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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

London, 1840

To Gerard Brooke, Esq., Lemington, Hants

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I get to the end of the first stage, you will perhaps hear from me again. If not, you will know what has happened, and act accordingly. If I last out to Holland, it will be the utmost. I have betted old Truby two dozen of hock wine, against port and sherry, I shall never get to Cologne. Well, God bless you, my old friend, and all that belongs to you, from, dear Peter,

Your very faithful humble servant,

RICHARD ORCHARD.

P.S.—If I forward a few gallons of real Hollands to your London agents, Drinkwater and Maxwell, do you think they will send it down to Canterbury?

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ., LEMINGTON, HANTS.

DEAR GERARD,—You will stare at receiving another letter dated London; but we have been delayed a week beyond our time by my uncle, and a mysterious complaint in his luggage, which, for several days, would not pack up for want of a family medicine chest that had been ordered of the celebrated Butler and Co., of Cheapside. Moreover, it appeared that the invalid had applied for more last words of medical advice from Dr. Truby; but, instead of a letter, who should walk in yesterday evening but the Doctor himself! The fact is, he has a real regard for his Malade Imaginaire, though he sets his face against the fancy, and had made this sacrifice to friendship. My uncle's eyes glistened

at sight of the familiar figure. "Ay, ay," said he, with sundry significant nods, "you are come to prevent my going." "Quite the reverse," answered the other; "I suspected you would hang on hand, and have come thirty miles to help in giving you a shove off." Our Hyp looked a little disconcerted at this rebuff. "At least, doctor, you have something of importance to my health to remind me of?" "Not a syllable." "Mayhap, then, you have brought me some portable sort of medicine for travellers in a small compass?" suggested my uncle, expecting a welcome supplement to Butler's repository. "I have brought you," said the doctor, speaking leisurely, as he vainly tried to extract some refractory article from his coat-pocket, "something more to the purpose,—very useful to travellers too,—an invention of a professional friend;—you did not know the late Dr. Kitchiner?—it's a most invaluable defence against sudden attacks." "Mayhap," cried uncle, now eagerly assisting in the extrication of the parcel, "it's a self-acting blood-letter." "It's more likely to prevent blood-letting," answered the doctor, at last producing the implement, "a sort of night-bolt, for securing your bed-room door at a strange inn."—"Good God," exclaimed my uncle, reddening like one of his own turkey-cocks, "is it possible you could so forget the nature of my sudden attacks! I am not likely to die in my bed; but if I do, it will be from nobody coming near me; and here you are for keeping every soul from the room!" "Nevertheless," said the

doctor, "I still recommend the night-bolt. As a lady never faints without water and smelling salts, and help at need, I am convinced, by analogy, that a locked door, and nobody at hand, must be the best preventives of *some sorts* of apoplexy that can be devised." The wry face with which this illustration was received you may imagine, now that you have a key to the character. The doctor is not only a shrewd practitioner, but a humorist, and doubtless intended his night-bolt as a piece of practical irony on his patient's monomania;—if so, our Abernethys, and such medical eccentrics, have more common sense in their oddities than some regular practitioners in their common-places. However, my uncle having been worsted in the encounter, his sister, who is sufficiently anxious on the subject of health, but with reference to everybody's constitution except her own, then took up the argument, and anxiously inquired, "What her poor dear brother ought to do in case of any travelling accidents—for example, wet feet?" "In that case, madam," replied the doctor, with a low bow and a marked emphasis, "*Don't* let him change his shoes; *don't* get him dry stockings; and *don't* let him bathe his feet in warm water. That has been his practice during the first fifty years of his life, and it has agreed so well with him, that I do not feel justified in making any alteration." "To be sure," said my aunt thoughtfully, "he used to ride through brooks, and rivers, and never shifted himself, and yet never had any thing on his lungs. And I do remember once,

when he spent a fortnight in London on a visit, he took ill, and after thinking of everything that could have caused it, he could not account for it in any way except through missing his damp feet. But then as to his diet, doctor;—what ought he to eat?" "Whatever he can get, madam," said the doctor, taking another grave pinch of snuff; "but, as he values his life, let him avoid—any thing else, for, depend upon it, madam—*it never can do him any good.*" This oracular response defeated my poor aunt, who, by way of covering her retreat, then pulled him aside, and with a glance at your humble servant, inquired if the air we were going to was favourable to my constitution, for I was delicate, like "poor George." Of course, I pricked up my ears, and had an appropriate reward. "Madam," said he, "a young Englishman, on going abroad for the first time, generally gives himself so many airs, that the one he is going to is of the least possible consequence."

I subsequently contrived to ask the doctor confidentially, whether his patient would require any particular treatment whilst abroad. "Medically," said he, "none at all. Your worthy uncle's complaint is a very common one, in kind, if not in degree. With old women who have been active in their youth, it takes the form vulgarly called the fidgets—with country gentlemen, in their decline, it becomes hypochondriasis. They cannot live as hard as they used to do, and so think they are dying as fast as they can. Your fox-hunters

and so forth, are particularly liable to the disease. They are used to a kicking, bumping, jumping, thumping, jolting, bolting, scrubbing, scrambling, roll-and-tumble sort of existence, and the nerves and muscles will not subside kindly into quieter habits. To make the matter worse, a pedestrian when he can no longer walk will ride; but your equestrian, when he is past riding, will not condescend to walk. When he is unequal to horse-back, instead of taking to coach-back, or boat-back, he takes to a high-backed chair, and backgammon. What your uncle really wants is a mill to grind him young again. There is no such mill on earth, but the next best thing is to go in search of it. Take my word for it, the secret of your uncle's dying is, that he has more life in him, or steam, than the old machine knows how to get rid of." "Yes, yes," muttered my uncle, who had been musing, but caught the last sentence, "I always knew I should go off like a burst boiler!" "The Lord forbid!" ejaculated my aunt, who had been absorbed in her own steam-boat speculations—and having thus, in sporting language, changed our hare, we had a burst with high pressure, that lasted for twenty minutes. At the conclusion my aunt asked the doctor if he knew of any remedy against sea-sickness. "Only one, madam, the same that was adopted by Jack the giant killer against the Welch ogre." "And what was his remedy?" inquired my aunt, very innocently. "A false stomach, ma'am; put all you feel inclined to eat or drink into *that*; and I will stake my professional

character against its coming up again!" Just at this juncture his lynx eyes happened to alight on the medicine-chest. "I do hope that box is insured!" "Good heavens!" exclaimed my aunt, "is there any danger? We have not insured anything!" "Because," exclaimed the doctor, "if your nephew is any better than a George Barnwell in disguise, he will take the first opportunity for pitching that trash overboard." My uncle's back was up in a moment. "By your leave," he said, "I did once have occasion to call in Doctor Carbuncle in your absence, and he prescribed for me more trash, as you call it, in ten days, than you have done in as many years." "No doubt he did," answered the imperturbable Truby. "He would send it in by the dozen, like Scotch ale or Dublin porter, or any other article on which he gets a commission. Fat bacon, for instance, was once in vogue amongst the faculty for weak digestions, and he would favour you with that or any other gammon, at a trifle above the market-price." "Well, I always thought," exclaimed my aunt, "that Doctor Carbuncle was considered a very skilful man!" "As to his other medical acquirements, madam, there may be some doubts, but you have only to look in his face to see that he is well *red* in *noseology*."

This palpable hit, for Carbuncle happens to have a very fiery proboscis, quite restored my uncle's good humour. He laughed till the tears ran down his face, and even cracked a joke of his own, on the advantage of always hunting with a burning scent. The doctor,

like a good general, seized this favourable moment for his departure, and took his patient by the hand—"Well, *bon voyage*, and fine weather on the Rhine." "I shall never see it," cried my uncle, fast relapsing into a fit of hypochondriacism. "Phoo! phoo!—good bye, and a fair wind to Rotterdam." "I shall die at sea," returned my uncle; "at least if I reach the Nore. But mayhap I shall never get aboard. It is my belief I shan't live through the night," he bellowed after the doctor, who, foreseeing the point the argument must arrive at, had bolted out of the room and closed the door. "A clever man," said my uncle, when he was gone; "and no doubt understands my case, but as close as a fox. I only wish he would agree to my going suddenly—I should not die a bit the sooner for his giving me over."

Once more, farewell, with love to Emily from, dear Gerard, yours, &c.,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ., LEMINGTON, HANTS.

MY DEAR BROOKE,—Your prophecy was a plausible one, but as the servant girl said, after looking out of window in Piccadilly, for the Lord Mayor's show, "it did not come to pass." Instead of returning to Kent, we actually sailed from London on Wednesday morning, by the Lord Melville; and here follows a log