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## **The Pilgrims of the Rhine**

**Lytton, Edward Bulwer Lytton**

**London, 1834**

Chapter I.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120544](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120544)



THE  
**Pilgrims of the Rhine.**

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CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO QUEEN NYMPHALIN.

IN one of those green woods which belong so peculiarly to our island (for the continent has its forests, but England its woods), there lived, a short time ago, a charming little Fairy called Nymphalin; I believe she is descended from a

younger branch of the house of Mab, but perhaps that may be only a genealogical fable, for your fairies are very susceptible to the pride of ancestry, and it is impossible to deny that they fall somewhat reluctantly into the liberal opinions so much *à-la-mode* at the present day.

However that may be, it is quite certain that all the courtiers in Nymphalin's domain, (for she was a Queen Fairy,) made a point of asserting her right to this illustrious descent; and accordingly she quartered the Mab arms with her own,—three acorns vert, with a grasshopper rampant. It was as merry a little court as could possibly be conceived, and on a fine midsummer night it would have been worth while attending the Queen's balls,—that is to say, if you could have got a ticket; a favour not obtained without great interest.

But, unhappily, until both men and fairies adopt the excellent Mr. Owen's proposition, and live in parallelograms, they will always be the victims of *ennui*. And Nymphalin, who had been disappointed in love, and was still unmarried, had for the last five or six months been exceedingly tired even of giving balls. She yawned very frequently, and consequently yawning became the fashion.

“But why don't we have some new dances, my Pipalee?” said Nymphalin to her favourite maid of honour; “these waltzes are very old fashioned.”

“Very old fashioned,” said Pipalee.

The Queen gaped—and Pipalee did the same.

It was a gala night;—the court was held in a lone and beautiful hollow, with the wild brake closing round it on



every side, so that no human step could easily gain the spot. Wherever the shadows fell upon the brake, a glow-worm made a point of exhibiting himself, and the bright August moon sailed slowly above, pleased to look down upon so charming a scene of merriment; for they wrong the Moon who assert that she has an objection to mirth;—with the mirth of fairies she has all possible sympathy. Here and there in the thicket the scarce honeysuckles—in August, honeysuckles are getting out of season—hung their rich festoons, and at that moment they were crowded with the elderly fairies, who had given up dancing and taken to scandal. Besides the honeysuckle you might see the hawkweed and the white convolvulus, varying the soft verdure of the thicket; and mushrooms in abundance had sprung up in the circle, glittering in the silver moonlight, and acceptable beyond measure to the dancers; every one knows how agreeable a thing tents are in a *fête champêtre*! I was mistaken in saying that the brake closed the circle *entirely* round; for there was one gap, scarcely apparent to mortals, through which a fairy at least might catch a view of a brook that was close at hand, rippling in the stars, and chequered at intervals by the rich weeds floating on the surface, interspersed with the delicate arrowhead and the silver water lily. Then the trees themselves, dight in their prodigal variety of hues;—the blue—the purple—the yellowing tint—the tender and silvery verdure, and the deep mass of shade frowning into black; the willow—the elm—the ash—the fir—the lime—“and, best of all, Old England’s haunted

Oak:" these hues broke again into a thousand minor and subtler shades, as the twinkling stars pierced the foliage, or the moon slept with a richer light upon some favoured glade.

It was a gala night; the elderly fairies, as I said before, were chatting among the honeysuckles; the young were flirting, and dancing, and making love; the middle-aged talked politics under the mushrooms; and the Queen herself, and half a dozen of her favourites, were yawning their pleasure from a little mound, covered with the thickest moss.

"It has been very dull, Madam, ever since Prince Fayzenheim left us," said the Fairy Nip.

The Queen sighed.

"How handsome the Prince was!" said Pipalee.

The Queen blushed.

"He wore the prettiest dress in the world—and what a moustache!" cried Pipalee, fanning herself with her left wing.

"He was a coxcomb," said the Lord Treasurer, sourly. The Lord Treasurer was the honestest and most disagreeable Fairy at court; he was an admirable husband, brother, son, cousin, uncle, and godfather; it was these virtues that had made him a Lord Treasurer. Unfortunately they had not made him a sensible man. He was like Charles the Second in one respect; for he never did a wise thing; but he was not like him in another—for he very often said a foolish one.

The Queen frowned.



"A young Prince is not the worse for that," retorted Pipalee. "Heigho! does your majesty think his Highness likely to return?"

"Don't tease me," said Nymphalin, pettishly.

The Lord Treasurer, by way of giving the conversation an agreeable turn, reminded her majesty that there was a prodigious accumulation of business to see to, especially that difficult affair about the emmet-wasp loan. Her majesty rose, and leaning on Pipalee's arm, walked down to the supper tent.

"Pray," said the Fairy Trip to the Fairy Nip, "what is all this talk about Prince Fayzenheim? Excuse my ignorance, I am only just out, you know."

"Why," answered Nip, a young courtier, not a marrying fairy, but very seductive, "the story runs thus. Last summer a foreigner visited us, calling himself Prince Fayzenheim, one of your German fairies, I fancy;—no great things, but an excellent waltzer. He wore long spurs, made out of the stings of the horse-flies in the Black Forest; his cap sate on one side, and his moustachios curled like the lip of the dragon flower. He was on his travels, and amused himself by making love to the Queen. You can't fancy, dear Trip, how fond she was of hearing him tell stories about the strange creatures of Germany—about wild huntsmen—water sprites—and a pack of such stuff," added Nip, contemptuously, for Nip was a freethinker.

"In short?" said Trip.

"In short, she loved," cried Nip, with a theatrical air.

“And the Prince?”

“Packed up his clothes, and sent on his travelling carriage, in order that he might go at his ease, on the top of a stage pigeon—in short,—as you say,—in short, he deserted the Queen, and ever since she has set the fashion of yawning.”

“It was very naughty in him,” said the gentle Trip.

“Ah, my dear creature,” cried Nip, “if it had been *you* he had paid his addresses to!”

Trip simpered, and the old fairies from their seats in the honeysuckles observed she was “sadly conducted,” but the Trips had never been *too* respectable.

Meanwhile the Queen, leaning on Pipalee, said, after a short pause, “Do you know I have formed a plan!”

“How delightful,” cried Pipalee. “Another gala!”

“Pooh, surely even you must be tired with these levities; the spirit of the age is no longer frivolous; and I dare say as the march of gravity proceeds, we shall get rid of these galas altogether.” The Queen said this with an air of inconceivable wisdom, for the “Society for the Diffusion of General Stupefaction” had been recently established among the fairies, and its tracts had driven all the light reading out of the market. The “Penny Proser” had contributed greatly to the increase of knowledge and yawning, so visibly progressive among the courtiers.

“No,” continued Nymphalin; “I have thought of something better than galas—Let us travel!”

Pipalee clasped her hands in ecstasy.

“Where shall we travel?”



"Let us go up the Rhine," said the Queen, turning away her head. "We shall be amazingly welcomed; there are fairies without number, all the way by its banks; and various distant connections of ours, whose nature and properties will afford interest and instruction to a philosophical mind."

"Number Nip, for instance," cried the gay Pipalee.

"The Red Man!" said the graver Nymphalin.

"O my Queen, what an excellent scheme!" and Pipalee was so lively during the rest of the night, that the old fairies in the honeysuckle insinuated that the lady of honour had drunk a buttercup too much of the May dew.