

The difference between a Russian and a Lithuanian village, in their structure, is very remarkable. The former is built in a neat manner, and regularly along each side of the road. The latter consists of a straggling heap of huts, without order or arrangement, and separated from each by large spaces of ground.

Along this immense forest we still continued our journey over a dark and gloomy road. The fir trees are about sixty feet in height, but very slender. The country between Orcha and Minsk is one immense forest, and, unless in some open spaces, round the towns and villages, is perfectly compact and thick. It bore frequent marks of fire and the *bivouacs* of armies. We noticed several wooden platforms attached to the trunks of the trees, about thirty feet from the ground, which are used to place beehives upon, in order to collect honey and wax, during the summer months.

The approach to Minsk is by a sandy road; the view it presents is shewy and grotesque, from the number of clumsy churches it contains. The town is entered by a wooden bridge, over a small river, and along an avenue of trees and shrubberies

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This street rises to a considerable elevation, and terminates in a large open square of grass and mean wooden huts; from this another street goes off at right angles, containing large houses, and joining with a second square. Here the principal buildings are both of brick and wood. From this square several streets branch off, and enter a crowd of wooden hovels irregularly huddled together, and covering a large space of ground.

Minsk is rather a fine town for Lithuania; but is very dirty and very irregular. The buildings in the square are large churches very heavily constructed, without any elegance. Their gable ends front the street, and are terminated at each corner by a square spire, with a low dome between them. This kind of church is peculiar to Lithuania. The religion is partly Catholic, and partly Jewish. The population is about seven thousand, of which about three thousand are Jews. Of the lower classes, the Jews are the most filthy and the most annoying; it is impossible to avoid the pestilential intrusion of these grovelling reptiles. The moment a traveller arrives, he becomes haunted by them—he cannot stir without being watched. Every Jew employs

employs a vagabond to ply in the streets and solicit the custom of the stranger; his house is ready on all occasions, for an hotel, or any thing else, no matter how base!

On entering the town, we had great difficulty in finding an hotel to breakfast in, every house being crowded by the military. Jews innumerable flocked around and invited us: one of them begged us to enter his house, with the utmost obsequiousness; but at the door, demanded sixteen roubles for the use of a room. Fortunately we found a German, less imposing, and here we were lodged in a common billiard room, and slept on the long benches, amidst all the noise, filth, and vociferation of gambling Jews and Lithuanians. The people are rude, unpolished, vulgar and noisy. As an instance of their rudeness, we were often asked to mark the game for the player, they not being able to appreciate that good breeding and politeness, which is due to strangers, in civilised countries; and as an instance of their unparalleled and acknowledged dishonesty, the billiard balls were not allowed to lie on the table unless when the game was playing;

playing ; and in every room a spy is placed, to watch lest any moveable article should be taken away. In all public rooms and companies, also, are busy, prying, inquisitous characters, seeking for some words which may drop from a stranger as to the government, laws, &c. ;—in short, men who appear to be employed as informers, and report at the police office what they collect. Such is the dreadful effect of that powerful engine of despotism, which this vast empire wields, and which forms so prominent a feature in its character.

In so small a town it presented rather a lively spectacle in its equipages, dresses, &c. ; but the most interesting part to us was the exhibition of four or five thousand Cossacks, Bas-kirs, &c. fully equipped. They were stationed here to receive the Emperor Alexander, who was on his way from St. Petersburg to the Congress at Vienna. As in Russia proper, a vast deal of shew, parade and costliness is exhibited ; but it has all that boldness and barbarity about it, so peculiar to rude, unpolished and powerful nations. The ladies sit in open carriages, without any head-dress, although the weather

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is now so cold, that the common people are all wrapped up in their sheep-skins. There are many nobles here, both Lithuanian and Polish. They are a remarkably fine made class of men, and their dress is extremely graceful. They wear a long silken or cloth tunic, with loose sleeves—a broad silken sash is knotted round the waist, the head is closely shaven, and on it a Hessian cap is worn. It is said that Charles II. attempted to introduce this dress into England. The common Lithuanians exhibit the most abject and palsied appearance—man can scarcely present a more degraded picture. Their looks are squalid and haggard, their gait heavy and lifeless; their dress can scarcely merit description, for it scarcely deserves the name of dress; it is more like an irregular bundle of rags. The horses somewhat resemble the men in poverty and wretchedness, they seem half starved, are unshod, and without strength: six of them could scarcely drag our carriage.

The effects of the French invasion, on this town, were not so conspicuous, as in the others through which we have passed. On their retreat, being obliged to change their route towards Wilna, they did not reach Minsk, and it thus

escaped their flames. The capture of the French magazines, by the arrival of Admiral Tschikakoff, may be said to have sealed the fate of the tyrant; and hence his retreat became a perfect and wretched flight. The only trace of invasion, now presented, is in the poverty of the people, who were plundered by the soldiery on their advance to Moscow. The houses were not touched. After the battle of Berezina, it became a depôt for French prisoners, and held about twenty thousand, who mostly died.

From this neighbourhood vast quantities of ship-masts are sent down the Niemen; from the different sources of the river, the land carriage is about thirty miles. A large quantity of hemp, flax and grain, is also sent from this country. At present the prices have fallen considerably; what formerly sold for thirty roubles, is now sold for three.

We were detained two days at Minsk for horses; the post-house could grant none, as every thing was in hurry and bustle, on account of the arrival of the Emperor. What also contributed to our detention was, it being the Jew's Sabbath, and his unwillingness to do any business on that day: at
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length we overcame his religious scruples, and for thirty-eight roubles we procured six horses for the next two stages. The Jew would not receive the money into his hand, but held up the flap of his cloak for it!

The road leaves Minsk, over a large and beautiful common, which forms a kind of open circular space about the town, while, beyond it, one uninterrupted circle of forest binds the view. In one part of this common is seen a magnificent burying ground of the Jews. The country, for the first stage, continued partly open, but in general covered with distant forests; the road was excessively bad. We baited the horses at a solitary station-house, about seventeen miles from Minsk, and travelled the next stage during the night. We had not proceeded far, when one of the Jews fell asleep, the horses strayed to one side of the road, and the carriage was overturned into a ditch; fortunately no injury occurred to our persons excepting a slight contusion which one of the servants received on the knee; but our carriage was severely damaged, and all our light baggage was tossed out. We procured a torch, and after a careful search recovered all our books,

&c. A scene like this in a dark, cold, rainy night, in the midst of Lithuania and the inhospitable Jews, was by no means agreeable. Early in the morning we reached the small village of Koidanovo, containing about eight hundred inhabitants, and built in a tolerably neat manner. Here we were driven into a large stable, similar to the different stages throughout Holstein and part of Prussia. At every stage we began to remark a change of manner, strongly indicating a change of people. All traces whatever of the Russians we had long lost sight of, and that of the Poles began now to mingle with the Lithuanians. We were detained at this place several hours to repair the damages our carriage had received, and met with several traits of the Jewish character. For the next stage they demanded as many roubles as what we had agreed to give for the former ones: this is a common piece of imposition with the Jews; a charge was also made for the time the carriage had occupied the stable, and a still more extraordinary demand was made for a few blows which one of our servants had given the Jew at the time he overturned the carriage! The greatest confusion and vociferation prevailed.