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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

Hugo, Victor

London, 1843

Part XIX.

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PART XIX.

DIVINE PHILOSOPHY OF FOUR SAGES ON TWO LEGS.

HORROR-STRUCK and afraid, Pecopin fled down stairs, crossed the court and bridge, scaled the precipice, leaped the torrent, rushed through the bushes, and took refuge in the forest of Sonneck.

He ran all day like a madman escaped from durance. He still adored Bauldour, but abhorred her spectral representative, and could not disentangle the perplexities of his mind, memory, and heart. Evening approached, and seeing before him the towers of his ancestral castle, he tore off the rich garments given him by the devil, and threw them into the torrent of Sonneck. He then tore his hair, and found that he held a handful which was grey.

Suddenly his knees gave way under him, and he was forced to support himself against a tree. But lo! his hands were completely wrinkled. In his impatience, he had unfortunately torn off his talisman, and thrown it into the torrent with his clothes! The menaces of the slave of the sultana were instantly accomplished. He had aged by a hundred years in the space of a moment! And thus, in the morning he had lost his love, and in the evening

his youth. Again the hideous laugh resounded in his ears; yet he saw no one. The devil was enjoying his solitary fun.

How was he to act in this utter extremity? Having picked up a stick to support himself, he proceeded to the castle, which was happily not far off. As he arrived, he saw by the last gleam of twilight a jay, a blackbird, a magpie, and a crow, perched upon the roof among the weathercocks, as if waiting for him. The hen cried "Pecopin! Pecopin!" the pigeon "Bauldour! Bauldour!" and instantly he recalled to mind his dream at Bacharach, and the warning addressed to him by the old man, the other day, five hundred years ago. "For the young man, the blackbird whistles, the jay chatters, the magpie yelps, the crow croaks, the pigeon coos, the hen chuckles. But for the old man, birds have a number of instructive things to say."

He listened, and heard the four birds jesting merrily together, over the inconsistency of a certain young gentleman who goes out to enjoy a day's hunting, and cannot find his way back again till the close of a hundred years!

Lest he should entertain any doubt concerning the personality of their allusions, throughout the whole dialogue the hen kept cackling the name of "Pecopin!" while the pigeon replied, by gently cooing that of "Bauldour!"