

BORROW, George

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Shorter, Clement King: George Borrow  
and his circle, Boston, 1913.  
Houghton

## CHAPTER XXIV

### IN EASTERN EUROPE

IN 1844 Borrow set out for the most distant holiday that he was ever to undertake. Passing through London in March 1844, he came under the critical eye of Elizabeth Rigby, afterwards Lady Eastlake, that formidable critic who four years later—in 1848—wrote the cruel review of *Jane Eyre* in *The Quarterly* that gave so much pain to Charlotte Brontë. She was not a nice woman. These sharp, 'clever' women-critics rarely are; and Borrow never made a pleasant impression when such women came across his path—instance Harriet Martineau, Frances Cobbe, and Agnes Strickland. We should sympathise with him, and not count it for a limitation, as some of his biographers have done. The future Lady Eastlake thus disposes of Borrow in her one reference to him:

March 20.—Borrow came in the evening; now a fine man, but a most disagreeable one; a kind of character that would be most dangerous in rebellious times—one that would suffer or persecute to the utmost. His face is expressive of strong-headed determination.<sup>1</sup>

Quoting this description of Borrow, Dr. Knapp describes it as 'shallow'—for 'he was one of the

<sup>1</sup> *Journals and Correspondence of Lady Eastlake*, edited by her nephew, Charles Eastlake Smith, vol. i. p. 124. John Murray, 1895.

kindest of men, as my documents show.' The description is shallow enough, because the writer had no kind of comprehension of Borrow, but then, perhaps, his champion had not. Borrow was neither one of the 'kindest of men' nor the reverse. He was a good hater and a whole-hearted lover, and to be thus is to fill a certain uncomfortable but not discreditable place in the scheme of things. About a month later Borrow was on the way to the East, travelling by Paris and Vienna. From Paris he wrote to Mr. John Murray that Vidocq 'wished much to have a copy of my *Gypsies in Spain*,' but suspects the Frenchman of desiring to produce a compressed translation. Will Mr. Murray have the book translated into French? he asks, and so circumvent his wily friend.<sup>1</sup> In June he is in Buda Pesth, whence he wrote to his wife:

To Mrs. George Borrow, Oulton, Lowestoft

PESTH, HUNGARY, 14th June 1844.

MY DEAREST CARRETTA, — I was so glad to get your letter which reached me about nine days ago; on receiving it, I instantly made preparations for quitting Vienna, but owing to two or three things which delayed me, I did not get away till the 20th; I hope that you received the last letter which I sent, as I doubt not that you are all anxious to hear from me. You cannot think how anxious I am to get back to you, but since I am already come so far, it will not do to return before my object is accomplished. Heaven knows that I do not travel for travelling's sake, having a widely different object in view. I came from Vienna here down the Danube, but I daresay I shall not go farther by the river, but shall travel through the country to Bucharest in Wallachia, which is the next place I intend to visit; but Hungary is a widely different country to Austria, not at all civilised, no coaches, etc., but only carts and wagons; however, it is all the same thing to

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Borrow* by Herbert Jenkins, p. 361.



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me as I am quite used to rough it; Bucharest is about three hundred miles from here; the country, as I have said before, is wild, but the people are quite harmless—it is only in Spain that any danger is to be feared from your fellow creatures. In Bucharest I shall probably stay a fortnight. I have a letter to a French gentleman there from Baron Taylor. Pesth is very much like Edinburgh—there is an old and a new town, and it is only the latter which is called Pesth, the name of the old is Buda, which stands on the side of an enormous mountain overlooking the new town, the Danube running between. The two towns together contain about 120,000 inhabitants; I delivered the letter which dear Woodfall was kind enough to send; it was to a person, a Scotchman, who is superintending in the building of the chain bridge over the Danube; he is a very nice person, and has shown me every kind of civility; indeed, every person here is very civil; yesterday I dined at the house of a rich Greek; the dinner was magnificent, the only drawback was that they pressed me too much to eat and drink; there was a deal of champagne, and they would make me drink it till I was almost sick, for it is a wine that I do not like, being far too sweet. Since I have been here I have bathed twice in the Danube, and find myself much the better for it. I both sleep and eat better than I did. I have also been about another chapter, and get on tolerably well; were I not so particular I should get on faster, but I wish that everything that I write in this next be first-rate. Tell Mama that this chapter begins with a dialogue between her and my father; I have likewise contrived to bring in the poor old dog in a manner which I think will be interesting. I began this letter some days ago, but have been so pleasantly occupied that I have made little progress till now. Clarke, poor fellow, does not know how to make enough of me. He says he could scarcely believe his eyes when he first received the letter, as he has just got *The Bible in Spain* from England, and was reading it. This is the 17th, and in a few days I start for a place called Debreczen, from whence I shall proceed gradually on my journey. The next letter which you receive will probably be from Transylvania, the one after that from Bucharest, and the third D.V. from Constantinople. If you like you may write to Constantinople, directing it to the care of the English Ambassador, but be sure to pay the postage.

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Before I left Vienna Baron Hammer, the great Orientalist, called upon me; his wife was just dead, poor thing, which prevented him showing me all the civility which he would otherwise have done. He took me to the Imperial Library. Both my books were there, *Gypsies* and *Bible*. He likewise procured me a ticket to see the Imperial treasure. (Tell Henrietta that I saw there the diamond of Charles the Bold; it is as large as a walnut.) I likewise saw the finest opal, as I suppose, in the world; it was the size of a middling pear; there was likewise a hyacinth as big as a swan's egg; I likewise saw a pearl so large that they had wrought the figure of a cock out of it, and the cock was somewhat more than an inch high, but the thing which struck me most was the sword of Tamerlane, generally called Timour the Tartar; both the hilt and scabbard were richly adorned with diamonds and emeralds, but I thought more of the man than I did of them, for he was the greatest conqueror the world ever saw (I have spoken of him in *Lavengro* in the chapter about David Haggart). Nevertheless, although I have seen all these fine things, I shall be glad to get back to my Carreta and my darling mother and to dear Hen. From Debrezen I hope to write to kind dear Woodfall, and to Lord from Constantinople. I must likewise write to Hasfeld. The mulct of thirty pounds upon Russian passports is only intended for the subjects of Russia. I see by the journals that the Emperor has been in England; I wonder what he is come about; however, the less I say about that the better, as I shall soon be in his country. Tell Hen that I have got her a large piece of Austrian gold money, worth about forty-two shillings; it is quite new and very handsome; considerably wider than the Spanish ounce, only not near so thick, as might be expected, being of considerable less value; when I get to Constantinople I will endeavour to get a Turkish gold coin. I have also got a new Austrian silver dollar and a half one; these are rather cumbersome, and I don't care much about them—as for the large gold coin, I carry it in my pocket-book, which has been of great use to me hitherto. I have not yet lost anything, only a pocket handkerchief or two as usual; but I was obliged to buy two other shirts at Vienna; the weather is so hot, that it is quite necessary to change them every other day; they were beautiful linen ones, and I think you will like them when you see. I shall be so glad to



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get home and continue, if possible, my old occupation. I hope my next book will sell; one comfort is that nothing like it has ever been published before. I hope you all get on comfortably, and that you catch some fish. I hope my dear mother is well, and that she will continue with you till the end of July at least; ah! that is my month, I was born in it, it is the pleasantest month in the year; would to God that my fate had worn as pleasant an aspect as the month in which I was born. God bless you all. Write to me, to the care of the British Embassy, Constantinople. Kind remembrances to Pilgrim.

In the intervening journey between Pesth and Constantinople he must have talked long and wandered far and wide among the gypsies, for Charles L. Brace in his *Hungary in 1851* gives us a glimpse of him at Grosswardein holding conversation with the gypsies:

They described his appearance—his tall, lank, muscular form—and mentioned that he had been much in Spain, and I saw that it must be that most ubiquitous of travellers, Mr. Borrow.

The four following letters require no comment:

To Mrs. George Borrow, Oulton, Lowestoft

DEBRECZEN, HUNGARY, 8th July 1844.

MY DARLING CARRETA,—I write to you from Debreczen, a town in the heart of Hungary, where I have been for the last fortnight with the exception of three days during which I was making a journey to Tokay, which is about forty miles distant. My reason for staying here so long was my liking the place where I have experienced every kind of hospitality; almost all the people in these parts are Protestants, and they are so fond of the very name of Englishmen that when one arrives they scarcely know how to make enough of him; it is well the place is so remote that very few are ever seen here, perhaps not oftener than once in ten years, for if some of our scamps and swell mob were once to find their way there the good people of Hungary would soon cease to have

much respect for the English in general; as it is they think that they are all men of honour and accomplished gentlemen whom it becomes them to receive well in order that they may receive from them lessons in civilisation; I wonder what they would think if they were to meet such fellows as Squarem and others whom I could mention. I find my knowledge of languages here of great use, and the people are astonished to hear me speak French, Italian, German, Russian, and occasionally Gypsy. I have already met with several Gypsies; those who live abroad in the wildernesses are quite black; the more civilised wander about as musicians, playing on the fiddle, at which they are very expert, they speak the same languages as those in England, with slight variations, and upon the whole they understand me very well. Amongst other places I have been to Tokay, where I drank some of the wine. I am endeavouring to bring two or three bottles to England, for I thought of my mother and yourself and Hen., and I have got a little wooden case made; it is very sweet and of a pale straw colour; whether I shall be able to manage it I do not know; however, I shall make the attempt. At Tokay the wine is only two shillings the bottle, and I have a great desire that you should taste some of it. I sincerely hope that we shall soon all meet together in health and peace. I shall be glad enough to get home, but since I am come so far it is as well to see as much as possible. Would you think it, the Bishop of Debreczen came to see me the other day and escorted me about the town, followed by all the professors of the college; this was done merely because I was an Englishman and a Protestant, for here they are almost all of the reformed religion and full of love and enthusiasm for it. It is probable that you will hear from Woodfall in a day or two; the day before yesterday I wrote to him and begged him to write to you to let you know, as I am fearful of a letter miscarrying and your being uneasy. This is unfortunately post day and I must send away the letter in a very little time, so that I cannot say all to you that I could wish; I shall stay here about a week longer, and from here shall make the best of my way to Transylvania and Bucharest; I shall stay at Bucharest about a fortnight, and shall then dash off for Constantinople—I shan't stay there long—but when once there it matters not as it is a civilised country from which start steamers to any part where you may want to go. I



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hope to receive a letter from you there. You cannot imagine what pleasure I felt when I got your last. Oh, it was such a comfort to me! I shall have much to tell you when I get back. Yesterday I went to see a poor wretch who is about to be hanged; he committed a murder here two years ago, and the day after tomorrow he is to be executed—they expose the people here who are to suffer three days previous to their execution—I found him in a small apartment guarded by soldiers, with hundreds of people staring at him through the door and the windows; I was admitted into the room as I went with two officers, he had an enormous chain about his waist and his feet were manacled; he sat smoking a pipe; he was, however, very penitent, and said that he deserved to die, as well he might; he had murdered four people, beating out their brains with a club; he was without work, and requested of an honest man here to receive him into his house one night until the morning. In the middle of the night he got up, and with his brother, who was with him, killed every person in the house and then plundered it; two days after, he was taken; his brother died in prison; I gave him a little money, and the gentleman who was with me gave him some good advice; he looked most like a wild beast, a huge mantle of skin covered his body; for nine months he had not seen the daylight; but now he is brought out into a nice clean apartment, and allowed to have everything he asks for, meat, wine, tobacco—nothing is refused him during these last three days. I cannot help thinking that it is a great cruelty to keep people so long in so horrid a situation; it is two years nearly since he has been condemned. Do not be anxious if you do not hear from me regularly for some time. There is no escort post in the countries to which I am going. God bless my mother, yourself, and Hen.

G. B.

To Mrs. George Borrow, Oulton, Lowestoft

HERMANSTADT, July 30, 1844.

MY DEAREST CARRETA,—I write to you a line or two from this place; it is close upon the frontier of Wallachia. I hope to be in Bucharest in a few days—I have stopped here for a day owing to some difficulty in getting horses—I shall hasten onward as quick as

possible. In Bucharest there is an English Consul, so that I shall feel more at home than I do here. I am only a few miles now from the termination of the Austrian dominions, their extent is enormous, the whole length of Hungary and Transylvania; I shall only stay a few days in Bucharest and shall then dash off straight for Constantinople: I have no time to lose as there is a high ridge of mountains to cross called the Balkans, where the winter commences at the beginning of September. I thought you would be glad to hear from me, on which account I write. I sent off a letter about a week ago from Klausenburg, which I hope you will receive. I have written various times from Hungary, though whether the letters have reached you is more than I can say. I wrote to Woodfall from Debreczen. I have often told you how glad I shall be to get home and see you again. If I have tarried, it has only been because I wished to see and learn as much as I could, for it was no use coming to such a distance for nothing. By the time I return I shall have made a most enormous journey, such as very few have made. The place from which I write is very romantic, being situated at the foot of a ridge of enormous mountains which extend to the clouds, they look higher than the Pyrenees. My health, thank God, is very good. I bathed to-day and feel all the better for it; I hope you are getting on well, and that all our dear family is comfortable. I hope my dear mother is well. Oh, it is so pleasant to hope that I am still not alone in the world, and that there are those who love and care for me and pray for me. I shall be very glad to get to Constantinople, as from there there is no difficulty; and a great part of the way to Russia is by sea, and when I am in Russia I am almost at home. I shall write to you again from Bucharest if it please God. It is not much more than eighty miles from here, but the way lies over the mountains, so that the journey will take three or four days. We travel here in tilted carts drawn by ponies; the carts are without springs, so that one is terribly shaken. It is, however, very healthy, especially when one has a strong constitution. The carts are chiefly made of sticks and wickerwork; they are, of course, very slight, and indeed if they were not so they would soon go to pieces owing to the jolting. I read your little book every morning; it is true that I am sometimes wrong with respect to the date, but I soon get right again; oh, I shall be so glad to see you





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and my mother and old Hen. and Lucy and the whole dear circle. I hope Crups is well, and the horse. Oh, I shall be so glad to come back. God bless you, my heart's darling, and dear Hen.; kiss her for me, and my mother.

GEORGE BORROW.

To Mrs. George Borrow, Oulton, Lowestoft

BUCHAREST, August 5, 1844.

MY DEAREST CARRETA,—I write you a few lines from the house of the Consul, Mr. Colquhoun, to inform you that I arrived at Bucharest quite safe: the post leaves to-day, and Mr. C. has kindly permitted me to send a note along with the official despatches. I am quite well, thank God, but I thought you would like to hear from me. Bucharest is in the province of Wallachia and close upon the Turkish frontier. I shall remain here a week or two as I find the place a very interesting one; then I shall proceed to Constantinople. I wrote to you from Hermanstadt last week and the week previous from Clausenburgh, and before I leave I shall write again, and not so briefly as now. I have experienced every possible attention from Mr. C., who is a very delightful person, and indeed everybody is very kind and attentive. I hope sincerely that you and Hen. are quite well and happy, and also my dear mother. God bless you, dearest.

GEORGE BORROW.

To Mrs. George Borrow, Oulton, Lowestoft

BUCHAREST, August 14, 1844.

MY DARLING CARRETA,—To-morrow or the next day I leave Bucharest for Constantinople. I wrote to you on my arrival a few days ago, and promise to write again before my departure. I shall not be sorry to get to Constantinople, as from thence I can go wherever I think proper without any difficulty. Since I have been here, Mr. Colquhoun, the British Consul-General, has shown me every civility, and upon the whole I have not passed the time disagreeably. I have been chiefly occupied of late in rubbing up my Turkish a little, which I had almost forgotten; there was a time when I wrote

it better than any other language. It is coming again rapidly, and I make no doubt that in a little time I should speak it almost as well as Spanish, for I understand the groundwork. In Hungary and Germany I picked up some curious books, which will help to pass the time at home when I have nothing better to do. It is a long way from here to Constantinople, and it is probable that I shall be fifteen or sixteen days on the journey, as I do not intend to travel very fast. It is possible that I shall stay a day or two at Adrianople, which is half way. If you should not hear from me for some time don't be alarmed, as it is possible that I shall have no opportunities of writing till I get to Constantinople. Bucharest, where I am now, is close on the Turkish frontier, being only half a day's journey. Since I have been here, I have bought a Tartar dress and a couple of Turkish shirts. I have done so in order not to be stared at as I pass along. It is very beautiful and by no means dear. Yesterday I wrote to M. Since I have been here I have seen some English newspapers, and see that chap H. has got in with M. Perhaps his recommendation was that he had once insulted us. However, God only knows. I think I had never much confidence in M. I can read countenances as you know, and have always believed him to be selfish and insincere. I, however, care nothing about him, and will not allow, D.V., any conduct of his to disturb me. I shall be glad to get home, and if I can but settle down a little, I feel that I can accomplish something great. I hope that my dear mother is well, and that you are all well. God bless you. It is something to think that since I have been away I have to a certain extent accomplished what I went about. I am stronger and better and hardier, my cough has left me, there is only occasionally a little huskiness in the throat. I have also increased my stock of languages, and my imagination is brightened. Bucharest is a strange place with much grandeur and much filth. Since I have been here I have dined almost every day with Mr. C., who wants me to have an apartment in his house. I thought it, however, better to be at an inn, though filthy. I have also dined once at the Russian Consul-General's, whom I knew in Russia. Now God bless you my heart's darling; kiss also Hen., write to my mother, and remember me to all friends.

G. BORROW.

