

THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

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In the Far East—Distractions and Distresses of Time—How Odessa Looks—Sounds from Home—No Show Lions—Historical Reminiscences of Odessa—Novel Bathing Costumes—Preparing to Visit the Czar—Fluttering Among the Republicans.

ODESSA, Russia, August 22d.

The Far East.

We have got so far east, now—a hundred and fifty-five degrees of longitude from San Francisco—that my watch cannot keep the hang of the time any more. It has got discouraged and stopped. I think it did a wise thing. The difference in time between Sebastopol and Sacramento is enormous. When it is six o'clock in the morning here, it is week before last in California. Counting one or two detours from the straight line, this watch has travelled considerably more than ten thousand miles east from San Francisco, and as neither of us are accustomed to wandering very far from home, we are excusable for getting a little tangled as to time. I have ciphered it out far enough to know, that with a good deal over ten hours' difference between this place and the Pacific the sun is rising here when it is setting in San Francisco, or it is rising in San Francisco when it is setting here, I cannot tell which. These distractions and distresses about the time have worried me so much that I was afraid my mind was so much affected that I never would have any appreciation of time again; but when I noticed how handy I was yet about comprehending when it was dinner-time, a blessed tranquillity settled down upon me and I am tortured with doubts and fears no more.

Odessa.

This is about twenty hours' run from Sebastopol, and is the most northerly port in the Black Sea. We came here to get coal, principally. The city has a population of 133,000, and is growing faster than other small city out of America. It is a free port, and is the great grain mart of this particular part of the world. Its roadstead is full of ships. Engineers are at work, now, turning this open roadstead into a spacious artificial harbor. It is to be almost enclosed by massive stone piers, one of which will extend into the sea over 3,000 feet in a straight line. Sir Charles Hartley, a very distinguished English engineer, won the \$8,000 prize for the best plan for the new harbor, and he was shrewd enough to leave some of the instructions as to the mode of building it obscure enough to render it best for the Government to accept his bid for its construction. It is a comfortable speculation. He is to complete it in five years, and gets \$5,000,000 for it.

Suggestions of Home.

I have not felt so much at home for a long time as I did when I "raised the hill" and stood in Odessa for the first time. It looked just like an American city; fine, broad streets, and straight as well; low houses (two or three stories), wide, neat, and free from any quaintness of architectural ornamentation; locust trees bordering the sidewalks (they call them acacias); a stirring, business-look about the streets and the stores; fast walkers; a familiar *new* look about the houses and everything; yea, and a driving and smothering cloud of dust that was so like a message from our own dear native land that we could not refrain from shedding a few grateful tears and swearing in the old time-honored way. Look up the street or down the street, this way or that way, we saw only America! There was not one thing to remind us that we were in Russia. We walked for some little distance, revelling in this home vision, and then we came upon a church and a hack driver, and lo! the illusion vanished! The church had a slender-spined dome that rounded inward at its base, and looked like a boy's peg-top turned upside down, and the hackman seemed to be dressed in a long petticoat without any hoops. These things were essentially foreign, and so were the carriages—but everybody knows about these things, and there is no occasion for my describing them.

Loading.

We were only to stay here a day and a night and take in coal; we consulted the guide-books and were rejoiced to know that there were no sights in Odessa to see; and so we had one good, untrammelled holiday on our hands, with nothing to do but iddle about the city and enjoy ourselves. We prowled through the markets and criticised the fearful and wonderful costumes from the back country; examined the populace as far as eyes could do it; and closed the entertainment with an ice-cream debauch. We do not get ice-cream everywhere, and if we do, we are apt to dissipate to excess.

We only found two pieces of statuary, and this was another blessing. One was a bronze image of the Duc de Richelieu, grand nephew of the splendid Cardinal. It stood in a spacious, handsome promenade, overlooking the sea, and from its base a vast flight of stone steps led down to the harbor—two hundred of them, fifty feet long, and a wide landing at the bottom of every twenty. It is a noble staircase, and from a distance the people toiling up it looked like insects. I mention this statue and this stairway because they have their story. Richelieu founded Odessa—watched over it with paternal care—labored with a fertile brain and a wise understanding for its best interests—spent his fortune freely to the same end—endowed it with a sound prosperity, and one which will yet make it one of the great cities of the Old World—built this noble stairway with money from his own private purse—and—. Well, the people for whom he had done so much, let him walk down these same steps, one day, unattended, old, poor, without a second coat to his back; and when years afterwards, he died in Sebastopol in poverty and neglect, they called a meeting, subscribed liberally, and immediately erected this tasteful monument to his memory, and named a great street after him. It reminds me of what Robert Burns' mother said when they erected a stately monument to his memory: "Ah, Robbie, ye asked them for bread and they hae gi'en ye a stone."

Cheerful Bathing.

If there is one thing that is really cheerful in the world, it is cheerfulness. I have noticed it often. And I have noticed that when a man is right down cheerful, he is seldom unhappy for the time being. Such is the nature of man. Now I have often thought that our style of bathing was rather reserved than otherwise, and lacked many elements of cheerfulness. But you cannot say that of the Russian style. I watched a party of them at it this afternoon in the harbor, and it is really nice. The men and women, and the boys and girls, all go in together, along about noon, and the men don't wear anything at all; the boys don't, the little girls don't, and the young women and the old women usually wear a single white thin garment with ruffles around the top of it and short sleeves, (which I have forgotten the name of it,) but this would be a very good apology for a bathing dress, if it would only stay down. But it won't do it. It will float up around their necks in the most scandalous way, and the water is clear, and yet they don't seem to know enough to kick up the mud on the bottom. I never was so outraged in my life. At least a hundred times, in the seven hours I stayed there, I would just have got up and gone away from there disgusted, if I had had any place to go to. Several times I had a mind to go anyhow. Why, those young ladies thought no more of turning somersaults, when I was not looking, than nothing in the world. Incensed as I was, I was compelled to look, most of the time, during this barbarous exhibition, because it forced them to make a show of modesty, at least. Yet it wouldn't even have accomplished that, if they hadn't been so fond of show naturally.

Well, you can't conceive of it. It was awful. But sometimes my outraged feelings were crowded down by my fears for the safety of those girls. They were so reckless. One splendid-looking young woman went in with nothing on but a shawl, and she kept it wrapped around her so that I was afraid all the time that she would tangle her feet in its long fringes and drown herself. My solicitude became so unbearable at last that I went and signified to her that if she wanted to take off her shawl I would hold it for her. But she only kicked up her heels and dived out of sight. I just took her to be one of your high-flyer, mock-modest kind, and left her to her fate. But she was the handsomest girl in the party, and it was a pity to see her endangering her life in that way.

I said to Brown: "It makes my heart bleed to to look upon this unhallowed scene."
"We better go, then," he said. "If you stay here seven more hours you might bleed to death."
So we went away. But it was marvellously cheerful bathing.

The Die Is Cast.

The people of Odessa have warmly recommended us to go and call on the Emperor, as did the Sebastopolians. They have telegraphed his Majesty, and he has signified his perfect willingness to grant us an audience. So we are getting up the anchors and preparing to sail to his watering-place. What a scratching around there is going to be, now! what a scratching of important meetings and appointing of solemn committees!—and what a furbishing up of claw-hammer coats and white silk neck-ties! As this fearful ordeal we are about to pass through pictures itself to my fancy in all its dread sublimity, I begin to feel my fierce desire to take a drink with a genuine Emperor cooling down and passing away. What am I going to do with my hands? What am I going to do with my feet? What in the world am I going to do with myself? The Consul says we must stand in a row and be perfectly civil, and the Emperor and a long file of gorgeously caparisoned Dukes and Princes and Generals will march in stately procession before us, and bow as they go. We must bow low, and smile—smile a smile of friendly interest, of affection, of admiration—a smile which must be so comprehensive that it shall seem that through us, all America smiled! If the Emperor speaks to any he in the party, that man must talk back, but do it with a world of deference and good-breeding. All right—but if he says anything to me in Russian I shall have to pass. And the Consul says that we must invite the Emperor to come on board and take a trip; and if he accepts, we must all vacate the ship, and give her up entirely to his control as long as he wants her. His family and suite will number a hundred and fifty, and fill her full. If he chooses to invite half a dozen of us to accompany his party, we must gratefully accept—the others must stay ashore. But the Emperor must be sole lord of the vessel for the time being. Very well, I do not consider that it is taking any chances. The Emperor is one of the most responsible men in Europe.

And the Consul also says that if the Emperor takes a trip, he will doubtless invite our whole tribe to dine with him at the palace two or three days afterward. Well, we are bound for Palestine anyhow. [A pun will be observed in the last sentence.] We are all tired of ship fare. We are all mighty hungry. I foresee that the Emperor is going to bring famine upon himself if he invites this gang to dinner, but it is his own fault. Nobody will be to blame but himself. Think of the way those varlets will waltz through the Imperial bill of fare!

MARK TWAIN.