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**Up the Rhine**

**Hood, Thomas**

**London, 1840**

To Gerard Brooke, Esq.

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With stern right hand it stretches forth a scroll,  
Wherein she reads in melancholy letters,  
The cruel fatal pact that placed her soul  
And her young heart in fetters.

“Wretch! Sinner! Renegade! to truth and God,  
Thy holy faith for human love to barter!”  
No more she hears, but on the bloody sod  
Sinks, Bigotry’s last Martyr!

And side by side the hapless Lovers lie:  
Tell me, harsh Priest! by yonder tragic token,  
What part hath God in such a Bond, whereby  
Or hearts or vows are broken?

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TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

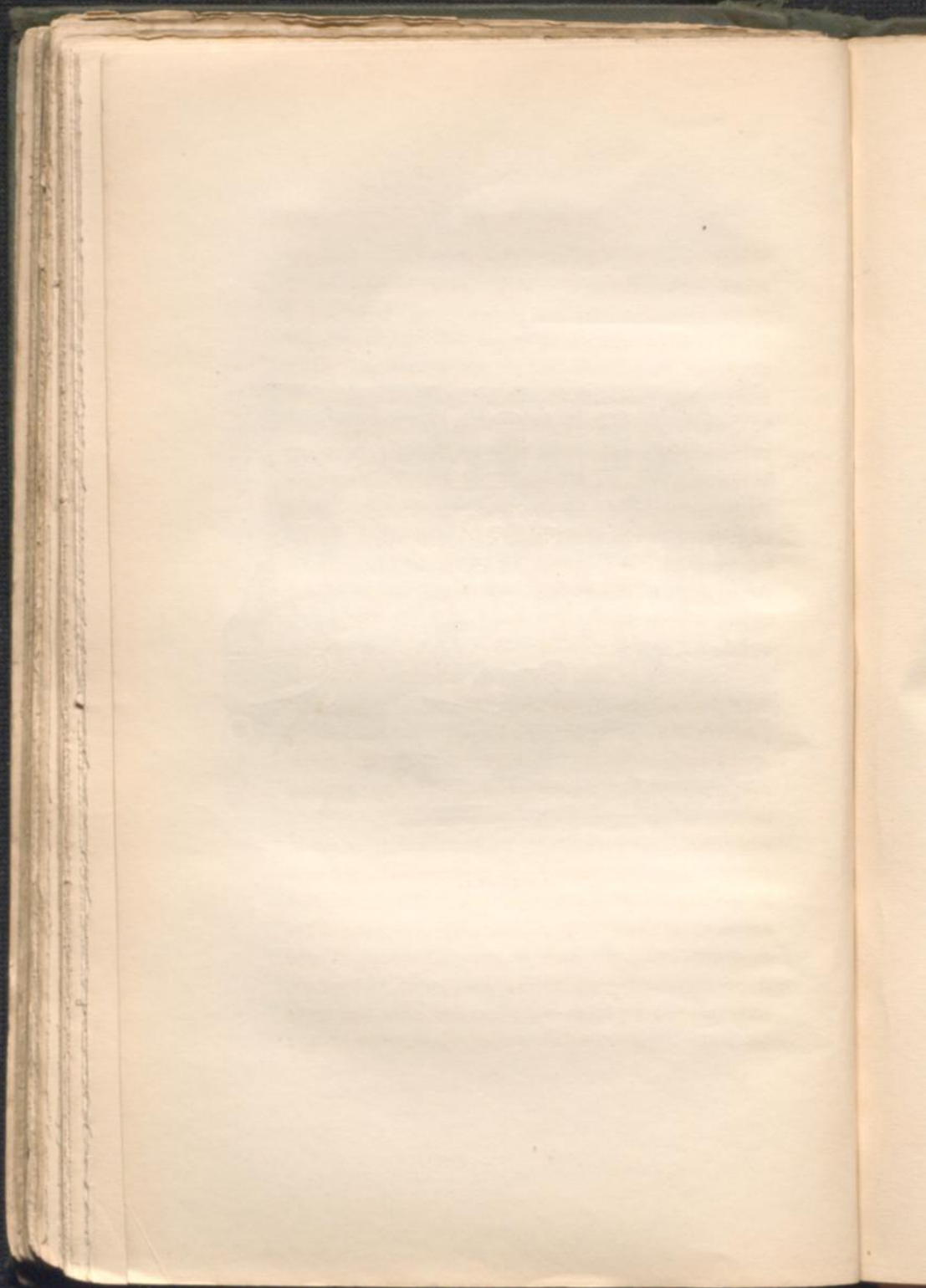
MY DEAR GERARD,—Yesterday, at an early hour, we bade adieu to the old Roman colony, and embarked in the Princess Marianne. Instead of any improvement, however, in the scenery, we soon found ourselves between low banks and willows; as if, by some “stop her,” and “back her” manœuvre, her Highness, with reversed paddles, had carried us into Holland. But I am none of those fastidious travellers, who, in the absence of the picturesque, throw themselves back in the carriage, and go to sleep. Although for some dis-

tance there was nothing alongside but a flat plain, yet lark after lark, "weary of rest," kept springing up from the dewy grass, and soared aloft on twinkling wings, that seemed, like its song, all in a quiver with delight. The air was breezy, and bright, and balmy, and floated visibly against the horizon: the sky was beautifully blue, and the feathery white clouds fluttered across it like summer butterflies. The grass waved, the flowers nodded, the leaves danced,—the very water sparkled, as if it felt a living joy. Even our Hypochondriac owned the genial influence of the time, and his Sister resumed some of the spirits for which she was noted in her girlhood. The truth is, there was a charm in these humble ruralities, of which even the Cockney, of Nimeguen renown, was aware. "Tame scenery, sir," remarked a saturnine-looking man, at the same time turning his back on the bank we were gliding past. "Yes," answered the Londoner, with a cheerful smile; "Yes—but it's natur."

Amongst other peculiarities, nothing strikes a stranger more, in his course up the Rhine, than the German fondness for bowing. Whenever the steamer passes, or stops at, a little town, you see a great part of the population collected on the shore, ready to perform this courtesy. One or two, like fuglemen, go through the manoeuvre by anticipation, as if saluting the figure-head; then the vessel ranges alongside, and off goes the covering of every head—hats and caps, of all shapes and colours, are flourishing in the air. Wet, or dry,



BARELY CIVIL.



or scorching sun, every male, from six years old to sixty, is uncovered. Some seize their caps by the top, others by the spout in front; this gives his hat a wave to and fro, that saws with it up and down; the very baker plucks off his white night-cap, and holds it shaking at arm's length. Meanwhile, their countrymen on board vigorously return the salute; the town is passed, and the ceremony is over. But, no!—a man comes running at full speed down a gateway, or round the corner of a street, looks eagerly for the boat, now 100 yards distant, gives a wave with his hat or cap, and then, thrusting his hands into his pockets, returns deliberately up the street, or gateway, as if he had acquitted himself of an indispensable moral duty.

Remarking on this subject to an English gentleman on board, he told me the following anecdote in point:—“During a temporary residence,” said he, “at Mayence, I made a slight acquaintance with one of the inhabitants, of the name of Klopp. He had much of the honesty and conscientiousness attributed to his countrymen, and though in practice a plain, straightforward, matter-of-fact person, was nevertheless addicted, like Germans in general, to abstruse studies. Subsequently, for the sake of the baths, I shifted my quarters to Ems, and was one morning sitting at breakfast, when a rapping at the door announced a visitor, and in walked Herr Klopp. After the usual compliments, I inquired, whether he had come to Ems for pleasure merely, or on account of his health? ‘For neither,’ replied the honest German;

'my errand is to you, and I shall return home directly I have paid off a little debt.' I was not aware, I told him, that we had any pecuniary transactions whatever. 'No,' replied Herr Klopp, 'not in money; but if you remember, on such a day (giving me the day and date) we passed each other on the Mayence Bridge. I had recently been reading Fichte, and my head was full of speculations; so that, though conscious of your bowing to me, I omitted to return your salute. It is true that I recollected myself in the cattle-market, and indeed pulled off my hat, but that hardly satisfied my conscience. So the end is, I have come to acquit myself of the debt; and here it is'—And, will you believe it, sir? with all the gravity of a Prussian sentry presenting arms, the scrupulous German paid me up the salute in arrear!"

To reward our patience, the blue crests of the Siebengebirge at length loomed over the low land, to the left, and assured us that our Pilgrim's Progress had brought us in sight of the Delectable Mountains. We had been advised to stop at Bonn, for the sake of some excursions in the neighbourhood, and that ancient and learned city soon made its appearance. Its aspect was quaint and inviting. As we neared the shore it was crowded with spectators, amongst whom those *Bonny Laddies*, the students, were gaily conspicuous. A great many were dressed as Tyrolese, with ribbons and flowers in their high-crowned hats; and, whatever a Quaker might have thought of such vanities, a painter would assuredly

have been grateful for such very picturesque accessories to the foreground. You may form some notion of their appearance from the remark of my Uncle—"Frank, they must have made a long night at the masquerade, to be in their fancy dresses so late in the morning." When I told him they were the students, he made one of his wry faces. "Students! What do they study?—Private Theatricals? Yes—there's a youngster dressed up like Macready in William Tell; and yonder's another with a parasol straw-hat, a nankeen jacket, and a long pipe in his mouth, like the Planter in Paul and Virginia!"

The moment the "Princess" came abreast of the pier, a party of the Burschen sprang on board, of course with an equal number of pipes, and formed a group on the deck. Most of them were in costume "marvellously imaginative;" some seemed to have sought their *Journal des Modes*, or *Mirror of Fashion*, in the pictures of Vandyke or Salvator Rosa; others appeared to have been clothed, in a fit of enthusiasm, by a romantic tailor. Indeed, one of them presented so very *outré* a figure, that I was not at all surprised to hear the Cockney's exclamation of "What a Guy!" No small portion of care and culture had been bestowed upon their hair, moustaches, and beards, which strongly reminded me of the Dutch hedges, that are trained and trimmed into all sorts of grotesque and fanciful shapes. But in the midst of these speculations, the bell warned us to provide for our own departure; and winding in



Indian file through the motley crowd, we made the best of our way to the hotel.

After establishing ourselves in comfortable quarters, we strolled about the town, first taking a long gaze, from the Altezoll, across the broad Rhine, at the grand group of the Seven Mountains. We then scanned the façade of the University, took a peep in at a church or two, and discussed a flask of Ahrbleichart in the *Vinea Domini*. During this ramble we saw, of course, a number of the students, and it was amusing to hear Nuncle guessing at the historical personages they had selected for their models;—for instance, Peter the Wild Boy—Van Butchell—Don Quixote—Samson—Absalom—Esau—Blackbeard the Pirate—Confucius—Henri Quatre—and Bampfylde Moore Carew. One very dissimilar pair he christened Valentine and Orson; another “Junker,” remarkably unkempt and unshorn, he compared to Baron Trenck; and “Egad!” he cried, as we passed a square-set figure in an antique dress, and fiercely moustached, “Egad! there’s Pam!” Perhaps the most whimsical of these fancies was that of a tall fellow, who, with sleekly-combed hair, a huge white collar thrown back over his shoulders, and trowsers that buttoned to his jacket, stalked along like a Brobdignagian school-boy! I was anxious to know my Uncle’s opinion of these oddities, and contrived to extract it. “All theatrical mummery, Frank; all theatrical mummery! But, mayhap,” said he, after a pause, “it’s like a breaking out on the skin, and serves

to carry off fantastical humours that are better out than in."

I am inclined to think this is nearly the truth of the case; for it is notorious that these Burschen come in, according to the proverb, as Lions, and go out as Lambs,—some of the wildest of them settling down in life as very civil civilians, sedate burgomasters, and the like. Indeed, were it otherwise,—were there as much real as mock enthusiasm under these formidable exteriors, should we not hear more often than we do of University riots and outbreaks,—of Middle-Age forays,—with an occasional attempt to set fire to the Rhine? The worst is, as a great portion of these students affect the uncouth and savage, mere Tybals and Fire-eaters, if they at all act up to their characters, they must be public nuisances; and if they do not, they hardly allow themselves fair play. Many of them, doubtless, are good-hearted lads, and industrious scholars, and as such, surely it would better become them to appear like what they are, ambitious of a place in the political, literary, artistic, or scientific annals of their country, rather than as candidates for a niche in its Eccentric Mirror or Wonderful Magazine.

These vagaries in dress form, by the by, a curious anomaly in Prussia; where, in conformity with the military penchant of the King, all public bodies, excepting the learned ones, are put into uniform. Thus, there are the Post officials with their orange collars, the Police with their pink ones, the Douane with their blue ones,

the Bridge-men with their red ones;—postilions, prisoners, road-makers, all have their liveries and their badges. But there is no *regulation* academical costume, and the students, by indulging in such eccentric *habits*, are possibly only making the most of their unique independence.

At one o'clock, we dined at the table d'hôte, and then rode off in a carriage to the Kreutzberg. At the top of the hill, we found a party of French travellers, three gentlemen and a lady, enjoying the fine prospect. Had they been countryfolk, it is probable that we should never have exchanged a word—for, as Marshal \* \* \* said, "the advanced guard of an Englishman is his reserve,"—but with foreigners it is otherwise; the strangers saluted us most courteously, and one of them addressing my Uncle, we all fell into talk. After commenting on the beauty of the view, we went *en masse* into the church, which formerly belonged to a Servite Convent. This edifice is considered as peculiarly sanctified, by possessing the steps which led up to the judgment-seat of Pontius Pilaté, and which are said to be still stained by the blood drops, drawn from the brow of our Saviour by the crown of thorns. These sacred stairs, as you are perhaps aware, have the faculty, like Sir Boyle Roche's famous bird, of "being in two places at once." I ventured to hint this to the lively Frenchwoman, but instead of expressing doubt or vexation, she only answered with a "Vraiment?" I then described the Scala Santa at Rome, but with as little

effect. "Vraiment?" she repeated. "Quel miracle! mais tout est possible au bon Dieu!"

Just at this moment we were startled by a loud exclamation in German from the attendant, followed by a slight scream, and, to my astonishment, I saw my Aunt precipitately scampering down the marble stairs! It seems she had unconsciously stepped on the *tabooed* precincts, which was no sooner perceived by the guardian of the place, than, with a loud outcry that the stairs were sacred, he made a snatch to draw her back by the arm. The abrupt voice, the unknown tongue, the threatening gesture, and the angry expression of a countenance by no means prepossessing, took full effect on her weak nerves, and impelled her to escape as from a madman. And now arose a serious difficulty. The trespasser had stopped exactly half way down the flight, to set foot on which is sacrilege, but as she could not be expected, nor indeed allowed, to stand there for ever, the point was how to get her off. By going up them on her knees, like a Catholic pilgrim, she would have gained a plenary indulgence for a year; but this, as a staunch Protestant, she declined, and as a modest female she refused to clamber over the double balustrade that separated her from a common staircase on either side. Which would then occasion the least sacrilege, to ascend by the way she came, or to descend and be let out at the great folding doors, the number of stairs to be profaned in either case being the same? It was a question to pose the whole college of St. Omer!

The attendant was at his wits' ends how to act, and referred the point to the French party, as Catholics, and competent advisers, but for want of a precedent they were as much abroad as himself. The first gentleman he appealed to shrugged his shoulders, the lady did the same; the second gentleman shrugged his shoulders and made a grimace, and the third shrugged his shoulders, made a grimace, and shook his head. In the meantime, the trespasser looked alarmed and distressed; she had gained some obscure notion of the case, and possibly thought, in her vague idea of the powers of popery, that she had subjected herself to the pains and penalties of the Inquisition. It was an awkward dilemma, particularly as the attendant protested most vehemently whenever the culprit attempted to stir. Luckily, however, he turned his back during his consultation, when, at a beckon and a wink from my Uncle, my Aunt, not without trembling, quietly slipped up the sacred stairs on the points of her toes!

This termination of so intricate a dilemma was a relief to us all, and to none more than Martha, who now ventured to draw out the handkerchief she had stuffed into her mouth, by way of stopper to a scream. But the affair had so cowed the unlucky transgressor, that when we visited the vault under the church, to inspect the Mummies, she preferred to "sit out." And it was well she escaped a sight which could not have failed to remind her of "poor George." Imagine about two dozen of dead monks laid out, in their habits as they

lived, in open coffins, all in various stages of decay, some almost as fresh and fleshy as might be expected of an anchorite, after a long course of fasting and mortification; others partly dropping, and dropped into dust; and here and there a mere skull, grinning like one of Monk Lewis's spectres, from under its cowl. The cause of their extraordinary preservation has given rise to much conjecture. My own opinion is, that by way of pendants to the holy stairs, and heaping "voonders upon voonders," the bodies have been *Kyanized* by some secret process which was afterwards partially lost, as the more recent corpses scarcely promise to keep so well as the more ancient ones. It was impossible to stand amongst so many venerable relics of humanity, some of them from three to four centuries old, without entering into very Hamlet-like reflections. What had become, during that long interval, of the disembodied spirits? Had they slept in utter darkness and blank oblivion; or had they a twilight existence, in dreams reflective of the past? Did they still, perhaps, hover round their earthly haunts and fleshy tenements; or were they totally entranced, only to wake at the sound of the last trumpet? But these are themes too awful for a gossiping letter. Suffice it we all felt the influence of the place and scene. In the neighbourhood of such objects, a strange mysterious feeling lays us under a spell. By a sort of process of transfusion, the vital principle that departed from the concrete form, seems to have passed into an abstract figure:—Life is dead, but DEATH is alive! and we

breathe, and look, and tread, and whisper, as if we were in his actual though invisible presence. Few words, therefore, were uttered as we stood in that dreary avenue,—I remember but one exclamation from the French woman, as she gazed on one of the most perfect and placid of the faces—a wish, that the figure and features of those we hold most dear, could always be thus preserved to us. It sounded like a natural sentiment, at the time,—but it was little shared in by one of the spectators, who, as we quitted the vault, drew me aside, with an air of great solemnity. “Frank,—make me one promise. If I die in these parts, don’t let me be embalmed. It’s all nonsense and profanity. We’re ordained to decay by nature, and religion bids us try not to preserve our bodies, but to save our souls. Besides, as to keeping one’s face and person for one’s friends to look at, it’s my notion they would soon give over coming to see us, unless we could return the visits. No, no!—as Abraham said, ‘let us bury our dead out of our sight.’” “At least,” said I, “the Mummies are a natural curiosity.” “Why yes,” he replied, with a smile, as we stepped into the bright, brisk, open air, “and a political one, too, Frank, to see so many of our representatives beyond corruption.”

At the church-door we parted with the pleasant French people, who were going further inland;—and then returned to our carriage. In our way home we halted at Poppelsdorf, to see the Botanical Garden, and the Museum, which contains abundant specimens of the

mineralogy and geology of the Rhenish mountains, the Eifel, and the brown coal of Friesdorf. Amongst the fossils is a complete series of frogs, from the full-grown froggy that might a wooing go, down to that minute frogling—a tadpole. My Uncle's remark on them was an original one, and deserves the consideration of our chemists. "Frank, if we could but find out a way of petrifying our great men, what a deal of money would be saved, in chipping statues!"

But now, Gerard, good night. Fatigued and drowsy from our breezy rambles, a resolution has been moved and seconded, for retiring early, that I am too heavy-headed to oppose. "God bless the man who invented sleep!" cries honest Sancho Panza, "and Heaven be praised that he did not take out a patent, and keep the discovery to himself." My best love to Emily.

I am, my dear Gerard, yours very truly,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.

P.S.—Past one o'clock, and here I am, not couchant but rampant! Yet have I been between sheets, and all but into the soft arms of Mrs. Morpheus,—but oh! Gerard, a night at Bonn, is any thing but a *bonne nuit*!

Never did I throw myself with such sweet abandonment into that blessed luxury, a bed. Sleep, the dear Eider duck, was beginning to brood me with her downy breast and shadowy wings,—I was already swooning away into the delicious semi-oblivion that precedes the



total forgetfulness, when crash! I was startled broad awake by the compound rattle of a vehicle, that seemed to have twelve wheels, with four-and-twenty loose spokes in each, and a cast-iron horse! Students, of course, from their revels at Godesberg! Another and another followed—then a street squabble—and then “Am Rhein! Am Rhein!” arranged for any number of voices. Doze again—but no—another scrambling shandrydan,—and then a duo—no, a trio—no, a quart—no, a quint—no, a sext—zounds! a dozen were chiming in at the topmost pitch of their lungs! Partial as I am to music, I could not relish these outbreaks, nor did it comfort me a whit, that all who met, or overtook these wassailers, joined most skilfully and scientifically in the tune!

I like your German singers well,  
 But hate them too, and for this reason,  
 Although they always sing in time,  
 They often sing quite out of season.

In short, finding that it was impossible to sleep, I got up—rang for candles—cigars—and brandy and water, and then amused myself with the tale of *diablerie* I inclose. Meanwhile the students subsided—the streets are quiet,—and once more, good night.