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The Pilgrims of the Rhine

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Chapter IX.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE SCENERY OF THE RHINE ANALOGOUS TO THE GERMAN LITERARY GENIUS.—
THE DRACHENFELS.

ON leaving Cologne, the stream winds round among banks that do not yet fulfil the promise of the Rhine; but they increase in interest as you leave Surdt and Godorf. The peculiar character of the river does not, however, really appear, until by degrees the Seven Mountains, and “THE

CASTELLED CRAG OF DRACHENFELS" above them all, break upon the eye. Around Neider Cassel and Rheidt, the vines lie thick and clustering; and, by the shore, you see from place to place the islands stretching their green length along, and breaking the exulting tide. Village rises upon village, and viewed from the distance as you sail, the pastoral errors that enamoured us of the village life, crowd thick and fast upon us. So still do these hamlets seem, so sheltered from the passions of the world; as if the passions were not like winds—only felt where they breathe, and invisible save by their effects! Leaping into the broad bosom of the Rhine comes many a stream and rivulet upon either side. Spire upon spire rises and sinks as you sail on. Mountain and city—the solitary island—the castled steep—like the dreams of ambition, suddenly appear, proudly swell, and dimly fade away.

"You begin now," said Trevylyan, "to understand the character of the German literature. The Rhine is an emblem of its luxuriance, its fertility, its romance. The best commentary to the German genius is a visit to the German scenery. The mighty gloom of the Hartz, the feudal towers that look over vines and deep valleys on the legendary Rhine; the gigantic remains of antique power, profusely scattered over plain, mount, and forest; the thousand mixed recollections that hallow the ground; the stately Roman, the stalwart Goth, the chivalry of the feudal age, and the dim brotherhood of the ideal world, have here alike their record and their remembrance. And over

such scenes the young German student wanders. Instead of the pomp and luxury of the English traveller, the thousand devices to cheat the way, he has but his volume in his hand, his knapsack at his back. From such scenes he draws and hives all that various store which after years ripen to invention. Hence the florid mixture of the German muse—the classic, the romantic, the contemplative, the philosophic, and the superstitious. Each the result of actual meditation over different scenes. Each the produce of separate but confused recollections. As the Rhine flows, so flows the national genius, by mountain and valley—the wildest solitude—the sudden spires of ancient cities—the mouldered castle—the stately monastery—the humble cot. Grandeur and homeliness, history and superstition, truth and fable, succeeding one another so as to blend into a whole.

“But,” added Trevylyan a moment afterwards, “the Ideal is passing slowly away from the German mind, a spirit for the more active and the more material literature is springing up amongst them. The revolution of mind gathers on, preceding stormy events; and the memories that led their grandsires to contemplate, will urge the youth of the next generation to dare and to act.”

Thus conversing, they continued their voyage, with a fair wave and beneath a lucid sky.

The vessel now glided beside the Seven Mountains and the Drachenfels.

The sun slowly progressing to his decline cast his yellow beams over the smooth waters. At the foot of the mountains

lay a village deeply sequestered in shade; and above, the Ruin of the Drachenfels caught the richest beams of the sun. Yet thus alone, though lofty, the ray cheered not the gloom that hung over the giant rock: it stood on high, like some great name on which the light of glory may shine, but which is associated with a certain melancholy, from the solitude to which its very height above the level of the herd condemned its owner!

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