

Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

London, 1840

To Gerard Brooke, Esq.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124956](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124956)

TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

MY DEAR GERARD,—To borrow the appropriate style of a bulletin of health, “our Hypochondriac has passed a bad night, but is free from fever, and hopes are entertained of his speedy convalescence.”

The truth is, this morning we were rather alarmed by the prolonged absence of the head of the family. The breakfast appeared—the tea was made, and stood till it was cold—but no Uncle. As he is naturally an early riser, this circumstance excited, first surprise, then anxiety, and then apprehension. My Aunt looked astonished, serious, and at last terrified, lest her brother, fulfilling his own prophecy, should have really departed in earnest. In the end, I became nervous myself, and took the liberty of entering the bed-chamber of the absentee, when a sight presented itself which I cannot now recal without laughing.

Imagine my worthy Uncle lying broad awake, on his back, in a true German bedstead—a sort of wooden box or trough, so much too short for him, that his legs extended half-a-yard beyond it on either side of the foot-board. Above him, on his chest and stomach, from his chin to his knees, lay a huge squab or cushion, covered with a gay-patterned chintz, and ornamented at each corner with a fine tassel,—looking equally handsome, glossy, cold, and uncomfortable. For fear of

deranging this article, he could only turn his eyes towards me as I entered, and when he spoke, it was with a voice that seemed weak and broken from exhaustion. "Frank, I've passed—a miserable night." Not a doubt of it, thought I, with a glance at his accommodations. "I havn't—slept—a wink." Of course not (mentally). "Did you ever see such a thing as that?" with a slight nod and roll of his eyes towards the cushion. I shook my head. "If I moved—it fell off; and if I didn't, I got—the cramp." Here a sort of suppressed groan. "Frank,—I've only turned once—all night long." I ventured to suggest that he would have done well to kick off the incumbrance on purpose, and the words had hardly left my lips when off flew the variegated cushion to the floor. The action seemed to relieve him, as if it had actually removed a weight from his bosom: he drew a long breath, and raised himself up on his elbow. "You're right, Frank; I've been a fool, sure enough—but that comes of foreign customs one never met with before; I suppose poor Kate was scared by my not coming down?" I nodded assent. "Yes—I shall go that way, some day, no doubt. Why, these beds are enough to kill one. It's impossible to sleep in 'em—but it's my suspicion the Germans sit up smoking all night. Any-how, I'll stake my head there's not such a thing as a slug-a-bed in the whole country."

As he now showed an inclination to rise, I left him for the breakfast-table, where he soon joined us; and

when he was seated, and had buttered his roll, he returned to the subject. "Frank, I've been thinking over the sleeping business, and my mind's made up. Take my word for it, the German beds are at the bottom of the German stories. They're all full of hobgoblin work and devilry, as if a man had written them after bad dreams. Since last night, I think I could make up a German romances story myself, like 'the Devil and Dr. Faustus.' I'm convinced I should have had the horrors, and no need to eat a raw-pork supper neither, like Mr. What's-his-name, the painter;—that's to say, provided I could only have gone to sleep. There's that outlandish cushion on your stomach—to my mind it's a pillion—it's nothing but a pillion for the nightmare to sit upon." "And then," chimed in my Aunt, "the foreign bedsteads are so very short,—to stretch yourself is out of the question. Besides, mine was quite a new one, with a disagreeable smell I could never account for till this morning." "As how, Kate?" asked my Uncle. "Why, it's an unpleasant thing to mention," said my Aunt, "but when I awoke, I found myself sticking with both my soles to the foot-board, by the varnish."

So much for our sleeping accommodations at Cologne. Perhaps, Gerard, as you are of a speculative turn, you will think my Uncle's theory of diablerie worth working out. To my own fancy, sundry passages of the "Faust,"—read aloud in the original language,—sound suspiciously like a certain noise produced by uneasy

lying; indeed, I think it very possible to trace all the horrible phantasmagoria of the Walpurgis Night to the inspiration of a German bed, and its "nightmare's pillion."

The rest of the day was spent in seeing the Lions—and first, the Cathedral, the mere sight of which did me good, both morally and physically. Gerard, 'tis a miracle of art—a splendid illustration of transcendentalism; never perhaps was there a better attempt, for it is but a fragment, to imitate a temple made without hands. I speak especially of the interior. Your first impression on entering the building is, of its exquisite lightness: to speak after the style of the Apostle Paul, it seems not "of the earth earthy," but of heaven and heavenly, as if it could take to itself wings and soar upwards. And surely if angelic porters ever undertake to carry Cathedrals instead of Chapels, (as we have seen a promise below of "messages carefully delivered"), the Dom Kirche of Cologne will be their first burden to Loretto. The name of its original architect is unknown in the civic archives, but assuredly it is enrolled in letters of gold in some masonic record of Christian faith. If from impression ariseth expression, its glorious builder must have had a true sense of the holy nature of his task. The very materials seem to have lost their materialism in his hands, in conformity with the design of a great genius spiritualised by its fervent homage to the Divine Spirit. In looking upward along the tall slender columns which seem to have sprung spontane-

ously from the earth like so many reeds, and afterwards to have been petrified, for only nature herself seemed capable of combining so much lightness with durability. I almost felt, as the architect must have done, that I had cast off the burden of the flesh, and had a tendency to mount skywards. In this particular, it presented a remarkable contrast to the feelings excited by any other Gothic edifice with which I am acquainted. In Westminster Abbey, for instance, whose more solid architecture is chiefly visible by a "dim religious light," I was always overcome with an awe amounting to gloom; whereas at Cologne, the state of my mind rose somewhat above serenity. Lofty, aspiring, cheerful, the light of heaven more abundantly admitted than excluded, and streaming through painted panes, with all the varied colours of the first promise, the distant roof seemed to re-echo with any other strains than those of that awful hymn the "Dies Irae." In opposition to the Temple of Religious Fear, I should call it the Temple of Pious Hope. And now, Gerard, having described to you my own feelings, I will not give you the mere description of objects to be found in the guide-books. From my hints you will be, perhaps, able to pick out a suggestion that might prove valuable in the erection of our new churches. Under the Pagan mythology, a temple had its specific purpose; it was devoted to some particular worship, or dedicated to some peculiar attribute of the Deity: as such, each had its proper character, and long since the votaries and the worship have passed

away, travellers have been able to discriminate, even from the ruins, the destination of the original edifice. Do you think, Gerard, that such would be the case, were a future explorer to light on the relics of our Langham Place or Regent Street temples; would an antiquarian of 2838, be able to decide, think you, whether one of our modern temples was a Christian church, or a parochial school, or a factory! Had men formerly more belief in wrong than they have now in right? Was there more sincerity in ancient fanaticism than in modern faith? But I will not moralize; only as I took a last look at the Cathedral of Cologne, I could not help asking myself, "Will such an edifice ever be completed—shall we ever again build up even such a beginning? The cardinal virtues must answer the question. Faith and Charity have been glorious masons in times past—does "Hope's Architecture" hold out equal promise for the future?"

The fees demanded by the guardians of the Dom Kirche have been complained of by sundry travellers besides Grundy. For my own part, I should not object to their being higher, provided they were devoted to the repairs of the building, or even towards a more appropriate altar. The present one is in such a style of pettiness and prettiness, that it looks like a stall at a religious fancy fair. But then, as a set-off, there is a picture—the Adoration of the Virgin and Child—which is a lay miracle! It is very old; but only proves the more, that as Celestial Wisdom may come from the

mouths of babes and sucklings, even so was Heavenly Beauty produced by Art in its very infancy.

Our next visit was to the Church of St. Peter, passing, by the way, the house of Rubens, with his well-known effigy painted over the door. The altar-piece, representing the crucifixion of his patron-saint, is a wonderful picture,—though it possibly derives a portion of its interest from the extraordinary position of the main figure. The face of the Martyr Saint is particularly fine; and, in order to aid the effect, the exhibitor produces a wooden machine, through which you look at the picture, stooping so that your own head is in nearly the same position as that of the Apostle;—and thereby hangs a tale. My Uncle had scarcely adjusted himself in the required attitude, and taken a glimpse at the painting, when he abruptly rose upright, muttering, in an under tone, “That’s done it at last—all my blood’s gone to my head;” and withal walked off, and seated himself on a chair in the aisle, where he remained for some minutes, with his eyes closed, perfectly motionless and silent. As usual in such cases, we allowed the circumstance to pass unnoticed; and by and by, as I anticipated, two or three experimental hems, followed by a sonorous blowing of his nose, announced that our Hypochondriac had come, of his own accord, to himself. In fact, he soon stood again beside us, and pulling his hand from his pocket, presented a handsome gratuity to our attendant. “There, Mister; it’s no doubt a very fine painting, though to my mind rather an uncomfort-

able object; as for that wooden invention," at the same time saluting it with a hearty kick, to the utter astonishment of our little Sacristan, "it ought to be indicted;—it's nothing more nor less, sir, than a trap for the apoplexy!"

After this characteristic exhibition we parted, my Uncle preferring to return to the hotel, and leaving me to visit and report on the other sights of Cologne. Amongst the rest, was the Masquerade Room, devoted to the Carnival balls. It is a fine room as to size, and supported in the middle by columns, intended to represent huge champagne glasses, whence the painted characters and groups which cover the walls and ceiling are supposed to effervesce. The idea, however, is better than the execution,—the intent surpasses the deed. The designs display a good deal of dull pantomime and trite allegory, such as a heart put up to auction, and the like. But the Germans, even of Cologne, on the strength of a Roman origin, ought not to attempt a Carnival. The Italian genius and the Teutonic are widely asunder—as different as macaroni and sausage. Polichinello is quite another being to Hans Wurst—he is as puff paste to solid pudding. The national spirit is not sufficiently volatile, airy, or mercurial. The wit of the Germans is not feather-heeled; their humour is somewhat sedate. The serious fantastic, the grave grotesque, is their forte, rather than the comic. In short, their animal spirits, like their animal frames, are somewhat solid; and I could not help

fancying that the frolics of their Saturnalia must resemble the ponderous fun described by Milton :—

“ The unwieldy Elephant,
To make them mirth used all his might, and wreathed
His lithe proboscis.”



In my way homeward I was struck by a voice that seemed familiar to my ear, and looking in at a shop-door, I saw what would be a subject for a picture of domestic interest. On one side of the counter stood my Aunt, looking wonderfully blank and discomposed ; on the other, was a grave broad-faced German, with his shoulders up to his ears, his eye-brows up to his crown, and the corners of his mouth down to his chin. On the counter itself, nearest my Aunt, lay a small parcel of her purchases, with a sovereign intended to pay for them, while, next to the opposite party, were arranged three or four Prussian dollars and some smaller coins ; the difficulty, whatever it might be, had evidently come to a dead-

lock. My Aunt cast her eyes upward, as if the case was beyond mortal arrangement. The shopkeeper gravely shook his head, and had recourse to his snuff-box. A glance towards your humble servant made my Aunt look in the same direction, and in an instant I was clutched by the arm and hauled into the shop. "I'm so glad you're come, Frank; I was never so served in my life." And hastily gathering up the Prussian dollars, she banged them singly down again, each after each, on the counter with a vehemence little in keeping with her character. "There," said she, when the operation was finished, "one can't be deceived in that; there's no more ring in them than in so many leaden dumps." Of course, I guessed the matter at a glance, but having met with somebody who could understand her language, my Aunt was more disposed to talk than to listen. "But, my dear Aunt, it's the case with all the currency." "I know it is. I have rung the small pieces too, and they're no better than brass farthings. Mr. Grundy was quite right, they all cheat the English if they can." "Pooh, pooh, it's the proper currency of the country." "Nonsense, Frank! look here, they're only washed over like bad sixpences, anybody can see that! The man must have taken me for a perfect fool." All this time the German had kept looking alternately in our faces as each happened to be talking, but he now inquired if I could speak his language, and without waiting my answer, began anxiously explaining his own share in the transaction. The change, he said, was correct, he had counted it ten times over with the lady,

but still she was dissatisfied ; and as for the money, it was the standard coin of the country. All of which I duly interpreted to my Aunt, who, at last, was prevailed upon to exchange her good sovereign for the bad dollars ; and catching up her purchases she departed, compelled but unconvinced. Her secret opinion, indeed, transpired as she stepped from the threshold :—“ Well, I must say, Frank, it's the first time I ever heard of a King being a common coiner of bad money, and what's worse, obliging all his own subjects to pass it off !”

By a curious coincidence, on entering the Hotel, we found my Uncle engaged in precisely similar speculations. “ Here, Frank,” said he, holding out to me a small document, “ look at that. Talk of rag-money ! I wish old Cobbett was alive again, or that his ghost would come up the River Rhine, just to hear what he'd say on the subject. Why, here's Mercury, and the Royal Arms, and the Spread Eagle, and Hercules, and all sorts of engine-turning, and filagree-work, and crinkum-crankums, and the value in three different languages, French, English, and High Dutch, and after all it's nothing but a three-shilling note !” “ It's about as good as their German silver,” murmured my Aunt, as if talking to herself. “ At least the Prussian money,” said I, “ has one convenience.” “ And what's that ?” asked my Aunt, rather tartly ; “ it's both bad and heavy, as I know by my bag.” “ I alluded,” said I, “ to its almost infinite sub-division ; no small consideration to your amateurs of cheap charity. In England, for instance, there are plenty of professedly benevolent persons who would, no

doubt, contribute their '*mite*,' as it is called, to any charitable object, provided there were any real coin of that denomination." "Cologne swarms with objects, sure enough," said my good Aunt, with a very sincere sigh for the multitudinous miseries she was unable to relieve. "You have the comfort," said I, "my dear Aunt, that, with twelve pfennings to a groschen, you may give to nine beggars out of the dozen at the cost of an English penny."

Of course this was only banter, but the subject set me thinking of the comparative misery of being poor in a rich country. For example, to give a pauper in England a farthing, which in Germany would purchase *something*, is literally to give him nothing at all. I am not aware of any article to be obtained at the price; what used to be, and is called a farthing candle, fetches a halfpenny. Still, I am not quite convinced but that the cheapest country may prove generally the dearest one; the difficulty of spending money alone must not be taken into account, but also the difficulty of obtaining it. Hence, it seems to me that the real dearness or cheapness of a country can only be properly weighed by a native. But I am no political economist; and besides, I think it as well to defer my local conclusions till I have had some experience of the premises. So, lest you should think my letter as long as an Eau de Cologne bottle without its spirit, I shall here close. The verses are for Emily, the sketch for yourself, with all loving remembrances from, dear Gerard, yours ever truly,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.

TO * * * * *

WITH A FLASK OF RHINE WATER.

The old Catholic City was still,
In the Minster the vespers were sung,
And, re-echoed in cadences shrill,
The last call of the trumpet had rung :
While, across the broad stream of the Rhine,
The full Moon cast a silvery zone ;
And, methought, as I gazed on its shine,
“ Surely, that is the Eau de Cologne !”

I inquired not the place of its source,
If it ran to the east or the west ;
But my heart took a note of its course,
That it flow'd towards Her I love best—
That it flow'd towards Her I love best,
Like those wandering thoughts of my own,
And the fancy such sweetness possess'd,
That the Rhine seemed all Eau de Cologne !



F 3