

MISCELLANEOUS.

IN THE BALKAN MOUNTAINS.

BELGRADE, Servia, June 9.—“During the pilgrimage everything does not suit the taste of the pilgrim,” says the Turkish proverb—a statement one feels especially applicable after a detour of two or three hundred miles to get out of a submerged country. Travel through a country in a state of investment, with swarming soldiery and phenomenally rigid surveillance, is not an altogether easy task for a woman; but it can be accomplished. When it comes, however, to the windows of heaven being opened, and the fountains of the great deep broken up, difficulties arise that cannot be bridged in a hurry. This especially among the Balkans.

When I reached Sofia, two weeks ago, the sun had just broken through the clouds—“a good omen,” they assured me, as it had rained almost steadily for a month. Alas! that the omen was of no avail. For five days it poured steadily, relentlessly; and the mountain sides, as seen from my window, were torn with whirling cataracts, plowing their way down to the plain below. On Monday, I went to the station to resume my journey; but found the ticket office closed, and an official notice up to the effect that no trains were running through Servia. The railroad had been destroyed in many places, and five days at least must elapse before travel could be resumed. I wrote at once to Cook's agency in Constantinople to see if I could return there and resume my journey westward over some other route. No answer. Explanation received later when I discovered that the track between Sofia and Constantinople was also submerged. Tried to get to Rustchuk but found no chance there. Waited a week, while all the good Bulgarian friends cudgled their brains as how to get me out of their country, but with no avail. Reports came in from every side of villages destroyed, houses carried away, people drowned, roads and bridges totally demolished and crops ruined. No mail came from Europe for five days and no mail went out of Sofia for the same time, and still it rained. At last word came from the postoffice that they had commenced carrying the mail over the Balkan mountains by wagon, and thence dispatching it by the Danube, and that if I dared make the trip, a man had been found who would take me. I agreed at once, as exit by rail would be impossible for days to come, and I was already far behind schedule time.

Three o'clock the next morning saw the start, announced by the driver's peculiar Turkish trill of t-r-r-r-r-r—with much rolling of the r's. Three wiry-looking horses, with jangling bells, headed our conveyance; a cumbrous, phaeton-sort of an affair, into whose narrow limits were stuffed a peasant woman and two children, who lived a day's journey over the mountain, beside myself. Behind was securely lashed my trunk, crowned by the peasant's capacious bundle of Yorghans, and supplemented with bales of straw, and swiveling pails. On either side of the vehicle hung various baskets, jugs, bags, and buckets, while the driver shared his elevated perch

with a motley crowd of packages, blankets and repair supplies.

As we rattled down the city streets, the sun was just struggling to show his almost forgotten face above the snow-crowned mountain, Vitersha, and the gray sky was flecked with roseate clouds. At the street faucets and hydrants, sleepy gen d'armes and early rising inhabitants were performing their morning ablutions, for exceptional, indeed, is the Bulgarian house that presents any facilities for personal cleanliness inside its walls. Belated pussy cats who had been making a night of it, were stealing homeward, crouching along the walls, and the peripatetic sausage vendors were already a-foot with their wares, sizzling over their portable charcoal braziers. Two sportsmen, with guns and game bags, and feathers in their hats, rattled out from an adjoining street, and the sturdy milk women, balancing their long-curved poles over their shoulders, were soon in evidence.

As we left the city, turning our faces mountainward, group after group of picturesque peasants met us, on their way to town; women with fluttering contingents of fowls or pink young porkers, hung from poles or carried in pokes; banditti-looking Albanians, on horseback, munching bread and onions; buffaloes slowly pacing with great loads of straw, under convoy of bronzed peasants with homespun cotton garments thrown wide open from their bared chests. The roads, usually superb, were all heavy from the continued rains, and the fields of barley, stretching their broad acres on either side of the road, bent their bearded heads almost to the ground.

Instead of the blood-red poppies that colored all the landscapes in Greece and Turkey, a tall, purple-spiked flower, something like the larkspur, grew among the grain, and mirrored its color in the glassy pools that fringed the roadsides, broadening out frequently far into the fields. On and on we sped, our progress marked by gray stones measuring off the kilometers that were to number 156 before we could reach the Danube. For miles our surroundings varied little. Village after village of mud huts, straw-thatched or covered with lichen-colored tiles, an occasional white spire that marked—never a church—but a brewery; great flocks of black sheep, guarded by lone y shepherds in garments of sheepskin; groups of picturesque peasant girls, their long black braids, rose-crowned, on their way to wash their linen at some favorite pool; but never a detached house, never a fruit tree or orchard, and rarely a vegetable, save a patch of onions here and there.

About 8 o'clock we came to our first ruined hamlet, where the swift mountain stream, swelling in its course, had covered the little village and blotted it out of existence. Mournful-looking men and women were wading aimlessly among the floating debris, while the roadway was almost covered with the round stones brought down the mountain side by the rushing torrent. As we began winding our way up the mountain side, the views behind us grew extended, and vegetation became rapidly less. Wild roses, pink and white, clung to some of the reddish rocks that for the most part stood bare and solitary, and

from one side of the road, where sheep were feeding under the care of a Thracian-looking chap, the smell of pennyroyal came pungent and familiar. A group of old peasant women who had been gathering herbs and simples among the rocks, passed us, their bare legs, scant skirts, toothless mouths and grey hanging braids atoned for by wild flowers, coquettishly adjusted above their ears. At 11 o'clock we stopped to eat our luncheon and feed our horses at the most pretentious Khan we had passed. This was a square, red plastered building, one-story high, but containing two rooms and a real board floor. Three clumsy home-made tables adorned with three dirty red spreads were placed at our disposal, while our aesthetic tastes received stimulus, more or less, from a series of German prints illustrative of the Russo-Turkish campaign of '77.

Here we discussed our black Bulgarian bread, and cheese made from sheep's milk, attended by a number of fowls and dogs who had the entire of the place. Three hours more of laborious climbing over the most desolate of regions, accentuated by an occasional settlement of the forlornest mud hovels conceivable, and the threatening cloud broke upon us in a perfect deluge. Although the cumbrous top to our vehicle was at once put up, necessitating our sitting with heads bent upon our breasts, the rain found free entrance. Our horses were put as near to a gallop as possible, and mid flying mud, pouring rain and a series of objurcations on the part of the driver we at last drew up in front of another of the wayside khans, miserable beyond description. Gaunt pigs wallowed in front of its forbidding entrance, for this as well as every other village in the Balkans was engulfed in mud. Our driver made his way to the shelter which promised him at least a mug of beer, while we sat outside, ruminating on the delights of European travel. The children were wet and sleepy, but stoically refrained from tears. Their store of bedding was soaked through and through, but their equanimity was undisturbed. An armful of hay was brought out by a youth in tight white trousers, an apron, and a ring on his forefinger, who placed it in the mud in front of our sorry-looking steeds, who were beginning to show distinct signs of weakening.

The population of the khan grew again; bare legged mountaineers in sheepskin coats and caps came striding over the hills from every direction, while one peg-legged veteran, doubtless a residuary of the war, hopped nimbly and affably among his confreres. After an hour's waiting our driver reappeared, somewhat cheered, though still wet to the skin. On and up we climbed, a cold rain still falling, through clouds whose gray opaqueness, parting now and then, gave glimpses of the same vapory blanket encompassing the sides of the mountains beneath us. Here was no vegetation at all, nothing but the cold gray of rock and cloud. The road grew steeper and the mud deeper, until at last all progress became impossible. Meeting an ox team, a halt was called, our horses taken off from the carriage and the oxen put in their place. Our driver took the horses and disappeared, leaving us to the care of the owner of the oxen, who resumed the line of march, guiding his team by means of a goad, which he ap-