



## CHAPTER VIII.

### REVEL AND NARGEN.

**M**Y first thoughts on waking up were—we are almost within gunshot of an enemy's fortress, and the Baltic Fleet is now vindicating its name and function in sealing up hostile squadrons, and so letting the good folks of our maritime towns at home rest in security. Such a reflection was neither idle nor inappropriate, but was it sufficiently appreciated? On returning home, I was asked, by a narrow and captious Radical in Aberdeen, what good the Baltic Fleet had done? to which I replied, with natural warmth and contempt: "Why, enabled your unthankful head to sleep in peace; and probably kept your blessed house from being knocked about your ears." The "friend of every country but his own" made no reply.

I turned out very early, and on reaching the quarterdeck proceeded to take in as much as possible of our surroundings, especially of the island of which we were the temporary masters, and the fortress of which we much desired to be.

Nargen is low and sandy, 9 miles in length, by from 1 to 2 in breadth; it is almost covered with pine woods, and has a scanty Finnish, or Swedish, fishing population, whom we were cautioned not to molest; it lies off the Ethonian shore, about four or five miles from Revel; it was as we found—an old rendezvous for a British Fleet. An armed party at once proceeded on shore to scour the island, and establish an outlook from the dismantled light-house.

Revel lay due south, and with a glass was plainly visible; for the atmosphere in the Baltic in the summer months is remarkably transparent. Every fort and prominent object could be clearly identified, of which the most conspicuous was the Domberg, or Cathedral, on a precipitous height; and on another height the High Church. Between these heights is the seaward approach to the town, which then contained about 30,000 inhabitants. The batteries commanding the roadstead were partly earth and partly granite; and of the latter one was a huge casemated fort of 300 guns. From it the smoke of furnaces for heating red hot shot was constantly visible. At our standpoint Revel was singularly pretty.

On the day after arrival targets were placed out for practice for our own benefit, and probably to waken up the enemy. The accuracy of the firing greatly pleased me, as the slender flagstaffs on floating barrels were constantly being shot down. The whole proceeding was keenly watched from Revel.

The 12th being a general holiday we proceeded *en masse* on shore, and I put my first foot on Russian soil. We ran our boat on the beach,

beside a number of native fishing craft. We made straight for the village, which was a mere motley aggregation of cabins, barns, and byres, of rough hewn logs, dove-tailed without nails, and the interstices stuffed with moss and turf, to "expel the winter's flaw." The doors and windows in the cabins were placed anyhow, and the latter, at most, had only one or two panes of glass. The roofs were of grass or spruce thatch. Sometimes there was a chimney, but often none, so that smoke issued from many crevices as if they were on fire. The houses were fairly clean within, but, of course, had the reeky flavour so characteristic of everything Russian. The walls were decorated with pictures of the Virgin and unnamed saints; or, per contra, with sheets of the "Illustrated London News," obtained from the Fleet. The essential brick built stove for heating and cooking was always near the door; a few plate racks, boxes, tables, and stools completed the furnishing.

Around the dwellings were a few cleared patches of grass surrounded by wattle fences, but not a single cultivated field or garden. Agriculture was confined to the grazing of a few cows and sheep, and to the rearing of poultry: for all other supplies the people were dependent on Revel. On this account boats with provisions were allowed to come from the latter place every day; and spiritual food in the shape of a priest once a week. Here, as on all the Russian islands visited by the Fleet, the village had a most deserted appearance, only old men, women, and children were visible; all the able-bodied men and boys of the maritime districts having been swept up by the merciless naval conscription, to rot in the pent-up Russian fleet. Ethnologically,



the people of these islands were not Russian Slavs, but a mixture of Finns, Swedes, and German Ethonians; they are very fair, blue eyed, and some had the marked Finnish Mongolian expression. Of course, to us they were entirely friendly, as indeed it was their interest to be. But if men were scanty, so were animals; cattle and sheep were few; some lean dogs growled defiance, and a few grey hound pigs trotted about; there were plenty of poultry, shut up in barns from which they kept up an incessant din. On leaving the village we struck through the woods for the lighthouse some six miles away: here and there we came across isolated log cabins; and one excellent but empty chateau, built of sawn timber, with a shingle roof, and superior fittings throughout. The windows were smashed, and inside all was wrack and ruin; it had been an official residence, and, even according to our ideas, a snug and comfortable one. The effects of our ball practice the previous day on the trees skirting the shore were very striking; some were torn and splintered from top to bottom; at the distance of over a mile from the ships we found a 68 pound shot. At a hamlet a party of our Marines were busy washing, using the tubs and boilers of the villagers, who sat by smoking and chatting, quite unconcerned.

We reached the lighthouse about one o'clock, and immediately ascended by 231 steps; a magnificent all round view was our reward; a lookout party from the "Royal George" was in possession, but all the fittings had been carefully removed. We returned to the village about 4 p.m., and had bread and milk and a game at quoits. The Revel priest passed by, and we joked about making him prisoner; he was a pleasant fellow, and he and the

Interpreter had a long conversation in German and Finnish, in the course of which he mentioned that many families, fearing a bombardment, had left Revel. The houses were full of soldiers, and the garrison provisioned for six months. He said the officials blamed the Nargeners for selling us milk, etc., which was obviously absurd; because, we could help ourselves if need be. The people had a keen appreciation of our coin, but if they did not hide it, all would be grabbed by the officials directly our backs were turned.

When we got on board, our own dinner having long been over, Duncan asked me to dine, for the first time, in the Ward Room. I came to the conclusion that, with less pretence, our Gun Room mess was quite as good.

On the 13th, after some days of doubt, we were forced to recognise that loathsome small-pox had broken out on board; whether we brought it from England, or caught it at Faro, was a moot point: but the former was probable, and the strange death at Keil from "malignant measles" was evidently small-pox after all. The fore part of the upper deck was at once screened off for the isolation of about twenty cases, including Commander Preedy and Lieutenant Poore, R.M.A. Revaccination all round was at once begun.

On this day a curious fog, common in summer in the Gulf of Finland, was seen; in the morning the ship was wholly enveloped; but at noon it lifted for a time about six feet from the water, so that while we could see under it from the Gun Room ports the rest of the ship remained shrouded. It soon re-descended, however, and remained until dispersed in the evening by a westerly breeze.

On the 14th, I attended my first flogging parade, and took particular note of all that passed. In olden times men were flogged, both in the Army and Navy, for trivial offences; but by 1855 it was reserved as a punishment for the more serious crimes.

The culprit in this instance was an ordinary seaman convicted of the despicable offence of stealing from comrades. The whole crew—officers and men—were piped to the quarterdeck, and the culprit paraded to hear the charge, conviction, and sentence read by the Captain. He was ordered to strip, which he did to the waist. A kerchief was bound round his neck, and, standing face on to a trap ribbing, was tied hands and feet to it, like an extended frog. A sturdy boatswain's mate then stepped to the front with a cat o' nine tails, and on signal deliberately delivered twelve lashes, each of which was shouted out and recorded by a ship corporal. He was relieved by another mate; and so on until the forty were administered. The culprit was then unbound, his shirt thrown over his shoulders, and taken to the sick bay for treatment. He bore his punishment pluckily, but evidently suffered much. The effect of the lashes were in order as follows:—the first strokes produced red streaks over the back, and made the muscles visibly quiver; fresh welts continued to arise, till at the end of the first dozen the back was a dull red mass; at the eighteenth the skin broke, and blood began to trickle down, and so on; when the fortieth was reached the back, from the nape of the neck to the loins, was like a lump of bloody meat. I have been at several flogging parades since; but was so deeply impressed by this one, that I wrote in my Journal:



“of all the villainous sights, this is the vilest ; yet the terror of the lash prevents an enormous amount of crime on a man o’ war.” In spite of all the maudlin nonsense which has been written about corporal punishment, it undoubtedly has a deterrent effect on brutalized criminals ; witness garroters.

Meanwhile small-pox had increased to 27 cases including Hannen, the First Lieutenant ; and we were ordered to Faro to land the cases, and fumigate the ship. My colleague, More, was placed in charge of them.

On the 17th two deaths occurred on board ; seaman McCrea, from aneurism ; and Bull, from apoplexy. I moralized over these deaths to the effect that, after all, they were not disproportionate in our ship’s population ; for it would take a town of 20,000 inhabitants to furnish the able bodied men we had on board. But deaths and small-pox little affected our gaiety ; for a sailor whose broken leg I was bandaging said to me in cheery fashion, “ Shall I be well for the taking of Cronstadt ? ” to which I answered “ Aye, aye.”

On the 18th the “ Orion ” left at noon, but in the evening, although fifty miles away, we saw her distinctly inverted in the heavens, through mirage.

We left Faro on the 19th and rejoined the Fleet, without the occurrence of any more small-pox.

During the next few days, many, including myself, had shivers and shakes like ague, probably due to great variations in the temperature.

The Queen's birthday was kept with due honour on the 24th; and on the 26th, the Fleet left Nargen, heading up the Gulf of Finland.

