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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

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Letter XII.

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LETTER XII.

MUSÉE WALRAF.

Andernach.

AT Cologne, in addition to the cathedral, the town-hall, and the Hotel Ibach, I visited at the Schleiss Kottin, near the city, the remains of the subterraneous aqueduct which, in the time of the Romans, extended from Cologne to Trèves, and of which the traces are still visible in thirty-three villages. In Cologne itself I visited the Musée Walraf, and I am tempted to favour you with its inventory. For the present, however, I spare you. Let it suffice you to know, that if I did not see there, thanks to the depredations of Baron Hubsch, the war-chariot of the ancient Germans, the famous Egyptian mummy, and the culverine four yards long, cast at Cologne in 1400, I saw at all events the beautiful Roman sarcophagus and armour of Bishop Bernard de Galen, besides an enormous cuirass supposed to have been that of the Imperial general, Jean de Wert. I looked in vain, however, for his sword eight feet long, his famous pike, and Homeric helmet, of which it is recorded that two men could scarcely lift it from the ground.

The pleasure of seeing curious objects, museums, churches, or town-halls, is considerably lessened by the constant demand for fees. Upon the Rhine,

as in all much-frequented countries, such demands sting you like gnats. On a journey let the traveller put faith in his purse, and without it let no man look for the tender mercies of hospitality, or the grateful smile of a kindly farewell. Allow me to set forth the state of things which the aborigines of the Rhine have created, as regards the fee or *pour boire*. As you enter the gates of a town you are asked to what hotel you intend to go; they next require your passport, which they take into their keeping. The carriage pulls up in the court-yard of the posthouse; the conductor, who has not addressed a word to you during the whole journey, opens the door and thrusts in his filthy hand—" *Something to drink.*" A moment afterwards comes the postilion, who, though prohibited by the regulations, looks hard at you, as much as to say, " *Something to drink.*" They now unload the diligence, and some vagabond mounts the roof and throws down your portmanteau and carpet bag—" *Something to drink!*" Another puts your things into a barrow, and inquiring the name of your hotel, away he goes, pushing his barrow. Arrived at the hotel, the host insinuatingly inquires your wishes, and the following dialogue takes place, which ought to be written in all languages on all the doors of all the rooms.

" Good day, Sir."

" Sir, I want a room."

" Good, Sir: (*bawls out*) No. 4 for this gentleman."

" Sir, I wish to dine."

" Directly, Sir," &c.

You ascend to your room, No. 4, your baggage

having preceded you, and the barrow gentleman appears.

"Your luggage, Sir—*Something to drink.*"

Another now appears, stating that he carried your baggage upstairs.

"Good," say you, "I will not forget you with the other servants when I leave the house."

"Sir," replies the man, "I do not belong to the hotel—*Something to drink.*"

You now set out to walk, and a fine church presents itself. Eager to enter, you look around, but the doors are shut! "*Compelle intrare,*" says holy writ, according to which the priests ought to keep the doors open. The beadles shut them, however, in order to gain "*something to drink.*" An old woman, perceiving your dilemma, points to a bell-handle by the side of a low door; you ring, the beadle appears, and on your asking to see the church, he takes up a bundle of keys and proceeds towards the principal entrance, when, just as you are about to enter, you feel a tug at your sleeve, with a renewed demand for "*something to drink.*"

You are now in the church. "Why is that picture covered with a green cloth?" is your first exclamation.

"Because it is the finest we possess," replies the beadle.

"So much the worse" is your reflection. "In other places they exhibit their best paintings, *here* they conceal their *chef d'œuvres.*"

"By whom is the picture?"

"By Rubens."

"I wish to see it."

The beadle leaves you a moment, and returns with a grave-looking personage, who, pressing a spring, the picture is exposed to view; but upon the curtain reclosing, the usual significant sign is made for "*something to drink*," and your hand returns to the pocket.

Resuming your progress in the church, still conducted by the beadle, you approach the grating of the choir, before which stands a magnificently attired individual, no less than the *Suisse*, waiting your arrival. The choir is *his* particular department, which, after having viewed, your superb cicerone makes you a pompous bow, meaning, as plain as bow can speak, "*something to drink*."

You now arrive at the vestry, and wonderful to say, it is open: you enter, when lo! *there* stands another verger, and the beadle respectfully withdraws, for the verger must enjoy his prey to himself. You are now shown stoles, sacramental cups, bishops' mitres, and in some glass case, lined with dirty satin, the bones of some saint dressed out like an operadancer. Having seen all this, the usual ceremony of "*something to drink*" is repeated, and the beadle resumes his functions.

You find yourself at the foot of the belfry, and desire to see the view from the summit. The beadle gently pushes open a door, and having ascended about thirty steps, your progress is intercepted by a closed door. The beadle having again departed, you knock, and the bell-ringer makes his appearance, who begs you to walk up—" *Something to drink*." It is some relief to your feelings that

his man does not attempt to follow you as you make your way upwards to the top of the steeple.

Having attained the object of your wishes, you are rewarded by a superb landscape, an immense horizon, and a noble blue sky; when your enthusiasm becomes suddenly chilled by the approach of an individual who haunts you, buzzing unintelligible words into your ears, till at last you find out that he is especially charged to point out to strangers all that is remarkable, either with regard to the church or landscape. This personage is usually a stammerer, and often deaf: you do not listen to him, but allow him to indulge in his muttering, completely forgetting him, while you contemplate the immense pile below, where the lateral arches lie displayed like dissected ribs, and the roofs, streets, gables, and roads appear to radiate in all directions, like the spokes of wheels, of which the horizon is the fellow.

Having indulged in a prolonged survey, you think about descending, and proceed towards the stairs; and lo! there stands your friend with his hand extended.

You open your purse again.

"Thanks, Sir!" says the man, pocketing the money; "I will now trouble you to remember *me*."

"How so—have I not just given you something?"

"*That* is not for me, Sir, but for the church; I hope you will give me *something to drink*."

Another pull at the purse.

A trap-door now opens, leading to the belfry; and another man shows and names you the bells.

"*Something to drink*" again! At the bottom of the stairs stands the beadle, patiently waiting to reconduct you to the door; and "*something to drink*" for him follows as a matter of course.

You return to your hotel, taking good care not to inquire your way, for fear of further demands. Scarcely, however, are you arrived when a stranger accosts you by name, whose face is wholly unknown to you.

This is the commissioner who brings your passport, and demands "*something to drink.*" Then comes dinner; then the moment for departure—" *Something to drink.*" Your baggage is taken to the diligence—" *something to drink.*" A porter places it on the roof; and you comply with his request for "*something to drink,*" with the satisfaction of knowing that the claim is the last. Poor comfort, when your miseries are to recommence on the morrow!

To sum up, after paying the porter, the wheelbarrow, the man who is not of the hotel, the old woman, Rubens, the Suisse, the verger, ringer, church, under-ringer, stammerer, beadle, commissioner, servants, stable-boy, postman, you will have undergone eighteen taxings for fees in the course of a morning.

Calculating all these from the minimum of ten sols to the maximum of two francs, this drink-money becomes an important item in the budget of the traveller. Nothing under silver is accepted. Coppers are the mere sweepings of the street—an object of inexpressible contempt. To this ingenious class of operatives the traveller represents a mere sack of

money, to be emptied in the shortest manner possible.

The government sometimes comes in for its share; takes your valise and portmanteau, shoulders them, and then holds forth its official hand. In some great cities the porters pay a certain tax to government, of so much per head on every traveller. I had not been a quarter of an hour in Aix-la-Chapelle before I had given "*something to drink*" to the King of Prussia.