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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

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To Doctor Truby, Beckenham, Kent

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TO DOCTOR TRUBY, BECKENHAM, KENT.

DEAR DOCTOR,—As the post-mark will show, we are at Cologne, whereby you have won the Hock wine, and I think I see you on the broad grin, and cracking your finger joints. Well, let those laugh that win. It was a very near thing, and you all but lost ten times over. Not to name other warnings by land and sea, there was Nimeguen, so near a finish, that I was dead and gone up to the knees. But that you won't believe, or at least you won't own to it. But I am no Methuselah for all that. It's my firm belief I shall never go out of Cologne alive. What signifies a man's eating, and drinking, and sleeping? All one's nourishment goes for nothing, if once sudden death has got insidiously into the system. My stamina is gone. My constitution broke up a matter of six years ago; and as for my organs and functions, they're not worth a straw. You know that as well as I do, but because I haven't exactly got apoplexy or epilepsy, or atrophy, or any of your regulation diseases, you won't allow me to have anything at all. Mayhap, it's a new case, or a complication of all the old ones, and beyond medical skill. That's my own impression, but I needn't repeat the symptoms, for you never could or would enter into my inward feelings. We shall see which is right. There was poor Bromley, with much such a complaint as mine—

nobody believed *he* was going till he was gone, and it's my notion some people had their doubts even then.

Regarding our foreign travels, you will hear all about them from Bagster, excepting the night-bolt, which is at the bottom of the river Rhine. The very first time I tried it there was a night alarm in the hotel, and between a new-fangled article and the dark, I might have been burnt or suffocated in my bed-chamber before I could unscrew myself out. So much for what, by your leave, I call your Infernal Machine.

As yet, I have not seen much of Cologne. I did try one or two strolls by myself, with one of the church-steeples for a guide; but what with the loftiness of the houses, and the narrowness and crookedness of the streets, I soon lost my landmark, and came to so many faults and checks, that I never went out but I lost myself like a Babe in the Wood, and had to be showed home by a little boy. That has put an end to my rambles for the present, for I can't bring my mind to the foreign fashion of going about with a lacquey-de-place at my heels, like a mad gentleman and his keeper. But I learned from my walks that Cologne has no Paving Board, nor Commissioners of Sewers. Every yard you go is like winding a pole-cat, and the roads are paved with rough stones, where the horses skate and slip about, on shoes as high-heeled as Queen Bess's. I happened to see one going to be shod in the Beast Market, and it was a sight to draw old Joe Bradley's eyes out of his head. By what I've seen of the German

cattle, they are far from remarkable for spirit or vice, though, to judge by the blacksmiths' contrivances, you would suppose the whole breed was by Beelzebub, out of the Devil's Dam. There was the horse, what you or I should call a Quaker's nag, shut in a cage like a wild beast, with a wooden bar to keep his head up, and another to keep it down, and a bar over his back, in case of his rearing, and one under his belly, to prevent his lying down, and a bar or a chain behind him, to hinder his lashing out. If all that ceremony is fit and proper, thought I,—for one of our English farriers to take a horse's hoof into his lap, mayhap a young spicly colt, without a bar, or a chain, or anything, can be nothing else but a tempting of Providence.

I have seen the famous Cathedral, which is a fine building, but not half finished, and as such, an uncomfortable sight, for it looks like a broken promise to God. But they do say the King of Prussia is very anxious to complete it, which, being a Protestant, is a liberal feeling on his part, and deserved a better return from the Catholic Archbishop of Cologne than flying in the face of his Majesty, who, by what I hear, gives fair play to both religions. The more pity he was led to act harshly by his Jewish subjects, and point them out by law for mockery and ill-usage, even to forbidding them the use of Christian names; for, as I was told by a Jewish gentleman from Coblenz, they were obliged to call their children after the Heathens and Pagans—Diana, and Flora, and Cerberus, and so forth, just like

so many hounds. The very worst way in the world to make a Jewish father or mother say as Agrippa did: "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."

From the Cathedral we went to St. Peter's Church, where I had a warning. But on that subject, as I said before, I shall hold hard, though it was a serious one for all that, and decidedly apoplectic. On my way home, I looked in at several Catholic places of worship. In most of them service was going on, in which I joined, for although it was in a foreign tongue, I felt it was in praise of the Almighty, just as well as I knew that the music was a psalm tune, and not a jig. Thank God, Popery is none of my bugbears. I am not like old Mrs. Twisleton of Beckenham, who never closed her eyes for a week after Catholic Emancipation, for fear of being converted in her sleep. To my thinking, it's too late in the day for a Guy Faux or a Bloody Mary. If we ever see a bonfire in Smithfield, it will be to roast an ox whole, and not a martyr. On the contrary, it's my firm belief that an *auto da fee* now-a-days would be called a burning shame by the Papists themselves. Roasting martyrs has gone by as well as drowning of witches, and when one fashion is expected to turn up again, it's time for our old women to quake in their shoes for fear of the other. However, some folks think otherwise, and are as panic-struck by their own fancies as old Farmer Phillpotts, who was well-nigh scared to death, one moonshiny night, by a scarecrow made out of his own old clothes. So in one of the churches here

I met with a fellow-traveller, who came over by the Lord Melville, a hot-tempered man, with a face as red all over as Carnaby's nose, and a mighty broil he was in when the priests and singing-boys came past us in procession, with their candlesticks and banners.—“There,” said he; “there's pomps and vanities, as we say in our Catechism; there's mummery! there's a gabble for you,” when the priest began his Latin prayers. By and by a bell rang, and that sent him into a fresh tantrum. “What on earth has a little muffin-bell to do with religion?” Next, the priest held up the glory, or whatever it is called, which set the red face pulling as many wry mouths as if it had been a bottle of horse physic. At last I fairly expected to see him go into convulsions like a mad dog, for he got a sprinkle of the holy water on his coat sleeve, but he brushed it off in as great a hurry as if it had been drops of vitriol. “Renounce me,” says he, “if I can put up with it!” and off he flounced into the aisle, which only made matters worse. “Here's more of their humbug,” says he, pointing up at a black board that was hung to a pillar, and covered all over with little legs, and arms, and hands, and feet, in wax-work. “All miraculous cures, of course,” says he; “but mayhap, Sir, you believe in miracles? I don't, and no more did my father before me; and what's more, Sir, he wouldn't have knelt down with a Papist on the same pavement—he wouldn't to save his soul.” As that was a lash out at me, I spoke up, and made bold to ask if he approved of family

worship? "I hope I do," said he, "we have it at home every night of our lives." "Because," said I, "it's my notion that all Christians are of one family, and as such, I can't understand how a friend to family worship can want to narrow the circle by shutting out any of his relations. To my mind, Christianity was meant to be represented by our good old Christmas dinners, where we tried to assemble all that belonged to us round one hospitable board, down to our nineteenth cousins. Mayhap, I'm not quite orthodox," said I, "but I'm sincere, for they're the sentiments of a dying man." Well, it will be a laugh against me down at Beckenham, but you must have the end of the story. At last, from one thing to another, we got to high words in a whisper, when up comes a beadle, or verger, or policeman, or somebody in authority, and, not understanding English, takes quite the wrong side of the case. It's my belief, that, finding the other party the warmest of the two in his looks, and the highest in his voice, he thought he was defending instead of attacking the Catholic religion,—whereby showing the red-faced fellow into a seat right in front of the altar, he civilly beckoned, and signed, and wheedled me down the aisle, and then fairly bowed and scraped me out of the church door.

To tell the truth, Doctor, standing, as one may say, on the brink of the grave, and only comforted by a firm belief in my own persuasion, it shocks me to find men putting so little faith in the stedfastness and durability

of their own church. It's surely a melancholy thing, but, as we see at Exeter Hall and elsewhere, those that most cry up Protestantism, and its truth, and beauty, and reasonableness, and excellence, and its being built on the solidest of all foundations, the rock of the Gospel itself, are the most down-hearted and desponding about its case. Instead of trusting to its own nature, or to Providence to support it, they go about crying that Protestantism is in danger, and, forsooth! give it over, just because, by their own accounts, it has the best constitution, namely, a divine one,—the best climate, namely, England,—the best diet, namely, the reading of the Bible,—the best exercise, namely, missionaries and itinerating,—the best physicians, namely, Archbishops and Bishops,—the best apothecaries, namely, poor curates,—the best nurses, namely, the speechifiers themselves,—and the blessing of God to boot. Now, in my humble opinion, a Christian man ought to put some confidence in the virtue of his religion, as well as in his wife's; for it's paying but a sorry compliment to either to be always expecting them to be corrupted and seduced,—and what's worse, corrupted and seduced by an ill-favoured, misbegotten monster, as the speechifiers themselves paint his portrait, as ugly as Buckhorse.

To return to ourselves, in my own state of health there is no amendment, but, as you know in your own heart, there was none to be looked for. I have only been sent up the river Rhine, as other patients in a desperate way are packed off to Madeira, that their

funerals may not rise up against their Doctors. My Sister Kate, as usual, talks of not surviving Poor George ; but as yet, I am glad to say, shows no constitutional symptoms of going after him. As for my Nephew, he is well and hearty, and enjoys his foreign travelling so much, I am quite grieved for his sake, poor fellow, to reflect how soon and suddenly it may be brought to a close. But after all, our life below is only a tour, that ends by returning to the earth from whence we came. As such, I have reached my own last resting-place, and whenever you hear of the city of Cologne, I feel sure, dear Doctor, you will remember your old and very faithful friend,

RICHARD ORCHARD.

P. S.—The medicine-chest you took such a spite at was left behind in a hurry at Rotterdam, and never missed till last night, when I wanted a tea-spoonful of magnesia. I hope and trust I shall be able to get medicine in Germany ; but Frank says, if their physics are like their metaphysics, a horse oughtn't to take them without good advice.



A SPARE BED ON THE RHINE.

