

this, and that he swore an oath that as long as he lived he would never again have dealings with the clergy, for, unfortunately, old Nichifor was pious and was much afraid of falling under the ban of the priests. He quickly went to the little monastery at Vovidenia to Chiviac, the anchorite of St. Agura, who dyed his hair and beard with black cherries, and on dry Friday he very devoutly baked an egg at a candle that he might be absolved from his sins. And after this he decided that from henceforth he would have more to do with the commercial side.

"The merchant," said old Nichifor, "lives by his business and for himself."

When he was asked why, old Nichifor answered jokingly:

"Because he has not got God for his master."

Old Nichifor was a wag among wags, there was no doubt of it, but owing to all he had to put up with he became a bit disagreeable.

I don't know what was the matter with her, but for some time past, his old wife had begun to grumble; now this hurt her; now that hurt her; now she had the ear-ache; now some one had cast a spell over her; now she was in tears. She went from one old witch to the other to get spells and ointments. As for old Nichifor, this did not suit him and he was not at all at his ease; if he stayed two or three days at home there was such bickering and quarrelling and ill will that his poor old wife rejoiced to see him leave the house.

It's plain old Nichifor was made for the road, and that when he was off it he was a different man; let him be able to crack his whip and he was ready to chaff all the travellers he met and tell anecdotes about all the chief places he passed through.

Early one day--it was the Wednesday before Whit-Sunday--old Nichifor had taken a wheel off the carriage, and was greasing it when suddenly Master Shtrul of Neamtzu town came up behind him; he was a grocer; a dealer in ointments; he took in washing; he traded in cosmetics, hair-dyes, toilet accessories, blue stone, rouge or some good pomade for the face, palm branches, smelling salts and other poisons.

At that time there was no apothecary in Neamtzu town and Master Shtrul to please the monks and nuns brought them all they wanted. Of course he did other business too. To conclude, I hardly know how to tell you, he was more important than the confessor, for without him the monasteries could not have existed.

"Good morning, Mosh Nichifor!"

"Good luck to you, Master Shtrul. What business brings you to us?"

"My daughter-in-law wants to go to Peatra. How much will you charge to take her there?"

"Probably she will have a great many packages like you do, sir," said old Nichifor, scratching his head. "That doesn't matter; she can have them. My carriage is large; it can hold a good deal. But without bargaining, Master Shtrul, you give me sixteen shillings and a gold irmal and I'll take her there quite easily; for you'll see, now I've attended to it and put some of this excellent grease into it, the carriage will run like a spinning-wheel."

"You must be satisfied with nine shillings, Mosh Nichifor, and my son will give you a tip when you get to Peatra."

"All right, then; may God be with us, Master Shtrul. I am glad the fair is in full swing just now; perhaps I shall get a customer for the return journey. Now I would like to know when we have to start?"

"Now, at once, Mosh Nichifor, if you are ready."