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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

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To Gerard Brooke, Esq.

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linnin,—tho' it looks more like a new cookey reecat for
How to smoak yure Hams. But I hear Missus bell,
so with kind luv to all, includin John Futman, I
remane in haste, my dear Becky Yure laving frend,

MARTHA PENNY.

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

MY DEAR GERARD,—At last we have turned our
backs on the good city of Rotterdam, and made our
first advance up the Waal branch of the fashionable
river. As you are aware, the banks of the Lower
Rhine are of a very uninteresting character: to sing
their beauties one needs only, with Desdemona, to "sing
all a green willow, sing willow, willow, willow." In
such a case there is but one alternative. In the
absence of good scenery and decorations, the traveller
must turn for entertainment to the strolling company
on board, and such *pièces de circonstance* as they may
happen to present.

It is one of the discomforts of striving against the
stream on the Rhine, that you must start extra-
vagantly early, in order to accomplish the next stage
before night. To aggravate this nuisance, the *garçon*
appointed to rouse us crowed, like the "bonnie
grey cock," a full hour too soon; and then, by way
of amends, called us as much too late; so that we
had to save our passage and passage-money (paid

beforehand) by a race to the quay. Short as the course was, it led to a great deal of what the turf-men call *tailing*. Your humble servant was first on board, my Uncle made a bad second, my Aunt a worse third, her maid Martha barely saved her distance, and the baggage was nowhere at all. In fact, the steamer was already on the move before our Dutch porters made their appearance, so that the greater part of the luggage was literally pitched on board, with a clangour and clatter that excited a peal of merriment from ship and shore. "In the name of heaven, what is all this?" inquired my Uncle, who noticed a considerable addition to our sundries. "Oh, it's the beautiful brass pail," moaned my Aunt, writhing in pantomimical distress; "and look how it's all battered and bruised!" whilst her maid indignantly collected a shower of wooden shoes, intended to be presented as foreign curiosities to her fellow-servants at Woodlands. My Uncle shrugged up his shoulders and made a wry face at the prospect. "Zounds, Frank!" he said to me in an aside, "if we gather at this rate in our progress, we shall come to a stickfast in the end, like the great snow-ball in Sandford and Merton. To my mind, your poor Aunt is making a toil of a pleasure; however, the more little troubles she gets into, the more likely to forget her great one. Though, to be sure, it sounds odd," he continued, observing me smile, "for a widow to be wiping away her tears with a brass-pail."

I had now time to look round, and, on taking a survey of the company, was not sorry to recognise our

old acquaintance the red-faced man, looking as ruddy as a Dutch apple, but like an apple that had been bruised. From whatever cause, there was a discolouration round his right eye which hinted plainly with Lord Byron, that

“ Sometimes we must box without the muffles,”

especially when we are blessed with a temper as hot and hasty as a pepper-castor with a loose top. He eagerly pounced upon me as one with whom he could pour out his bottled-up grievances, and thus they began their audible effervescence:—“ Glad to see you, Sir; here’s a pretty eye for the beauties of the Rhine—black as my hat, Sir;—well it wasn’t knocked out!” I sympathised of course, and inquired how it had happened. “ How, Sir? it could only happen in one way. I’ve heard of black devils, and blue devils, and renounce me if I don’t think there are yellow ones.”—“ You do not surely mean our old shipmate the American?”—“ Yes, but I do though. You remember how unpleasant he made himself to everybody on board—wouldn’t be sick or anything. As for me, it was natural instinct or something, but I hated him from the first time I set eyes on him. It gave me a turn to look at him. I felt as if I was turning bilious myself; I did indeed! If I don’t cut him, thought I, the moment we get on shore, my name’s not Bowker—John Bowker. So I asked him at Rotterdam to recommend a good inn, and he named the Skipper

House. That was enough for me, and off I took myself to the Bath Hotel. Well, Sir, what next? After supper, and making myself comfortable, up I went to bed, and what do you think I saw?" Here Mr. John Bowker made a solemn pause, and looked me full in the face; his visage grew redder, except the black circle, which seemed to darken; he knocked his hat down over the damaged eye, fiercely rammed his double fists into his pockets, drew in a long breath, and then resumed in a voice quite guttural from the broil within. "Renounce me, Sir, if I didn't see his infernal jaundice face on the clean pillow!"—"Very unpleasant indeed." "Yes, Sir; there it was, all yellow in the middle of the white—just like a poached egg. By the bye, I don't think I shall ever eat one again—he has quite poisoned the idea, Sir, he has, upon my life!" There was an expression of loathing about the redden as he said this that would have delighted Dr. Johnson, who has recorded his opinion of "a good hater." However, I affected concern, and inquired how the untoward event had originated. "Originated!—phoo, phoo—no such thing. It was done on purpose, Sir—sheer *malice prepense*. I told him quite civilly, I was afraid of a little mistake. 'I'm afraid there is,' said he; 'what's your number?' 'My name,' said I, 'is Bowker—John Bowker—and I'm number seventeen.' 'Ah,' said he, 'that's just where it is—my name is Take-care-of-yourself, and I reckon I'm number one.' Cool, Sir, wasn't it? and I tried to be cool too, but I couldn't—blood will boil: it's human nature, Sir—and mine began

singing in my ears like a kettle. Thought I, this must be vented somehow, or I shall burst a vessel; it's a dread of mine, Sir, that some day I shall burst a vessel, if my passion isn't worked off—and between that and his grinning at me, I couldn't help making a punch at the fellow's head: I couldn't, upon my soul. That led to a scuffle, and the noise brought up the master and the garsoons—however, the end was, I got my bed and this beautiful black eye into the bargain—for the landlord soon proved my right to number seventeen." "And what excuse," I asked, "did the usurper offer for his intrusion?" "None in the world, Sir. Not a syllable! except that the Skipper House happened to be full, and my bed happened to be empty. Confound his yellow face!—I thought it was jaundice, or the American fever—but it's brass, Sir,—brass lacker. But that's not the end. 'In course,' said he, 'you'll allow a half-naked individual about twenty minutes or so to make himself decent and collect his traps?' Well, Sir, having vented my warmth, I was quite agreeable; and how do you think he spent the time?" Here another pause for the speaker to muster all his indignation. "Why, Sir, when it came to fresh making the bed, he had wound and rolled up both the sheets into balls, hard balls, Sir, as big as your head!" "An old trick," I remarked, "amongst nautical men, and called reefing." "Nothing more likely, Sir," said the reface; "he'd been thirty years at sea, you know, as he told me when he swindled me out of my sovereign. However, there were the two

sheets—the only pair not in use—and the devil himself couldn't pick an end out of them, landlord, garsoons, and all. Renounce me if I don't believe they're in *statu quo* at this very moment—I do, upon my life!" The fervour with which he made this declaration quite upset my gravity: and he joined at first in my mirth, but stopped short as abruptly as if he had been seized by a spasm. "No, no, Sir," he said, with a serious shake of the head—"the thing's beyond a laugh. It's my remark, Sir, that I never took a strong dislike to a person at first sight without his giving me good reason for it in the end. Mark my words, Sir—that turmeric-faced Yankee is my evil genius. He'll haunt me and spoil my pleasure wherever I go. He has poisoned the German ocean for me already, and now, Sir, he'll poison the river Rhine—he will, Sir, as sure as my name's Bowker—John Bowker—he'll poison the Rhine, and the Baths, and the Hock wine, and every thing—as certain as I stand here!"

Absurd as this picture will seem to you, my dear Gerard, it is nevertheless sketched from nature. And, after all, how many of us there are who, in the pilgrimage of life, thus conjure up black, blue, or yellow-faced bugbears to poison our river Rhines! But, not to moralise, suppose me now driven, by a smart shower, into a rather noisy, very odoriferous, and piping-hot cabin, the rule against smoking having been reversed, by turning the prohibitory placards with their faces to the wall. Here I found my Uncle good-humouredly play-

ing, or rather trying to play, at dominoes with a German, the only difficulties being that the German and English games are as different as the two languages. Still they persevered with laudable patience, each after his own fashion, till they had finished two glasses a-piece of curaçoa. "It is very extraordinary," remarked my Uncle, as he rose up, neither winner nor loser, "that in spite of the thousands and thousands of English, who have passed up and down the Rhine, the natives have never learned yet to play at dominoes!"

A complaint from a countrywoman at the next table was quite in keeping. For some minutes past she had been calling out "Hoof! hoof! hoof!" to our squat little Dutchman of a garçon, who in return only grinned and shook his head. "It's really provoking," exclaimed the lady, "to have such a stupid waiter. He doesn't even know the French for an egg!"

Our first stoppage was at Dordrecht, or Dort, a quaint, characteristic town, that looked like an old acquaintance, its features being such as are common on the pictorial Dutch tiles. Here, amongst other additions to our living freight, we obtained a private soldier, of whom his wife or sweetheart took a most affectionate leave—as of a house lamb about to be butchered by "les braves Belges." Again, and again, and again, she called him back for more last words, and imprinted fresh editions, with additions, of her farewell, upon his lips. But the warning bell of the steamer rang, fatal as curfew to the light of love—the weeping

female gave her warrior one more desperate hug, that almost lifted him off his feet; he tore himself from the arms that dropped listless, as if she had no further use for them in this world—the paddles revolved—and there on the quay, so long as Dordrecht remained in sight, we beheld the forlorn frow, gazing, as motionless and inanimate as one of the staring painted wooden dolls indigenous to her country. “Poor souls!” murmured my Aunt, who had been looking on with glistening eyes; “what a horrid cruel thing is war, when it comes home to us!” My Uncle, too, gave utterance to a thought, which sounded like an echo of my own: “Egad, Frank, there wasn’t much Dutch phlegm in that!”

I was too much interested by this episode to notice the advent of another passenger, till he was announced in an angry whisper. “There he is again!—Curse his yellow face!—I thought he was a day a-head of me!” and lo! the American stood bodily before us, having halted at Dordrecht to inspect the saw-mills, and the ponds for containing the huge rafts of timber that float thither down the Rhine, from Switzerland and the Black Forest. His old opponent glared at him fiercely with his sound eye, and very soon found fuel for the flame. The deck of a steamer is supposed to be divided amidships by an imaginary line, aft of which the steerage passengers are expected not to intrude. In the Rhenish vessels this trespass is forbidden, by sundry polyglott inscriptions, under penalty of paying the higher rate of passage; and the arrangement affords a curious test of

character. A modest or timid individual, a lover of law and order, scrupulously refrains from passing across the boundary; another, of a careless easy disposition, paces indifferently within or beyond the invisible fence, whilst a third fellow (ten to one he wears his hat all aslant) ostentatiously swaggers to the very stern, as if glorying that there is a privilege to usurp, and a rule to be broken. It was soon apparent to which of these classes our American belonged. "Look at him, sir," growled Mr. John Bowker, giving me a smart nudge with his elbow, "*do* look at him! He's a steerage passenger, and see where he is, *confound* his impudence! sitting on the skylight of the best cabin. Pray, come here, sir;" and seizing me by the arm, he dragged me to the paddle-box, and pointed to the deck-regulations, conspicuously painted up in three different languages. "There, sir, read that;" but he kindly saved me the trouble, by reading aloud the English version of the rules—"There's the law distinctly laid down, and yet that yellow scoundrel—" He broke off abruptly, for the yellow scoundrel, himself, attracted by our movements, came to see what we were looking at; deliberately read over the inscriptions in French, Dutch, and English, and then quietly resumed his seat on the skylight. "Cool, isn't it?" asked the chafing Bowker, "he can't say *now* he has had no warning. Renounce me, if I don't name it to the captain, I will, upon my life! What's to become of society, if we can't draw a line? Subversion of all order—levelling all ranks; democracy let loose; anarchy,

sir, anarchy, anarchy, anarchy!" Here his vehemence inciting him to physical action, he began to walk the deck, with something of the mien of a rampant red lion; but still serving up to me the concoctions of his wrath, hot and hot. "I suppose he calls that American independence! (*A walk.*) Sir, if I abominate anything in the world, it's a Yankee, let alone his yellow face. (*Walk.*) It's hereditary, sir. My worthy father, John Bowker senior, could never abide them—never! (*Walk.*) Sir, one day he met a ship captain, in the city, that wanted to know his way to the Minories.—Says my father, 'I've an idea you're an American.' 'I guess I am,' said the captain. 'And pray, sir,' said my worthy parent, 'what do you see in my face to make you think I'd tell a Yankee his way to the Minories, or any where else?' Yes, sir, he did, upon my life. He was quite consistent in that! (*Another walk, and then a full stop.*) I suspect, sir, you think I am warm?" I could not help smiling an assent. "Well, sir, I know it. I *am* warm. It's my nature, and it's my principle to give nature her head. I've strong feelings, very; and I make a point never to balk them. For instance, if there's a colour I detest, it's yellow. I hate it, sir, as a buffalo hates scarlet—and there's that Yankee with a yellow face, yellow eyes, yellow teeth, and a yellow waistcoat—renounce me, if I don't think he's yellow all through, ugh!" and with a grimace to match the grunt, he hurried off to the bows, as if to place the whole length of the vessel between

himself and the object of his aversion. Still, with the true perversity of a self-tormentor, who will neither like things nor let them alone, he continued to watch every movement of his enemy, and was not slow in extracting fresh matter of offence. "I must go below," he muttered, as he again approached me, "it's an infernal bore, but I *must!* There's no standing him! I can't walk the same deck! It's forbidden to talk to the helm, and there he is drawling away to the steersman! Renounce me, if he isn't telling him the story of the rolled-up sheets—I know it by his grinning! Sir, if I stay above, I shall have a fever,—he'll change my whole mass of blood—he will, as sure as fate;" and with a furious glance at the yellow face, down scrambled the peppery-tempered gentleman to cool his heat—like Bowker senior, "he was quite consistent in that"—with a stiff glass of hot brandy and water.

As you know, Gerard, I am not professedly a sentimental traveller, like Sterne, yet I could not help moralizing on what had passed. Mr. John Bowker seemed to me but a type of our partisans and bigots, political and religious, who take advantage of any *colourable* pretext on the *palate* of their prejudices, to shut their hearts against a fellow-creature, who may wear green to their orange, or pink to their true blue. In short, heaven knows how far I might have carried my reflections on the iniquity of hating a man for his yellow face, if I had not suddenly recollected that, ere now, many a human being has been stolen, enslaved, bought,

and sold, scourged, branded, and even murdered, merely because he happened to have a black one. Should you still require an apology for these extra ruminations, I must refer for my excuse to the sight of the fortress of Gorcum, where nineteen Catholic priests suffered death for the faith that was in them; and to a glimpse of the castle of Lowenstein, in which Grotius was imprisoned for his opinions, and reduced to compose his renowned treatise "De Jure Belli et Pacis," where he could neither be comfortably at peace, nor conveniently make war.

I have said that steaming up the Lower Rhine is sufficiently tedious; and it was eight o'clock P. M. ere we arrived at Nimeguen, a frontier town, chiefly remarkable as the place where the triple treaty was signed in 1678, between France, Holland, and Spain. It will interest you more to remember, that Sir Walter Scott spent a night here, on his last melancholy journey towards Abbotsford and his long home. There is a story current that the innkeepers eagerly sent their carriages to await the arrival of the steamer which conveyed so illustrious a personage, and that Sir Walter unconsciously availed himself of the vehicle belonging to one hotel, to convey him to a rival establishment, of course to the great chagrin of the coach-proprietor. For our humble selves, we have set up our rest with Doctor, or Dokter,—a name which doubtless had a charm for my hypochondriac Uncle, quite independent of the recommendation of the German with whom he had played at dominoes, and who was probably a genteel

“touter” in disguise. However, the house is clean, quiet, and comfortable, with a small garden in the rear, and a painted wooden figure of a Dutchman at the end of the main walk ; to which figure, by the way, I caught my Uncle bowing, hat in hand, mistaking it, no doubt, for our Doctor himself. This wooden statuary is, timberly speaking, quite a branch of the Dutch fine arts, and surely art must be in its second childhood, when it returns to playing with dolls. On which theme, my dear Gerard, I could write an essay, but my paper being filled up, as well as my leisure, I must conclude, with kind regards to yourself, and love to Emily.—
Yours, &c. FRANK SOMERVILLE.

TO PETER BAXTER, ESQ., SOLICITOR,
CANTERBURY.

MY DEAR PETER,—I take shame to myself for not writing you before, as you could only come to one conclusion. But you have been long prepared for such an event, and consequently the less shock to your feelings ; still, an old friend is an old friend, and I heartily beg your pardon for the sorrow I am sure you would display at my loss. As for black clothes, being professional wear, you would be at no cost, I trust, on that score, but I do hope you have not added to trouble by acting on my last will. But you were never hasty in law matters. No doubt it was my bounden duty to let you