters, our friends, our European habits again, and the comforts of which for many months we had enjoyed but casual snatches. We rejoiced, therefore, in the speed with which we got over the ground, and scarcely cared to bestow a glance on the stanitzas that fled away behind us. In passing through a Russian village, however, we were constrained to bestow some attention on outward objects, our carriage being stopped by a wedding party that filled the whole street. We counted a dozen pavosks filled with young people of both sexes. The girls, with their heads bedizened with ribbons, screamed almost like savages, and rivalled the young men in impudence and coarseness. It was a disgusting spectacle. The bride differed from the rest only by the greater profusion of ribbons and flowers that formed her head-gear; her face was as red, her gestures as indelicate, and her voice as loud and shrill as those of her companions.

It may seem scarcely credible, but we were but two-and-twenty hours travelling 316 versts, between Stavropol and the Don. We ate and slept in the carriage, and only alighted at the river side, where all sorts of tribulations awaited us. I cannot at this moment think of that memorable night without wondering at the pertinacity with which ill-luck clings to us when once it has fastened upon us. At ten at night, when we were some little way from the Don, we were told that the bridge was in a very bad state, and that we should probably be obliged to wait till the next day, before we could cross it. Such a delay was not what we had bargained for, especially as we had reckoned on enjoying that very night a good supper and a good bed under a friendly roof in Rostof. Then the weather, which had been so mild, had suddenly turned chill, and this was another motive to haste; so we went on without heeding what was told us; but when we came to the river, the tokens that the bridge was out of order, were but too manifest. Several carts stood there unyoked, and peasants lay beside them, patiently waiting the daylight. These men reiterated the bad news we had already heard; but then it was only eleven o'clock; if we waited we should have to pass nearly seven hours in the britchka, exposed to the cold night air, whereas once on the other side, we should reach Rostof in two hours. This consideration was too potent to allow of our receding from our purpose. At the same time we neglected no precaution that prudence required. The coachman and the Cossack were sent forward with a lantern to make a reconnaissance, and returning in half an hour, they reported that the passage was not quite impracticable, only it would be necessary to be very cautious, for some parts of the bridge were [Pg 345] so weak, that any imprudence might be fatal to us.

Without calculating the risks we were about to run, we at once alighted, and followed the carriage, which the coachman drove slowly, whilst the Cossack went ahead with the lantern, pointing out the places he ought to avoid. I do not think that in the whole course of my travels we were ever in so alarming a situation. The danger was imminent and indubitable. The cracking of the woodwork, the darkness, the noise of the water dashing through the decayed floor, that bent under our feet, and the cries of alarm uttered every moment by the coachman and the Cossack, were enough to fill us with dismay: yet the thought of death did not occur to me, or rather my mind was too confused to have any distinct thought at all. Frequently the wheels sank between the broken planks, and those were moments of racking anxiety; but at last by dint of perseverance we reached the opposite bank in safety. The passage had lasted more than an hour; it was time for it to end, for I could hold out no longer; the water on the bridge was over our

ancles. It may be imagined with what satisfaction we took our places again in the carriage. The dangers we had just incurred, and which we were then better able fully to understand, almost made us doubt our actual safety. For a long while we seemed to hear the noise of the waves breaking against the bridge; but this feeling was soon dispelled by others; for our nocturnal adventures were by no means at an end.

At some versts from the Don our unlucky star put us into the hands of a drunken coachman, who after losing his way, I know not how often, and bumping us over ditches and ploughed fields, actually brought us back in sight of the dreadful bridge which we still could not think of without shuddering. We tried in our distress to persuade ourselves we were mistaken, but the case was too plain; there was the Don in front of us, and there stood Axai, the village we had passed through after getting into the britchka. Fancy our rage after floundering about for two hours to find ourselves just at the point from which we started. The only thing we could think of was to pass the night in a peasant's cabin; but our abominable coachman, whom the sight of the river had suddenly sobered, and who had reason to expect a sound drubbing, threw himself on his knees and so earnestly implored us to try the road to Rostof again, that we yielded to his entreaties. The difficulty was how to get back into the road, and we had many a start before we found it. The carriage was so violently shaken in crossing a ditch, that the coachman and Anthony were pitched from their seats, and the latter fell upon the pole, and became entangled in such a way that he was not easily extricated. His shouts for help, and his grimaces when my husband and the Cossack had set him on his legs were so desperate, that one would have thought half his bones were broken, though he had only a few trifling bruises. As for the yemshik, he picked himself up very coolly, and climbed into his seat again as if nothing extraordinary had happened. [Pg 346] To see the quiet way in which he resumed the reins, one would have supposed he had just risen from a bed of roses; such is the usual apathy of the Russian peasants.

It was four in the morning when we came in sight of Rostof, which is but twelve versts distant from the Don. Thus we spent a great part of the night in wandering about that town, like condemned ghosts, without deriving much advantage from our rash passage of the river. It was well worth while to run the risk of drowning, when our calculations and efforts could be baffled by so vulgar a cause as the drunkenness of a coachman! But the sight of Rostof, where good cheer and hospitality awaited us, consoled us for all our mishaps. Yet even here, when we almost touched the goal, our patience was put to further trial; for alighting at the post station two versts from the town, our rascally coachman positively refused to drive us a foot beyond it. This was too much for the Cossack's endurance, so drawing out a long knout from his belt, he paid the fellow on the spot the whole reckoning he had intended to settle with him at the journey's end. The yemshik's shouts brought all the people of the station about us, and the wife of the postmaster came and scolded him at such a rate, that at last he was forced to drive us to the town; but it was more than an hour before he set us down at Mr. Yeams's house. His drunkenness had now passed into the sleepy stage, and he could only be kept to his work by constant thumping.

The house where we intended to lodge contained a corn store belonging to Mr. Yeams, English consul at Taganrok, who had obligingly invited us to use it when we quitted that town, and had sent orders to that effect to his clerk, M. Grenier: and so pleased were we with our quarters on our first visit to Rostof, that now the thought of going anywhere else never entered our heads. To have done so would have seemed an affront to Mr. Yeams's cordial hospitality. While we were unpacking the carriage, Anthony went and knocked at the door, and the coachman, unyoking his horses, in a trice went off as fast as he could, without even waiting to ask for drink money. Some minutes elapsed; Hommaire, losing patience, knocks again, when at last out comes Anthony with a very long face, and tells us that M. Grenier, clerk and Provençal into the bargain, refused of his own authority to receive us, pretending that he had not a room for us. Unable to comprehend such conduct, and believing that there was some mistake in the case, my husband went himself to the man, who putting his nose out from under the blankets, told him impudently, we must go and look for a lodging elsewhere.

All comment on such behaviour would be superfluous. To shut the door at night against one's own country people, and one of them a woman, rather than incur a little personal trouble, was a proceeding that could enter the head of none but a Provençal. The Kalmucks might have given a lesson in politeness to this boor, who rolled himself up snugly to sleep, whilst we spent the night, [Pg 347] benumbed and shivering, under his windows in his court-yard. It may be conceived in what a state I passed the night; drenched with wet, worn down with mental and bodily fatigue, hungry, sleepy, and chilled by the sharp cold that at that season precedes sunrise, I was really unconscious of what was passing around me. As soon as it was light the Cossack procured horses, and took us to the best hotel in Rostof, where a warm room, an excellent bowl of soup, and a large divan, soon set us to rights again. On our arrival at Taganrok all the Yeams family were indignant at the behaviour of our Provençal, and, had we been disposed to pay him in his own coin we might have done so. They would have sent him his discharge forthwith, had we not interceded for him; the French consul wrote him a threatening letter, and with this our vengeance remained satisfied.

We learned at Taganrok that the strangest rumours had gone abroad respecting us. Some said that the Circassians had made us prisoners, others that we had perished of hunger and thirst in the Caspian steppes. In short, every one had had his own melodramatic version of our supposed fate. I cannot describe all the kind interest that was shown on our safe return from so hazardous a journey. In spite of our wish to arrive as soon as possible in Odessa, we could not refrain from bestowing a week on friends who received us with such warm sympathy.

The winds from the Ural swept away in one night all that October had spared. The weather was

still sunny when we arrived on the shores of the Sea of Azof; but on the next day the sky assumed that sombre chilly hue that always precedes the metels or snow-storms. The whole face of nature seemed prepared for the reception of winter, that eternal sovereign of northern lands. The sea-beach covered with a thin coating of ice, the harsh winds, the ground hardened by the frost, and the increasing lividness of the atmosphere, all betokened its coming, and made us keenly apprehensive of what we should have to suffer on our way to Odessa, where we were to take up our winter quarters, and from whence we were still 900 versts distant. With the rapidity of the Russian post the journey might be accomplished in ten days, if the weather were not unfavourable; but after the threatening symptoms I have mentioned, we might expect soon to have a fall of snow, and perhaps to be kept prisoners by it in some village.

Unfortunately for us it was the most dangerous season for travelling in Russia. The first snows, which are not firm enough to bear a sledge, are much feared by travellers, and almost every year cause many accidents. At this period, too, the winds are very violent, and produce those frightful snow-storms which we have already described. It was a very cheerless prospect for persons so way-worn and weary as we were, to have incessantly to fight against the elements and other obstacles. I remember that in this last journey our need of rest was so urgent, that the poorest [Pg 348] peasant seated by his stove was an object of envy to us.

We once more passed through all the German colonies I had so much admired a few months before. But the pleasing verdure of May had disappeared beneath the icy winds of the north, and all was dreary and dull of hue. Even the houses, no longer glistening in the sunshine, had a sombre appearance in harmony with the withered leaves of the orchards. A metel that broke out one night forced us to pass two days in a German village, in the house of a worthy old Prussian couple. The wife had lost the use of one side, and could not leave her chair, but her husband supplied her place in all the domestic concerns with a skill that surprised us. As in all the German houses, the principal room was adorned with a handsome porcelain stove, and a large tester bed which our hosts insisted on giving up to us. From morning till night the husband, aided by a stout servant girl, exerted all his culinary powers for our benefit. The table was laid out all day until dinner hour with coffee, pastry, bottles of wine, ham, and other appetising commodities.

There is nothing I think more delightful in travelling than to watch the proceedings of a somewhat rustic cuisine. In such cases all the marvels of Carême's art fade before two or three simple dishes prepared under your own eyes. The ear is pleasingly titillated by the tune of the frying-pan, the smell of good things stimulates desire and quickens the imagination, and the very preliminaries are so agreeable, that the traveller would not exchange them for the most magnificent banquet in the world.

The quantity of snow that had fallen during those two days retarded our speed. A man rode on before the carriage and carefully sounded the ground, for the metel had filled up the holes and ditches, and obliterated all landmarks. Nothing can be more frightful than those snowy wastes recently swept and tossed by furious winds. All trace of man's existence and his works, have disappeared beneath those white billows heaped upon each other like those of the ocean in a storm. How well we could appreciate, in those long days we spent in plodding through the snow, the horrible sufferings of our poor soldiers, perishing by thousands in the fatal retreat of 1812! The thought of their misery smote upon our hearts, and forbade us to complain, warmly clad as we were, drawn by stout horses, and having all we required done for us by others.

As we approached Kherson post-sledges began to show themselves; several of them shot by us with travellers wrapped up to the eyes in their fur cloaks. These sledges are very low, and hold at most two persons. It very often happens that the body part upsets without the driver's perceiving it; the accident is not at all dangerous; but it must be exceedingly annoying to the traveller, as he rolls in the snow, to see his sledge borne away from him at full speed, leaving him no help for it but to follow on foot. If the driver does not take the precaution to look back from time to time, the traveller may chance to run all the way to the next station, and it may be imagined in what a [Pg 349] plight he arrives there. When the accident happens by night the case is still more serious. Many Russians have told us that they had thus lost their way, and only after a day or two's search had found the station where their sledge had arrived empty. Nothing, indeed, is more common than to lose one's way in the steppes, nor is it at all necessary to that end that one should fall out of his sledge. We ourselves were once in danger of roaming about all night in the neighbourhood of Kherson in search of our road, which we could not find. A very dense fog surprised us at sunset, scarcely five versts from the town. For a long time we went on at random, not knowing whether we were going north or south, and Heaven knows where we should have found ourselves at last, if we had not caught the sound of horses' bells. The travellers put us on the right way, and told us it was ten o'clock, and we had twelve versts between us and Kherson.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## DEPARTURE FOR THE CRIMEA—BALACLAVA—VISIT TO THE MONASTERY OF ST. GEORGE—SEVASTOPOL—THE IMPERIAL FLEET.

After a winter spent in the pleasures of repose, we left Odessa at the end of April to visit the Crimea, on board the *Julia*, a handsome brig, owned and commanded by M. Taitbout de Marigny. Our departure was extremely brilliant. The two cannons of the *Julia*, and those of the *Little Mary*, that was to sail in company with us, announced to the whole town that we were about to weigh anchor. Our passage could not fail to be agreeable under such a captain as ours. M. Taitbout de Marigny, consul of the Netherlands, joins to the varied acquirements of the man of science all the accomplishments of the artist and man of the world.

The voyage was very short, but full of chances and incidents; we had sea-sickness, squalls, clear moonlight nights, and a little of all the pains and pleasures of the sea. On the second morning, the sun shining brightly, we began to discern the coast of that land, surnamed inhospitable by the ancients, by reason of the horrible custom of its inhabitants to massacre every stranger whom chance or foul weather led thither. The woes of Orestes alone would suffice to render the Tauris celebrated. Who is there that has not been moved by that terrible and pathetic drama, of which the brother and sister were the hero and heroine on this desert shore! As soon as I could distinguish the line of rocks that vaguely marked the horizon, I began to look for Cape Parthenike, on which tradition places the temple of the goddess of whom Iphigenia was [Pg 350] the priestess, and where she was near immolating her brother. With the captain's aid I at last descried on a point of rock at a great distance from us a solitary chapel, which I was informed was dedicated to the Virgin. What a contrast between the gentle worship of Mary and that of the sanguinary Taura, who exacted for offerings not the simple prayers and *ex voto* of the mariner, but human victims! All this part of the coast is sterile and desert: a wall of rock extended before us, and seemed to shut us out from the peninsula so often conquered and ravaged by warlike and commercial nations. Richly endowed by nature, the Tauris, Chersonese, or Crimea, has always been coveted by the people of Europe and Asia. Pastoral nations have contended for possession of its mountains; commercial nations for its ports and its renowned Bosphorus; warlike peoples have pitched their tents amid its magnificent valleys; all have coveted a footing on that soil, to which Greek civilisation has attached such brilliant memories.

During a part of the day the wind was contrary, and obliged us to make short tacks in view of the rocky wall; but at four o'clock a change of wind allowed the brig to approach the coast. The sea was like a magnificent basin reflecting in its transparent waters the great calcareous masses that overhung it. It was a fine spectacle; but our captain's serious expression of countenance, and the intentness with which he watched the sails, and directed the manœuvres, plainly showed that our situation was one of difficulty, if not of danger. A boat was manned and sent off to explore the coast, and as its white sail gleamed at a distance in the sun, it looked like a seabird in search of its nest in the hollow of some rock. The *Little Mary* imitated all our evolutions, skimming over the waves like a sea swallow. She shortened her trip at every tack, and kept closer and closer to us; and our captain's face grew more and more grave, until all at once to our great surprise the rock opened before us like a scene in a theatre, and afforded us a passage which two vessels could not have entered abreast. Having got fairly through the channel, M. Taitbout was himself again. This entrance he told us is very dangerous in stormy weather, and often impracticable even when the wind is but moderately fresh. The scene, however, on which it opens is extremely beautiful. The port is surrounded with mountains, the highest of which still bear traces of the old Genoese dominion, and in front of the entrance is the pretty Greek town of Balaclava, with its balconied houses and trees rising in terraces one above the other. A ruined fortress overlooks the town: from that elevated point the Genoese, once masters of this whole coast, scanned the sea like birds of prey, and woe to the foreign vessels tempest driven within their range! Balaclava, with its Greek population, its girdle of rocks, and its mild climate, resembles those little towns of the Archipelago that are seen specking the horizon as one sails towards Constantinople.

While we remained on board waiting for the completion of the custom-house formalities, we [Pg 351] were entertained with the most picturesque and animated scene imaginable. It was Sunday, and the whole population was scattered over the shore and the adjoining heights. Groups of sailors, Arnaouts, and girls as gracefully formed as those of the Grecian isles, were ascending the steep path to the fortress, or were dancing to the shrill music of a balalaika. All the balconies were filled with spectators, who were busy, no doubt, discussing the apparition of a brig in their port; for the trade of Balaclava, so flourishing under the Genoese, is now fallen to such a degree that the arrival of a single vessel is an event for the whole town.

Balaclava, the Cembalo of the Genoese, is now the humble capital of a little Greek colony founded in the reign of Catherine II., and now numbering several villages with 600 families. During her wars with the Porte, the empress thought of appealing to the national sentiments of the Greeks, and their hatred of the Turks. The result answered her expectations, and Russia soon had a large naval force that displayed the most signal bravery in all its encounters with the enemy. When the campaign against Turkey was ended, the Greek auxiliaries took part in the military operations in the Crimea; and after the conquest of the peninsula, they were employed in suppressing the revolts of the Tatars, and striking terror into them by the sanguinary cruelty of their expeditions. It was at that period the Mussulmans of the Crimea gave them the name of Arnaouts, which they have retained ever since.

The peninsula having been finally subjugated, the Greeks were formed into a regimental colony, with the town and territory of Balaclava for their residence. They now number 600 fighting men, who are only employed in guarding the coasts. The colonist is only liable to be

called out for active service during four months in the year; the other eight he has at his own disposal for the cultivation of his lands. Each soldier has twenty-eight rubles yearly pay, and finds his own equipment.

The day after our arrival at Balaclava we made a boating excursion to examine the geology of the coast, and landed in a beautiful little cove lined with flowering trees and shrubs. On our return the boatmen made themselves coronals of hawthorn and blossoming apple sprays, and decorated the boat with garlands of the same, and in this festive style we made our entry into Balaclava. In our poetic enthusiasm as we looked on the lovely sky, the placid sea, and the Greek mariners, who thus retained on a foreign shore, and after the lapse of so many centuries, the cheerful customs of their ancestors, we could not help comparing ourselves to one of the numerous deputations that used every year to enter the Pyræus, with their vessels' prows festooned with flowers, to take part in the brilliant festivals of Athens.

We bade adieu that day to our excellent friend M. Taitbout de Marigny, who continued his cruise to Ialta, where we were again to meet him. We set out for the convent of St. George, our [Pg 352] minds filled with classical reminiscences, which fortified us to endure the horrible bumping of our pereclatnoi. This vehicle is a sort of low four-wheeled cart, so narrow as barely to accommodate two persons, who have nothing to sit on but boxes and packages laid on a great heap of hay. It is no easy matter to keep one's balance on such a seat, especially when the frail equipage is galloped along from post to post at the full speed of three stout horses. Yet this is the manner in which most Russians travel, and often for a week together, day and night.

The road from Balaclava to the monastery presents no striking features; it runs over a vast plateau, as barren as the steppes. A little before sunset we were quite close to the convent, but saw nothing indicative of its existence, and were, therefore, not a little surprised when the driver jumped down and told us to alight. We thought he was making game of us, when he led the way into an arched passage, but when we reached the further end a cry of admiration escaped our lips, as we beheld the monastery with its cells backed against the rock, its green-domed church, its terraces and blooming gardens, suspended several hundred feet above the sea. Long did we remain wrapt in contemplation of the magic effect produced by man's labour on a scene that looked in its savage and contorted aspect as if it had been destined only to be the domain of solitude.

The Russian and Greek monasteries are far from displaying the monumental appearance of the western convents. They consist only of a group of small houses of one story, built without symmetry, and with nothing about them denoting the austere habits of a religious community. Those poetic souls who find such food for meditation in the long galleries of the cloisters, could not easily be reconciled to such a disregard for form. The monks received us not like Christians, but like downright pagans. The bishop, for whom we had letters, happening to be absent, we fell into the hands of two or three surly-looking friars, whose dirty dress and red faces indicated habits any thing but monastic. They confined us in a disgustingly filthy hole, where a few crazy chairs, two or three rough planks on tressels, and a nasty candle stuck in a bottle, were all the accommodation we obtained from their munificence. Our dragoman could not even get coals to boil the kettle without paying for it double what it was worth. When we remonstrated with the monks their invariable answer was, that they were not bound to provide us with any thing but the bare furniture of the table. Such was their notion of the duties of hospitality.

With our bones aching from the pereclatnoi we were obliged to content ourselves with a few cups of tea by way of supper, and to lie down on the execrable planks they had the assurance to call a bed. Fortunately, the bishop returned next day, and we got a cleaner room, mattresses, pillows, plenty to eat, and more respectful treatment on the part of the monks; but all this could [Pg 353] not reconcile us to men who had such a curious way of practising the precepts of the gospel. The few days we spent among them were enough to enable us to judge of the degree of ignorance and moral degradation in which they live. Religion which, in default of instruction, ought at least to mould their souls to the Christian virtues, and to love of their neighbours, has no influence over them. They do not understand it, and their gross instincts find few impediments in the statutes of their order. Sloth, drunkenness, and fanaticism, stand them instead of faith, love, and charity.

The great steepness of this part of the coast renders the descent to the sea extremely difficult. We tried it, however, and with a good deal of hard work we scrambled down to the beach, which is here only a few yards wide. Magnificent volcanic rocks form in this place a natural colonnade, the base of which is constantly washed by the sea, whilst every craggy point is tenanted by marine birds, the only living creatures to be seen.

On our return to the convent we found it full of beggars who had come for the annual festival that was to be held on the day but one following. Cake and fruit-sellers, gipsies and Tatars, had set up their booths and tents on the plateau; every thing betokened that the solemnity would be very brilliant, but we had not the curiosity to wait for it. We set out that evening for Stavropol, glad to get away from a convent in which hospitality is not bestowed freely, but sold.

On leaving the monastery we proceeded first of all in the direction of Cape Khersonese, the most western point of this classic land, where flourished, for more than twelve centuries, the celebrated colony of Kherson, founded by the Heracleans 600 years B. C. At present the only remains of all its greatness are a few heaps of shapeless stones; and strange to relate, the people who put the last hand to the destruction of whatever had escaped the barbarian invasions and the Mussulman sway, was the same whose conversion to Christianity in the person of the Grand Duke Vladimir, was celebrated by Kherson in 988. When the Russians entered the Crimea some considerable architectural remains were still standing, among which were the principal gate of

the town and its two towers, and a large portion of the walls; besides which there were shafts and capitals of columns, numerous inscriptions and three churches of the Lower Empire, half buried under the soil. But Muscovite vandalism quickly swept away all these remains. A quarantine establishment for the new port of Sevastopol was constructed on the site of the ancient Heraclean town, and all the existing vestiges of its monuments were rapidly demolished and carried away stone by stone; and but for the direct interference of the Emperor Alexander, who caused a few inscriptions to be deposited in the museum of Nicolaief, there would be nothing remaining in our day to attest the existence of one of the most opulent cities of the northern coasts of the Black Sea.

At a short distance from Cape Khersonese begins that succession of ports which render this [Pg 354] point of the Crimea so important to Russia; one of them is Sevastopol, whence the imperial fleet commands the whole of the Black Sea, and incessantly threatens the existence of the sultan's empire. Between Cape Khersonese and the Sevastopol roads which comprise three important ports, there are six distinct bays running inland parallel to each other. First come the Double Bay (*Dvoinaia*) and the Bay of the Cossack (*Cozatchaia*), between which the Heracleans founded their first establishment, no trace of which now exists. Then comes the Round Bay (*Kruglaia*), that of the Butts (*Strelezkaia*), and that of the Sands (*Pestchannaia*). These five are all abandoned, and are only used by vessels driven by stress of weather to seek shelter in them. It was in the space between the Bay of the Sands and that more to the west where the quarantine is established, that the celebrated Kherson once stood.

A little beyond the quarantine cove, the traveller discovers Sevastopol, situated on the slope of a hill between Artillery and South bays, the first two ports on the right hand as you enter the main roads. The position of the town thus built in an amphitheatre, renders its whole plan discernible at one view, and gives it a very grand appearance from a distance. Its barracks and stores, the extensive buildings of the admiralty, the numerous churches, and vast ship-building docks and yards, attest the importation of this town, the creation of which dates only from the arrival of the Russians in the Crimea. The interior, though not quite corresponding to the brilliant panorama it presents from a distance, is yet worthy of the great naval station. The streets are large, the houses handsome, and the population, in consequence of an imperial ukase which excludes the Jews from its territory, is much less repulsive than that of Odessa, Kherson, Iekaterinoslav, &c.

The port of Sevastopol is unquestionably one of the most remarkable in Europe. It owes all its excellence to nature, which has here, without the aid of art, provided a magnificent roadstead with ramifications, forming so many basins admirably adapted for the requirements of a naval station. The whole of this noble harbour may be seen at once from the upper part of the town. The great roadstead first attracts attention. It lies east and west, stretching seven kilometres (four miles and three-quarters) inland, with a mean breadth of 1000 yards, and serves as a station for all the active part of the fleet. It forms the medium of communication between Sevastopol and the interior of the peninsula. The northern shore presents only a line of cliffs of no interest, but on the southern shore the eye is detained by the fine basins formed there by nature. To the east, at the very foot of the hill on which the town stands, is South Bay, in length upwards of 3000 mètres, and completely sheltered by high limestone cliffs. It is here the vessels are rigged and unrigged; and here, too, lies a long range of pontoons and vessels past service, [Pg 355] some of which are converted into magazines, and others into lodgings for some thousand convicts who are employed in the works of the arsenal. Among these numerous veterans of a naval force that is almost always idle, the traveller beholds with astonishment the colossal ship, the *Paris*, formerly mounting 120 guns, and which was, down to 1829, the finest vessel in the imperial fleet.

Beyond South Bay, and communicating with it, is the little creek in which the government is constructing the most considerable works of the port, and has been engaged for many years in forming an immense dock with five distinct basins, capable of accommodating three ships of the line and two frigates, while simultaneously undergoing repairs. The original plan for this great work was devised by M. Raucourt, a French engineer, who estimated the total cost at about 6,000,000 rubles. The magnitude of this sum alarmed the government, but at the instance of Count Voronzof, they accepted the proposals of an English engineer, who asked only 2,500,000, and promised to complete the whole within five years. The work was begun on the 17th of June, 1832; but when we visited Sevastopol, some years after the first stone had been laid, the job was not half finished, and the expenses already exceeded 9,000,000 rubles. The execution of the basins seems, however, to be very far from corresponding to the enormous expenses they have already occasioned, and it is strange, indeed, that a weak and friable limestone should have been employed in hydraulic constructions of such importance. The angles of the walls, it is true, are of granite or porphyry, but this odd association of heterogeneous materials conveys, in itself, the severest condemnation of the mode of construction which has been adopted.

Highly favoured as is the port of Sevastopol with regard to the form and the security of its bays, it yet labours under very serious inconveniences. The waters swarm with certain worms that attack the ships' bottoms, and often make them unserviceable in two or three years. To avoid this incurable evil, the government determined to fill the basins with fresh water, by changing the course of the little river, Tchernoi Retchka, which falls into the head of the main gulf. Three aqueducts and two tunnels, built like the rest of the works in chalk, and forming part of the artificial channel, were nearly completed in 1841; but about that period the engineers endured a very sad discomfiture, it being then demonstrated that the worms they wanted to get rid of were produced by nothing else than the muddy waters which the Tchernoi Retchka pours into the harbour.[67]

Artillery Bay, which bounds the town on the west, is used only by trading vessels. This and Careening Bay, the most eastern of all, are not inferior in natural advantages to the two others we have been speaking of; but we have nothing more particular to mention respecting them. [Pg 356]

After discussing the harbours and the works belonging to them, we are naturally led to glance at the war-fleet, and the famous fortifications of which the Russians are so proud, and which they regard as a marvel of modern art. In 1831, when the July revolution was threatening to upset the whole *status quo* of Europe, a London journal stated in an article on the Black Sea and Southern Russia, that nothing could be easier than for a few well-appointed vessels to set fire to the imperial fleet in the port of Sevastopol. The article alarmed the emperor's council to the highest degree, and orders were immediately issued for the construction of immense defensive works.

Four new forts were constructed, making a total of eleven batteries. Forts Constantine and Alexander were erected for the defence of the great harbour, the one on the north, the other on the west side of Artillery Bay; and the Admiralty and the Paul batteries were to play on vessels attempting to enter South Bay, or Ships' Bay. These four forts, consisting each of three tiers of batteries, and each mounting from 250 to 300 pieces of artillery, constitute the chief defences of the place, and appear, at first sight, truly formidable. But here again, the reality does not correspond with the outer appearance, and we are of opinion that all these costly batteries are more fitted to astonish the vulgar in time of peace, than to awe the enemy in war. In the first place their position at some height above the level of the sea, and their three stories appear to us radically bad, and practical men will agree with us that a hostile squadron might make very light of the three tiers of guns which, when pointed horizontally, could, at most, only hit the rigging of the ships. The internal arrangements struck us as equally at variance with all the rules of military architecture: each story consists of a suite of rooms opening one upon the other, and communicating by a small door, with an outer gallery that runs the whole length of the building. All these rooms, in which the guns are worked, are so narrow, and the ventilation is so ill-contrived, that we are warranted by our own observation in asserting that a few discharges would make it extremely difficult for the artillerymen to do their duty. But a still more serious defect than those we have named, and one which endangers the whole existence of the works, consists in the general system adopted for their construction.

Here the improvidence of the government has been quite as great as with regard to the dock basins: for the imperial engineers have thought proper to employ small pieces of coarse limestone in the masonry of three-storied batteries, mounting from 250 to 300 guns. The works, too, have been constructed with so little care, and the dimensions of the walls and arches are so insufficient, that it is easy to see at a glance, that all these batteries must inevitably be shaken to pieces whenever their numerous artillery shall be brought into play. The trials that have been made in Fort Constantine, have already demonstrated the correctness of this opinion, wide rents having been there occasioned in the walls by a few discharges. [Pg 357]

Finally, all the forts labour under the disadvantage of being utterly defenceless on the land side. Thinking only of attacks by sea, the government has quite overlooked the great facility with which an enemy may land on any part of the coast of the Khersonese. So, besides that the batteries are totally destitute of artillery and ditches on the land side, the town itself is open on all points, and is not defended by a single redoubt. We know not what works have been planned or executed since 1841; but at the period of our visit a force of some thousand men, aided by a maritime demonstration, would have had no sort of difficulty in forcing their way into the interior of the place, and setting fire to the fleet and the arsenals.

We have now to speak of the offensive strength of the Port of Sevastopol, that famous fleet always in readiness to sail against Constantinople. The effective of the Black Sea fleet, in 1841, was as follows:—

| | |
|---|---|
| Ships of the line | 13, 2 of 120 guns, the rest of 84 |
| Frigates | 6 mounting 60 guns |
| Corvettes | 6 mounting 20 guns |
| Brigs | 10 mounting 10 to 20 guns |
| Schooners | 5 |
| Cutters | 10 |
| Steamers | 5 |
| Tenders | 25 |

The largest tenders are of 750 tons' burden, the smallest thirty. The crews, making together fourteen battalions, ought to be 14,000 strong. But we know that in Russia official figures are always much higher than the reality. We think we cannot be far wrong in setting down the actual strength at 6000 or 8000 men.

Like every thing else in Russia, the ships of war look very imposing at first sight, but will not bear a very close scrutiny. After what we have stated respecting the venality of the administrative departments, it is easy to conceive the malversations that must abound in the naval arsenals. In vain may the government lavish its money and order the purchase of the needful materials; its intentions are sure to be baffled by the corruption and rapacity of its servants. The vessels are generally built of worthless materials, and there is no kind of peculation but is practised in their construction. We have mentioned the *Paris* as an instance of the short duration of Russian ships: and all the vessels of the same period are in nearly as bad a plight. A single cruise has been enough to make them unserviceable. We must, however, admit that the naval boards are not alone to blame for this rapid destruction. According to the information we

have received, it appears that the ships are built generally of pine or fir; but every one knows that these kinds of wood, produced in moist places and low bottoms, cannot possess the solidity required in naval architecture.

Before quitting Sevastopol we made an excursion to the head of the great bay, to visit the [Pg 358] remains of a once celebrated town, of which nothing now remains but some ruins known under the name Inkermann. We explored with some interest a long suite of crypts, some of which seem to belong to the remotest antiquity, while others evidently date from the Lower Empire. Among the latter we particularly noticed a large chapel, excavated wholly in the rock, and presenting in its interior all the characteristics of the Byzantine churches. Above all these subterraneous edifices, on the highest part of the rocks, stand some fragments of walls, the sole remains of the castle and town that formerly crowned those heights. The ruins appear to occupy the site of the ancient Eupatorion of Strabo, which afterwards, under the name of Theodori, became the seat of a little Greek principality dependent on the Lower Empire. It was taken by the Turks in 1475, and soon afterwards totally destroyed.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[67] See notes at the end of the volume.

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# CHAPTER XXXV.

BAGTCHE SERAI—HISTORICAL REVOLUTIONS OF THE CRIMEA—THE PALACE OF THE KHANS—COUNTESS POTOCKI.

After our excursion to Inkermann we left Sevastopol the same day, glad to quit the Russians and their naval capital for Bagtche Serai, that ancient city, which previously to the Muscovite conquest might still vie in power and opulence with the great cities of the East. Even now, though much decayed, Bagtche Serai is the most interesting town in the Crimea.

The road which leads to it runs parallel with a mountain chain, and commands very beautiful scenery, which we beheld in all the fresh luxuriance of May. The hills and valleys were clothed with forests of peach, almond, apple, and apricot trees in full blossom, and the south wind came to us loaded with their fragrance. We had many a flying glimpse of landscapes we would willingly have paused to admire in detail, but the pereclatnoi whirled us along, and towns, hillsides, winding brooks, farms, meadows, and Tatar villages shot past us with magic rapidity.

Notwithstanding a temperature of 25° Reaumer, the day appeared to us very short. Yet we were impatient to see Bagtche Serai, its palace and its fountains which have been sung by Pushkin, the Russian nightingale; and this impatience, which increased as we approached our journey's end, prevented us from visiting different spots which less hasty travellers would not have disdained. Every mountain, valley, or village has some peculiar interest of its own. There were aqueducts, old bridges, and half-ruined towers in every direction to tell of an ancient [Pg 359] civilisation; but all these interested us less, perhaps, than the modest dwelling in which Pallas long resided, and where he ended his days.

Bagtche Serai has completely retained its national character in consequence of an ukase of Catherine II., empowering the Tatars to retain exclusive possession of their own capital. You would fancy yourself in the heart of the East, in walking through the narrow streets of the town, the mosques, shops, and cemeteries of which so much resemble those of the old quarters of Constantinople. But it is especially in the courts, gardens, and kiosks of the harem of the old palace, that the traveller may well believe himself transported into some delicious abode of Aleppo or Bagdad.

It was in 1226, that the Mongol or Tatar hordes led by Batu Khan, grandson of Genghis Khan, after invading Russia, Poland, and Hungary, made their first appearance in the Crimea, and laid the foundations of the Tatar kingdom, which was soon to attain a high degree of power. The Genoese about the same time took possession of several important points on the southern coast, and founded Caffa and other towns, which became extremely flourishing seats of commerce. Their prosperity lasted until 1473, when the Turks, already masters of Constantinople, drove the Genoese out of the Crimea, and took under their protection the Khans of little Tatary, who became vassals of the Porte, whilst retaining their absolute sway over the Crimea. From that time until the eighteenth century, the history of the peninsula is but a long series of contests between the Ottomans, the Tatars, and the Muscovites.

Russia, coveting this fine country, took advantage of its continual revolutions, and sent a large army thither in 1771, for the purpose of putting the young prince Saheb Guerai on the throne. By this stroke of policy, she took the Crimea out of the hands of the Porte, and brought it under her

own sole protection. In return for the empress's good offices, Saheb Guerai ceded to her the towns of Kertch, Yeni Kaleh, and Kalbouroun, very advantageously situated on the Dniepr. In this way Russia took the first steps towards the celebrated treaty of Kainardji of 1774, which conceded to her the free navigation of all the seas dependent on the Turkish dominions. But it was not until 1783, that her sway was irrevocably established in the peninsula, and the Tatars submitted to a yoke against which they had so often and so boldly struggled.

During the brilliant period in which the khans reigned in the Crimea, the seat of government alternated between Eski Krim and Tchoufout Kaleh, until the beginning of the sixteenth century, when Bagtche Serai was made the capital.

One would hardly recognise in the simple and orderly Tatars of the present day, the descendants of those fierce Mongols who imposed their sway on a part of western Europe. There is a great difference between the Tatars of the coast and those of the mountains. The former have been rendered covetous, knavish, and treacherous by their continual intercourse with the [Pg 360] Russians; whilst their mountain brethren have retained the patriarchal manners that distinguish the Asiatic peoples. Their hospitality is most generous. The Tatar's best room, and the best which his house and his table can afford, are offered to his guest with a cordial alacrity that forbids the very idea of a refusal; and he would deem it an insult to be offered any other payment than a friendly grasp of the hand.

The Tatar women, without being handsome, display a timid grace that makes them singularly engaging. In public they wear a long white veil, the two ends of which hang over their shoulders, and they are particularly remarkable for their complete freedom from every appearance of vulgarity. We saw none at Bagtche Serai, but those of the poorer classes; the women of the mourzas (nobles), and beys (princes) live quite retired and never show themselves in public.

But to return to the palace of Bagtche Serai. It is no easy task to describe the charm of this mysterious and splendid abode, in which the voluptuous khans forgot all the cares of life: it is not to be done, as in the case of one of our palaces, by analysing the style, arrangement, and details of the rich architecture, and reading the artist's thought in the regularity, grace, and noble simplicity of the edifice: all this is easy to understand and to describe: such beauties are more or less appreciable by every one. But one must be something of a poet to appreciate a Turkish palace; its charms must be sought, not in what one sees, but in what one feels. I have heard persons speak very contemptuously of Bagtche Serai. "How," said they, "can any one apply the name of palace to that assemblage of wooden houses, daubed with coarse paintings, and furnished only with divans and carpets?" And these people were right in their way. The positive cast of their minds disabling them from seeing beauty in any thing but rich materials, well-defined forms and highly-finished workmanship, Bagtche Serai must be to them only a group of shabby houses adorned with paltry ornaments, and fit only for the habitation of miserable Tatars.

Situated in the centre of the town, in a valley enclosed between hills of unequal heights, the palace (Serai) covers a considerable space, and is enclosed within walls, and a small stream deeply entrenched. The bridge which affords admission into the principal court is guarded by a post of Russian veterans. The spacious court is planted with poplars and lilacs, and adorned with a beautiful Turkish fountain, shaded by willows; its melancholy murmur harmonises well with the loneliness of the place. To the right as you enter are some buildings, one of which is set apart for the use of those travellers who are fortunate enough to gain admittance into the palace. To the left are the mosque, the stables, and the trees of the cemetery, which is divided from the court by a wall.

We first visited the palace properly so called. Its exterior displays the usual irregularity of [Pg 361] Eastern dwellings; but its want of symmetry is more than compensated for by its wide galleries, its bright decorations, its pavilions so lightly fashioned that they seem scarcely attached to the body of the building, and by a profusion of large trees that shade it on all sides. These all invest it with a charm, that in my opinion greatly surpasses the systematic regularity of our princely abodes. The interior is an embodied page out of the Arabian Nights. The first hall we entered contains the celebrated Fountain of Tears, the theme of Pushkin's beautiful verses. It derives its melancholy name from the sweet sad murmur of its slender jets as they fall on the marble of the basin. The sombre and mysterious aspect of the hall, further augments the tendency of the spectator's mind to forget reality for the dreams of the imagination. The foot falls noiselessly on fine Egyptian mats; the walls are inscribed with sentences from the Koran, written in gold on a black ground in those odd-looking Turkish characters, that seem more the caprices of an idle fancy than vehicles of thought. From the hall we entered a large reception-room with a double row of windows of stained glass, representing all sorts of rural scenes. The ceiling and doors are richly gilded, and the workmanship of the latter is very fine. Broad divans covered with crimson velvet run all round the room. In the middle there is a fountain playing in a large porphyry basin. Every thing is magnificent in this room, except the whimsical manner in which the walls are painted. All that the most fertile imagination could conceive in the shape of isles, villages, harbours, fabulous castles, and so forth, is huddled together promiscuously on the walls, without any more regard for perspective than for geography. Nor is this all: there are niches over the doors in which are collected all sorts of children's toys, such as wooden houses a few inches high, fruit trees, models of ships, little figures of men twisted into a thousand contortions, &c. These singular curiosities are arranged on receding shelves for the greater facility of inspection, and are carefully protected by glass cases. One of the last khans, we were assured, used to shut himself up in this room every day to admire these interesting objects. Such childishness, common among the Orientals, would lead us to form a very unfavourable opinion of their intelligence, if it was not redeemed by their instinctive love of beauty, and the poetic feeling which they possess in

a high degree. For my part I heartily forgave the khans for having painted their walls so queerly, in consideration of the charming fountain that plashed on the marble, and the little garden filled with rare flowers adjoining the saloon.

The hall of the divan is of royal magnificence; the mouldings of the ceiling, in particular, are of exquisite delicacy. We passed through other rooms adorned with fountains and glowing colours, but that which most interested us was the apartment of the beautiful Countess Potocki. It was her strange fortune to inspire with a violent passion one of the last khans of the Crimea, who carried her off and made her absolute mistress of his palace, in which she lived ten years, her [Pg 362] heart divided between her love for an infidel, and the remorse that brought her prematurely to the grave. The thought of her romantic fate gave a magic charm to every thing we beheld. The Russian officer who acted as our cicerone pointed out to us a cross carved on the chimney of the bed-room. The mystic symbol, placed above a crescent, eloquently interpreted the emotions of a life of love and grief. What tears, what inward struggles, and bitter recollections had it not witnessed!

We passed through I know not how many gardens and inner yards, surrounded with high walls, to visit the various pavilions, kiosks, and buildings of all sorts comprised within the limits of the palace. The part occupied by the harem contains such a profusion of rose-trees and fountains as to merit the pleasing name of The Little Valley of Roses. Nothing can be more charming than this Tatar building, surrounded by blossoming trees. I felt a secret pleasure in pressing the divans on which had rested the fair forms of Mussulman beauties, as they breathed the fresh air from the fountains in voluptuous repose. No sound from without can reach this enchanted retreat, where nothing is heard but the rippling of the waters, and the song of the nightingales. We counted more than twenty fountains in the courts and gardens; they all derive their supply from the mountains, and the water is of extreme coolness.

A tower of considerable height, with a terrace fronted with gratings that can be raised or lowered at pleasure, overlooks the principal court. It was erected to enable the khan's wives to witness, unseen, the martial exercises practised in the court. The prospect from the terrace is admirable; immediately below it you have a bird's-eye view of the labyrinth of buildings, gardens, and other enclosures. Further on the town of Bagtche Serai rises gradually on a sloping amphitheatre of hills. The sounds of the whole town, concentrated and reverberated within the narrow space, reach you distinctly. The panorama is peculiarly pleasing at the close of the day, when the voices of the muezzins, calling to prayer from the minarets, mingle with the bleating of the flocks returning from pasture, and the cries of the shepherds.

After seeing the palace we repaired to the mosque and to the cemetery in which are the tombs of all the khans who have reigned in the Crimea. There as at Constantinople, I admired the wonderful art with which the Orientals disguise the gloomy idea of death under fresh and gladsome images. Who can yield to dismal thoughts as he breathes a perfumed air, listens to the waters of a sparkling fountain, and follows the little paths, edged with violets, that lead to lilac groves bending their flagrant blossoms over tombs adorned with rich carpets and gorgeous inscriptions?

The Tatar who has charge of this smiling abode of death, prompted by the poetic feeling that is lodged in the bosom of every Oriental, brought me a nosegay plucked from the tomb of a [Pg 363] Georgian, the beloved wife of the last khan. Was it not a touching thing to see this humble guardian of the cemetery comprehend instinctively that flowers, associated with the memory of a young woman, could not be indifferent to another of her sex and age?

Some isolated pavilions contain the tombs of khans of most eminent renown. They are much more ornate than the others, and the care with which they are kept up testifies the pious veneration of the Tatars. Carpets, cashmeres, lamps burning continually, and inscriptions in letters of gold, combine to give grandeur to these monuments, which yet are intended to commemorate only names almost forgotten.

Such is a brief sketch of this ancient abode of the khans, which was carefully repaired by the Emperor Alexander. He found it in such a state of disorder and neglect, that it was probable nothing would remain in a few years of a dwelling with which is associated almost the whole past history of the Crimea. But Alexander, whose temperament was so well adapted to appreciate the melancholy beauty of the spot, immediately on his return to St. Petersburg sent a very able man to Bagtche Serai, with orders to restore the palace to the state in which it had been in the time of the khans. Since then the imperial family has sometimes exchanged the dreary magnificence of the St. Petersburg palaces for the rosy bowers and sunny clime of the Tatar Serai.

In speaking of this Tatar town, I must not forget to mention a man known throughout the Crimea for his eccentricity. It is about twelve years since a Dutchman of the name of Vanderschbrug, a retired civil engineer in the imperial service, arrived in the Tatar capital with the intention of settling there. His motive for this act of misanthropy has never been ascertained; all that is known is, that his resolution has remained unshaken. Since his installation among the Tatars, Major Vanderschbrug has never set his foot outside the town, though his family reside in Simpheropol. His retiring pension, amounting to some hundred rubles, allows him to lead a life, which to many persons would seem very uninviting, but which is not devoid of a certain charm. The complete independence he has secured for himself, makes up to him, in some sort, for the void he must feel in the loss of family affection. He lives like a philosopher in his little cottage, with his cow, his poultry, his pencils, some books, and an old housekeeper. He speaks the language of the Tatars like one of themselves, and his thorough knowledge of the country, and the originality of his mind render his conversation very agreeable. All over the country he is

known only by the name of the hermit of Bagtche Serai. The Tatars hold him in great respect, often refer their disputes to his decision, and implicitly follow his advice.

We breakfasted with him, and seeing him apparently so contented with his lot, we thought how little is sufficient to make a man happy when his desires are limited. Major Vanderschbrug [Pg 364] beguiles his solitude with reading and the arts, for which he has preserved a taste. He showed us some fine water-coloured drawings he had made, and an old volume of Jean Jacques Rousseau, which he has kept for many years as a precious treasure. To all the objections we raised against the strange exile to which he condemned himself, he replied that ennui had not yet invaded his humble dwelling.

Before bidding farewell to Bagtche Serai, we went in company with our recluse to visit the Valley of Jehoshaphat and the famous mountain of Tchoufout Kaleh,[68] which has been for several centuries the exclusive property of certain Jews, known by the name of Karaïmes or Karaïtes. They are a sect who still adhere to the law of Moses, but who separated from the general body, as some writers suppose, several centuries before the Christian era. According to other authorities, the separation did not occur until A.D. 750. There is a marked difference between them and the other Jews. The simplicity of their manners, their probity and industry give them a strong claim to the traveller's respect.

At six in the morning we mounted our little Tatar horses, and began to ascend the steep road that winds through a vast cemetery, covering the whole side of the mountain. The melancholy aspect of the tombs, covered with Hebrew inscriptions, accords with the desolation of the scene. Of the whole population, that during the lapse of ages have lived and died on this rock, nothing remains but tombs, and a dozen families that persist, from religious motives, in dwelling among ruins.

In the time of the khans, the Karaïtes of Tchoufout Kaleh were stoutly confined to their rock, being only allowed to pass the business hours of the day in the Tatar capital, returning every evening to their mountain. When one of them arrived opposite the palace on horseback, he was bound to alight and proceed on foot until he was out of sight. But since the conquest by the Russians, the Karaïtes are free to reside in Bagtche Serai, and they have gradually left the mountain, with the exception, as I have stated, of a few families who regard it as a sacred duty to abide on the spot where their forefathers dwelt.

Considering the almost inaccessible position of the town, its want of water, the sterility of the soil, and the loneliness of the inhabitants, we cannot fail to be struck by the thirst for freedom that made the Karaïtes of yore choose such a site, and the constancy of the families that still cling to it. Tchoufout Kaleh is built entirely on the bare rock, and the mountain is so steep that in the only place where it admits of access, it has been necessary to cut flights of steps several hundred feet long. As you ascend, huge masses of overhanging rocks seem to threaten you with [Pg 365] destruction, and when you enter the ruined town, the sepulchral silence and desolation of its dilapidated streets make a painful impression on the mind. No inhabitant comes forth to greet the stranger or direct him on his way. The only living beings we saw abroad were famished dogs that howled most dismally.

Besides the interest we felt in this acropolis of the middle ages, we had a still stronger motive for our journey to Tchoufout Kaleh; namely, to see a poet who has resided from his youth upwards on that dreary rock. We had heard a great deal about it from M. Taitbout de Marigny and from Major Vanderschbrug; the first point, therefore, towards which we bent our steps was the rabbi's dwelling, built like an eagle's nest on the point of a rock. Being shown into a small room furnished with books and maps, we found ourselves in presence of a little old man with a long white beard who received us with the grave and easy dignity of the Orientals. His features were of the most purely Jewish cast. With the help of the major, who acted as our interpreter, we were enabled to carry on a long conversation, and to admire the varied knowledge possessed by a man so completely cut off from the world. Is it not wonderful that a person in such a position, and so totally deprived of all necessary appliances, should undertake the gigantic task of writing the history of the Karaïtes from the time of Moses to our days? Yet thus our rabbi has been employed for upward of twenty years, undismayed by the difficulties of all kinds that lie in his way. It was not a little moving to see a man of great intellect, vast erudition, and poetic imagination, wearing out on a desolate rock the remains of a life which would have been so fair and so productive if passed in more active scenes. He showed us several sacred poems in manuscript written in his youth. How much I regretted that I could not read the productions of such a poet.

He lives like a patriarch surrounded by ten or a dozen children of all ages who enliven and embellish his solitude. Several little rooms communicating together by galleries form his dwelling. It is very humble, but the rabbi's remarkable physiognomy, and the Oriental costume of his wife and daughters, impart a charm even to so rude a tenement. He escorted us to the synagogue, a small building, long left to solitude. We saw, too, not without a lively interest, the grave of a khan's daughter, who, in the time of the Genoese rule, forsook the Koran for the law of the Christians, and died at the age of eighteen among those who had converted her. Like every thing else about it, it was in a state of neglect and decay.

All the lower part of the mountain, and also a deep narrow valley stretching eastward of Tchoufout Kaleh are covered with tombs, to which circumstance the situation owes its name of Valley of Jehoshaphat. Opposite the Karaïte town is the celebrated convent of the Assumption, which is annually visited in the month of August by more than twenty thousand pilgrims. Its cells excavated in the rock have a very curious appearance from a distance. Some wooden flights of [Pg 366] stairs on the outside of the rock lead to the several stages of this singular convent inhabited only

by a few monks.

On our return to Bagtche Serai we noticed several crypts in the rock which are the haunt of a large number of Tsiganes. Nowhere does this vagrant people present a more disgusting aspect than in this locality. Their horrible infirmities, distorted limbs, and indescribable wretchedness make one almost doubt that they can belong to humanity.

We proceeded the next day to Simpheropol where we were to pass some days.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[68] Tchoufout Kaleh, formerly called Kirkov, was for a long series of years the residence of the khans, until Mengle Gherai quitted it for Bagtche Serai, in 1475.

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# CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIMPHEROPOL—KAKOLEZ—VISIT TO PRINCESS ADEL BEY—EXCURSION TO MANGOUP KALEH.

Under the Tatars Simpheropol was the second town of the Crimea, and the residence of the Kalga Sultan, whose functions were nearly equivalent to those of vice-khan. He exercised the regency of the country on the death of the khan, until his successor was nominated by the Porte. The Kalga's court was composed of the same functionaries as that of Bagtche Serai, and his authority extended over all the regions north of the Crimea mountains. Simpheropol was then adorned with palaces, mosques, and fine gardens, few traces of which now remain. The tortuous streets, high walls, and rose thickets of the old city, have given place to the cold monotony of the Russian towns. It is the capital of the government of the Crimea, with a population of about 8000 souls, of whom 1700 are Russians, 5000 Tatars, 400 strangers, and 900 gipsies. Its plan is large enough to comprise ten times as many houses as it possesses; but, at least, it retains its Salghir, the banks of which are covered with the finest orchards in the Crimea. But instead of building the new town in the valley, it has been set at the top of a great plateau where its few houses and its disproportionately wide streets present no kind of character. It is with extreme pleasure, therefore, that after wandering through the streets in which the sun's rays beat down without any thing to break their force, one finds himself under the cool verdant shades that fringe the Salghir, with the pretty country houses that peep out from the orchards.

We made many excursions in the vicinity, and were above all pleased with the beautiful landscapes in the valley of the Alma. In a ride on horseback to visit some rocks of an interesting geological character, we crossed the river eighteen times in the space of three hours: this may [Pg 367] afford an idea of the multitude of meanders it makes before continuing its course to the Black Sea.

Bagtche Serai being on the road to Karolez, we could not resist the pleasure of once more seeing its delightful palace. We passed the evening in one of the large galleries, admiring the magic appearance of the buildings and gardens by moonlight. The deep stillness of the place; the mysterious aspect of the principal edifice, one part of which was completely in the shade, whilst the other, with its coloured windows and its open balconies, received the full rays of the moon; the masses of foliage in the gardens, and the melancholy sounds of the fountain; all this accompanied by the imaginative relations of our eccentric friend, the major, made an indelible impression on our minds.

At Bagtche Serai we finally exchanged the pereclatnoi for Tatar horses, the serviceable qualities of which had commended themselves to us in many trials. Our cavalcade made a grotesque appearance as we rode out of the palace. For my own part I looked oddly enough, perched on an enormously high Tatar saddle in my Caspian costume, with my parasol in my hand. Hommaire wore with Oriental gravity the Persian cap, the girdle and the weapons, to which he had become accustomed in his long wanderings. But the queerest figure of all was our dragoman. Half-a-dozen leather bags containing provisions dangled at his horse's flanks; my poor straw bonnet, which I had been obliged to abandon for a round hat, hung at the pummel of his saddle, and in addition to all this accoutrement he carried in his hand a large white canvass umbrella to screen him from the sun. Two Tatar horsemen followed us, carrying likewise their contingent of baggage.

After some hours' riding through a lovely country, intersected with streams, valleys, and numerous orchards, we arrived in the evening at Karolez, a Tatar village, lost among mountains, in the valley of the same name, which is one of the most delightful spots in the beautiful Crimea, so rich in picturesque scenes.

Though it does not belong to the southern coast, and consequently has no maritime traffic,

Karolez, nevertheless, possesses a romantic attraction, which every year brings to it numerous visitors. This is owing to its vicinity to Mangoup Kaleh, the abundance of its waters, the mountains that encompass the valley with a line of battlemented walls, as if Nature had been pleased in a sportive mood to imitate art, whilst yet retaining her own more majestic proportions; and, lastly, the merit of belonging to the Princess Adel Bey, whose beauty, though invisible has inspired many a poet.

I had taken care before leaving Simpheropol to furnish myself with a letter from the governor to the princess, in order to obtain an interview which might enable me to judge whether the beauty of this Tatar lady and her daughters was as great as fame reported. The question had been often agitated since our arrival in the Crimea; it may, therefore, be imagined how desirous I was to resolve it. But in spite of my letter of introduction, my admission to the palace was still very problematical. Many Russian ladies had tried in vain to enter it; for the princess, while exercising the noblest hospitality, was seldom disposed to satisfy the curiosity of her guests. Though the law of Mahomet respecting the seclusion of women is less rigidly observed among the Tatars of the Crimea than among the Turks of Constantinople, rich ladies do not often pass the threshold of their own dwellings, and when they do they are always closely veiled. [Pg 368]

One of my friends from Simpheropol, who had proceeded the day before to the princess's, having giving notice of our coming, we were received in the most brilliant style. The guest house was prepared with the ostentation which the Orientals are fond of displaying on all occasions. A double line of servants of all ages was drawn up in the vestibule when we dismounted; and one of the oldest and most richly dressed ushered us into a saloon arranged in the fashion of the East, with gaily painted walls and red silk divans that reminded us of the delightful rooms in the palace of the khans. The princess's son, an engaging boy of twelve years of age, who spoke Russian very well, attached himself to us, obligingly translated our orders to the domestics, and took care that we wanted for nothing. I gave him my letter, which he immediately carried to his mother, and soon afterwards he came and told me, to my great satisfaction, that she would receive me when she had finished her toilette. In the eagerness of my curiosity I now counted every minute, until an officer, followed by an old woman in a veil, came to introduce me into the mysterious palace of which I had as yet seen only the lofty outer wall.

My husband, as arranged between us beforehand, attempted to follow us, and seeing that no impediment was offered, he stepped without ceremony through the little door into the park, crossed the latter, boldly ascended a terrace adjoining the palace, and, at last, found himself, not without extreme surprise at his good fortune, in a little room that seemed to belong to the princess's private apartments. Until then no male stranger except Count Voronzof had ever entered the palace; the flattering and unexpected exception which the princess made in favour of my husband, might, therefore, lead us to hope that her complaisance would not stop there. But we were soon undeceived. The officer who had ushered us into the palace, after having treated us to iced water, sweetmeats and pipes, took my husband by the hand, and led him out of the room with very significant celerity. He had no sooner disappeared than a curtain was raised at the end of the room, and a woman of striking beauty entered, dressed in a rich costume. She advanced to me with an air of remarkable dignity, took both my hands, kissed me on the two cheeks, and sat down beside me, making me many demonstrations of friendship. She wore a great deal of rouge; her eyelids were painted black and met over the nose, giving her countenance a certain sternness, that, nevertheless, did not destroy its pleasing effect. A furred velvet vest fitted tight to her still elegant figure. Altogether her appearance surpassed what I had conceived of her beauty. We spent a quarter of an hour closely examining each other, and interchanging as well as we could a few Russian words that very insufficiently conveyed our thoughts. But in such cases, looks supply the deficiencies of speech, and mine must have told the princess with what admiration I beheld her. Hers, I must confess, in all humility, seemed to express much more surprise than admiration at my travelling costume. What would I not have given to know the result of her purely feminine analysis of my appearance! I was even crossed in this *tête-à-tête* by a serious scruple of conscience for having presented myself before her in male attire, which must have given her a strange notion of the fashions of Europe. [Pg 369]

Notwithstanding my desire to prolong my visit in hopes of seeing her daughters, the fear of appearing intrusive prompted me to take my leave; but checking me with a very graceful gesture, she said eagerly "*Pastoy, Pastoy*" (stay, stay), and clapped her hands several times. A young girl entered at the signal, and by her mistress's orders threw open a folding door, and immediately I was struck dumb with surprise and admiration by a most brilliant apparition. Imagine, reader, the most exquisite sultanas of whom poetry and painting have ever tried to convey an idea, and still your conception will fall far short of the enchanting models I had then before me. There were three of them, all equally beautiful and graceful. Two were clad in tunics of crimson brocade, adorned in front with broad gold lace. The tunics were open and disclosed beneath them cashmere robes, with very tight sleeves terminating in gold fringes. The youngest wore a tunic of azure blue brocade, with silver ornaments: this was the only difference between her dress and that of her sisters. All three had magnificent black hair escaping in countless tresses from a fez of silver filigree, set like a diadem over their ivory foreheads; they wore gold embroidered slippers and wide trousers drawn close at the ankle.

I had never beheld skins so dazzlingly fair, eyelashes so long, or so delicate a bloom of youth. The calm repose that sat on the countenances of these lovely creatures, had never been disturbed by any profane glance. No look but their mother's had ever told them they were beautiful; and this thought gave them an inexpressible charm in my eyes. It is not in our Europe, where women, exposed to the gaze of crowds, so soon addict themselves to coquetry, that the imagination could

conceive such a type of beauty. The features of our young girls are too soon altered by the vivacity of their impressions, to allow the eye of the artist to discover in them that divine charm of purity and ignorance with which I was so struck in beholding my Tatar princesses. After embracing me they retired to the end of the room where they remained standing in those graceful Oriental attitudes which no woman in Europe could imitate. A dozen attendants muffled in white muslin, were gathered round the door, gazing with respectful curiosity. Their profiles, [Pg 370] shown in relief on a dark ground, added to the picturesque character of the scene. This delightful vision lasted an hour. When the princess saw that I was decided on going away, she signified to me by signs that I should go and see the garden; but though grateful to her for this further mark of attention, I preferred immediately rejoining my husband, being impatient to relate to him all the details of this interview, with which I was completely dazzled.

Next morning we set out on horseback for Mangoup Kaleh, a mountain renowned throughout the country, and of which the inhabitants never speak but with veneration. Goths, Turks, and Tatars have been by turns its possessors. Owing to its almost impregnable position, it has played an important part in all the revolutions of the Crimea. The town of Mangoup, which appears to have been the residence of the Gothic princes, was formerly a very considerable place. It had a bishop in 754. The Turks took it and put a garrison in it in 1745. Twenty years afterwards it was entirely burnt down. The khans of the Crimea next took possession of it, and let it gradually fall into decay. At the close of the last century, the population of this ancient town still consisted of some Karaïte families; at present there remains no other trace of their existence than the tombs spread over the mountain side.

For three hours we ascended the mountain by scarcely marked bridle roads, astonished at the confidence with which our horses walked up those steep slopes where there seemed hardly any hold for their feet. But the horses of the Crimea are wonderfully surefooted, and if they can set down their feet anywhere, it is alike to them whether it is on a smooth plain or on the verge of a precipice. Here, as at Tchoufout Kaleh, the mountain was covered with tombs; but these bore inscriptions in Tatar as well as Hebrew, showing that this deserted soil had formerly been trodden by more than one people. The ascent ended at a broad triangular plateau on the summit of the mountain, where the town once stood. It is now a barren spot, strewed all over with ruins. Two sides of the plateau are perpendicular; the third was defended by a fortress, part of which is still standing.

Every thing on this mountain wears a grand and melancholy character. Desolation has long taken it for its domain. Nothing meets the eye but ruins, tombs, and a naked soil. And yet, notwithstanding the stern aspect of the place, it does not fill the soul with the same feelings of painful awe as Tchoufout Kaleh. This is because the ancient town of the Karaïtes, all mutilated as it is by time and events, still retains a semblance of existence, and this alliance between life and death necessarily impresses the mind with a superstitious dread. At Mangoup Kaleh all human traces have been too long effaced to awaken painful thoughts. There one thinks not so much of men as of remote epochs, of the great events and numerous revolutions of which this rock has been the theatre.

The façade of the fortress has withstood the slow attacks of time, though full of cracks, and the [Pg 371] lofty walls appear still from a distance to protect Mangoup Kaleh. Herds of Tatar horses graze in complete freedom on the plateau, and drink from a large reservoir supplied by a spring that never fails in any season. As we were exploring the interior of what must have been the citadel, we came upon a clump of lilacs in full bloom among the ruins. I cannot tell the impression made on me by those flowers thus unfolding their sweets under the dew of Heaven far from every human eye. Besides the fortress we found another edifice partly spared by time. Its construction and the graves about it showed it to be an old Christian church. The chancel was in tolerably good preservation, and even the windows had not suffered much dilapidation.

The view from Mangoup Kaleh is very extensive and varied. On the one side is the sea with its islands and capes, its vessels, and Sevastopol, which can be distinctly perceived in clear weather. To the west, magnificent orchards, vine-clad hills, and broad meadows, intersected with streams, stretch away as far as the eye can reach in the direction of Simpheropol; then, at the foot of the mountain, the valley of Karolez, its forests, its rocky girdle, its Tatar village, and the palace of the princess Adel Bey, disclosing its Moorish architecture from behind a screen of poplars.

At the earnest recommendation of our guides, I ventured to explore some grottoes hollowed in the rock, the descent to which is rather difficult and dangerous. There are about a dozen of them opening one into the other, and separated only by shapeless pillars. The Tatars could give us no sort of explanation as to these subterraneous chambers. They seem like those of Inkermann to belong to very remote antiquity, but their origin and history are quite unknown.

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## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## ROAD TO BAIDAR—THE SOUTHERN COAST; GRAND SCENERY—MISKHOR AND ALOUPKA—PREDILECTION OF THE GREAT RUSSIAN NOBLES FOR THE CRIMEA.

The country we passed over, next day, on our way to the southern coast, had a wild sylvan appearance strikingly in contrast with what we had hitherto seen. Between the valley of Karolez and that of Baidar near the coast, lies a chain of mountains with deep gorges filled with forests. Sometimes the road passed along the bottom of one of these gorges, where we were constantly obstructed by watercourses and thickets; sometimes we pursued a track barely discernible along the flank of the mountain, and then the summits of the hills that had seemed so high when we looked up to them from below, were hidden beneath us in dense vapours. At last, by dint of [Pg 372] ascending and descending, we reached the wide plain of Baidar, with the village in its centre. Early next morning we were again on horseback, and breathing with delight the wild odours exhaled by the still dewy forest.

Our road ascended gently to the culminating point of the mountain, and then we stood rooted for a while to the spot in admiration of the magnificent sea view that burst upon us. But our thoughts were suddenly called off in another direction by the music of a military band, and looking down we were surprised to see several groups of soldiers posted some hundred feet below the point where we stood. It was a whole regiment employed in making a new road between Sevastopol and Ialta. Some were blowing up rocks, and filling the air with something like the din and smoke of battle; others were busy round a great fire preparing the morning meal; the musicians were waking the mountain echoes with their martial strains, and the officers were lounging in front of a tent smoking their pipes.

When we had sufficiently indulged our admiration of the scene, we turned with some dismay to contemplate the descent before us. The mountain which we had found so gently sloping on the western side, here fell so precipitously that I could not imagine how our horses were to make their way down. For my part I thought it safest to alight and lead my horse. The band of the regiment, as if they had guessed we were French, saluted us with the overture of the *Fiancée*. After we had already reached the seaside, we still heard that charming music, weakened by distance, but kindling our recollections of home in the most unexpected manner.

We spent some days at Moukhalatka, the residence of Colonel Olive, a Frenchman, formerly page to Louis XVIII., who entered the service of the Grand-duke Constantine shortly after the return of the Bourbons to France. Beyond Moukhalatka our way lay over mountains, the scenery of which partly compensated for the incessant toil of climbing up broken rocks, and passing through glens where we could only advance in single file. But with the exception of these difficulties, the whole journey to Aloupka was a continual enchantment. Talk of the isles of the Archipelago with their naked rocks! Here a luxuriant vegetation descends to the water's edge, and the coast everywhere presents an amphitheatre of forests, gardens, villages, and country houses, over which the eye wanders with delight. The almond, the cythesus, the wild chestnut, the Judas-tree, the olive, and the cypress, and all the vegetation of a southern clime, thrives there with a vigour that attests the potency of the sun. On our left we had gigantic masses towering vertically, sombre tints, and an inconceivable chaos of rocky fragments; on our right a brilliant mosaic bordered by the sea. But the beauty of the scenery about Aloupka is even still more striking. The eye takes in at once the majestic Tchatir Dagh, Cape Aïtodor, with its lighthouse, [Pg 373] the Aiou Dagh, the brow of which, by a curious freak of nature, seems crowned with bastions and half-ruined towers, the Ai Petri, and the Megabi, with its gilded dome surmounted by a cross which was erected by the celebrated Princess Gallitzin, whose memory is still fresh in the Crimea. All these objects are clothed in a rich and varied garb of light such as belongs only to the warm atmosphere of southern lands.

Aristocracy has set its seal on this favoured portion of the coast. The change in the appearance of the roads indicates the neighbourhood of wealthy landowners. They have been made expressly for the dashing four-horse equipages that are continually traversing it. We observed that the limits of each estate were marked by a post bearing the blazonry of the proprietor.

We were most agreeably surprised in the neighbourhood of Aloupka, where we fell in on the road with our friend M. Marigny. In consequence of this welcome encounter we put off our visit to Aloupka to the next day, and proceeded with the consul to Mishkor, the estate of General Narishkin, adjoining that of Count Voronzof.

We were greatly pleased with this fine property, on the maintenance of which the general annually expends 100,000 francs. It comprises forests, a park, a château, a church, and a great number of ornamental buildings, that bespeak the exquisite taste of the proprietor. Mishkor has this great advantage, that its costly artificial arrangements are so well disguised under an appearance of rural simplicity, that one is almost tempted to attribute its perfections to the hand of nature.

The reverse is the case at Aloupka where art reigns supreme. This almost royal residence, which has excited the envy even of the Emperor Nicholas, has already cost Count Voronzof between 4,000,000 and 5,000,000 of francs, although it is not yet finished. All epochs and all styles are represented in its architecture and embellishments. Its lofty walls, its massive square tower and belfry, its vaulted passages and the mysterious aspect of its long galleries, give it a considerable resemblance to a feudal manor; but the Oriental style is exhibited in its small columns, its chimneys, and its profusion of pinnacles and domes. To justify the construction of such a porphyry château, the count should have been able to retrograde some centuries: in our

own times such a dwelling is an anachronism. What is the use of such walls when there is no fear of being attacked by a neighbour? What is the use of those vaulted passages without men-at-arms to fill them? An old castle speaks to the imagination, recalling the chronicles, the fortunes and events connected with it, but a modern construction like this is a thing of no meaning. Its towers, battlements, and threatening walls seem a parody on the past. What have they seen? of what combats, feuds, loves, and revenges have they been witnesses?

In addition to this total want of fitness of character, the château has besides the grievous defect of being very disadvantageously situated. The coast is so narrow at this spot that there are [Pg 374] but a few paces' breadth between the façade of the building and the sea, so that, in order to have a fair view of the whole, one must take a boat and put out from the shore until the proper point of view is found. Now it is not every one who will be disposed to take this trouble solely for the purpose of appreciating the effect of a façade.

The park displays a charming labyrinth of broken rocks, and a variety of natural picturesque and extraordinary features. Art has had nothing to do but to make paths and alleys between the accumulated volcanic masses, and to adorn the sides of the cascades with flowers. In the hollow of a rock there is a deep grotto with a little babbling spring, inviting to repose and meditation. At the eastern end of the château there is a lofty cypress wood, which the countess calls her Scutari.

The general aspect of this magnificent abode is too grave to delight the eye; we admire but do not covet it. The gigantic shadow of the Ai Petri, which hangs like a veil over the whole domain, adds still more to its sternness.

The reputation of the southern coast dates only from the arrival of Count Voronzof in the Crimea, previously to which no one thought of residing on it, except some speculators who were beginning to try the cultivation of the vine there. The count, who is a man of much taste, was at once struck with the beauty of the country, and soon became the purchaser of several estates in it. His example was followed by numbers of wealthy nobles whose eyes were immediately opened to the charms of the landscapes when once the count had proclaimed their attractions. Numerous villas were erected in the course of a few years along all the coast from Balaclava to Theodosia. A fleet of steamers was established, with the port of Ialta for their head quarters. The imperial family itself gave into the fashion and purchased Oreanda, one of the most beautiful sites on the coast; and many foreigners, infected by the prevailing fever, turned all they had into money and settled in the Crimea to cultivate the vine, a pursuit which Count Voronzof was then encouraging to the utmost of his power. But this was the reverse of the medal; most of them were ruined, and are now expiating in extreme poverty the cupidity with which they plunged into foolish enterprises.

Throughout its whole extent the coast presents only a narrow strip, seldom half a league wide, traversed by deep ravines, and backed by a range of calcareous cliffs that shelter it from the north wind. It is only on this *detritus* that the handsomest domains are situated. Among these are Koutchouk Lampat, belonging to General Borosdine; Parthenit, where is still to be seen the great hazel under which the Prince de Ligne wrote to Catherine II.; Kisil Tasch, the proprietor of which bears a name famous in France, that of Poniatowski; Oudsouf, lying close under the forest shades of Aiou Dagh; Arteck the estate of Prince Andrew Gallitzin; Ai Daniel, the property of the late Duc [Pg 375] de Richelieu; Marsanda; Oreanda, an imperial domain; Mishkor and Nikita; Gaspra where Madame de Krudener died in the arms of her daughter, Baroness Berckheim; and Koreis where Princess Gallitzin, exiled from court, ended her days.

All these properties, adjoining each other, are, in the fine season, the rendezvous of a numerous society eagerly intent on pleasure. Aloupka is the great centre of amusement. Foreigners of distinction who are for the moment at Odessa, are *ex officio* the guests of Count Voronzof; but many of them have on their return complained of paying somewhat too dearly for the governor-general's hospitality. As the château, notwithstanding its imposing appearance, can contain only a small number of the select, the majority are compelled to find a lodging at the inn of the Two Cypresses near Aloupka, the landlord of which, by way of doing honour to his noble patron, practises unsparing extortion on all who have need of his apartments.

On our way to Ialta, about a dozen versts from Mishkor we visited the country houses best worth seeing, particularly Gaspra, which interested us for Madame de Krudener's sake. Perhaps the reader will not be unwilling to peruse the details I collected respecting the motives that induced that celebrated woman to settle in the peninsula, and which connected her name with that of two other women equally remarkable for their strange fortunes.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THREE CELEBRATED WOMEN.

Every one is aware of the mystic influence which Madame de Krudener exercised for many years over the enthusiastic temperament of the Emperor Alexander. This lady who has so charmingly portrayed her own character in *Valérie*, who was pre-eminently distinguished in the aristocratic *salons* of Paris by her beauty, her talents, and her position as an ambassadress, who was by turns a woman of the world, a heroine of romance, a remarkable writer, and a prophetess, will not soon be forgotten in France. The lovers of mystic poetry will read *Valérie*, that charming work, the appearance of which made so much noise, notwithstanding the bulletins of the grand army (for it appeared in the most brilliant period of the empire); those who delight in grace, combined with beauty and mental endowments, will recall to mind that young woman who won for herself so distinguished a place in French society; and those whose glowing imaginations love to dwell on exalted sentiments and religious fervour, united to the most lively faith, cannot refuse [Pg 376] their admiration to her who asked of the mighty of the earth only the means of freely exercising charity, that evangelical virtue, of which she was always one of the most ardent apostles.

The *Lettres de Mademoiselle Cochelet* make known to us with what zeal Madame de Krudener applied herself to seeking out and comforting the afflicted. Her extreme goodness of heart was such that she was called, in St. Petersburg, the Mother of the Poor. All the sums she received from the emperor were immediately distributed to the wretched, and her own fortune was applied in the same way, so that her house was besieged from morning till night by mujiks and mothers of families, to whom she gave food both for soul and body.

With so much will and power to do good, Madame de Krudener by and by acquired so great an influence in St. Petersburg, that the government at last became alarmed. She was accused of entertaining tendencies of too liberal a cast, religious notions of no orthodox kind, extreme ambition cloaked under the guise of charity, and therewith too much compassion for those miserable mujiks of whom she was the unfailing friend. But the chief cause of the displeasure of the court was the baroness's connexion with two other ladies, whose religious sentiments were by all means exceedingly questionable. They were the Princess Gallitzin and Countess Guacher (we will give the real name of the latter by and by).

The publicity which these ladies affected in all their acts could not but be injurious to the meek Christian enterprise of Madame de Krudener. The princess was detested at court. Too superior to disguise her opinions, and renowned for her beauty, her caustic wit, and her philosophic notions, she had excited against her a host of enemies, who were sure to take the first opportunity of injuring her with the emperor. As for the Countess Guacher, the chief heroine of our tale, her rather equivocal position at the court furnished a weapon against her, when suddenly issuing from the extreme retirement in which she had previously lived, she became one of Madame de Krudener's most enthusiastic adepts. But before we proceed further it will be necessary to give a brief account of her arrival in Russia.

Two years before the period I am speaking of, a lady of high rank arrived in St. Petersburg, accompanied by a numerous retinue, and giving herself out for one of the victims of the French revolution. In that quality she was received with alacrity in the society of the capital, and the Emperor Alexander himself was one of the foremost to notice her. It appeared that she came last from England, where she had taken shelter during the revolutionary troubles; but the motive which had induced her, after so long a residence among the English, to quit their country for Russia, remained an impenetrable secret. She always evinced an extreme repugnance to meet the French emigrants, who resided in St. Petersburg, and they on their part declared that the [Pg 377] name she bore was entirely unknown to them. It soon began to be whispered about, that the lady was, perhaps, a personage of illustrious birth who desired to be *incognita*; but what her real name was no one could tell, not even the emperor. The wit of the courtiers was baffled by the lofty reserve of the countess, who always affected a total silence whenever France was mentioned in conversation. Alexander, always prompt to declare himself a champion of dames, respected the fair stranger's *incognito* with chivalric loyalty, and declared that any attempt to penetrate the mystery would exceedingly displease him. This was enough to cool the fever of curiosity that had infected the courtiers since Madame Guacher's first appearance; her name was thenceforth mentioned only with a circumspection that would have seemed very curious to any one unacquainted with the Russians, and she soon became a stranger to the court, where she appeared only on rare occasions.

The emperor alone, stimulated no doubt by the mystery she observed respecting her past history, and struck by her high-bred demeanour, kept up an intercourse with her to which he seemed to attach much value. There was nothing of ordinary gallantry in this, at least there never was any thing to indicate that their intimacy had led to so commonplace a result. The romantic spirit of Alexander, delighted to build all sorts of hypotheses on a person whose noble presence and lofty airs exercised a peculiar prestige upon his imagination.

When the Princess Gallitzin returned to St. Petersburg after a journey to Italy, the emperor, who sincerely admired her, took upon himself to make two ladies acquainted whom he thought so fitted to appreciate each other. As he had foreseen, a close intimacy grew up between them, but to the great mortification of the court, this intimacy was, through Madame de Krudener's influence, the basis of an association which aimed at nothing less than the conversion of the whole earth to the holy law of Christ.

At first the scheme was met with derision, then alarm was felt, and at last, by dint of intrigues, the emperor, whom these ladies had half made a proselyte, was forced to banish them from court, and confine them for the rest of their days to the territory of the Crimea. It is said that this decision, so contrary to the kind nature of Alexander, was occasioned by an article in an English newspaper, in which the female trio and his imperial majesty were made the subjects of most

biting sarcasms. Enraged at being accused of being held in leading strings by three half-crazed women, the emperor signed the warrant for their exile to the great joy of the envious courtiers. The victims beheld in the event only the manifestation of the divine will, that they should propagate the faith among the followers of Mahomet. In a spirit of Christian humility they declined receiving any other escort than that of a non-commissioned officer, whose duty should be only to see to their personal safety, and transmit their orders to the persons employed in the [Pg 378] journey. Their departure produced a great sensation in St. Petersburg; and every one was eager to see the distinguished ladies in their monastic costume. The court laughed, but the populace, always sensitive where religion is concerned, and who, besides, were losing a most generous protectress in Madame de Krudener, accompanied the pilgrims with great demonstrations of respect and sorrow to the banks of the Neva, where they embarked on the 6th of September, 1822.

Two months after that date, on a cold November morning, when the Sea of Azof was already beginning to be covered near shore with a thin coat of ice, there arrived in Taganrok one of those large boats called lodkas, which ply on all the navigable rivers of the empire, and are used for the transport of goods. This one seemed to have been fitted up for the temporary accommodation of passengers. The practised eyes of the sailors in the port soon noticed the peculiar arrangement of the deck, the care with which the bales of merchandise were ranged along the gangways, and above all, the great carpet that covered the whole quarter-deck. These circumstances excited much curiosity in the port, especially as at that advanced season arrivals were very rare; but conjecture was exerted in vain, as to who might be the mysterious passengers, for the whole day passed without one of them appearing. It was ascertained, indeed, that a non-commissioned officer landed from the lodka, and waited on the police-master and the English consul, and that those functionaries repaired on board the lodka; but that was all, and the public remained for ever in ignorance whence the lodka came, whither it was bound, and who were the persons on board of it.

The same evening the English consul was waiting with some curiosity for the visit of a foreigner, who, as he had been informed by the non-commissioned officer of the lodka, would call on him at eight o'clock; but her name and her business remained a mystery for him. At the appointed time the door opened, and a person entered whose appearance at first sight did not seem to justify the curiosity which the consul had felt about her. Dressed in a long, loose, grey robe, and a white hood with lappets falling on the bosom, she had all the appearance of those Russian nuns who go about to rich houses and beg for their convents. Taking her for one of these persons, Mr. Y—— was about to give her a very expeditious answer, when to his surprise she accosted him in excellent English. The appearance and manners of the visitor soon convinced him she was a person of superior station. The conversation turned at first on England. The unknown told him that having long resided in that country, she had felt desirous of seeing its representative in Taganrok; she then went on to discuss English society, mentioning the most aristocratic names, and talking in such a manner as to show that she must have been long familiar with the London world of fashion. After this she proceeded to the main object of her visit, which was to procure from the consul a podoroshni, to continue her journey by land instead of by [Pg 379] water as before.

All this while the consul was scrutinising his strange visitor with increasing astonishment. She appeared to be about fifty years of age; her features, which were still very well preserved, must have been once very handsome. She had a Bourbon countenance, large blue eyes, grave lineaments, and a somewhat haughty ease in her demeanour, that altogether produced a singularly imposing effect. The conversation gradually becoming more familiar, the lady confessed that having been converted by the Baroness de Krudener and the Princess Gallitzin, she had been exiled with those ladies to the Crimea, where she purposed to preach the faith.

This unexpected communication of course increased the surprise of Mr. Y——, and drew from him some observations on the nature of such a project. After lauding the zeal of the fair missionary, he hinted a doubt that she would find many proselytes among the Mahometans, and asked her had she no family or friends who had a more direct claim on her charity than strangers, who were too barbarous to appreciate her motives. This question produced an extraordinary effect on the lady. She grew pale and confused, and muttered indistinctly that all her earthly ties were broken, and that the wrath of Heaven had long rested on her head! A silence of some minutes followed that avowal. The consul remained with his eyes fixed on the strange being before him, and in spite of all his address and knowledge of the world, he was quite at a loss how to behave or how to renew the conversation. His visitor, however, relieved him by taking her leave, after repeating her request that he would supply her with a podoroshni on the following morning.

It may easily be imagined that Mr. Y—— did not wait until the next day to satisfy his curiosity respecting the ladies whose invincible spirit of proselytism had sent them from the banks of the Neva to the shores of the Black Sea, and soon after the departure of his visitor he was on his way to the port. He had no difficulty in finding the lodka; the deck was deserted, but a light shone through one of the skylights. Looking down he saw three phantom-like females standing at a table covered with papers, and reading out of large books. When their prayers were ended they began to chant hymns in a slow measure. The solemn religious harmony, suddenly breaking the deep silence, made so intense an impression on the consul, that twenty years afterwards he still spoke of it with enthusiasm.

Countess Guacher stood with her back towards him, but he had a full view of the faces of the two other ladies. Madame de Krudener was small, delicate, and fair haired; her inspired looks

and the gentleness of her countenance bespoke her boundless beneficence of soul. The Princess Gallitzin, on the contrary, had an imposing countenance, the expression of which presented a strange mixture of shrewdness, asceticism, sternness, and raillery. For a long while the pilgrims continued chanting Sclavonic psalms, the mysterious impart of which accorded with the [Pg 380] enthusiastic disposition of their souls. Before they had ended, the sound of footsteps on the deck woke Mr. Y—— from his trance of wonder. The new comer was the non-commissioned officer, and Mr. Y—— desired the man to announce him, although he hardly expected to be admitted at so late an hour. His visit was nevertheless accepted, and the ladies received him with as much ease as if they had been doing the honours of a drawing-room.

In spite of their religious enthusiasm, and the apostolic vocation which they attributed to themselves, it may easily be imagined that these three high-bred ladies, accustomed to all the refinements of luxury, should now and then have had their tempers a little ruffled by the hardships of their journey, and that their mutual harmony should have suffered somewhat in consequence. Their wish, therefore, to separate on their arrival at Taganrok was natural enough. Countess Guacher especially, having made less progress than her companions in the path of perfection, had often revolted against the austere habits imposed on her; but these ebullitions of carnal temper were always brief and transient; and on the day after her visit to the consul, when he returned to the port to announce that the podoroshni was ready, the boat and its passengers had disappeared, and no one could give any information about them.

## II.

The apparition of these ladies in the Crimea threw the whole peninsula into commotion. Eager to make proselytes, they were seen toiling in their *béguine* costume, with the cross and the gospel in their hands, over mountains and valleys, exploring Tatar villages, and even carrying their enthusiasm to the strange length of preaching in the open air to the amazed and puzzled Mussulmans. But as the English consul had predicted, in spite of their mystic fervour, their persuasive voices, and the originality of their enterprise, our heroines effected few conversions. They only succeeded in making themselves thoroughly ridiculous not only in the eyes of the Tatars, but in those also of the Russian nobles of the vicinity, who instead of seconding their efforts, or at least giving them credit for their good intentions, regarded them only as feather-witted *illuminatæ*, capable at most of catechising little children. The police, too, always prompt to take alarm, and having besides received special instructions respecting these ladies, soon threw impediments in the way of all their efforts, so that two months had scarcely elapsed before they were obliged to give up their roving ways, their preachings, and all the fine dreams they had indulged during their long and painful journey. It was a sore mortification for them to renounce the hope of planting a new Thebaid in the mountains of the Crimea. Madame de Krudener could not endure the loss of her illusions; her health, already impaired by many years of an ascetic life, declined rapidly, and within a year from the time of her arrival in the peninsula, there remained no hope of saving her life. She died in 1823, in the arms of her daughter, the Baroness [Pg 381] Berckheim, who had been for some years resident on the southern coast, and became possessed of many documents on the latter part of a life so rich in romantic events: but unfortunately these documents are not destined to see the light.

Princess Gallitzin, whose religious sentiments were perhaps less sincere, thought no more of making conversions after she had installed herself in her delightful villa on the coast. Throwing off for ever the coarse *béguine* robe, she adopted a no less eccentric costume which she retained until her death. It was an Amazonian petticoat, with a cloth vest of a male cut. A Polish cap trimmed with fur completed her attire, that accorded well with the original character of the princess. It is in this dress she is represented in several portraits still to be seen in her villa at Koreis.

The caustic wit that led to her disgrace at the court of St. Petersburg, her stately manners, her name, her prodigious memory, and immense fortune, quickly attracted round her all the notable persons in Southern Russia. Distinguished foreigners eagerly coveted the honour of being introduced to her, and she was soon at the head of a little court, over which she presided like a real sovereign. But being by nature very capricious, the freak sometimes seized her to shut herself up for whole months in total solitude. Although she relapsed into philosophical and Voltairian notions, the remembrance of Madame de Krudener inspired her with occasional fits of devotion that oddly contrasted with her usual habits. It was during one of these visitations that she erected a colossal cross on one of the heights commanding Koreis. The cross being gilded is visible to a great distance.

Her death in 1839 left a void in Russian society which will not easily be filled. Reared in the school of the eighteenth century, well versed in the literature and the arts of France, speaking the language with an entire command of all that light, playful raillery that made it so formidable of yore; having been a near observer of all the events and all the eminent men of the empire; possessing moreover a power of apprehension and discernment that gave equal variety and point to her conversation; a man in mind and variety of knowledge, a woman in grace and frivolity; the Princess Gallitzin belonged by her brilliant qualities and her charming faults to a class that is day by day becoming extinct.

Now that conversation is quite dethroned in France, and exists only in some few salons of Europe, it is hard to conceive the influence formerly exercised by women of talent. Those of our day, more ambitious of obtaining celebrity through the press than of reigning over a social circle, guard the treasures of their imagination and intellect with an anxious reserve that cannot but

prove a real detriment to society. To write feuilletons, romances, and poetry, is all very well; but to preside over a drawing-room, like the women of the eighteenth century, has also its merit. But we must not blame the female sex alone for the loss of that supremacy which once belonged to [Pg 382] French society. The men of the present day, more serious than their predecessors, more occupied with positive, palpable interests, seem to look with cold disdain on what but lately commanded their warmest admiration.

But we have lost sight of the Countess Guacher, who is not for all that the least interesting of our heroines. Resigning herself with much more equanimity than her companions to the necessity of leaving the Tatars alone, she hired for herself, even before their complete separation, a small house standing by itself on the sea shore; and there she took up her abode with only one female attendant. Following the example of the Princess Gallitzin, she threw off the *béguine* robe and assumed a kind of male attire. For some time her existence was almost unknown to her neighbours; so retired were her habits. The only occasions when she was visible was during her rides on horseback on the beach, and it was noticed that she chose the most stormy weather for these excursions.

But her recluse habits did not long conceal her from curious inquiry. A certain Colonel Ivanof, who had noticed the strange proceedings of the pilgrims from their first arrival in the Crimea, set himself to watch the countess, and at last took a house near her retreat; but in order that his presence might not scare her, he contented himself for some weeks with following her at a distance during her lonely promenades, trusting to chance for an opportunity of becoming more intimately acquainted with her. His perseverance was at last rewarded with full success.

One evening, as the colonel stood at his window observing the tokens of an approaching storm, he perceived a person on horseback galloping in the direction of his house, evidently with the intention of seeking shelter. Before this could be accomplished the storm broke out with great fury, and just then the colonel was startled by the discovery that the stranger was his mysterious neighbour. The sequel will be best told in his own words:

"Full of surprise and curiosity I hastened to meet the countess, who entered my doors without honouring me with a single look. She seemed in very bad humour, and concentrated her whole attention upon a tortoise she carried in her left hand. Without uttering a word or caring for the water that streamed from her clothes, she sat down on the divan, and remained for some moments apparently lost in thought. For my part, I continued standing before her, waiting until she should address me, and glad of the opportunity to scrutinise her appearance at my ease. She wore an Amazonian petticoat, a green cloth vest, buttoned over the bosom, a broad-brimmed felt hat, with a pair of pistols in her girdle, and, as I have said, a tortoise in her hand. Her handsome, grave countenance excited my admiration. Below her hat appeared some grey locks, that seemed whitened not so much by years as by sorrow, of which her visage bore the impress.

"Without taking off her hat, the flap of which half concealed her face, she began to warm the [Pg 383] tortoise with her breath, calling it by the pet name *Dushinka* (little soul), which duty being performed she deigned to look up, and perceived me. Her first gesture bespoke extreme surprise. Until then, supposing she was in a Tatar house, she had taken no notice of the objects around her, but the sight of my drawing-room, my library, my piano, and myself, struck her with stupefaction. 'Where am I?' she exclaimed, in hurried alarm. 'Madam,' I replied, 'you are in the house of a man who has long lived as a hermit—a man who like you loves solitude, the sea, and meditation—who has renounced like you the society of his kind to live after his own way in this wilderness.' These words struck her forcibly. 'You, too,' she ejaculated, 'you, too, have divorced yourself from the world, and why? Ay, why?' she repeated, as if conversing with her own thoughts, 'why bury yourself alive here, without friends, without relations, without a heart to respond to yours? Why die this lingering death, when the world is open to you—the world with its delights, its balls and spectacles, its passionate adorations, with the fascinations of the court, the favour of a queen?' Imagine my astonishment to hear her thus in a sort of hallucination, revealing her secret thoughts and recollections. In these few words her whole life was set forth, the life of a beautiful woman, rich, flattered, habituated to the atmosphere of courts.

"After a pause of some duration she entered into conversation with me, questioned me at great length on the way in which I passed my time, on my tastes, the few resources I enjoyed for cultivating the arts, &c. We chatted for more than an hour like old acquaintances, and she seemed quite to have forgotten the strange words she had uttered in the beginning of the interview. Being very much puzzled to know what pleasure she took in carrying the tortoise about with her, I asked her some questions on the subject; but with a solemnity that seemed to me strangely disproportioned to the subject, she told me she had made a vow never to separate from it. 'It is a present from the Emperor Alexander,' she said, 'and as long as I have it near me I shall not utterly despair of my destiny.' Availing myself of this opening I tried to make her talk of the motives that had brought her to the peninsula, but she cut me short by saying that since she had become acquainted with the character of the Tatars she had given up all thought of making converts among them. 'They are men of pure feelings and pure consciences,' she said, impressively; 'why insist on their changing their creed, since they live in accordance with the principles of morality and religion? After all it matters little whether one adores Jesus Christ, Mahomet, or the Grand Lama, if one is charitable, humble, and hospitable.'

"I laughed, and said she spoke rank heresy, and that if she preached such doctrines, she ran great risk of having a bull of excommunication fulminated against her. 'It is since I have given up preaching,' she replied, 'that I have begun to think in this way; solitude makes one regard things in quite a different aspect from that in which they are seen by the world. Only three months ago I [Pg 384] set Catholicism above all religions, and now I meditate one still more perfect and sublime. Will

you be my first disciple?' she said, in a tone between jest and earnest, that left me very uncertain whether she was serious or not. When she left my house I escorted her to her own door, and promised I would call on her the next day."

The second interview was not less curious than the first: the colonel found his neighbour busily at work with a glass spinner's lamp and a blowpipe, making glass beads. She did not allow her visitor's presence to interrupt her operations, but finished before him enough to make a necklace. She then showed him several boxes filled with beads of all sorts, made by her own hands, and said very seriously, "If ever I return to the world I will wear no other ornaments than such pearls as these. It is a stupid thing to wear true ones. See how bright, clear, and large these are! Would any one suppose they were not the produce of the Indian Ocean? So it is with every thing else: what matters the substance if the form is beautiful and pleasing to the eye?" The colonel was about to enter into a grave discussion of this very questionable moral doctrine, very common in the eighteenth century, when suddenly changing the subject, the countess took down a sword that hung at the head of her bed and laid it on his lap. "You see this weapon, colonel: it was given me by a Vendean chief in admiration of my courage; for though a woman I have fought for the good cause, and many a time smelt powder among the bushes and heaths of Bretagne. You need not wonder at my partiality for weapons and for male costume; it is a reminiscence of my youth. A Vendean at heart, I long made part in the heroic bands that withstood the republican armies, and the dangers, hardships, and fiery emotions of partisan warfare are no secrets to me." "But," observed the colonel, "how is it that thus devoted as you are to the royal cause you do not return to your country, where monarchy is again triumphant?" "Hush!" she answered, lowering her voice, "hush! let us say no more of the present or the past. Would you ask the shrub broken by the storm why the breath of spring does not reanimate its mutilated form? Let us leave things as they are, and not strive to repair what is irreparable. Man's justice has pronounced its decree; let us trust in that of God, merciful and infinite, like all that is eternally just and good!"

It was in vain the colonel endeavoured by further questions to become acquainted with that mysterious past to which she could not make any allusion without extreme perturbation of mind; she remained silent, and retired to another room without renewing the conversation.

After these two interviews, Colonel Ivanof had no other opportunity of gathering any hints that could lead him towards a definite conclusion respecting this extraordinary woman, although he saw her almost daily for more than two months. She often talked to him of her residence in London, her friendly relations with the Emperor of Russia, her travels, and her fortune; but of [Pg 385] France not a word. Not an expression of regret, not a name or allusion of any sort, afforded the colonel reason to suspect that his neighbour had left behind her in her native land any objects on which her memory still dwelt. His brain was almost turned at last by the romantic acquaintance he had made. His vanity was piqued, and his desire to solve so difficult an enigma gave him no rest. He diligently perused the history of the French Revolution, in hopes to find in it a clue to his inquiry, but it was to no purpose. He felt completely astray in such a labyrinth. Many great names successively occurred to him as likely to belong to his mysterious neighbour, but there were always some circumstances connected with them that refuted such a supposition.

Perhaps a more matter-of-fact person would at last have discovered the truth; but the colonel's lively imagination led him to embrace the oddest hypothesis. It was his belief that the countess was the illegitimate offspring of a royal amour. Setting out from this principle he put aside all the names proscribed by the revolution, and stuck obstinately to a myth. But tired at last of this pursuit of shadows, he resolved to trust to that chance which had already been so favourable for the clearing up of his uncertainty. Assiduously noting all the lady's eccentricities, he knew not whether to pity or admire her, though very certain that her wits wandered at times.

She frequently received despatches from St. Petersburg, and seemed, notwithstanding her exile, to have retained a certain influence over the mind of the tzar. One day she showed her neighbour a letter from a lady of the court, who thanked her warmly for having obtained from the emperor a regiment which that lady had long been ineffectually soliciting for her son.

So absorbed was the Russian officer by the interest he took in the countess, that he seemed to have forgotten all the world besides; but an unexpected event suddenly put an end to his romantic loiterings, and sent him back to the realities of life. A Frenchman, calling himself Baron X—, arrived one fine morning from St. Petersburg, and established himself without ceremony as the countess's factotum. From that moment all intimacy was broken off between the latter and Colonel Ivanof. The cold, astute behaviour of the baron, and his continual presence, obliged the colonel to retire. It may seem strange that he surrendered the field so quickly to an unknown person, but it was time for him to return to his military duties, and besides, what could he do with a man whose connexion with the countess seemed of old standing, and who watched her with a jealous vigilance enough to discourage the most intrepid curiosity? His departure was scarcely noticed by Madame Guacher, whose habits had undergone an entire change since the arrival of the baron. The incoherence of her mind became more and more visible; it was only at long and uncertain intervals she rode out on horseback; the rest of her time was spent in enduring all sorts of extraordinary mortifications.

Baron X—remained in the Crimea until the death of the countess, which took place in 1823. [Pg 386] Being fully acquainted with all her affairs he was her sole heir, not legally, perhaps, but *de facto*. On leaving the peninsula he proceeded to England, where a large part of our heroine's property was invested, and he afterwards returned to Russia with a considerable fortune.

A curious incident occurred after the death of the countess. As soon as the emperor was informed of the event he despatched a courier to the Crimea, with orders to bring him a casket,

the form, size, and materials of which were described with the most minute exactness. The messenger, assisted by the chief of the police, at first made a fruitless search; but at last, through the information of a waiting woman, the casket was found sealed up, under the bed of the deceased lady. The courier took possession of it and returned with the utmost speed. In ten days he was in St. Petersburg.

The precious casket was delivered to the emperor in his private cabinet, in the presence of two or three courtiers. Alexander was so impatient to open it that he had the lock forced. But alas! what a sad disappointment! The casket contained only—a pair of scissors. It surely was not for the sake of a pair of scissors that Alexander had made one of his Cossacks gallop 4000 versts in a fortnight. Be that as it may, Baron X—was accused of having purloined papers of the highest importance, and unfairly possessed himself of Madame Guacher's fortune. But as he was then on his road to London, the emperor's anger was of no avail.

At a subsequent period, the disclosures made by this man, and the discovery of a curious correspondence, at last revealed the real name of the countess; but the tardy information arrived when there was no longer any one to be interested in it; the emperor was dead, and Colonel Ivanhof was fighting in the Caucasus.

Interred in a corner of the garden belonging to her house, that mysterious woman who had been the subject of so many contradictory rumours, had not even a stone to cover her grave, and to mark to the stranger the spot where rest the remains of the *Countess de Lamothe*, who had been whipped and branded in the Place de Grève, as an accomplice in the scandalous affair of the diamond necklace.[69]

**FOOTNOTE:**

[69] All the facts we have related respecting Madame de Lamothe are positive and perfectly authentic: they were reported to us by persons who had known that lady particularly, and who moreover possessed substantial proofs of her identity. It is chiefly to Mademoiselle Jacquemart, mentioned in "Marshal Marmont's Travels," that we are indebted for the details we have given respecting the arrival of our three heroines in the Crimea. We have ourselves seen in that lady's possession the sword which the countess alleged she had used in the wars of La Vendée, and sundry letters attesting the great influence she exercised over the Emperor Alexander.



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# CHAPTER XXXIX.

IALTA—KOUTCHOUK LAMPAT—PARTHENIT—THE PRINCE DE LIGNE'S HAZEL—OULOU OUZEN; A GARDEN CONVERTED INTO AN AVIARY—TATAR YOUNG WOMEN—EXCURSION TO SOUDAGH— MADEMOISELLE JACQUEMART.

The proximity of Ialta to the most remarkable places on the coast, its harbour, and its delightful situation, make it the rendezvous of all the travellers who flock to the Crimea in the fine season. A packet-boat from Odessa brings every week a large number of passengers, and the harbour is further enlivened by a multitude of small vessels from all parts of the coast. Nothing can be more charming than the sight of that white Ialta, seated at the head of a bay like a beautiful sultana bathing her feet in the sea, and sheltering her fair forehead from the sun under rocks festooned with verdure. Elegant buildings, handsome hotels, and a comfortable, cheerful population, indicate that opulence and pleasure have taken the town under their patronage; its prosperity, indeed, depends entirely on the travellers who fill its hotels for several months of the year. When it belonged to the Greeks it was counted among the most important towns on the coast; but the successive revolutions of the Crimea were fatal to it, and for a long while it remained only a wretched village. At present a custom-house and a garrison complete its pretensions to the style and dignity of a grand town. But nature has been so liberal to it, that instead of wondering at its rapid rise one is rather disposed to think it much inferior to what it might be.

We left Ialta in a tolerably large body, some on horseback, others in carriages. Leaving behind us Aloupka, Mishkor, Koreis, and Oreanda, we soon forgot their sumptuous displays of art for the inexhaustible marvels of nature. Our road lay parallel to the coast, and the continual variations of its admirable scenery made us think the way too short. A storm of rain overtook us in the fine forest of Koutchouk Lampat, and made us all run for shelter. The more advanced of the party easily reached the house of General Borosdin the owner of the property; but those in the rear, of whom I was one, were obliged to take refuge in a pavilion. Whilst we were quietly waiting there until the storm should blow over, the people of the house were seeking for us on all sides, having been sent out by our companions. Several times we saw them passing along at a distance armed with large umbrellas; but as there was a billiard-table in the pavilion we never showed ourselves

until we had finished an interesting game. The châtelain of Koutchouk Lampat, delighted to receive so numerous a party, entertained us with an excellent collation, in which figured all the wines of France and Spain.

A few leagues from Koutchouk Lampat lies Parthenit, a village where, for the first time, I received a mark of civility from Tatar females. As I entered the place, keeping in the rear of the [Pg 388] others according to my usual custom, I passed in front of a house in the large balcony of which there were three veiled women. Just as I passed beneath the balcony I slackened my horse's pace and made some friendly signals to them, whereupon, one of them, and I make no doubt the prettiest, repeatedly kissed a large bouquet of lily of the valley she held, and threw it to me so adroitly that it fell into my hand. Delighted with the present, I hastened up to my companions and showed it to them; but they were all malicious enough to assure me that the gift had been addressed not to myself but to my clothes. The reader will remember that I travelled in male costume.

At Parthenit we failed not to sit under the famous hazel-tree of the Prince de Ligne. Its foliage is so thick and spreading that it overshadows a whole *place*. The trunk is not less than eight yards in circumference, and is surrounded by a large wooden divan, almost always occupied by travellers, who use it as a tavern. The inhabitants of Parthenit regard this tree with great affection, and beneath its shade they discuss all the important affairs of the village. A limpid fountain, the waters of which are distributed through several channels, adds to the charm of the spot. Our whole cavalcade was completely sheltered under the dome of the magnificent hazel. The Tatars brought us sweetmeats, coffee, and fresh eggs, and obstinately refused to take payment for them. Almost the whole population came to see us, but their curiosity was not at all obtrusive. Such of them as had no immediate business with us kept a respectful distance.

On leaving Parthenit we passed very close to some old fortifications covering a whole hill with their imposing ruins. At evening we arrived at the post station of Alouchta,[70] where our party was to break up. Some of our companions returned to Ialta, others proceeded towards Simpheropol; whilst we ourselves, accompanied by a single Tatar and our dragoman, set out by the sea-coast for Oulou Ouzen. The distance was but twelve versts, but we spent several hours upon it, in consequence of the difficulty of the ground and the steepness of the cliffs which we were often obliged to ascend. We met no one on the way; this part of the coast is quite deserted and sterile.

Oulou Ouzen, our point of destination, is a narrow valley opening on the sea, and belonging to Madame Lang, who has covered it with vineyards and orchards. A week passed quickly away in the agreeable society of our hostess, whose residence is one of the prettiest in the country. Being very fond of birds, she has succeeded by a very simple process in converting her garden into a great aviary. On the day we arrived we were surprised to see her continually assailed by a flock [Pg 389] of pretty titmice that pecked at her hair and hands with extraordinary familiarity. They were the progeny in the third and fourth generation of a pair she had reared two years before, and had liberated in the beginning of spring. Next year they returned with a young brood that grew used by degrees to feed on the balcony, and at last to eat out of her hands. These in their turn brought her their young ones; other birds followed their example, and thus she has always a flock of gay dwellers of the air perching and fluttering about her balcony, which is covered with nets to protect them from birds of prey.

At Madame Lang's we met a very agreeable gentleman and a great admirer of the Crimea, M. Montandon, who has written an excellent itinerary of the country. We talked a great deal with him about a French lady, Mademoiselle Jacquemart, whose acquaintance my husband had made some months previously. She has resided for the last fifteen years in Soudagh, a valley near Oulou Ouzen. The Duc de Raguse speaks at great length of her in his *Excursion en Crimée*, and relates the tragic adventure of which she was the heroine some years ago, but he assigns for it a romantic cause which Mademoiselle Jacquemart has absolutely contradicted.

Few ladies have passed through a more eccentric life than Mademoiselle Jacquemart. In her young days, her beauty, her talents, and her wit invested her with a celebrity, such as rarely falls to the lot of one in the humble position of a governess. After having lived long in the great world of St. Petersburg and of Vienna, she suddenly withdrew to the Crimea, where, having like many others almost ruined herself by vintage speculations, she purchased the little property in which she now resides. Her history and her unusual energy of character led to a close intimacy between her and the old Princess Gallitzin, who was herself enough of an original character to like every thing uncommon, and Mademoiselle Jacquemart was an habitual guest at Koreis.

Before we left Oulou Ouzen we went to spend a day with Madame Lang's only neighbour, an old bachelor, who lives quite alone, not out of misanthropy, but that he may devote himself without interruption to his favourite pursuit of botany. A deep ravine between the two properties, and a steep descent overlooking the sea, render the road so dangerous that ladies can venture to traverse it only in a vehicle drawn by oxen. It was in this strange equipage, guided by a Tatar armed with a long goad, that we reached the house of M. Faviski, who was quite delighted, but greatly puzzled to receive ladies. He did the honours of his bachelor's dwelling, nevertheless, like a very well-bred gentleman.

While we were waiting for dinner, Madame Lang conceived the happy thought of sending for all the Tatar beauties of the village that I might see them. When they arrived, the gentlemen were obliged to leave the room, which was immediately entered by a dozen of pretty bashful young [Pg 390] women, looking like a herd of scared gazelles. But after a few words from Madame Lang, who speaks Tatar very well, they soon became familiarised with our strange faces, and grew very

merry. They took off their veils and papouches at our request, and favoured us with an Oriental dance. One of them quite astonished me by the magnificent lineaments of her face, which reminded me of the head of an empress on an ancient medal. They examined all the details of our toilette with childlike curiosity, and exacted from us the same attentive notice of the embroidery on their bodices and veils. Meanwhile, so amused were we by this scene, that we had quite forgotten the gentlemen whom we had turned out, and who now began to thump lustily at the door. The Tatar women were now thrown into the most picturesque and comical disorder, and ran about in all directions looking for their veils. In the midst of the confusion I was wicked enough to hide the veil and slippers of the young beauty, and then throw the door wide open. It was curious to see the dismay of the poor blushing creature who knew not how to escape from the bold admiration of several men. She had never in her life been in such a situation before; so when I thought the gentlemen had sufficiently indulged their curiosity, I hastened to relieve her by returning her veil.

Next day, after a fatiguing journey, we reached Soudagh in the evening. It was with no little interest I beheld the humble abode of a woman of talent, who, through some unaccountable whim, had quitted the world while still young, and retired to almost absolute solitude. She was glad to receive the visit of compatriots, and talked frankly to us of the hardships and discomforts of a life she had not the courage to abandon. The extreme loneliness of her dwelling exposed her to frequent attacks by night, and obliged her to have a brace of pistols always at the head of her bed. People stole her fruit, her poultry, and even her vines; she was kept continually on the alert, and had the fear before her of repetition of the horrible attempt to which she was once near falling a victim.

The account she herself gave us of that affair was as follows. Two days before it happened, a Greek applied to her for work and food. Not having any employment for him, she gave him some provisions, and advised him to look elsewhere for work. The next day but one, as she was returning in the evening from a geological excursion, carrying in her hand a small hatchet she used for breaking pebbles, she perceived the same man walking behind her in silence. Feeling some uneasiness, she turned round to look in the Greek's face; but at that moment she felt herself grasped round the waist, the hatchet was snatched out of her hand, and she received several blows with it on the head that deprived her of all consciousness. When her senses returned the assassin had disappeared. How she reached home with her skull fractured, she never could explain. For many months her life was in imminent danger, and her reason was impaired. At the time we saw her she still suffered acutely from some splinters of a comb that remained in her head. This is a much less romantic story than that told by Marmont. [Pg 391]

**FOOTNOTE:**

[70] About A.D. 465, the Khersonites invoked the protection of the emperors of the East against the Huns. Justinian seized the opportunity to erect the two fortresses of Alouchta and Oursouf, by means of which he subsequently rendered the republic of Kherson tributary to the empire. There still exist at Alouchta three large towers that formed part of the imperial castle.

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# CHAPTER XL.

RUINS OF SOLDAYA—ROAD TO THEODOSIA—CAFFA—MUSCOVITE VANDALISM—PENINSULA OF KERTCH—PANTICAPEA AND ITS TOMBS.

Leaving my wife to return with Mademoiselle Jacquemart to Oulou Ouzen, I took my way by the lower part of the valley of Soudagh through a labyrinth of vineyards and meadows covered with blossoming peach and apricot trees. Passing the paltry village that has borrowed one of the names of the celebrated Soldaya, we soon arrived at the sea beach at the foot of the triple castle erected by the intrepid Genoese, in 1365, on the site of a city they had just conquered, and which had flourished under the successive dominion of the Greeks, the Komans, and the Tatars.

The origin of Soldaya, or Sougdai, belongs to the most remote periods of Crimean history. In the eighth century it was a bishop's see, and though then dependent on the Greek empire it boasted not the less of its own sovereigns. Four centuries afterwards, in 1204, the Komans, an Asiatic people, expelled from their own territories, and driven westward by the hordes of Genghis Khan, entered the Crimea, where they were the precursors of that terrible Mongol invasion that was soon to overwhelm all the east of Europe. The arrivals of these fugitives was fatal to the Greek settlements; the princes of Soldaya were exterminated, and the victors took possession of their capital. But the Komans did not long enjoy their conquests. Overtaken a second time by the rapid current of the Mongol invasion, they were obliged to abandon the Crimea after thirty years' possession, and seek an asylum in the most western regions of Thrace.

Under the Mongol dominion the Greeks returned to Soldaya, which again became a Christian town, and the most important port of the peninsula. It was tributary, indeed, to the Tatars, but it had a bishop and its own administration.

In the beginning of the fourteenth century, when the Tatars of the Kaptchak adopted the religion of Mahomet, Mussulman fanaticism prevailed for a while in the Crimea, the Christians were expelled from Soldaya and their numerous churches were converted into mosques. But it is a remarkable fact that the word of a pope, John XXII., was of such force in 1323, that Ousbeck Khan allowed the exiles to resume possession of their city with the enjoyment of their ancient [Pg 392] privileges.

But twenty years had elapsed when a fresh revolution, occasioned by intestine disorder and dissensions, finally extinguished all trace of the Greek sway in Soldaya. The Genoese, who had for nearly a century been masters of Caffa, incorporated the ancient capital of the Komans with their own territory on the 18th of June, 1365.[71] Then it was that in order to secure their possession of the fertile territory of Soudagh and defend it against the Tatars, the enterprising merchant princes erected, on the most inaccessible rock at the entrance of the valley, that formidable fortress of three stories, crowned by the gigantic Maiden Tower (*Kize Kouleh*) whence the warders could overlook the fort, the sea, and the adjacent regions.

The Genoese remained in quiet possession of their castle for more than a century; but after the taking of Constantinople by Mahomet II., and the almost immediate destruction of Caffa, the capital of the Crimean colonies, Soldaya, shared the same fate. The Turks laid siege to the fortress in 1475. It made a long and obstinate resistance, and famine alone overcame the valour of the garrison.[72]

With the Genoese sway, fell all that had constituted the glory and prosperity of Soldaya during so many centuries; the population of the town was driven out and scattered; the once animated harbour was deserted, and grass grew in the streets trodden of yore by the elegant Greeks of the Lower Empire, the victorious Komans and the proud citizens of Genoa. A feeble Turkish garrison became the tenants of the place, and for nearly three centuries continued the unmoved spectators of the decay and desolation of one of the oldest and most remarkable cities of the Pontus Euxinus.

The imperial eagle of the tzars floated over the towers of Soldaya in 1781, and from that time began for the monuments of the Genoese colony that rapid destruction which everywhere characterises the Russian conquests. All the beautiful public and private buildings which Pallas so much admired in his first journey, disappeared, and out of their precious remains, Muscovite vandalism erected great useless barracks, the unmeaning ruins of which have, for many years, strewed the ground. At present Soldaya, erased from the list of towns and fortresses, has not even a watchman to guard its walls and its magnificent towers with their proud inscriptions. Every year the sight is saddened by fresh mutilations, and ere long there will remain nothing of [Pg 393] those marble tablets with their elegant arabesques that adorned every tower and doorway, and recorded its origin and history. The only thing that could save the Genoese castle from total destruction, would be to leave it quite alone, and to remove far from it every body of Russian authorities. Unfortunately, the government seems willing to take upon itself the care of its preservation, and there can be no doubt that demolition awaits the remains of Soldaya from the moment an *employé*, without salary enough to live on, shall be invested with the right of protecting them against the ravages of time and of men.[73]

On leaving Soldaya we proceeded towards Theodosia, the Caffa of the Genoese. We will not weary the reader with a monotonous description of our route. This part of the country is less diversified, less beautiful and picturesque, and the population much more thinly spread than in the other mountainous parts of the Crimea. The great calcareous chain recedes considerably from the coast, and from its precipitous sides it sends off blackish schistous offshoots, scarcely covered by a meagre vegetation, enclosing between them in their course to the sea some valleys in which the Tatars have established the only villages in the country. Completely abandoned by the aristocracy, destitute of roads, and unadorned by any of those elegant dwellings with which luxury and fashion have embellished the hill sides of Ialta, the whole coast between Alouchta and Theodosia is neglected by most tourists, and is only visited at rare intervals by scientific travellers. But if the Soudagh coasts are disdained by the Russian nobles, and display no Italian villas or porphyry gothic manors, the traveller finds there the most frank reception and truly Oriental hospitality. Far from all the centres of the elegant and partly corrupt civilisation which the Russians have imported into the Crimea within the last twenty years, the Tatars of these regions retain unaltered their ancient usages, and the prominent features of their primitive character. I could not easily describe the kindly good-will with which I was received in all the villages where I stopped. The fact that I was a Frenchman, who had nothing to do with any branch of Russian administration, had a really marvellous effect on the mountaineers. Wherever I went the best house, the handsomest divan, cushions, and carpets were assigned for my use; and in an instant I found myself sipping my coffee and smoking my chibouk, surrounded with all those comforts the want of which is so sorely felt by those who travel in certain parts of the East.

In Toklouk, Kooz, and Otouz, which we passed through successively, the flat-roofed Tatar houses are, as everywhere else, backed against the hills that flank the valley. By this means the inhabitants are enabled to keep up a communication with each other by the terrace tops of their [Pg 394] houses, where they regularly carry on their work, and which are formed of stout carpentry covered with a thick bed of clay. Nothing can be more picturesque than the appearance, at evening, of all these terraces rising in gradations one above the other. At that period of the day the whole population of each village is on the alert; and quitting the dark rooms in which they

had sheltered from the heat of the day, men, women, and children gather on the roofs; animation, mirth, and the din of tongues, takes place of the silence of day, and the observer is never weary of watching the picturesque scenes formed by the various groups engaged in their household occupations.

At Koktebel, a little village on the sea shore, twenty-nine versts from Soudagh, the sombre headland Kara Dagh terminates the bolder scenery of the Crimea. Beyond that point the country presents no picturesque features; vast plains gradually succeed the hills, and as the traveller advances he is forewarned by various tokens of his approach to the steppes, which form all the northern part of the peninsula, and extend eastward of the old Genoese colony to the shores of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Along the whole line from Soudagh to Theodosia there is not one point, not one monument or ruin to interest the historian or the antiquarian. Indeed the nature of the coast, now abrupt, now formed of great unsheltered flats, does not seem to favour the foundation of a town or of a harbour, whether for war or commerce.

We are now arrived at Theodosia or Caffa, formerly the splendid metropolis of the Genoese dominion in the Black Sea, now a Russian town, stripped of all political and commercial importance. The genius of barbarous destruction has wrought still more deplorable effects here than at Soldaya or any other spot in the Crimea.

Theodosia was founded by the Milesians in the early times of their expedition to the Pontus Euxinus, and long prospered as an independent colony. It was afterwards incorporated into the kingdom of the Bosphorus, and shared its destinies for many centuries. The Alans, a barbarous people from the heart of Asia, appeared in the Crimea about the middle of the first century of our era; Theodosia was sacked by them, and sixty years afterwards Arrian speaks of it in his *Periplus of the Black Sea* as a town entirely deserted. The Huns subsequently completed what the Alans had begun, and left not a vestige to indicate the true position of the old Milesian colony.

Ten centuries after the destruction of Theodosia, other navigators not less intelligent or enterprising than the Milesians, landed on the Crimean coasts; and soon there arose on the site of the Greek city another equally remarkable city, the annals of which form unquestionably one of the finest chapters in the political and commercial history of the Black Sea. It was in the middle of the thirteenth century, after the conquest of the Crimea by the Mongols, when three potent [Pg 395] republics were contending for the empire of the seas, that the Genoese, entering the bay of Theodosia, obtained from Prince Oran Timour the grant of a small portion of ground on the coast. The colony of Caffa was regularly founded in 1280, and so rapid was its rise, that in nine years from that date it was able, without impairing its own means of defence, to send nine galleys to the succour of Tripoli, then besieged by the Saracens.[74]

The foundation of Caffa increased the rancorous strife between Genoa and her potent rival of the Adriatic. The Crimean colony was surprised by twenty Venetian galleys in the year 1292, and totally destroyed. In the following year the Genoese again took possession of their territory; Caffa quickly rose from its ruins, and twenty years afterwards Pope John XXII. made it a bishop's see. War having broke out with the Tatars in 1343, Djanibeck Khan, sovereign of Kaptchak, laid siege to Caffa. The Genoese came off victorious in this warfare, but the dangers to which they were exposed made them feel the need of a strong system of fortifications. The earthen ramparts and the palisades of the town were, therefore, replaced by thick and lofty walls, flanked by towers, and surrounded by a deep, wide ditch, faced with solid masonry. These magnificent works, whose excellence and gigantic proportions may still be admired by the traveller, were begun in 1353, and finished in 1386. The most remarkable tower, that at the southern corner which commands the whole town, was dedicated to the memory of Pope Clement VI., in an inscription relating to the crusade preached by that pontiff at the time when the Tatars were invading the colony.

From that period the prosperity of Caffa augmented incessantly; it attracted to itself the trade of the most remote regions of Asia, and according to the statement of its historians it soon equalled in extent and population the capital of the Greek empire, which it surpassed in industry and opulence. The Genoese colony had thus reached the apogee of its glory and might in the middle of the fifteenth century, when the taking of Constantinople by Mahomet II. cut it off from the metropolis, and prepared its entire destruction.

On the 1st of June, 1475, a fleet of 482 vessels, commanded by the high admiral Achmet Pacha, appeared before Caffa, which was immediately bombarded by the formidable Ottoman artillery. The attack was of short duration; large portions of the walls, erected at a period when the use of cannons was unknown, were rapidly dismantled; breaches were made in all directions, and the besieged were forced to surrender at discretion on the 6th of June, 1475, after ineffectually attempting to obtain terms of capitulation.

Achmet Pacha entered Caffa as an incensed victor and an enemy of the Christian name. After taking possession of the consular palace, he disarmed the population, imposed an enormous fine on the town, and then seized half the property of the inhabitants, and all the slaves of both sexes. [Pg 396] The Latin Catholics were shipped on board the Turkish fleet and carried to Constantinople, where the sultan, established them by force in the suburbs of his new capital, after taking from them 1500 male children to be brought up as members of his guard. Thus was annihilated in the space of a few days, after 200 years of glorious existence, that magnificent establishment which the genius of Europe had erected on those remote shores, and which had shed such lustre on the commerce of the Black Sea.

Caffa, the destruction of which was immediately followed by that of Soldaya and Cembalo, was annexed to the Turkish dominions, and for upwards of 550 years had no other importance than what it derived from its Turkish garrison and its military position on the shore of a Mussulman

region, the absolute conquest of which never ceased to be an object of the Porte's ambition. In the middle of the seventeenth century, the old Genoese city awoke from its long trance, and in consequence of the commercial and industrial movement which then took place among the Tatars, it again became the great trading port of the Black Sea. Chardin, on his journey to Persia in 1663, found more than 400 vessels in the bay of Caffa. The town, to which the Turks then gave the name of Koutchouk Stamboul (Little Constantinople) contained 4000 houses, with a population exceeding 80,000 souls.

The new prosperity of Caffa was short lived. From the time of Peter the Great Russia pursued her threatening advance towards the regions of the Black Sea, and in 1783, in the reign of the Empress Catherine II., the Crimea was finally incorporated with the Muscovite empire. Caffa now accomplished the last stage of its destinies; it lost even officially its time-honoured name, and under the pompous appellation of the Greek Colony, bestowed on it by the Emperor Alexander, it became a paltry district town, to which authentic documents assign at the present day scarcely 4500 inhabitants. At Caffa, just as at Soldaya, the construction of useless barracks occasioned the demolition of the Genoese edifices. The facings of the ditches were first carried off, and then, emboldened by the deplorable indifference of the government, the destroyers laid hands on the walls themselves. The magnificent towers that defended them were pulled down, and there now remain only three fragments of walls belonging to the remarkable bastion erected in honour of Pope Clement VI. When the Genoese fortifications had been destroyed, the civil monuments next fell under the ruthless vandalism of the authorities. At the time the Russians took possession, two imposing edifices adorned the principal square of Caffa, the great Turkish baths, an admirable model of Oriental architecture, and the ancient episcopal church of the Genoese, built in the beginning of the fourteenth century, and converted into a mosque after the Turkish conquest. It was decided in the reign of Catherine II. that the mosque should be restored to the Greek church, but unfortunately instead of preserving it unaltered, the fatal project of adorning it with wretched [Pg 397] doric porticoes was adopted. The elegant domes that so gracefully encompassed the main building were, therefore, demolished; but scarcely were the bases of the columns laid when a trifling deficit occurred in the funds, as M. Dubois relates, and thenceforth the government refused to make any further advances.

The beautiful mosque which had been quickly stripped of its lead, to be sold, of course, for the benefit of the Russian officials, was thus abandoned to the mutilations of time and of the population, and soon became a mere ruin. In 1833, the ignorance of a civil governor, Kasnatcheief, completed this afflicting work of destruction, which extended at the same time to the great baths that still remained untouched. A fortnight's work with the pickaxe and gunpowder razed to the ground the two admirable monuments with which the Genoese and the Turks had adorned the town. When I visited Theodosia in 1840, the great square was still obstructed with their precious materials, which the local administration was eager to dispose of at a low price to whoever would buy them.

Of all the splendid edifices of the Genoese colony two churches alone have escaped the destroyer; art owes their preservation to the Catholics and the Armenians. For a very long time those two foreign communities struggled against the indifference of the government, and strove to obtain its aid for the repair of their edifices; but their applications were all unsuccessful, and it was by great personal sacrifices that they succeeded in recent times in themselves effecting the restoration of their temples.

If we turn our attention from the interior of the town to its environs, we are still afflicted by the same spectacle of destruction. All the thriving fields and orchards that encompassed the town in the time of the Tatars have disappeared. Two Muscovite regiments annihilated in a single winter all trace of the rich cultivation that formerly clothed the hills.

There is a museum in Theodosia, but except some Genoese inscriptions, foremost among which is that of the famous tower of Clement VI., it contains no remains belonging to the ancient Milesian colony. All the antiquities it possesses come exclusively from Kertsch (Panticapea), and were brought to Theodosia at a period when that town was still the chief seat of the administration of the Crimea. Dr. Grapperon, a Frenchman, is the director of the museum. He never fails to mystify the antiquaries who pass through his town, by exhibiting to them a pretended female torso, found in the heart of the Crimean mountains; but the cunning old man knows very well that his chef-d'œuvre is only a *lusus naturæ*.

Notwithstanding all the depredations of the authorities, and the stupid ignorance of a governor, Caffa has not been entirely metamorphosed into a Russian town. Its chief edifices have been demolished, its walls razed, its Tatar population expelled, and solitude has succeeded to its former animation, yet the general appearance of the city, its various private buildings, and its [Pg 398] streets paved with large flags, all bespeak a foreign origin and a foreign rule. Long may the town preserve this picturesque aspect, which reminds the traveller of that of the little Mediterranean seaports.

After three days spent in exploring the ruins of the Genoese colony, days rendered doubly agreeable by the varied and instructive conversation of my kind cicerone, M. Felix Lagorio,[75] I set out again to continue my investigations as far as the most eastern point of the Crimea. It is from the point where the last hills of the Crimean chain subside at the foot of the walls of Theodosia that the celebrated peninsula of Kertch begins, which extends between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azof to the shores of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. As I traversed its now deserted and arid plains, where nothing seems formed to arrest the attention for a single moment, my mind went back with astonishment to those glorious times when flourished the numerous opulent towns which the colonising genius of the Milesians erected in these regions. Theodosia, Nimphea,

Mirmikione, and on the other side of the strait Phanagoria, crowded the brilliant historic scene called up by my recollections; but above them all stood Panticapea, the celebrated capital of the kingdom of the Bosphorus, where Greek elegance and civilisation reigned for so many ages, and where Mithridates died after having for a while menaced the existence of the Roman empire. While my imagination was thus reconstructing the splendid panorama which the peninsula must have presented when the Bosphorians had covered it with their rich establishments, the Russian pereclatnoi was carrying me along through vast solitudes, where I sought in vain to discover some traces of that ancient Greek dominion, the grandeur and prosperity of which were extolled by Herodotus five centuries before the Christian era. Towards evening only, as I approached the Bosphorus, my curiosity was strongly excited by the singular indentations which the steppe exhibited along the line of the horizon, and soon afterwards I found myself in the midst of one of the chief necropolises of the ancient Milesian city. Huge cones of earth rose around me, and numerous coral crags, mingled with the mounds erected by the hands of men, enhanced the grandeur of this singular cemetery. On reaching the extremity of the plateau, I could overlook the whole extent of the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The last rays of the setting sun were colouring the cliffs on the Asiatic side, and the triangular sails of some fishing boats; the many tumuli of Phanagoria stood in full relief against the blue sky, and whilst the melancholy hue of evening was gradually stealing upon the smooth waters of the channel, the deeply-marked shadow of Cape Akbouroun was already spreading far over them. I had but a few seconds to admire these magnificent effects of light and shade: the sun dipped below the horizon, and twilight [Pg 399] immediately invested the scene with its uniform hues. Ten minutes afterwards I entered Kertch, a Russian town of yesterday, stretching along the sea at the foot of the celebrated rock which popular tradition has decked with the name of Mithridates' Chair. It was on the side of this mountain, formerly crowned by an acropolis, that the capital of the kingdom of the Bosphorus expanded like an amphitheatre. A few mutilated fragments are all that now exist of Panticapea; the hill on which it stood is parched, bare, and rent by deep ravines, and modern archæologists have had much difficulty in positively determining the site of the most celebrated of the Milesian colonies.

Having taken up my quarters in Kertch under the hospitable roof of M. Menestrier, one of the most agreeable of my countrymen I have met in my travels, I set earnestly about my excursions, and through the obliging kindness of Prince Kherkeoulitchev, the governor of the town, I was soon in possession of all the data requisite to guide me in my researches. I shall not, however, obtrude upon the reader all the archæological notes with which I enriched my journal, while exploring the tombs and monuments of Panticapea, since I have been anticipated in this respect by others more competent in such matters, especially M. Dubois Montperreux.

In roaming about the environs of Kertch, among the innumerable tumuli, that served as tombs for the sovereigns and wealthy citizens of Panticapea, one is instantly struck by the exceedingly slovenly and mischievous manner in which every opening of these mounds has been performed during the last twenty years. Instead of seeking to preserve these precious monuments bequeathed unaltered to them by so many generations, the Russians have been only bent on destroying them, in order to arrive the sooner at the discovery of the valuable contents thought to be enclosed within them. All the tumuli *against* which official exploratory operations have been directed, have been totally demolished, or cut in four by wide trenches from the summit to the base, and no one has even thought of effecting the required researches by means either of a vertical shaft or by tunnelling.

I have visited all the chief points where the destructive genius of the Muscovite archæologists has been exercised; but it would be impossible for me to describe the grief I felt at the sight of such horrible devastation. They have not contented themselves with destroying the form of the monuments; the inner chambers and the mortal remains within them have been no more respected than the earth and stones that had protected them for so many ages from all profanation. The bones have everywhere been taken out of the tombs, and exposed on the surface of the ground to the inclemency of the weather. M. Menestrier, of whom I have spoken above, and whose generous indignation has not spared the directors of these operations, had one day to bury with his own hands the still entire skeleton of a young woman. I have myself seen soldiers [Pg 400] warming themselves at large fires which they fed with the precious fragments of wooden sarcophagi they had just discovered.

Among the various tumuli, that situated near the quarantine establishment north of the town, unquestionably deserved especial attention on the part of the local administration. Considering the gigantic dimensions of its central chamber and gallery, both having corbelled ceilings, it was a truly unique monument, which the government should have been solicitous to transmit unimpaired to future generations. The entrance gallery is 36.25 mètres long, 2.80 wide, and 7.50 high. The five lower courses forming the basement are each 0.45 thick. Then come twelve other courses, only 0.40 high, and rising in corbels so as to form a series of regular projections on the interior of 0.12. The two upper courses, which have an interval of 0.25 between them, instead of being joined by keystones, are merely covered with large flags laid flat in mortar. The stability of such ceilings is evidently contrary to all the rules of art, and it is probable that in erecting them the builders must have used numerous wooden props and trusts, until the whole structure was consolidated by a sufficient load of earth. A rectangular opening at the end of the gallery three mètres high and 2.35 wide, gives admission into the interior of the central chamber or cupola.

The base of the cupola consists of four courses, of 0.40 to 0.45 in thickness, forming a total height of 1.85. The ground plan of this part is an irregular square, the sides of which are 4.50, 4.40, 4.45 and 4.30. Above the fifth course the four angles are filled in by stones forming a

circular projection of 0.30 in the line of the diagonal. The same thing is repeated in the succeeding courses. The curved portions thus gradually increase in extent, until at the ninth course they form together a complete circle, the diameter of which diminishes with each succeeding course, until at top there is only a circular opening of 0.70 diameter, which is closed in the same manner as the upper part of the entrance gallery. The total height of the cupola is 9.10. The material is tertiary shell limestone, large quarries of which exist in the neighbourhood. Of all the tombs recently explored by the Russians, that of the quarantine is the only one which had been previously opened. It was found completely empty. The first examination appears to have occurred at a very early date; perhaps at the time when the Genoese possessed the small fort of Cerco, at the foot of the mountain of Panticapea.

Of the tombs with semi-circular arches, that discovered in the summer of 1841 is among the most remarkable. It consists of two distinct chambers communicating with each other. In the centre of the inner one was found a wooden sarcophagus with a male skeleton having a crown of dead gold on the skull. It was from this sarcophagus that the wooden target was taken representing a fight between a stag and a griffin, which I have presented to the Cabinet of [Pg 401] Antiquities of the Bibliothèque du Roi. Another coffin found in the centre of the outer chamber contained a female skeleton in a wonderful state of preservation. The smallest bones of the fingers and toes were perfect, and where the skull lay was seen a large quantity of light brown hair. The garments even retained their form and colour, but they fell to pieces at the least touch. In this chamber, to the right on entering, there was a small niche, in which had been deposited the body of a child, with a bronze lamp and two lacrymatories, one of them of glass, beside it. I have the last two in my possession.

In 1841, when I first explored the remains of Panticapea, this remarkable tomb, which excited the admiration of all artists, served as a place of shelter for the cattle of the neighbourhood, and its fine entrance gallery was falling to ruin. Some months after my departure the work of destruction was carried on in the face of day, and the magnificent pavement of the chamber was shamelessly carried off. At Soudagh and Theodosia, I could in some degree account for the disastrous effects of administrative recklessness; the ignorant governors to whom was committed the sole custody of the antiquities of those towns, could see in the buildings of past ages only a quarry to be worked for their own profit. But at Kertch, which possesses a museum, and a committee of *savans* to superintend the processes for exploring its antiquities, such destruction appeared to me quite incomprehensible. It is true the Russian government cares little about the preservation of monuments, even of such as directly concern its own history; it granted only 4000 paper rubles for the investigations, and seems in reality to be interested only about objects of art, such as Etruscan vases, gold ornaments, small statues, &c., which may serve to decorate the rooms of the Hermitage; but there exists in Southern Russia a numerous society of antiquaries, officially constituted, and there cannot be a question, that if it would or could fulfil in some small degree the nominal purpose of its creation, it would immediately obtain from the emperor all the necessary supplies for the conservation of the monuments in the peninsula of Kertch. Unhappily, that general indifference to intellectual pursuits, which we have dwelt on in a preceding chapter, prevails as much with regard to archeology as any thing else. When I examined the exploring works, and conversed with the learned gentlemen that directed them, I could not help seeing before me, instead of the love of knowledge, palpable evidence of private interest and ambition employing all means to rise in the nobiliary scale of the empire; and whilst the Russian journals trumpeted forth the admirable discoveries made in the name of the history of mankind, every man of those who were disturbing the ashes of the ancient Panticapea thought only of augmenting his own income, or gaining a grade or a decoration.

Another proof how secondary a consideration in these researches is the interest of learning and history, is the scandalous neglect of the sarcophagi, the bas-reliefs, the architectural fragments, [Pg 402] and, in a word, all the large sculptures that cannot be sent to St. Petersburg and laid before his majesty. When I visited the museum of Kertch, I found the approaches to the building filled with antiques, which lay on the ground without any shelter. The noses and chins of the principal figures on the bas-reliefs had just been broken, perhaps that very morning; yet the learned committee had not thought of making the least complaint, so little importance did it attach to the matter. In passing through the various halls of the museum, I everywhere noticed the same negligence, and tokens of incessant pillage. Among other relics the destruction of which I had to deplore, I was shown the remains of a magnificent wooden sarcophagus, which had been found in perfect condition. It was enriched with Greek carvings, the prominent parts of which were gilded, and the hollow parts painted red, and it was in my opinion the most interesting piece in the museum. Thanks, however, to the obliging disposition shown by the keepers towards strangers, I doubt if a fragment or two of it yet remain at this moment. We should never have done, if we were to recite all the acts of vandalism and depredation of which the museum of Kertch has been the theatre. The details which we have given will sufficiently indicate the value of the archeological labours carried on upon the site of the ancient Panticapea; may the remonstrances we here put forth in the name of art, literature, and science, attract the notice of all those Russians who take a real interest in the historical monuments of their country.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[71] Superbi discordes et desides Græci a Genuensibus Italis fracti et debilitati civitatem eam amiserant (Martini Briniovii Tartaria, 1575).

[72] Cum obsidionem diuturnam ac famem, Genuenses diutius ferre nee impetum tam numerosi exercitus Turcorum sustinere amplius possent, in maximum tempum illud,

quod adhuc ibi integrum est, centeni aliquot vel mille fere viri egregii sese receperant, et per dies aliquot in arce inferiori in quam Turcæ irruperant fortiter et animose sese defendentes, insigni et memorabili Turcarum strage edita tandem in templo illo universi concidere.—Ibid.

[73] For a more detailed description of the ruins of Soudagh, see the remarkable work of M. Dubois de Montperreux. Paris, 1843.

[74] Giust. Ann. di Genova, lib. iii.

[75] Formerly French Consul at Theodosia; deprived of his place for his opinions upon the return of the Bourbons, and now filling the humble functions of Neapolitan consular agent. He is the author of a valuable work on the political revolutions of the Crimea.

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# CHAPTER XLI.

## POLITICAL AND COMMERCIAL REVOLUTIONS OF THE CRIMEA.

EXTENT AND CHARACTER OF SURFACE—MILESIAN AND HERACLEAN COLONIES—KINGDOM OF THE BOSPHORUS—EXPORT AND IMPORT TRADE IN THE TIMES OF THE GREEK REPUBLICS—MITHRIDATES—THE KINGDOM OF THE BOSPHORUS UNDER THE ROMANS—THE ALANS AND GOTHS—SITUATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF KHERSON—THE HUNS; DESTRUCTION OF THE KINGDOM OF THE BOSPHORUS—THE KHERSONITES PUT THEMSELVES UNDER THE PROTECTION OF THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE—DOMINION OF THE KHAZARS—THE PETCHENEGUES AND KOMANS—THE KINGDOM OF LITTLE TATARY—RISE AND FALL OF THE GENOESE COLONIES—THE CRIMEA UNDER THE TATARS—ITS CONQUEST BY THE RUSSIANS.

The Crimea comprises a surface of about 1100 square geographic leagues, divided into two distinct regions. The first of these is mountainous, and forms a strip of about ninety-five English miles in length along the southern coast, with a mean breadth of from twelve to sixteen miles; the second, the region of the plains, presents all the characters of the steppes of Southern Russia, [Pg 403] and extends northward to the isthmus of Perecop, which connects the peninsula with the continent. The Crimea now forms part of the government called the Taurid, the territory of which extends beyond Perecop, between the Dniepr and the Sea of Azof, to the 47th degree of latitude. Simpheropol is its chief town.

In order to give a clear conception of the political and commercial importance of the Crimea, which, by its almost central position in the Black Sea, commands at once the coasts of Asia, the mouths of the Danube, and the entrance to the Constantinopolitan Bosphorus, it is indispensable to present a rapid sketch of the numerous revolutions which the march of time and the invasions of peoples have effected in that important peninsula. It was in the middle of the seventh century before Christ, that the Milesians made their appearance on the northern shores of the Euxine. The eastern part of the Tauris, an open country and easy of occupation, having attracted their attention, they founded their first colonies there, possessing themselves at the same time of all the little region which we now call the peninsula of Kertch. The agricultural prosperity which they soon attained, was quickly known in Greece, whence it occasioned fresh and important emigrations. Theodosia, Nymphea, Panticapea, and Mermikion, were erected on the shore of the little peninsula, and served as seaports for the thriving colonists.

The success of the Milesians stimulated the Heracleans to follow their example. They chose the most western part of the country, landed not far from the celebrated Cape Perthenica, and after having beaten the savage natives and driven them back into the mountains, they settled in the little peninsula of Trachea, known in our day by the name of the ancient Khersonesus. Thus were laid the foundations of the celebrated republic of Kherson, which subsisted, great and prosperous, for more than 1500 years, and the capital of which having become the temporary conquest of a Grand Duke of Russia, in the tenth century, was the starting point of that great religious revolution which completely changed the face and the destinies of the Muscovite empire.

Whilst the Heracleans were consolidating their power by improving their trade, the Milesian settlements on the Bosphorus were growing up with magic rapidity, and were spreading even beyond the strait to the Asiatic coast, where the towns of Phanagoria, Hermonassa, and Kepos were founded. At first all these Milesian colonies were independent of each other, but at last they became united into the kingdom of the Bosphorus, B.C. 480.

As agriculture formed the basis of the public wealth of the Milesians, it became the object of the new government's peculiar attention. On his accession to the throne, Leucon relieved the

Athenians of the thirtieth imposed on exported corn, in consequence of which liberal measure those exports increased prodigiously; the Cimmerian peninsula became the granary of Greece, [Pg 404] and merchants flocked to Theodosia and Panticapea, where they procured at the same time wool, furs, and all those salted provisions, which still constitute one of the chief riches of Southern Russia. As for the import trade, of which history says little, it is easy to conceive the nature of its operations from the important archeological discoveries of Panticapea.

The Bosphorians undoubtedly received in exchange for their produce, all the manufactured goods which wealth and luxury had brought into vogue in Athens, and it was probably Greek artists who executed all those magnificent objects of art which are contained in the museum of Kertch, and which prove that the agricultural colonists of the Tauris did not fall short of the opulence of their brilliant mother city. Building materials seem to have formed an important item of importation. There is no trace of white marble either in the Crimea or on the northern coasts of the Black Sea; nevertheless, large quantities have been found in the excavations made at Kertch, and there is every reason to presume that the huge masses of cut marble employed in the public and private buildings, were imported ready wrought from Greece.

Despite the dangerous vicinity of the Sarmatians, the kingdom of the Bosphorus enjoyed perfect tranquillity for above three hundred years, and through a steady and rational policy increased in prosperity and riches, until the conquest of Greece by the Romans subverted all the commercial relations of the East. At that period the Bosphorians, attacked by the Scythians, and too weak to resist them, threw themselves into the arms of the celebrated Mithridates, who turned their state into a province of the Pontus, and bestowed it as an appanage on his son Makhares.

After the defeat and death of her implacable enemy, Rome maintained the traitor Pharnaces in possession of the crown of the Bosphorus; but the new prince's sovereignty was merely nominal, and the successors of the son of Mithridates, powerless and despoiled of all the Milesians had possessed on the Asiatic shore of the strait, reigned only in accordance with the caprice of the Roman emperors.

About the middle of the first century after Christ, the Alans entered the Tauris, devastated the greater part of the country, and entirely destroyed Theodosia, which had offered them some resistance. They were followed by the Goths, who in their turns became masters of the peninsula. But far from abusing their victory, they blended their race with that of the vanquished, founded numerous colonies on the vast plains north of the mountainous region, and followed their natural bent for a sedentary life and rural occupations. The Tauric Khersonese now entered on a fresh period of tranquillity and agricultural prosperity. Unfortunately, Greece was at this period rapidly declining under the Roman yoke; Rome having become the capital of the whole world, Egypt, Sicily, and Africa had naturally acquired to themselves the monopoly of the supply of corn; so [Pg 405] that with all its efforts the Tauris could not emerge from the depression into which it had been plunged by the political events of the first Christian century.

The remote and inaccessible position of the little republic of Kherson, preserved its independence during all these early barbarian invasions. In Diocletian's time, the Khersonites, whose dominions extended over nearly the whole of the elevated country, had concentrated in their own hands almost all the commerce that still existed between the Tauris and some parts of the shores of the Black Sea.[76] Their republic was the most powerful state of the peninsula, when war broke out between them and the Sarmatians, who had already seized the kingdom of the Bosphorus, and given it a king of their own nation. The struggle between the two rival nations lasted nearly a century, and the Sarmatians having been at last expelled, the Bosphorians again enjoyed some years of freedom and quiet. But the peace was not of long duration. The unfortunate peninsula was soon visited by the most violent tempest that had yet desolated it. The Huns, from the heart of Asia, came down to the Asiatic side of the strait, and soon the terrified Bosphorians beheld those furious hordes traversing the Sea of Azof, which had for a while arrested their progress. The ancient kingdom of the Milesians was then extinguished for ever. (A.D. 375.) The numerous colonies of united Goths and Alans shared the same fate, and all the rich agricultural establishments of the country were reduced to ashes. Still protected by their isolated position, the Khersonites alone escaped the devastation, in consequence of the rapidity with which the torrent of the invaders rushed forth towards the western regions of Europe.

The Tauris was still suffering under the effects of the frightful disasters inflicted on it by the Huns, when it was again ravaged by their disbanded hordes, after the death of Attila. The Khersonites were now in jeopardy, and in their alarm, they sought the protection of the Eastern Empire. Justinian, who then reigned at Constantinople, acceded to their request, but he made them pay dear for the imperial protection. Under pretence of providing for the defence of the country, he erected the two strong fortresses of Alouchta and Gourzoubita, on the southern coast, and the republic of Kherson became tributary to the empire.

In the latter part of the seventh century (A.D. 679) the Tauris was invaded by the Khazars, hordes that having accompanied the Huns, had settled in Bersilia (Lithuania), and had been formed into an independent kingdom by Attila himself. The apparition of these new conquerors, already masters of a vast territory, made such a sensation at Constantinople, that their alliance was courted by the sovereigns of the East, and the Emperor Leo even asked for his son the hand of the daughter of the kalgan, or chief of the nation. The forebodings of the imperial government [Pg 406] were soon realised, for in the short space of 150 years the Khazars, who had given their own name to the peninsula, founded a vast monarchy, the limits of which extended in Europe beyond the Danube, and in Asia to the foot of the Caucasus.

After the Khazars, whose fall was caused chiefly by the attacks of the Russians, and who thenceforth disappeared entirely from the records of history, the victorious Petchenegues ruled over the whole land except the southern territory of Kherson, which was incorporated with the Empire of the East. Under the sway of this other Asiatic people, the trade and commerce of the peninsula revived, its intercourse with Constantinople resumed activity, and the Tauric ports supplied the merchants of the Lower Empire with purple, fine stuffs, embroidered cloths, ermines, leopard skins, furs of all kinds, pepper, and spices, which the Petchenegues purchased in Eastern Russia, south of the Kouban, and in the Transcaucasian regions that extend to the banks of the Cyrus and the Araxes. Thus began again for this unfortunate country a new era of prosperity, unexampled for many previous centuries.

The dominion of the Petchenegues lasted 150 years, and then they themselves endured the fate they had inflicted on the Khazars. Assailed by the Comans, whom the growth of the Mongol power had expelled from their own territory, they were beaten and forced to return into Asia. The Comans, a warlike people, made Soldaya their capital; but they had scarcely consolidated their power when they were obliged to give place to other conquerors, and seek an abode in regions further west. With the expulsion of the Comans ceased all those transient invasions which dyed the soil of the Tauris with blood during ten centuries. The various hordes that have left nothing but their name in history, were succeeded by two remarkable peoples: the one, victorious over Asia, had just founded the most gigantic empire of the middle ages; the other, issuing from a trading city of Italy, was destined to make Khazaria the nucleus of all the commercial relations between Europe and Asia.

With the Mongol invasion of 1226, the empire of the tzars entered on that fatal period of servitude and oppression which has left such pernicious traces in the national character of the Muscovites. Russia, Poland, and Hungary, were successively overrun by the hordes of the celebrated grandson of Genghis Khan; Khazaria was added to their enormous conquests, and became, under the name of Little Tatary, the cradle of a potent state, which maintained its independence down to the end of the eighteenth century. Under the yoke of the Mongols the Tauris, after being oppressed at first, soon recovered; Soldaya was restored to the Christians, and soon proved that the resources of the country were not exhausted, and that nothing but peace and quiet were wanted to develop the elements of wealth with which nature had so liberally endowed it. In a few years Soldaya became the most important port of the Black Sea, and one of the great termini of the commercial lines between Europe and Asia. [Pg 407]

The greatness of Soldaya was, however, of short duration: another people, more active, and endowed with a bolder spirit of mercantile enterprise than the Greeks, came forward about the same period, and concentrated in its own hands the whole heritage of the great epochs that had successively shed lustre on the peninsula from the day when the Milesians founded their first colonies on the Cimmerian Bosphorus. Being already possessed of important factories in Constantinople, the Genoese had long been aware of the circumstances of the Black Sea, and the immense resources it would place at the disposal of enterprising men who should there centralise for their own profit all the commercial relations of Europe with Russia, Persia, and the Indies. The rivalry which then existed between them and the Venetians, accelerated the execution of their projects, and in 1820, after having secured the territory of the ancient Theodosia, partly by fraud, partly by force, they laid the foundation of the celebrated Caffa, through which they became sure masters of the Black Sea, and sole proprietors of its commerce. With the arrival of the Genoese the Tauris saw the most brilliant epochs of its history revived. Caffa became by its greatness, its population, and its opulence, in some degree the rival of Constantinople, and its consuls, possessing themselves of Cerco, Soldaya, and Cembalo, made themselves masters of all the southern coast of the Crimea. Other equally profitable conquests were subsequently made beyond the peninsula. The galleys of the republic entered the Palus Mæotis; Tana, on the mouth of the Don, was wrested from the Tatars; a fortress was erected at the mouth of the Dniestr; several factories were established in Colchis, and on the Caucasian coast, and even the imperial town of Trebisond was forced to admit one of the most important factories of the republic on the Black Sea. The Genoese colonies thus became the general emporium of the rich productions of Russia, Asia Minor, Persia, and the Indies; they monopolised for more than two centuries all the traffic between Europe and Asia, and presented a marvellous spectacle of thriving greatness. All this glory had an end. Mahomet's standard was planted over the dome of St. Sophia in 1453, and the intercourse of the Crimea with the Mediterranean was broken off. The destruction of the Genoese settlements was then inevitable; and the republic, despairing of their preservation, assigned them over to the bank of St. George, on the 15th of November, 1453. The consequences of this cession which put an end to the political connexion of the colonies with the mother state, were of course disastrous. Despair and loss of public spirit fell upon the colonists, individual selfishness predominated in all their councils, and the consular government, before remarkable for its integrity and its virtues, instead of uniting with the Tatars, and rendering its own position with regard to the Porte less perilous, completely disgusted them by a total want of honesty, and by selling its aid for gold to all the parties that were desolating the Crimea. So many faults were [Pg 408] followed by the natural catastrophe. Caffa was forced to surrender at discretion to the Turks on the 6th of June, 1473, and some months afterwards all the points occupied by the Genoese fell one by one into the hands of the Ottomans.

After the disaster of the Genoese colonies, the great lines of communication of the trans-Caucasian regions, the Caspian, the Volga, the Don, and the Kouban, were broken, having lost their feeders, and all the commercial relations with Central Asia were for a while suspended. The Venetians, who had obtained from the Turks the right of navigating the Black Sea, in consideration of a yearly tribute of 10,000 ducats, strove in vain to take the place their rivals had

lost; they were expelled in their turn from the Black Sea, the Dardanelles were closed against all the nations of the West, and the Turks and their subjects, the Greeks of the Archipelago, alone possessed the privilege of passing through the strait. In our remarks on the Caspian we have already pointed out the new outlets which the Eastern trade procured for itself by way of Smyrna, and the great revolution which followed Vasco de Gama's discovery.

Under the reign of the first khans, who were tributary to the Porte, the Crimea lost all its commercial and agricultural importance. Continual wars, and incessant revolts, sometimes favoured, sometimes punished by the Porte, added to the still deeply-rooted habits of a nomade and vagabond existence, for many years precluded the regeneration of the country. But a rich fertile soil, and a country abundantly provided with all the resources necessary to man, triumphed over the natural indolence of the Tatars, just as they had done before by the savage hordes that successively invaded the Tauris. The hill sides and valleys became covered with villages, and all branches of native industry increased rapidly with the internal tranquillity of the country. The corn, cattle, timber, resins, fish, and salt of Little Tatary furnished freights for a multitude of vessels. The commerce of Central Asia, it is true, was lost for it beyond recovery, but the exportation of its native produce and of that which Russia sent to it by the Don and the Sea of Azof, was more than sufficient to keep its people in a very thriving, if not an opulent condition. Caffa shared in the general improvement; it rose again from its ruins, became the commercial centre of the country, as in the time of the Genoese, and its advancement was such, that the Turks bestowed on it the flattering name of Koutchouk Stamboul (Little Constantinople).

The dominion of the khans extended at this period, in Europe and Asia, from the banks of the Danube to the foot of the mountains of the Caucasus, and the indomitable mountaineers of Circassia themselves often did homage to the sovereigns of the Tauris. The Mussulman population was divided in those days into two great classes: the descendants of the first conquerors, known by the special designation of Tatars; and the Nogais, nomade tribes who, [Pg 409] subsequently to the conquest, had come and put themselves under the protection of the illustrious Batou khan. The former, mixed up with the remains of the ancient possessors, formed the civilised part of the nation. Possessing the mountainous regions, and residing in towns and villages, they were both agriculturists and manufacturers; whilst the Nogais, who lived in a manner independently in Southern Russia, applied themselves solely to cattle rearing. They were at that time divided into five principal hordes: the Boudjiak occupied the plains of Bessarabia from the mouths of the Danube to the Dniestr; the Yedisan, the largest, which could bring into the field 80,000 horsemen, encamped between the Dniestr and the Dniepr; the Djamboiluk and Jedickhoul, the remnants of which still inhabit the territory of their ancestors, extended from the banks of the Dniepr to the western coasts of the Sea of Azof; lastly, the tribes of the Kouban, nomadised in the steppes between that river and the Don, which now form the domain of the Black Sea Cossacks. All these tribes collectively could, in case of urgent necessity, bring into the field upwards of 400,000 men. Such was the political condition of Little Tatary, when the Russian conquest of the provinces of the Sea of Azof and the Black Sea destroyed all the fruits of the great social revolution which had been effected in the habits of the Mussulmans by the new development of trade and commerce.

The first Muscovite invasion took place in 1736. A hundred thousand men, commanded by Field-marshal Munich forced the Isthmus of Perecop, entered the peninsula, and laid waste the whole country, up to the northern slope of the Tauric chain. The peace of Belgrade put an end to this first inroad, but the political existence of Little Tatary was, nevertheless, violently shaken; and from that time forth the khans were kept in continual perplexity by the secret or armed interventions of Russia, their subjects were stimulated to revolt, and they themselves were but puppets moved by the court of St. Petersburg.

In 1783, Sahem Guerai abdicated in favour of the Empress Catherine II., and the kingdom of the Tatars, exhausted by extensive emigrations and bloody insurrections, finally ceased to exist; and then perished rapidly the last elements of the prosperity of a land that had been so often ravaged, and had always emerged victoriously from its disasters. Previously to this period, in 1778, the irresistible command of Russia had determined the emigration of all the Greek and Armenian families of the peninsula, and an agricultural and trading population had been seen to quit, voluntarily as Russia pretends, fertile regions, and a favouring climate, to settle in the savage steppes of the Don and the Sea of Azof. About the same period, and under the same influence, began the emigration of the Tatars and Nogais, some of whom retired into Turkey, others joined the mountaineers of the Caucasus. The Russian occupation accelerated this disastrous movement, and on the day when the tzars extended their frontiers to the banks of the [Pg 410] Dniestr, the celebrated horde of Yedisan disappeared entirely from the soil of the empire. The Tatars of the region between the Dniepr and the Sea of Azof did not emigrate in such numbers as the others, for the imperial government had hemmed them in, even previously to the conquest, by formidable military lines on the east and on the west. The heaviest calamities fell, of course, on the peninsula, which was covered with fixed settlements, and was the centre of the Tatar civilisation and power, and there the scenes of carnage and devastation which had marked the irruption of the barbarians from Asia were renewed in all their horrors. The peninsula lost at least nine-tenths of its population; its towns were given up to pillage, its fields laid waste; and in the space of a few months that region which had been still so nourishing under its last khan, exhibited but one vast spectacle of oppression, misery, and devastation.

Since that period there have elapsed sixty years, during which the Russian domination has never had any resistance to encounter or revolt to quell; and yet, notwithstanding the opening of the Dardanelles, the Tauris has been unable, to this day, to rise from the deep depression into

which it was sunk by the political events of the close of the eighteenth century. It is true, no doubt, that very handsome villas have been erected on the southern coast, and that luxurious opulence has made that region its chosen seat; but the vital and productive forces of the peninsula have been smothered, its trade and agriculture have been destroyed; and that bootless quietude in which the dwindled population of the Tatars now vegetates, results, in fact, only from the destruction of all material resources, and the extinction of all moral and intellectual energy which have come to pass under the sway of the Russian administration.

**FOOTNOTE:**

[76] Const. Porph. de adm. Imp., c. xiii.

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# CHAPTER XLII.

COMMERCIAL POLITY OF RUSSIA IN THE CRIMEA—CAFFA SACRIFICED IN FAVOUR OF KERTCH—THESE TWO PORTS COMPARED—THE QUARANTINE AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE SEA OF AZOF, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES—COMMERCE OF KERTCH—VINEYARDS OF THE CRIMEA; THE VALLEY OF SOUDAK—AGRICULTURE—CATTLE— HORTICULTURE—MANUFACTURES; MOROCCO LEATHER— DESTRUCTION OF THE GOATS—DECAY OF THE FORESTS—SALT WORKS—GENERAL TABLE OF THE COMMERCE OF THE CRIMEA—PROSPECTS OF THE TATAR POPULATION.

When the Russian authority was fully established in the Crimea, and the inevitable disasters attending the occupation of a country by Muscovite troops had subsided, the imperial government seemed for a while disposed to rekindle the embers of the peninsular prosperity. The Emperor Alexander was personally acquainted with the intrinsic value of the country, and [Pg 411] manifested the best and most earnest intentions in its favour; but unfortunately he could not overcome the inveterate habits of the Russian functionaries, and their utter indifference to the true interests of the empire. Half measures, therefore, were all that was effected; custom-houses and quarantines were established, Caffa exchanged its name for that of the Milesian colony, German villages were founded,[77] large grants of land were made to Russians and strangers, vines were planted, and the cultivation of the olive was attempted; but all capital questions were overlooked or misconceived; no thought was given to the matter of markets or to commercial relations; and the government persisting in its prohibitive system, assimilated the Crimea to the other provinces, in spite of strong remonstrances, and repudiated all thoughts of mercantile freedom, the only means by which it could have given new life to the Crimea, and created an active and industrious population in the place of the Tatar tribes, of whom war and emigration had deprived the country.

But in lieu of such privileges Caffa was from the first endowed with a tribunal of commerce, a quarantine, and a custom-house of the first class; and if it could not recover its old greatness under the new domination, it might at least have expected to become one of the chief places of export and import in southern Russia, within the bounds prescribed by the exigencies of the customs. Situated at the extremity of the Tauric chain, not far from the Cimmerian Bosphorus, possessing the only trading port open to vessels in all seasons, in easy communication with rich and productive regions, this town possessed every possible claim to the peculiar attention of the Russian government. But the hopes which had been at first conceived, were entirely disappointed, and the unfortunate Theodosia was positively devoted to abandonment and destruction.

It is not easy to determine the real motives for which the old Genoese city was abandoned in favour of its rival on the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The ostensible reasons were sanatory measures, the necessity of having a general quarantine at the entrance of the Sea of Azof, encouragement of coasters and lighters, and the utility of a vast emporium opened to the productions of all Russia. We believe, however, that all these arguments were in reality of very secondary weight, and that the downfall of Theodosia is to be ascribed to nothing else than an absurd vanity. To resuscitate the ancient name of *Odessus*; to found a town called *Ovidiopol* in a country where Ovid never resided; to lead our geographers into error by giving the name of *Tiraspol* to a mean village on the Dniestr, in the front of Bender; to substitute the name of *Theodosia* for that of Caffa; all these innovations might have pleased certain archæologists, but how was it possible to resist the thought of rebuilding the celebrated capital of the kingdom of the Bosphorus? How irresistible [Pg 412] the temptation to raise a new and great city at the foot of Mithridates' rock! The memory of the Milesians had, therefore, to fade before that of the illustrious sovereign of Pontus; Theodosia was despoiled of its privileges and its revenues, its tribunal of commerce was transferred to Kertch, and double arbour dues were imposed on vessels touching there before arriving at the latter port.

Assuredly no stronger testimony could be borne to the superiority of Theodosia than that which was embodied in these arbitrary measures, nor could there be a more incontestible proof of the caprice to which the Genoese town was sacrificed. Caffa was infinitely better fitted than Kertch to satisfy those conditions which the official orders announced as the grounds for destroying its commercial position. The Kertch roads are often closed against vessels for three or four months continuously; the anchorage is unsafe, and often disastrous, both from the want of shelter and from the shallowness of the water. The port of Theodosia, on the contrary, is always open, and shipwrecks are unknown there. During the fine season an active service of lighters might have concentrated there all the freights brought by the Don and the Sea of Azof. In this way the commercial intercourse with Russia by the Black Sea would never have suffered the least interruption; and, what is an incalculable advantage in those latitudes, foreign vessels, being no longer constrained to make the long and difficult passage to Taganrok, or to run the risk of wintering in the ice, might, if they failed to obtain freight at Theodosia, have proceeded in search of one without loss of time to the southern shores of the Black Sea. All these grand considerations, which had raised the prosperity of Caffa so high, were superseded by the dictates of vanity.

Kertch then was declared, in 1827, a port of the first class, with a custom-house of entry and exit. A vast lazaret was immediately constructed, and five years afterwards appeared the famous sanatory orders which still regulate the navigation of the Sea of Azof. The duration of the quarantine was fixed at thirty days, but before that time can begin to run, the vessel must be moored within the lazaret, and every thing on board, including the effects of the crew, must be subjected to a fumigation of twenty-four hours. This operation being ended the sailors land, after having first divested themselves of all their dress and portable articles; the sails are plunged in water by the servants of the establishment, and the hull of the vessel is disinfected. After these preliminaries, which often occupy from ten to fifteen days, the sailors return to their vessels, and their days of quarantine begin to count. All these regulations are in curious contrast with those of the lazaret of Odessa, where the quarantine lasts only fifteen days.

This new system, which was in fact an interdict upon the Sea of Azof, told of course in favour of Kertch. But the factitious prosperity of that town appears to us to have already reached its utmost limit, and we doubt much that the best devised or most stringent orders can ever give to [Pg 413] its port those elements of commercial prosperity which nature has refused to it. Hence we see, that to avoid the delay and cost of the Kertch quarantine, the merchants of Taganrok and the neighbouring towns, use lighters almost exclusively to carry their goods to the vessels moored in the Cimmerian Bosphorus. On their arrival in the channel, these lighters are put into the hands of the crew belonging to the vessel to be freighted, and their men remain on shore during the trans-shipment. This being accomplished, the lighters are fumigated for twenty-four hours, and then taken back by the lightermen to the Sea of Azof. All these operations, however, are tedious, costly, and uncertain; and the only reason why the merchants have adopted this plan of proceeding is, that they all are reluctant to incur the great expenses of storing their goods in Kertch, and that the paucity of lighters, together with the irregularity of the winds, and the many shoals in the Sea of Azof, render shipments extremely expensive, so that no additional charge could be easily borne. At the opening of the navigation in 1839, freight between Taganrok and Kertch cost as much as four rubles per tchetvert of wheat, and 1-1/2 in the course of the summer. M. Taitbout de Marigny, who has paid great attention to all these matters, estimates the freight charges in question as equivalent on the average to those usually paid to Black Sea vessels bound for the Archipelago.[78]

A remarkable result of this whole system of quarantine and customs is as follows. Suppose two vessels start simultaneously from the Mediterranean, the one for Taganrok, the other for Odessa, and that the latter failing to obtain a cargo, shall quit Odessa after its fifteen days' quarantine, and sail for the Sea of Azof: there is every probability that after remaining at Taganrok long enough to take in its cargo, it will on its return still find the first vessel in the Kertch roads, waiting to complete the formalities required before it can enter the Sea of Azof. Such measures as these, would inevitably keep aloof from the ports of the Sea of Azof, and even from that of [Pg 414] Kertch, every vessel that was sure of its cargo beforehand. It is needless to insist afresh in this place on the superiority of Theodosia, considered as a general entrepôt of the goods arriving in the Sea of Azof, and of those which might have flowed directly into its port through the Isthmus of Arabat.

As for the commercial resources belonging intrinsically to the town of Kertch, it is enough to look at its situation at the extremity of a long, depopulated, and sterile peninsula, and its distance from every route, whether political or commercial, to be assured that they must be quite futile. Seven years after the creation of its port, the annual customs' revenue had not risen above 1200 rubles. In 1840, the whole quantity of corn that had issued from the town of Kertch since its origin, whether directly or through the medium of its entrepôts, scarcely amounted to 5000 tchetverts, and the receipts of the custom-house for the same year were but 695,130. If from this sum we deduct 551,108, the amount of the excise on salt destined exclusively for Russian consumption, and a further considerable sum produced by other imposts, there will remain an exceedingly small amount to represent the nett commercial revenue. The port of Kertch has, therefore, by no means fulfilled the grand expectations so foolishly conceived of it; it has ruined the great city of Theodosia, robbed the Crimea of its commercial importance, cut off all chances of prosperity from the ports of the Sea of Azof, and crippled navigation; and all this without any profit worth speaking of to itself, and without the least prospect of ever rising above the low condition in which it is doomed to vegetate, both by its geographical situation, and the nature and configuration of the adjacent regions.

The results have not been much more satisfactory as regards the growth of the Russian mercantile navy. According to official reports, which we believe exaggerated, there were, in 1840, in the Sea of Azof, 323 vessels measuring about 26,000,000 of kilogrammes, and manned by 1517 individuals. If we recollect that the Sea of Azof is but a marsh, the greatest depth of which does not exceed fourteen mètres, that the crafts which ply in it, pursuing always the same invariable track, hardly require the simplest rudiments of nautical skill for their management, and that the navigation of the sea is usually interrupted during four or five months of the year, it will be easily conceived that the maritime advantages which may accrue to Russia, from the closing of the Sea of Azof, must be very insignificant, not to say quite illusory.

We have now to examine the manufacturing and agricultural resources of the Crimea, and the measures which have been taken by the imperial government to further them. The cultivation of the vine may be considered as at present the most important, if not the most productive branch of industry in the country. When Russia took possession of it, the vineyards were concentrated in the southern valleys of Soudak, Kobsel, Koze, and Toklouk, and in those of the Katch, the Alma, [Pg 415] &c., on the northern slope of the Tauric chain. These vineyards which seem to have existed from very remote antiquity, were all in the plain, where they were subjected to continual irrigations after the system of the Greeks and Tatars. The consequence of this mode of culture was that the crops were extremely abundant, and the wine of a very poor quality.[79] After the Russian occupation, however, the business of vine-growing increased considerably in the northern valleys, which were soon frequented by the merchants of the interior, who were attracted both by the extraordinary cheapness of the produce, and by the facilities of transport. Thus the wines of the Crimea found their way into the interior of the empire, but they were chiefly used for mixing and adulteration; the small quantity that was sold in its original state was always of very bad quality, so that the peninsular wines were in very bad repute, and for a long while lost all chance of sale. This well-merited depreciation was such that even in our own day a merchant of eminence in Moscow or St. Petersburg would have thought it a serious disgrace to him to admit into his cellars a few bottles of Crimean wine.

Such was the state of the vine cultivation in the Crimea, when Count Voronzof was named governor-general of New Russia. Under his active and enterprising administration, a bold attempt was made to change the whole system of cultivation, so as to produce wines capable of competing advantageously with those of foreign countries.[80] The valleys, with their method of irrigation, were therefore abandoned, and the preference was given to the long strip of schistous and *éboulement* grounds which stretches along the seaside between Balaklava and Alouchta, on the southern coast. Count Voronzof set the example with his characteristic ardour; his first operations took place in 1826 at Aidaniel,[81] and six years afterwards he was the owner of 72,000 vine plants. The example of the governor-general was quickly followed, and in 1834, there were already 2,000,000 stocks in the country, from cuttings brought chiefly from the Rhenish and the French provinces.

When the vines were in full bearing, the next thing to be considered was to find a market for their produce; but here arose a great and unforeseen difficulty, and the brilliant expectations of [Pg 416] the planters were soon miserably disappointed. In spite of the difficulties of the route, some merchants yielded to the earnest solicitations of the governor-general and his imitators, and arrived on the coast to purchase; but the demands of the proprietors were exorbitant; their first outlay had been very great, and their produce small, yet they were bent on realising at once the amount of their investments. They thought, too, that by setting a high price on their wines, they would secure their reputation; accordingly they fixed it at twenty to twenty-five rubles the vedro (0.1229 hectolitres), and immediately they lost all chance of sale.

The business prospered better in the valley of the Soudak, where the same modifications had been introduced into the culture of the vine. The hill wines were sold at the rate of twelve to fifteen rubles the vedro, and those of the plain at five and six. But this did not last long; in 1840 the wine growers of Soudak could no longer dispose of their stock, though they had reduced their prices to two and three rubles for the best qualities, and to one and one and a half for the lowland wines. As to the wine-growers of the southern coasts, they were very glad at that time if they could find purchasers at the rate of five or six rubles the vedro.

Several causes contributed to these unfortunate results. The southern coast, as we have already said, consists of a long narrow strip of argillaceous schist and detritus, with a very steep inclination, and overtopped throughout its length by high cliffs of jura limestone. In consequence of these topographical conditions, the heat is very great in summer; the soil, which is quite destitute of watercourses, dries rapidly, and the many ravines by which it is intersected, completely deprives it of any little moisture that may remain in it. The scarcity of rain augments these disadvantages, so that the vine plants procured from abroad degenerate rapidly; as the grapes cannot ripen before autumn, the wine loses much in quality; and, moreover, the quantity is far from abundant, in proportion to the extent of the ground. These circumstances, combined with those occasioned by the desire to exalt the wines of the Crimea in public opinion, inflame both the pretensions of the proprietors and the indifference of the merchants, who could never have disposed of the coast wine at the high prices asked for it. These were afterwards considerably diminished, but not sufficiently to produce any effect. Whatever be said to the contrary, it is certain that the wines of the southern Crimea can never sustain any sort of comparison with those of France or the Rhine; hence they continued to be held in low repute, and the merchants of the interior still found it more to their advantage to make their purchases in the northern valleys, which were easy of access, and where the wine was incomparably cheaper. In spite of all their efforts, therefore, the wine-growers of the southern coast could not find a market [Pg 417]

for their produce, and were obliged to consume the chief part of it themselves.

It may, perhaps, excite surprise that no attempt has been made to evade the difficulties of land-carriage by seeking outlets by sea, and procuring customers in the great maritime towns of Russia. But unluckily there exists between Russia and Greece an ancient treaty, which the tzars, for political considerations no doubt, persist in religiously observing, and by virtue of which Greek wines are received almost free of duty in the imperial ports. Whoever is aware of the prodigious quantity and incredible cheapness of the wines of the Archipelago, and of the great facilities they afford for effecting mixtures and adulterations, will easily conceive, that with such a competition to encounter, the sale of Crimean wines became absolutely impossible. If the culture of the vine in the Crimea was induced by encouragements on the part of the government, then the landowners were grossly duped. But, as we shall explain by and by, the ministry seem never to have looked favourably on this branch of industry, and the vine-growers have only their own extreme want of forethought to blame for all the disasters that have befallen them.

At Soudak, however, the mischief appears to us attributable solely to the misconduct of the authorities. We have already stated that the vintage speculations of Soudak were at first much more prosperous than those of the southern coast. The situation of the valley, which is of very easy access for northern traffic, and the decided preference of the German colonists for white wines, for many years kept the fine plain of Soldaya in a thriving if not an opulent condition. But unfortunately, that western part of the coast not being within the region which the governor-general and the great landowners had taken under their special protection, Soudak was completely abandoned to her own resources; her roads were left without repairs, and the local administration took no measures whatever for the preservation of order and the security of individuals. When I visited the coast in 1840, the roads of this district were in the most deplorable condition;[82] they were strewed with fragments of carts and casks; a German waggoner was killed in my presence by the breaking down of his waggon; thieving and pillage were the order of the day in the valley, and the proprietors could only preserve their chattels by keeping a close personal watch upon them day and night. [Pg 418]

The consequences of this culpable neglect may readily be imagined. Purchasers diminished in number year by year, the wines lost their value, and the unfortunate proprietors with large stocks on hand were reduced to great poverty. All sorts of expedients were adopted under the pressure of the calamity; the wines were turned into vinegar, but again the speculation failed for want of a market. We heartily desire that our reasonable remonstrances in favour of Soudak may reach the imperial government, so that effectual measures may be taken to revive the great natural wealth of that magnificent valley. We do not know the intentions of the present finance minister, but it is to be hoped that he will not partake the narrow views of his predecessor. Count Cancrini was a fanatic partisan of the consumption of foreign wines, and at the same time the declared enemy of the home growth, which he regarded as most injurious to the customs' revenue of the empire.

In the present state of things it is not easy to predict the future fortunes of the Crimean wine production. For our own part, we are thoroughly convinced that France has no sort of competition to fear on the part of those regions. Whether the cultivation of the vine be concentrated in the valleys or on the hill sides, we do not think that the vintage can ever rival ours. It has been very justly remarked that wherever the vine and the olive grow together, the wines cannot have that delicacy and that *bouquet* which belong only to our temperate climates. We believe, however, that if the wines of the Archipelago were subjected to higher duties, if the means of transport were rendered more facile, and increased cultivation were given to the more open hill sides that extend towards the east of the Tauric chain, the Crimea would soon be enabled to supply the demand of the whole empire for the commoner sorts of wine, and the result would, perhaps, be extremely advantageous in diminishing the mischievous use of ardent spirits. Such a change as this would evidently be not at all prejudicial to French commerce, which sends only wines of the first quality to the south of Russia.

According to a report printed in the Russian journals of 1834, and cited by M. Dubois, the 7,100,000 vine plants, contained in that year on the old and new plantations, were distributed as follows:—

| | |
|---|---|
| South-west coast of the Crimea | 1,600,000 |
| Soudak and south-east coast | 2,000,000 |
| Valley of the Katch | 2,000,000 |
| Valley of the Alma | 500,000 |
| Valley of the Belek | 500,000 |
| German colonies | 500,000 |

The wine yielded by the vintage of 1832, was 32,307 hectolitres, of which 1694 were the produce of the south-west coast, 6050 that of Soudak, and 7865 that of the valley of the Katch. [Pg 419]

The plantations have augmented considerably since that time; we cannot venture, however, to accept as authentic, the following statistics of the annual production of the Crimea, given us by landowners in 1840:—

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Valley of Soudak | 80,000 vedros | 9,760 hectolitres |
| Southern coast | 120,000 vedros | 14,640 hectolitres |
| Northern valleys | 750,000 vedros | 91,500 hectolitres |

We have not much to say of the other branches of agriculture; they are all in the most deplorable state. The magnificent forests, yielding such quantities of timber, that formerly clothed the mountains, are rapidly disappearing. Camel breeding, formerly very productive to the Tatars of the plain, has given place to lank flocks of merinos. The most fertile valleys are in the same state of desolation in which they were left by the great calamities at the close of the last century, and the peninsula now produces scarcely corn enough for its own consumption. Horticulture alone has made any real progress. Some foreigners practise it with profit in the northern valleys, which for many years past have enjoyed the privilege of supplying all the fruit used at the tables of Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Manufactories are almost in the same state of decay as agriculture. Morocco and other leathers formerly constituted an important part of the exports from the Crimea; at present the value of these exports is no more than 129,646 rubles. It is about five years since this branch of industry was ruined. All that time there existed on the mountains of the peninsula a great quantity of goats, which being left at liberty, caused, it must be confessed, much damage to the forests, by nipping off the young shoots. According to the usual Russian practice of attacking secondary causes rather than going at once to the root of any evil, the local administration could devise nothing better in the case than to proclaim a war of extermination, by giving every one the right of hunting and killing goats, in all places and at all seasons. The goats were almost all destroyed, and with them fell of necessity the greater part of the manufactories for morocco leather. It would certainly have been easy for authorities, possessed of any practical ability, to preserve the forests without exterminating the goats; but as they would not, or could not, deal with the real destroyers, the noble landowners, they wreaked their spite on the quadrupeds. It is really inconceivable with what rapidity the finest forests of the Crimea are disappearing; year by year whole hills are totally stripped, and the government, stern as it has shown itself against the goats, takes no means to check this fatal devastation. Several great landowners are engaged in lawsuits gravely affecting their rights, and meanwhile, until their causes shall have been decided, they use their opportunity to cut timber as fast as possible. Foremost in those proceedings is [Pg 420] Admiral Mordvinof, who has already destroyed the exceedingly rich forests that clothed the hills above the valley of Baidar. The effects of this clearing away of the forests are already felt severely; the rivers are diminishing in volume, a great number of springs have run dry, and fire wood, now costs as much as forty rubles the fathom at Ialta.

Another branch of industry, likewise very profitable in former times, was the working of the rich salt-pits in the environs of Kozlov (Eupatoria). Only a few years ago eighty vessels used to come to the port from Anatolia, to take in cargo. The price of the salt was then very low, but the trade was nevertheless a source of employment and profit for all the surrounding population. The minister of finance was jealous of the profits realised by individuals in this trade, and therefore laid a considerable export duty on the salt. In the following year not a single vessel came from Anatolia, and it was soon ascertained that, prompted by necessity, the people of the southern shores of the Black Sea had found rich salt-pits in their own territory.

The following table of the commerce of the Crimea in 1838 and 1839, is taken from official documents. The figures contained in it are in our opinion exaggerated, for they do not by any means agree with those resulting from the detailed table we shall give further on.

| | IMPORTS. | | EXPORTS. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1838. | 1839. | 1838. | 1839. |
| | rubles. | rubles. | rubles. | rubles |
| Kertch | 175,321 | 250,887 | 226,999 | 123,082 |
| Theodosia | 673,535 | 695,130 | 1,281,244 | 955,108 |
| Eupatoria | 185,480 | 131,222 | 2,299,365 | 2,394,867 |
| Balaclava | 6,695 | | | |
| Total | 1,040,941 | 1,077,239 | 3,807,608 | 3,473,057 |

Be it remarked that among the exports corn alone figured in 1839 for 835,486 rubles for Theodosia, and 1,755,052 rubles for Eupatoria; and as all this corn came from countries beyond the Crimea, the nullity of the peninsular exportation is apparent. Moreover, the gross total of three and a half millions is scarcely the fifteenth part of the annual exportation of the town of Odessa alone. In order to give a more exact idea of the industrial and commercial situation of the Crimea, we set down the details of its exports and imports in 1839.

[Pg 421]

| IMPORTS. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ARTICLES. | KERTCH. | THEODOSIA. | EUPATORIA. |
| | rubles. | rubles. | rubles. |
| Cotton | 49,993 | 33,650 | |
| Cotton thread | 4,080 | 4,986 | |
| Turkish cotton cloths | 14,164 | 532,976 | |
| Chairs | 5,750 | | |
| Wooden vessels | 3,645 | 2,441 | |
| Woollen caps | 4,504 | 29,218 | |
| Oil | 20,636 | 3,589 | 16,997 |
| Sickles | 5,000 | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wines | 12,069 | 2,190 | 2,342 |
| Porter | 4,600 | 2,171 | |
| Cassonade | 14,354 | | |
| Fresh and dried fruit | 100,402 | 15,107 | 27,464 |
| Fine pearls | | 4,000 | |
| Coffee | | 4,319 | 25,102 |
| Linen thread | | 2,204 | |
| Nard juice and grapes | | 6,269 | |
| Turkish tobacco | | 3,345 | 7,823 |
| Olives | | 3,467 | |
| Raw silk | | 9,008 | |
| Dyed silk thread | | 20,915 | |
| Oak galls | | | 20,387 |
| Colours | | | 13,814 |
| Vegetables | | | 2,122 |
| Pepper | | | 3,063 |

EXPORTS.

| ARTICLES. | KERTCH. | THEODOSIA. | EUPATORIA. |
|---|---|---|---|
| | rubles. | rubles. | rubles. |
| Raw hides | 15,152 | 22,653 | 68,312 |
| Fish | 7,310 | | |
| Red caviar | 13,113 | | |
| Linseed | 6,100 | | |
| Rapeseed | 6,600 | | |
| Wheat | 31,040 | 745,031 | 1,544,313 |
| Wool | 41,185 | 19,087 | 344,997 |
| Cordage | | 3,275 | |
| Woollen felt | | 7,670 | 31,424 |
| Tanned leather | | 18,375 | 5,150 |
| Flax, hemp, and stuffs | | 11,323 | 27,065 |
| Butter | | 8,133 | 61,445 |
| Bar iron | | 2,340 | 14,700 |
| Salt | | 8,813 | 5,700 |
| Soda | | 4,691 | |
| Rye | | 48,157 | 66,600 |
| Barley | | 39,485 | 1,333,640 |
| Millet | | 2,870 | 1,910 |
| Glue | | | 3,494 |
| Raw Hemp | | | 3,264 |
| Locks | | | 22,296 |
| Copper utensils | | | 3,050 |
| Brass, and brass wire | | | 4,650 |
| Cutlery | | | 13,509 |
| Swords and epaulettes | | | 3,000 |
| Sheep skins | | | 3,650 |
| Suet | | | 11,893 |
| Turpentine | | | 2,100 |
| Beans | | | 8,589 |
| Flour | | | 2,120 |
| Raw silk | | | 3,200 |

[Pg 422]

We do not at all coincide in opinion with those who attribute the decadence we have just described to the general character of the people of the East. The Orientals, it is true, have none of that feverish activity which characterises the people of our climes; besides which their wants are so limited and so easily satisfied, that they can never, in their present social condition, become strenuous workers. Yet we have seen that the Tatars, when they first occupied the country, were distinguished for their agricultural and industrial labours, whether it was in consequence of their mixture with the old races, or merely of the propitious climate; they also employed themselves with such success in gardening and the cultivation of the vine and of corn, that the Crimea under the khans was considered one of the chief regions whence Constantinople drew its supplies. It was only the steppe tribes, whose sole wealth was their cattle, that remained true to their primitive habits and their nomade life. In like manner there exists to this day a very striking difference, both intellectual and physical, between the two fractions of the Mussulman race of the Crimea.

We believe, therefore, that under a better system it would have been easy to revive the laborious disposition of the Tatars by facilitating and encouraging commercial transactions, and gradually effacing the disheartening apprehensions under which the Mussulman population have naturally laboured since their great calamities befel them. Assuredly we cannot blame Russia for that depopulation of the country which was the first cause of its decadence. As victors, the

Russians used all the rights of the strong hand to consolidate their conquest and extinguish all chance of insurrection. The means no doubt were violent, disastrous, and often even exceeded all the bounds of humanity; yet it was scarcely possible but that excesses should be committed in a war between Russian Christians and Mussulman Tatars, who had so often braved, triumphed over, and swayed the Muscovite power. In fairness, therefore, we can only criticise the measures adopted by the Russian government subsequently to the conquest, from the day when the country was completely pacified, and the Tatars submitted implicitly to the new yoke, and lost all hope of deliverance.

We have already seen how an act of caprice annihilated the commercial prosperity of Theodosia, which would naturally have had the greatest influence over the industrial development of the peninsula; and we have pointed out the mischievous measures that ruined various branches of the native trade. To these depressing causes, for which the government with its fatal system of prohibition and its half measures is alone responsible, we must add others no less active, because they principally affect the agricultural population who stand most in need of encouragement. We have already repeatedly mentioned the countless depredations of the inferior government agents. In the Crimea the difference of religion and language, and the difficulty of making any kind of appeal for redress, naturally rendered the local administration more troublesome and rapacious than in any other province. The consequence was that the Tatars led a life of fear and distrust, agriculture languished, and every man cultivated yearly only as much as was necessary for the subsistence of his family, that he might not excite the cupidity of the *employés*. [Pg 423]

On his accession to the government, Count Voronzof, with his natural kindness, applied himself strenuously to improve the condition of the Tatars; he took them under his special protection, and prevented the rapacity of his underlings as far as in him lay. Unfortunately, his efforts could hardly avail beyond the limits of his own estates, and all his generous intentions were baffled or worn out by the incessant pettyfogging arts of the *employés*. Nothing could more signally exemplify the distrustful feelings of the Tatars, than the events which occurred during the famine of 1833, which was so great that whole families perished of hunger. Moved by these misfortunes the government offered aid to the Tatars, but incredible as it may appear, the proffered succours were generally refused, so much did the Mussulmans dread the price which would be afterwards exacted for such assistance.

Towards 1840, after the creation of the ministry of the domains of the crown under Count Kizilev, the imperial government set about the task in which Count Voronzof had failed. Men of the best character for intelligence and probity were sent to the Crimea, but their efforts were all ineffectual, and they soon retired in disgust from the useless struggle. The unfortunate Crimea was again surrendered to the unlimited power and endless knaveries of the captain *ispravniks*, and of the worthy subaltern agents of the local administration.

What are the destinies ultimately reserved for the Mussulman population of the Crimea,[83] now numbering barely 100,000 souls?[84] We are strongly inclined to anticipate its total extinction at a more or less remote date. The tribes are rapidly degenerating; the moral and physical forces of the nation are daily declining; the territorial wealth of the Tatars has been destroyed, sold, or divided; the native families distinguished for their past history or for their fortunes have disappeared; the population, instead of increasing, diminishes. There remains, therefore, no element of vitality to revive the effete remains of a power that made Russia tremble during so many centuries, and that even menaced for a while the political existence of all Europe.

## FOOTNOTES:

[77] These colonies now consist of nine villages, with a population of 1800 souls.

[78] *Trade of the Sea of Azof, in 1838 and 1839.*

| | | IMPORTS. | | EXPORTS. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1838. Rubles. | 1839. Rubles. | 1838. Rubles. | 1839. Rubles. |
| Taganrok | Goods | 5,887,901 | 5,334,369 | 7,666,943 | 13,813,323 |
| | Cash | 1,414,596 | 2,885,279 | | |
| Marcoupol | Goods | 300 | 987 | 3,422,107 | 6,276,882 |
| | Cash | 640,660 | 1,515,525 | | |
| Rostof on the Don | Goods | | | 3,205,406 | 6,078,037 |
| | Cash | | | | |
| Bordiansk | Goods | | | 2,971,426 | 4,107,638 |
| | Cash | 768,722 | 825,113 | | |
| Total | | 8,712,179 | 10,561,273 | 17,265,882 | 30,275,880 |

[79] De La Mottraye, who visited the Crimea in 1711, speaks of a Soudak wine the flavour of which he compares with Burgundy. At that period the wines of the northern valleys sold at 2-1/2 centimes the bottle. In Peyssonel's time, in 1762, the Soudak wines fetched from 32 to 38 centimes the bottle; those of Belbek 22 to 25, and those of Katch, of which De La Mottraye speaks, 13 to 15. The Ukraine Cossacks and the Zaporogues consumed the greatest portion of these wines; about 1210 hectolitres annually according to Peyssonel. In 1784, at the time of the Russian occupation, the price of Soudak wine was 5 to 6 centimes the litre; it rose to 65 centimes in 1793, during the war with Turkey.—(See Pallas, Voyage dans la Russie Méridionale.)

[80] Previously to Count Voronzof, M. Rouvier, who introduced the breed of merino sheep

into Russia, had planted vines from Malaga on the hill sides of Laspi, at the western extremity of the chain; but his example had not many imitators.

[81] Aidaniel is north-east of Ialta, a little town, the chief station for steamboats.

[82] Of roads perfectly practicable for wheeled vehicles there exist in the Crimea: 1. The road leading from Simpheropol to Sevastopol, skirting the northern slope of the Tauric chain; its length is thirty-nine English miles; 2. That from Simpheropol to Ialta, crossing the mountains at the foot of the Tchatir Dagh, forty-nine miles; 3. That from Ialta to Balaclava, proceeding along the southern coast as far as Foros, where it passes on to the northern side of the mountains; its length is forty miles between Ialta and Foros; the second portion was in course of construction in 1840. This line of road seems to us extremely ill-contrived. It has been carried along the very foot of the jura-limestone cliffs, for the purpose of avoiding expense in crossing the ravines; and thus it is completely exterior to the vine-growing and cultivable district, and every proprietor who desires to use it must make a private road at his own expense, in order to reach the elevated level of the highway. We say nothing of the roads in the plains, the construction of which, just as in the interior of Russia, consists merely in tracing the breadth and direction by a ditch on either side.

[83] Hitherto the Tatars have been exempted from military service; they are merely required to furnish one squadron to the imperial guard, to be discharged every five years. As for the taxes imposed on them they amount to the illusory sum of 8*s.* 4*d.* for every male individual, not including duty work on roads, transports, &c.

[84] The total population of the Crimea is about 200,000, including Russians, Greeks, Armenians, Karaïtes, Germans, and other foreigners.

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# CHAPTER XLIII.

## HISTORICAL SKETCH OF BESSARABIA.

### TOPOLOGY—ANCIENT FORTRESSES—THE RUSSIAN POLICY IN BESSARABIA—EMANCIPATION OF THE SERFS—COLONIES—CATTLE—EXPORTS AND IMPORTS—MIXED POPULATION OF THE PROVINCE.

To complete our account of the southern regions of Russia, it remains for us to speak of Bessarabia, the most remote province which the tzars possess on the shores of the Black Sea, and the country which formed, down to the commencement of the present century, one of the most valuable possessions of the principality of Moldavia. We will not now endeavour to withdraw the veil that covers the history of past ages, or discuss the effects produced upon this province by the expeditions of Darius and of Alexander, the Roman conquests, the Tatar invasions, and the Mussulman dominion: we will confine ourselves to contemporaneous facts, the only ones which can have some chance of exciting, if not interest, at least curiosity.

Bessarabia is bounded on the south by the Danube, north and east by the Dniepr and the Black Sea, and west by the Pruth, which separates it from Moldavia, and by Bukovine, a dependency of Austria. It thus forms between two rivers which might easily be rendered navigable, a strip of more than 375 English miles in length, with an average breadth not exceeding fifty. This strip, which expands gradually as it approaches the sea, is divided into two regions, totally distinct both in population and in topographical character. The southern part, to which the Tatars have given the name of Boudjiak, consists of the flat country which extends to the sea between the mouths of the Danube and lower part of the Dniestr. It has all the characteristics of the Russian steppes, possesses but a few insignificant streams, and is chiefly fitted for rearing cattle; it yields little to tillage, except in some localities along the watercourses, where numerous colonies of Germans and Bulgarians are settled. The northern part adjoining Austria is, on the contrary, a hill country, beautifully diversified, covered with magnificent forests, and rich in all the productions of the most favoured temperate climates.

At the period when the Russians appeared on the banks of the Dniestr, the Boudjiak steppes were occupied by Nogai Tatars, nomades for the most part, who after having been at first tributary to the khans of the Crimea, had placed themselves under the protection of the Porte; whilst the northern region was possessed by a numerous Moldavian population, essentially agricultural, subjected to the laws of serfdom, and acknowledging the authority of the hospodars of Jassy. The Ottoman power was represented solely by military garrisons holding peaceful possession of the two fortresses of Ismael and Kilia on the Danube, and those of Khotin, Bender, and Ackerman, on the Dniestr.

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The fortress of Ismael is famous for the sieges sustained in it by the Turks against Souvarof. Its fortifications have not been much increased by Russia; she keeps in it a numerous garrison, and a

considerable amount of artillery. The little flotilla of the Danube is stationed at the foot of the walls. The fort of Kilia is now quite abandoned.

The fortress of Khotin is half of Genoese, half of Turkish construction. The citadel or castle is an irregular square, flanked by enormous towers. The Turks and the Russians have added new fortifications to the old works, without however increasing the strength of the position. In the present state of military art, Khotin is of no importance whatever. Commanded on all sides by hills, and situated on the very edge of the Dniestr, it would not resist a regular siege of a few hours. The walls consist of courses of brick and cut stone, and bear numerous Genoese inscriptions. Over the principal gate are seen a lion and a leopard, chained beside an elephant bearing a tower. These figures are in the Eastern style, and date from the time of the Turks. The doors and the uprights of the windows are adorned with verses from the Koran. The great mosque of the fortress has unfortunately been demolished, and nothing remains of it but its minaret, which stands alone in the midst of the place, as if to protest against the vandalism of the conquerors. On the other side of the Dniestr, at a short distance from the river, is Kaminietz, the capital of Podolia.

Bender and Ackerman likewise possess two castles of Genoese and Turkish construction: the latter situated on the liman of the Dniestr, has been abandoned; the former, which stands on the main road to Turkey, has a garrison. Between Bender and Khotin, on the banks of the Dniestr, are the ruins of a fourth fortress called Soroka, which merits a special description, inasmuch, as it is altogether different from the other edifices we have noticed in Southern Russia. It forms a circular enclosure of thirty-one mètres, interior diameter. At four equidistant points of the circumference, stand as many towers, projecting externally in a semi-cylindrical form, whilst on the interior they are prismatic. Between the two towers on the river side, there is a fifth which commands the single gate of the castle. The interior diameter of the towers is 5.5 mètres; the thickness of the walls is 3.8 mètres. They have embrasures in the upper parts, and a few openings at various heights. All round the walls in the inner court there is a circular range of apartments on the ground, in tolerable preservation, and consisting of ten casemates seven mètres deep, lighted only from within. They formed probably, the stables of the fortress. Above this range are the remains of an upper story, which, of course, served with the towers for lodging [Pg 426] the garrison. The whole building exhibits the greatest solidity, and the mortar is wonderfully hard. But it is a bitter disappointment to the traveller that there are no inscriptions on the walls, or sculpture of any kind to fix the date of the edifice. The fortress never had ditches; its strength consists only in the height and thickness of its walls. The only entrance is towards the Dniestr, four or five yards from the scarp that flanks the river. This arrangement was probably adopted in order to secure a means of retreat, and of receiving provisions by way of the river.—The general appearance of the castle reminded me of the Roman fortresses erected against the barbarians, remains of which exist in many parts of Europe.

Bessarabia was justly considered, at the period referred to above, as one of the most fertile and productive provinces of the Black Sea. Ismael and Remy were its two great export markets for corn; Ackerman sent numerous cargoes of fruit and provisions of all kinds yearly to Constantinople; the magazines of the fortresses were profusely filled with wheat and maize; the countless flocks of the Boudjiak steppes supplied wool to the East and to Italy; and Austria alone drew from them annually upwards of 60,000 heads of cattle. Such were the circumstances of Bessarabia at the time when the Russians, in the worst moment of their disasters, at the very time when Napoleon was entering their ancient capital, had the courageous cleverness to obtain the cession of that province, and advance their frontier to the Danube, at the same time securing the inestimable advantage of being free to withdraw their troops from it, and march them against the invader.

When the Russians took possession, the Nogais, many tribes of whom had previously emigrated, completely forsook their old possessions, and withdrew beyond the Danube, and thus there remained in Bessarabia only the Moldavian population, who were Greek Christians, like the Russians. The conduct of the government towards the Bessarabians was at first as accommodating and liberal as possible. Official pledges were given them, that they should retain their own language, laws, tribunals, and administrative forms of all kinds. The governors of the country were chosen from among the natives, and the province remained in the full enjoyment of its commercial immunities and franchises, which were the grand bases of its agricultural prosperity. But these valuable privileges soon begot jealousies; the old administration fell into discredit through its own injudicious pretensions, and perhaps also in consequence of political intrigues against it, and it became exposed to the incessant hostility even of the boyars. The outcry was so great, that the Emperor Alexander, wishing to satisfy the population, determined that a new constitution should be framed, which should be more in harmony with the habits, the wants, and the state of civilisation of the country.

A committee of twenty-eight was appointed to draw up this constitution, conspicuous among [Pg 427] whom was M. Pronkoul, one of the most eminent boyars of the country. He had the chief hand in framing the constitution, and he promoted the adoption of its most liberal articles, with a very laudable spirit and much cleverness, no doubt, but with by no means a just discernment of the state of things. As soon as the commission had completed its task, Alexander visited Bessarabia, in 1818, and was welcomed with the most cordial gladness, and the most sumptuous rejoicings. He received from the province a national present of 5000 horses, and was quite amazed at the prosperity and the inexhaustible resources of his new conquest. It was naturally desired to take the opportunity of his presence for the ratification of the new constitution; but that was not to be had so readily, since it brought in question the principle of the political unity of the empire. It

was rightly represented to Alexander that it would be imprudent and impolitic to give a final and decisive sanction to a system, the real value and fitness of which could only be made known by time. The emperor yielded to these considerations, and merely ordered that the constitution should be put in force, without prejudice to the future.

The fundamental principles of this constitution were as liberal as possible; too liberal, indeed, to have had the slightest chance of enduring. Bessarabia retained all its nationality; the governor and the vice-governor alone could be Russians, all the other functionaries were to be Moldavians; the province continued to enjoy all commercial immunities, and the finances, too, were under the immediate inspection and control of the natives. To any man of common sense and foresight, the maintenance of such a constitution was a chimera. Was it to be imagined that Russia would allow the subsistence of a conquered province on its extreme frontiers, in contact with Turkey, governing itself by its own laws, and possessing an administration diametrically opposed to that which controls the other governments of the empire?

The Moldavian boyars nevertheless considered the promulgation of the constitution as a victory, and thought in their infatuation they might defy all the chances of the future. But events soon undeceived them, and the mismanagement of their own institutions provoked the first blow against their privileges. In accordance with old customs the government continued to sell the taxes by auction, and they were generally farmed by the great landowners of the province. This vicious system of finance, which had been practised under the Oriental regimen of the hospodars, could not fail to have fatal consequences under the new system of things. As we have already said, Bessarabia had retained her commercial freedom in its full extent after her union with Russia. It rapidly degenerated into an abuse, through the improvident prodigality of the Moldavians, and the extravagant ideas of civilisation and progress that fermented in all their brains; luxury increased beyond measure among the nobles, and Kichinev, the capital, became famous through all the country for its sumptuous festivities, and the wealth of its ware-rooms. [Pg 428] The consequence was that the receipts of the treasury proceeded in the inverse ratio of the progress of luxury; and the farmers, whose expenses swallowed up more than the revenue, were last unable to pay the sums they had contracted for. The imperial government was of course indulgent during the first years, and had not recourse to any severe measures. This conduct encouraged the defaulters, and the disorder of the finances at last reached such a pass as called indispensably for the strenuous intervention of the imperial government. The commercial franchises of the province were suppressed therefore in 1822, the prohibitive system of the imperial customs was introduced, and the payment of all arrears was rigorously exacted. This last measure of course gave occasion to endless suits and executions, and so the ruin of the principal families was accomplished at the same time as the destruction of all their political influence, and the government had then only to fix the day when its principles of political unity should have complete force in its new conquest.

The constitution thus impaired, subsisted, however, until the death of Alexander; but on the accession of Nicholas it was completely suppressed; Bessarabia was deprived of all its privileges, and even of its language, and was assimilated in all points of administration to the other provinces of the empire; with the exception, however, that the government, in order to ensure the ulterior success of its measures, took from the inhabitants the right of electing their captain ispravniks, or officers of rural police.[85]

So radical a revolution could not be effected without bringing with it serious perturbations. It is enough to recollect what we have said of the venality of the public functionaries, in order to guess what the Bessarabians must have had to endure at the hands of that multitude of Russian *employés* who took up their quarters in the towns and villages. The intrigues and pettyfogging artifices of these men complicated more and more the already numerous lawsuits; and the daily increasing perplexities in the relations between the landowners, the freedmen, and the serfs, overthrew all the elements of the national wealth. To all these causes of disorganisation were added the military occupation of the country in the time of the Turkish war, and this was the more onerous because the rich procured themselves exemption for money, and the whole burden fell on the petty proprietors and the peasants.

When the country fell into this state of exhaustion, the boyars were not slow to remonstrate: [Pg 429] and they did so with such vehemence, on the occasion of the journey of the Emperor Nicholas, in 1827, that he resolved to have a commission appointed, to report to him at St. Petersburg, on the grievances of the province. The election of the commissioners took place immediately; but as the boyars revived their old pretensions, whilst the government strenuously adhered to its system of political unity, it was not possible to come to an understanding respecting the ameliorations to be introduced into the administrative regimen. The elections, after being frequently annulled and recommenced, produced no result, and the last commission named was finally dissolved without having been able to repair to St. Petersburg.

All these long altercations necessarily produced asperity in the relations of Bessarabia with the superior administration, and at last the imperial government, weary of these discussions, was ready to take any measure to reduce the Moldavians to the most absolute political and administrative nullity, even to the prejudice of the national prosperity. To this end it was determined to cut off the last means of influence which serfdom afforded to the boyars, by issuing an ukase, by virtue of which all serfs were declared free, with the right of residing where they pleased. The consequences of this abrupt emancipation were, of course, disastrous to agriculture. Urged by intrigues, or by the chimerical hope of bettering their physical condition, the serfs abandoned their old abodes to settle elsewhere, and chiefly on the lands recently acquired by the Russians. In this way many villages were left deserted, the lands remained

untilled, and the landowners found themselves suddenly deprived of the hands necessary for their work.

Putting aside all political considerations, this measure of the government was unquestionably premature. Nothing in the moral or physical condition of the Bessarabians could as yet justify so radical a destruction of all that belonged to the old system. The state of the serfs was in fact very tolerable, and quite in harmony with the civilisation of the country. The peasants were no further bound to the soil, than inasmuch as a certain portion of it was placed at their disposal. Their duties to their lords were defined by rule, and consisted generally of eighteen days' labour in the year, some haulages, and the tithes of their produce. The landowners, no doubt, occasionally abused their power in a cruel manner; but these abuses were not without remedy. A resolute and conscientious administration might easily have put an end to them. Under the present system, the peasants possessing no lands appeared to us in reality much more enslaved, and in a far less satisfactory physical condition. Formerly, the interests of the lords and the serfs were closely united, the prosperity of either necessarily inferred that of the others; but now that the emancipated serfs, possessing no means of subsistence of their own, cultivate the land only in virtue of a contract, the landowners think only how to get as much profit out of them as possible, during the time the engagement lasts, and care nothing what becomes of them afterwards. The [Pg 430] peasants, it is true, have a right of appealing to the tribunals; but in consequence of the venality of the latter, their complaints generally serve only to put them to expense, and make their condition worse. A rich boyar said very naïvely to me on this subject, "How do you suppose the husbandman can obtain justice, when for every egg he gives we give a silver ruble?" Again, the frequent changes of abode are very pernicious, from the loss of time and the expense they occasion. Other dwellings must be built, new habits must be contracted; the peasant is soon reduced to destitution, and finds himself obliged to accept whatever terms are offered him. In this way the dependence of the rural population is but the more grievous for being limited, and their situation towards the landlords is without security for the present, or guarantee for the future. Nor have their duty labours undergone any modification, and the abuses are exactly the same as under the old régime. Without exceeding the limits of the regulations, a peasant pays his master tithes of all agricultural produce, besides $1^{r}{\cdot}20$ for every head of large cattle, 0.16 for each sheep, and one hive of honey out of every fifty he possesses. He takes upon himself, moreover, all repairs of buildings, enclosures, &c., supplies night watchers, executes annually at least three haulages over thirty-eight miles of ground, and seldom works less than twenty-eight or thirty days for his landlord, often as much as fifty or even sixty. In point of physical welfare, therefore, the results of emancipation are quite illusory, and the more so as the peasants enjoy no political rights, and support all the burdens and *corvées*. In fine, the new system has as yet produced only loss, trouble, and embarrassment, both to large and small fortunes. As to hopes for the future, none can be seriously conceived, except for very distant times. It will require many years even for a wise and enlightened administration to rectify the state of a country whose population consists of a scanty body of landowners, and a mass of peasants without fixed domicile, possessing no other resources than the chance of a limited engagement, and the labour of their hands.

We will not go into details of all the measures adopted by the Russian government with reference to the agricultural and commercial affairs of Bessarabia: they were as contradictory and as irrational as those we have noticed in our account of the Crimea. The immigrations of the Bulgarians[86] and Germans,[87] it is true, were favoured, and they were granted the most fertile [Pg 431] lands of the Boudjiak; several villages of Cossacks[88] and of Great Russians[89] were settled in the same regions; and attempts were even made with some success to colonise a few nomade tribes of gipsies.[90] But all these excellent creations, the first idea of which belongs to the head of the state, were largely counterbalanced by the mischievous measures of the local boards. Thus, for instance, in consequence of the division among the great landlords of all the immense meadows formerly possessed by the hospodars, and which they used to rent out in pasture, the national business of rearing zigai sheep was destroyed, and gave place to some ruinous attempts to introduce the merino breed. Extreme injury was done at the same time to the breeding of horses and horned cattle, a business which the government had already seriously damaged by forcing the proprietors of such stock to become Russian subjects or give up their employment, and by impeding by countless vexatious formalities the entrance of foreign merchants into the province, and their sojourn in it. In 1839, Bessarabia sold only 2365 horses, whereas formerly Austria alone drew from it from 12,000 to 15,000 every year for her cavalry.[91]

The following general table of the exports and imports of Bessarabia by the Danube and by land is drawn up from official documents. It cannot, however, indicate precisely the commercial situation of Bessarabia, since a considerable portion of the goods declared in five places named belongs only to the transit trade through the province, which, moreover, receives a quantity of manufactured and other goods from Southern Russia that are not mentioned at all in the table. Our figures would require a certain reduction to make them accurately represent the true state of the case.

BY THE DANUBE.—IMPORTS. [Pg 432]

| NAMES OF PLACES. | 1838. | | 1839. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Goods. | Cash. | Goods. | Cash. |
| | rubles. | rubles. | rubles. | rubles. |
| Ismael | 253,697 | 1,632,996 | 238,996 | 820,035 |
| Reny | 50,193 | 797,497 | 85,429 | 553,174 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | 303,890 | 2,430,493 | 324,425 | 1,373,209 |
| EXPORTS. | | | | |
| Ismael | 3,913,494 | 9,915 | 2,793,244 | |
| Reny | 718,040 | 50,773 | 609,541 | 77,745 |
| Total | 4,631,534 | 60,688 | 3,402,785 | 77,745 |
| BY LAND.—IMPORTS. | | | | |
| Novo Selitza, Austrian frontier | 221,324 | 1,939,604 | 245,198 | 3,048,064 |
| Skouleni on the Pruth | 222,507 | 497,209 | 195,088 | 721,015 |
| Leovo on the Pruth | 52,336 | 29,932 | 55,664 | 26,291 |
| Total | 496,167 | 2,466,745 | 495,950 | 3,795,370 |
| EXPORTS. | | | | |
| Novo Selitza | 1,978,172 | 163,868 | 3,277,660 | 81,868 |
| Skouleni | 829,692 | 525,638 | 737,462 | 540,618 |
| Leovo | 96,832 | 60,537 | 59,906 | 36,709 |
| Total | 2,904,696 | 750,043 | 4,075,028 | 659,195 |

Total of the customs and other duties realised in 1838, in the five localities above-named, 360,332 rubles, and in 1839, 319,134 rubles.

From some scattered details we have already given, the reader may conjecture that the population of Bessarabia is exceedingly mixed. The Boudjiak numbers among its inhabitants, Great Russians, Cossacks, Germans, Bulgarians, Swiss vine-dressers, gipsies, and Greek and Armenian merchants. The northern part of the province, on the contrary, is occupied almost exclusively by the Moldavian race, whose villages extend even along the Dniestr to the vicinity of Ackerman. Jews abound in the northern part; there are very few in the towns of the Boudjiak; leaving them out of the account the Bessarabian population may be divided into four great classes: the nobles, the free peasants who possess lands, the newly emancipated peasants, and the gipsies. The nobles consist of the ancient Moldavian aristocracy, the public functionaries, retired officers, and a great number of Russians, who have become landowners in the province. To this class we must join the Mazils, who are descendants of the ancient boyars, but whom war and the numerous revolutions that have desolated the land have reduced to penury. They form at present an intermediate class between the new nobles and the peasantry, and differ from the [Pg 433] aristocracy only in not taking part in the elections of the judges and marshals of the nobles. The free peasants are those, who, having been emancipated in times more or less remote, possess lands, and depend neither on the great landlords nor on the crown, though subject to ordinary imposts and *corvées*. The newly liberated peasants consist of those who are settled, by virtue of a contract or agreement, on lands belonging to individuals or to the crown; they form the majority of the population. The Bohemians are still subjected to the laws of slavery. Some of them, to the number of 900 families, belong to the crown, and the rest to Moldavian landowners, who usually employ them as servants, workmen, and musicians.

In Bessarabia, as throughout Russia and the principalities of the Danube, the new generation of nobles have completely renounced the habits of former days. They have of course adopted the straight coat, trousers, cravat, and all the rest of our Western costume; there is nothing striking in their outward appearance. The old boyars alone adhere to their ancestral customs; a broad divan, pipes, coffee, dolces, and the kieff after dinner, are indispensable for them; and to some of them shampooing is a delicious necessity. I know a certain nobleman who cannot fall asleep without having his feet rubbed by his Bohemian. But what above all strikes and delights every stranger, especially a Frenchman, is the eager and cordial hospitality and kindness he encounters in every Moldavian house. One is sure of meeting everywhere with men who sympathise heartily with every thing great and useful to mankind which our civilisation and our efforts have produced in these latter times. It is only to be regretted that these brilliant qualities are often tarnished by the corruption which administrative venality and rapacity, supervening upon long military occupations, have insensibly diffused through all classes of the population.

The Bessarabian of the lower class is by nature a husbandman; he very rarely plies a trade. To know his real worth he must be seen in the interior of the country, far from the towns. The Moldavian peasant is brave, gay, and hospitable; he delights to welcome the stranger, and generally would be ashamed to receive the slightest present from him. The Russians accuse him of excessive sloth, but the charge appears unfounded. The Moldavian peasant seldom, indeed, thinks of accumulating money, but he always works with zeal until he has attained the position he had aspired to, the amount of comfort he had set his heart on; and, in reality, it is not until after the fulfilment of his desires that he becomes lazy, and that his efforts are generally limited to procuring his family the few sacks of maize necessary for its subsistence. But increase his wants, make him understand that there are other enjoyments than those in which he indulges so cheaply, and you will infallibly see him shake off his natural apathy, and rise to the level of the new ideas he has adopted.

The most charming thing in the Moldavian villages is the extreme cleanliness of the houses, [Pg 434] which are generally surrounded by gardens and thriving orchards. Enter the forest dwelling, and you will almost always find a small room perfectly clean, furnished with a bed, and broad wooden divans covered with thick woollen stuffs. Bright parti-coloured carpets, piles of cushions, with open work embroideries, long red and blue napkins, often interwoven with gold and silver thread, are essential requisites in every household, and form a principal portion of the dowery of young women.

In general, the women take little part in field labours, but they are exceedingly industrious housewives. They are all clever weavers, and display great art and taste in making carpets, articles of dress, and linen. The great object of emulation among the women of every village, is to have the neatest and most comfortable house, and the best supplied with linen and household utensils.

Such was Bessarabia, when I visited it in detail, on my return from my long journeys in the steppes of the Caspian. I visited it a second time when about to quit Russia for the principalities of the Danube; and when I crossed the Pruth, I could not help reiterating my earnest prayers that the inexhaustible resources of this province may at last be duly appreciated, and that effectual measures may be taken to put an end to that languor and depression in which it has been sunk for so many years.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[85] Bessarabia now includes nine districts, the capitals of which, beginning from the south, are Ismael, Ackerman, Kahoul, Bender, Kichinev, Orgeiev, Beltz, Soroka, and Khotin. Kichinev is the capital of the government; it was formerly a poor borough on the Bouik, a little river that falls into the Dniestr; the preference was given it on account of its central position. Its population is now 42,636, of whom from 15,000 to 18,000 are Jews. It is to the administration of Lieutenant-general Fœderof that the town owes the numerous embellishments, and the principal public edifices it presents to the traveller's view.

[86] The Bulgarian colonies, the most prosperous of all those that have been established in the Boudjiak, numbered in 1840, 10,153 families, comprising 32,916 males, and 29,314 females. The surface of their lands has been estimated at 585,463 hectares, of which 527,590 are fit for tillage and hay crops, and 57,873 are waste. The Bulgarian colonists pay the crown 50 rubles per family. The corn harvest amounted, in 1839, to 211,337 tchetverts. They have contrived to preserve among them the breed of zigai sheep, the long strong wool of which is in demand in the East, and formed, previously to the Russian occupation, the chief wealth of the Bessarabians: they now possess about 343,479.

[87] The German colonies include nineteen villages and 1736 families. They are in a very backward condition.

[88] After the destruction of the celebrated Setcha of Dniepr, the Zaporogue Cossacks withdrew in great numbers beyond the Danube, and settled with the permission of the Turks on that secondary branch of the Balkan which runs between Isaktchy and Toultcha. During the wars of 1828 and 1829, the Russian government contrived to gain the allegiance of many of the descendants of these Zaporogues who served it as spies. Their number was so considerable that after the campaign Russia formed them into military colonies in the Boudjiak. These colonies increased greatly in consequence of the asylum they afforded to all the refugees and vagabonds of Russia, and presented, in 1840, an effective of two regiments of cavalry of 600 men each, with a total population of 3000 families, having eight villages and 50,000 hectares of land.

[89] We have no exact data respecting these villages, the situation of which is wretched enough. Their population consists entirely of fugitives, to whom the government had for many years granted an asylum in Bessarabia to the detriment of the neighbouring government.

[90] The gipsies have three villages containing 900 families. The establishment of these colonies was not effected without difficulty, and it required all the severity of a military administration to make them sow their grounds.

[91] Since our departure, the Russian government seems disposed to interest itself on behalf of Bessarabia. We are informed that it is at present turning its attention to the navigation of the Dniestr, a matter of the more importance since the Dniestr washes Bessarabia throughout its whole length, and there is not yet in that province any means of communication practicable at all seasons.



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# NOTE.

To complete our author's account of Sevastopol, we subjoin an abstract of a paper by Mr. Shears, C.E., which was read at the meeting of the Institution of Civil Engineers, January 12, 1847.

> "Sevastopol is very peculiarly situated, amidst rocky ground, rising so abruptly from the shore, that there was not space for the buildings necessary for a dockyard. On account of the depth of water close in shore, and other natural advantages, the emperor determined to make it the site of an extensive establishment, and as there is not any rise of tide in the Black Sea, and the construction of cofferdams would have

been very expensive and difficult in such a rocky position, it was decided to build three locks, each having a rise of ten feet, and at this level of thirty feet above the sea to place a main dock with lateral docks, into which vessels of war could be introduced, and the gates being closed, the water could be discharged by subterranean conducts to the sea, and the vessel, being left dry, could be examined and repaired, even beneath the keel. A stream was conducted from a distance of twelve miles to supply the locks, and to keep the docks full; this, however, has been found insufficient, and a pumping-engine has since been erected by Messrs. Maudsley and Field, for assisting.

"The original intention was to have made the gates for the docks of timber, but on account of the ravages of a worm, which it appears does not, as in the case of the Teredo navalis or the Tenebranes, confine itself to the salt water, it was resolved to make them with cast iron frames covered with wrought iron plates.

"There are nine pairs of gates, whose openings vary from 64 feet in width and 34 feet 4 inches in height for ships of 120 guns, to 46 feet 7 inches in width, and 21 feet in height, for frigates.

"The manipulation of such masses of metal as composed these gates demanded peculiar machines; accordingly, Messrs. Rennie fitted up a building expressly, with machines constructed by Mr. Whitworth, by which all the bearing surfaces could be planed, and the holes bored in the ribs, and all the other parts, whether their surfaces were curved or plane. The planing was effected by tools which travelled over the surface, backward and forward, cutting each way; the piece of metal being either held in blocks, if the surface was plane, or turned on centres, if the surface was curved. The drilling was performed by machines, so fixed, that the pieces could be brought beneath or against the drills, in the required direction, and guided so as to insure perfect uniformity and accordance between them.

"Travelling cranes were so arranged, as to take the largest pieces from the wharf, and place them in the various machines, by the agency of a very few men, notwithstanding their formidable dimensions; the heelposts in some cases being upwards of 34 feet long. Each endless screw, for giving progressive motion to the cutting tools, was 45 feet long. Some idea may be formed of the manual labour avoided by the machines, when it is stated, that the surface planed or turned in the nine pairs of gates equals 717,464 square inches; and in some cases a thickness of three-quarters of an inch was cut off. The surface in the drilled bolt holes equals 120,000 square inches." [Pg 436]

The paper gave all the details of the construction of the gates, and the machinery for making them; and was illustrated by a series of detailed drawings.

## THE END.

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**C. WHITING, BEAUFORT HOUSE, STRAND.**

Transcriber's Note

Some inconsistent hyphenation and spelling in the original document has been preserved.

Typographical errors corrected in the text:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Page | v | Debats changed to Débats |
| Page | v | Ickaterinoslav changed to Iekaterinoslav |
| Page | 6 | accomodation changed to accommodation |
| Page | 20 | etsablished changed to established |
| Page | 26 | bord changed to board |
| Page | 27 | that changed to than |
| Page | 55 | DEBATS changed to DÉBATS |
| Page | 59 | orgie changed to orgy |
| Page | 70 | porticos changed to porticoes |
| Page | 71 | satify changed to satisfy |
| Page | 77 | party changed to parti |
| Page | 78 | Alsacian changed to Alsatian |

Page 84 Azor changed to Azov
Page 87 guerillero changed to guerrillero
Page 93 "Every thing is matter of surprise" changed to "Every thing is a matter of surprise"
Page 93 cassino changed to casino
Page 113 choses changed to chooses
Page 114 subsistance changed to subsistence
Page 117 bead changed to head
Page 120 acording changed to according
Page 141 Gengis changed to Genghis
Page 153 Gengis changed to Genghis
Page 157 Alsacean changed to Alsacian
Page 159 it changed to its
Page 173 stupified changed to stupefied
Page 174 vieing changed to vying
Page 176 rareties changed to rarities
Page 180 Tibetian changed to Tibetan
Page 185 Tondoutof changed to Tondoudof
Page 194 Samarcand changed to Samarkand
Page 196 hectrolitres changed to hectolitres
Page 207 semovar changed to samovar
Page 214 gaolors changed to gaolers
Page 217 wo-begone changed to woe-begone
Page 218 semovar changed to samovar
Page 223 downfal changed to downfall
Page 224 predecesssors chaned to predecessors
Page 235 Tourgouth changed to Torgouth
Page 237 latitiude changed to latitude
Page 257 batallions changed to battalions
Page 267 Ghenghis changed to Genghis
Page 269 Boudjak changed to Boudjiak
Page 270 earthern changed to earthen
Page 282 fistycuffs changed to fisticuffs
Page 282 suprise changed to surprise
Page 297 Bukharest changed to Bucharest
Page 307 Caucausus changed to Caucasus
Page 322 Emmaneul changed to Emmanuel
Page 325 Manghislak changed to Manghishlak
Page 326 incontestibly changed to incontestably
Page 349 Taibout changed to Taitbout
Page 351 formalties changed to formalitiev
Page 363 cashmires changed to cashmeres
Page 364 Bagtchte changed to Bagtche
Page 367 moolight changed to moonlight
Page 369 filagree changed to filigree
Page 373 belfrey changed to belfry
Page 380 ebulitions changed to ebullitions
Page 384 thngs changed to things
Page 388 fhe changed to the
Page 388 sweatmeats changed to sweetmeats
Page 391 Ghenghis changed to Genghis
Page 392 Soudah changed to Soudagh
Page 400 griffen changed to griffin
Page 409 Guerei changed to Guerai
Page 411 recuscitate changed to resuscitate
Page 423 Cossaks changed to Cossacks
Page 432 Skoulein changed to Skouleni

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