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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

Hugo, Victor

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Part XVI.

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PART XVI.

DEBATING WHETHER A MAN CAN RECOGNISE A MAN HE HATH
NEVER SEEN.

PECOPIN turned round, and saw two men among the bushes; one being the masked pricker, Pecopin trembled. He carried under his arm a large red portfolio. The other was a little old man, humped, lame, and hideous. It was he who was so familiar to Pecopin. But Pecopin vainly attempted to recall his face.

"Sir knight!" inquired the humpback, "have you forgotten me?"

"You are surely the slave from the Red Sea?" said Pecopin.

"Say rather the hunter of the wood of Lost Footsteps," replied the man. He seemed reluctant to announce himself as the devil!

"Be what you will, since you have kept your word, and I am at Falkenberg, and about to see Bauldour again," replied the knight, "I am your humble servant, and thank you in all sincerity."

"What did I answer last night, when you took me to task?"

"You bad me take patience."

"So say I again! You were too hasty in reproving me; perhaps you are as much so in thanking me."

So speaking, the devil assumed an inexpressibly cunning look. Irony is the favourite cast of countenance of the devil!

"What means all this?" said Pecopin, beginning to quake.

The devil pointed to the masked pricker. "Dost thou remember that man?"

"I do!" said he.

"Dost know him?"

"I do not!"

The pricker unmasked, and discovered the face of Erilangus. Pecopin stood confounded!

"Pecopin!" resumed the devil, "You were my creditor; I owed you two things—this hump and this club foot. I am fond of paying my debts like a gentleman, and sought out Erilangus in order to ascertain your tastes. He told me you were passionately fond of hunting. On learning this, I said that it were a pity but you should see the famous Black Hunt. At sunset I met you in the thicket, and in the wood of Lost Footsteps. I arrived in the nick of time. The dwarf Rollo was about to take you for himself; and I therefore made free with you.

Pecopin was now trembling in every limb.

"Had you not possessed your talisman," added the devil, "I should have kept you for my own. But I am well satisfied that things should be as they are. To be palatable, vengeance ought to be dressed with a variety of sauces."

"To the point, demon!" cried Pecopin, scarcely able to speak.

"To reward Erilangus for his revelations," re-

sumed the fiend, "I have made him my secretary of state. The plan is worth something!"

"Trifler!" exclaimed Pecopin, in utter despair.

"I promised you," gravely resumed the devil, "that after this night's chace, at sunrise I would take you back to Falkenberg. Here you are!"

"One word more! Is Bauldour still among the living?"

The devil nodded affirmatively.

"Is she married?"

"No!"

"Has she taken the veil?"

"No!"

"Does she still love me?"

"As much as ever!"

"In that case," cried Pecopin, "whoever you be, and whatever happens, I repeat my thanks!"

"So much the better!" exclaimed the devil. "We are both satisfied with our bargain."

So saying, he seized Erilangus in his arms, though bigger than himself, and twisting his deformed leg round the other, raised himself on the point of his toes, spun rapidly round, and penetrated the earth with the action of a screw.

As the ground closed over the devil, a little bluish flame issued forth, mingled with green sparks, which flew gaily off towards the forest; flickering about the trees, and sending forth thousands of luminous hues, much like a rainbow, gradually losing itself among the thick foliage.