

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,—You will not be sorry to receive tidings of a person whose mysterious disappearance, some two or three years back, cost us both some speculation. Yesterday, whilst looking at the monument of Cuno of Falkenstein, in the venerable church of St. Castor, I was accosted by name, and with some difficulty recognised, under a German cap and kittel, our old friend Markham. In answer to my inquiries, he told me a new edition of the old story—of “becoming security for a friend,” &c.; in short, he had come abroad to retrench, and selected this bank of the Rhine for his saving-bank. From what I could learn, the experiment had not answered his expectations. “You remember,” said he, “our laughing at a written notice stuck up at the Opera House in London, enforcing certain exclusive regulations, in consequence of the great *affluence* of strangers behind the scenes? In the same sense, the great affluence of strangers up the Rhine has not only had the effect of raising the price of every article, but with its proper meaning, the supposed affluence of the English travellers has generated a proportionate spirit of rapacity and extortion. I reckon, for instance, that I am charged a third more than a native

on my whole expenditure, so that you see there is not much room left for saving."

Of course, the opinions of a disappointed man must be received *cum grano salis*,—but in the main, Markham's statements agree with those of Grundy, and though his remarks have occasionally a splenetic tone, yet he "gives his reasons." On some topics his outbreaks are rather amusing. Thus, when I asked if he did not find the natives a very good, honest sort of people, he replied to my question by another—"Do you expect that the descendants of our Botany Bay convicts will be remarkable for their strict notions of *meum* and *tuum*?" "Of course not," said I; "but the honesty of the German character has been generally admitted." "Granted," said he, "but there is such a thing as giving a dog a good name as well as a bad one, upon which he lives and thrives as unjustly as another is pitch-forked or shot with slugs. That the Germans are honest as a nation I believe, as regards your Saxons, Bavarians, Austrians, or north-countrymen,—but as for your Coblenzers, and the like, whence were they to derive that virtue? Was the *rava avis* hatched in any of the robbers' nests so numerous in these provinces? Was it inculcated by the ministers of their religion? An archbishop of Cologne, when asked by one of his retainers how he was to subsist, significantly pointed out, that the Knight's castle overlooked four highways, and hinted to his vassal that, like Macheath, he must take to the road. No, no—if the Rhine-

landers be particularly honest, they were indebted for their education, like Filch in the *Beggars' Opera*, to very light-fingered schoolmasters. Why, every Baron in the land was a bandit, and half the common people, by a regularly organised system, were either Journeymen Robbers or Apprentices. That's matter of history, my boy! At any rate, if Rhenish honesty be a fact, our prison philanthropists are all wrong; and Mrs. Fry and the Sheriffs, who are so anxious to separate the juvenile convicts from the accomplished thieves, ought immediately to take a trip up the Rhine. Instead of classification and moral instruction, the true way would be something like this:—take a clever boy, bring him up like a young Spartan—reward him for successful picking and stealing—strike the eighth commandment out of his catechism,—send him to school in Newgate, and let Bill Soames be his private tutor; do all this, and expect eventually to discover in him the Honest Man that Diogenes couldn't find with his lanthorn!" "Do you speak," I asked, "from theory or from experience?" "From both," said he; "and comparing the Middle Ages with the modern ones, I cannot help thinking that an extortion of some 30 per cent. on all foreign travellers on the Rhine, has a strong smack of the old freebooting spirit."

On leaving St. Castor's we saw, directly opposite the porch, the well-known fountain with its celebrated inscriptions:—

" ANNO 1812.

" Mémorable par la Campagne contre les Russes, sous la Préfecture de Jules Douzan."

" Vu et approuvé, par nous, Commandant Russe de la Ville de Coblenz, le 1^{er} Janvier, 1814."

" There!" said Markham, pointing to the graven words, " there are two sentences which have caused far more cackling than they deserved. The adulation of Mayors and Prefects is too common, for the erection of a monument on any occasion, or no occasion at all, to be a matter of wonder. But the mere undertaking an expedition against Russia *was* a memorable event in the career of Napoleon, whatever its ultimate result. As for the Russian General, he might naturally be astonished and delighted to find himself in command of a city on the Rhine, and its obelisk; but his comment, if it points any moral at all, chiefly recalls the uncertainty of all human calculations. As a sarcasm it is feeble, with a recoil on himself; for where is St. Priest now, or who hears his name? Whereas, the spirit of the French Emperor still lives and breathes on the banks of the Rhine—aye, in Coblenz itself—in his famous Code!"

Our old acquaintance volunteering to be my guide, we made the round of the sights of the town, which are not very numerous, as the valets-de-place are well aware when they eke out their wonders with an old barrack or a street-pump. So having seen the new Palace, the house that cradled Prince Metternich, the Jesuits' Church with its surprising cellars, and some other local

"Lions" and cubs, we adjourned to Markham's lodgings, where, after ascending a dark, dirty, circular staircase, we entered an apartment with a visible air of retrenchment about it; for, with mere apologies for window-curtains, it had given up carpets, and left off fires. The only ornamental piece of furniture, for it certainly was not useful, was the sofa, which on trial afforded as hard and convex a seat as a garden-roller. "Rather different from my old snugger in Percy Street," said my host with a dubious smile. "There is not, indeed, much sacrifice to show," I replied, "but perhaps the more solid comfort." "Comfort, my dear fellow!" cried Markham, "the Germans don't even know it by name; there's no such word in the language! Look at the construction of their houses! A front door and a back door, with a well staircase in the middle, up which a thorough draught is secured by a roof pierced with a score or two of unglazed windows; the attics by this airy contrivance serving to dry the family linen. Make your sitting room, therefore, as warm as you please with that close fuming, unwholesome abomination, a German stove, and the moment you step out of the chamber door, it is like transplanting yourself, in winter, from the hot-house into the open garden. To aggravate these discomforts, you have sashes that won't fit, doors that don't shut, hasps that can't catch, and keys not meant to turn! Then, again, the same openings that let in the cold, admit the noise; and for a musical people, they are the most noisy I ever

met with. Next to chorus singing, their greatest delight seems to be in the everlasting sawing and chopping up of fire-wood at their doors; they even contrive to combine music and noise together, and the carters drive along the streets smacking a tune with their whips!"

The conversation was here interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Markham, a handsome, but careful-looking personage, to whom I was cordially introduced. Indeed she confessed to trouble, especially a severe illness of her husband soon after their arrival at Coblenz,—not to mention all the minor annoyances and inconveniences of living in a foreign country without any knowledge of the language. "But those little trials," she said, "are now things to laugh over, although they were sufficiently harassing at the time." "My chicken, for instance," cried Markham, with a chuckle at the remembrance. "You must know, that Harriet here took it into her kind head that, as I was an invalid, I could eat nothing but a boiled fowl. The only difficulty was how to get at it, for our maid does not understand English, and her mistress cannot speak any thing else. However, Gretel was summoned, and the experiment began. It is one of my wife's fancies that the less her words resemble her native tongue, the more they must be like German; so her first attempt was to tell the maid that she wanted a cheeking, or a keeking. The maid opened her eyes and mouth, and shook her head. 'It's to cook,' said her mistress, 'to coke—to put in an iron thing—in a

pit—pat—pot.' 'Ish verstand nisht,' said the maid in her Coblenz patois. 'It's a thing to eat,' said her mistress, 'for dinner—for deener—with sauce—soase—sowse.' But the maid still shrugged her shoulders. 'What on earth am I to do!' exclaimed poor Harriet, quite in despair, but still making one last attempt. 'It's a live creature—a bird—a bard—a beard—a hen—a hone—a fowl—a fool—a foal—it's all covered with feathers—fathers—feeders—fedders!' 'Hah, hah!' cried the delighted German, at last getting hold of a catchword, 'Ja! ja! fedders—ja wohl!' and away went Gretel, and in half an hour returned triumphantly with *a bundle of stationer's quills!*"

The truth of this domestic anecdote was certified by Mrs. M. herself. "But I was more successful," she said, "the next morning; for, on Gretel opening her apron, after marketing, out tumbled a long-legged living cock, who began stalking about, and chuckling with surprise to find himself in a drawing-room. At last, on the third day I succeeded, for I did obtain a dead fowl, and reckoned myself fortunate, even though it came in after all, roasted instead of boiled."

"But now you know something of the language," said I, "you fare sumptuously, of course, for it's a luxuriant country." "To the eye," so replied Markham, "it is lovely indeed; and, at a first-rate hotel, where you enjoy the choicest of its productions, it may keep its promise. But for a private table, just listen to our bill of fare. Indifferent beef—veal killed at

eight days old—good mutton, but at some seasons not to be had—poultry plentiful, but ill-fed—game in moderation. No sea-fish—yes, oysters, as big, shell and all, as a pennypiece, and six shillings a hundred. You hear of salmon-fisheries, but the steamers have frightened away the fish,—I have seen about six here in two years, and have been asked two dollars a pound: perch 3*d.* and 4*d.* per pound; and worthless chub and barbel *ad libitum*. No good household bread—it is half rye—and wheaten flour is only to be bought at the pastry-cook's; good vegetables, but the staple one, potatoes, small and waxy, such as we should call *chats* in England, and give to the pigs. Fruit abundant, but more remarkable for quantity than quality, and often uneatable from vermin,—for example, cherries, fine to look at, but every one containing a worm. For foreign fruit, you may have indifferent oranges at 4*d.* to 5*d.* each. Coffee reasonable and good—tea as dear and bad. Then for wine, the lower sorts of Rhenish and the Moselle are cheap and excellent; but the superior kinds are easier to procure in London than on the Rhine. Foreign wines you may have at pleasure—for your honest Rhinelanders have little to learn in the arts of adulteration and simulation. Thus you have Bavarian beer brewed at Coblenz; Westphalian hams cured in Nassau; Florence oil extracted from Rhenish walnuts; French Cognac, Bordeaux, and Champagne, made from German potatoes and grapes; English gin distilled at Düsseldorf; and Gorgona anchovies, caught in the Rhine. Perhaps you are not aware, that in



BEER WITH A BODY.

addition, the Germans are the most notorious poison-mongers in Europe?"

I stared, as you may suppose, at such an assertion. "It is true, however," said Markham, "some of their physicians have detected an active poison in their national blood-sausages;—a little while back there were proclamations in the papers against poisonous-coloured sugar-plums; Mr. Krauss of Dusseldorf found their potato-brandy so poisonous, as to attribute to its use most of the crimes committed in Rhenish Prussia;—and of course you are aware of the experiments in London with the poor finches and the poisonous German candles!"

"Now he is too bad—isn't he?" interposed Mrs. Markham, with a smile. "But it is half joke and whim. Would you believe it, Sir, he has set me against all the beer in the place, on account of an establishment facing the Moselle, inscribed, oddly enough, 'Baths and Beer Brewery.' He will have it, that as hot malt is recommended in some cases by the German doctors, the two businesses are only brought under one roof for the natives to bathe in the beer!"

"And why not?" said Markham. "Does not Head say that at Schwalbach they bathe in the mullagatawny soup, and at Wiesbaden in the chicken-broth? But to return to our subject, the advantages of living in Coblenz. It may be otherwise, elsewhere in Germany; but as a general principle, take my word for it, the grand difference is not in the cost, but in the manner of living. As for retrenchment, on the same plan it

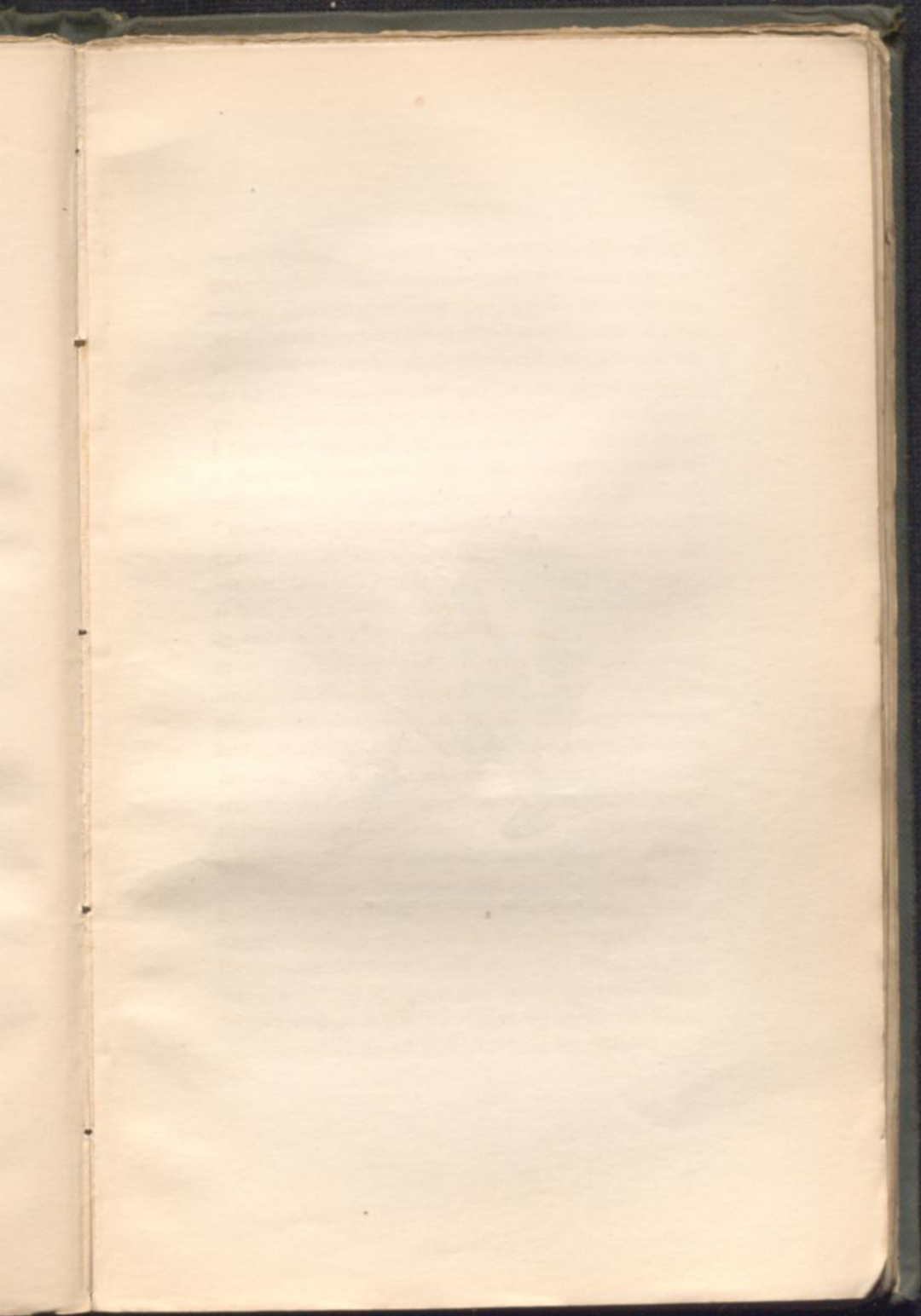
might be effected in London. Lodge in a second floor—dispense with a carpet,—have as little and as plain furniture as possible—burn wood in a German stove—keep a cheap country servant—buy inferior meat, chats, and rye-bread—drink Cape and table-beer—see no company—dress how you please—above all go to market, as you must do here, with your ready-money in your hand—then sum up, at the year's end, and I verily believe the utmost saving, by coming to such a place as this, would be some 10*l.* or 20*l.* to set off against all the deprivations and disadvantages of expatriation."

You will perceive a little sub-acid in Markham's statements; but allowing for that ingredient, his remarks seem deserving of consideration. I suspect it would require more philosophy than most persons possess, to reside in London with the indifference as to caste, appearances, and fashion, which his scheme requires; but that persons of limited incomes might live in the provinces, or in Scotland, as cheaply, and more comfortably, than on the Continent in general, appears to me very probable, and on various accounts highly desirable; especially as experience proves that a residence abroad is as injurious, as foreign travelling is beneficial, to the English character.

Wishing to make Markham known to my Uncle, I induced him to return with me to my lodgings. In our way we passed through the Place-d'Armes, a small square, surrounded by lime-trees. "Here," said my companion, "is the scene of a recent and successful insurrection!" "Indeed!" I could not help exclaim-



PERSECUTED ACCORDING TO LAW.



ing—"then it had but a small theatre, which I presume was the reason why the performance did not get into the English journals." "May be so," said he, "but here is the play-bill;" and taking a small slip of paper from his pocket-book, he read to me the following manifesto:—

NOTICE.

"The warm weather of spring now returning, it is again a common duty to clear the trees and bushes of caterpillars. Notice is therefore given, to all possessors of trees and bushes, to clear them from caterpillars, and to exterminate these destructive vermin. This clearing of the trees, &c. must be done *thoroughly* until the 10th of April. Any neglect in this respect will incur the punishment dictated by the laws of the police.

(Signed) "THE OBER-BÜRGERMEISTER."

"There," said Markham, "there's the proclamation! Now look up at those bare lime-trees, stripped of almost every leaf,—was there ever such a practical quiz on a despotic government? It has quelled the Frankfort rioters—it has dispersed the Heidelberg students—it has bridled and curbed young Germany, and tamed the Burschenschaft—but it cannot put down the Raupenschaft! Think of a Prussian Ober-Bürgermeister beaten by a blight! Imagine the first magistrate of the capital of the Rhenish provinces foiled by a secret society of grubs! Fancy the powerful prying Police defied by an association of maggots,—and Absolutism itself set at nought by a

swarm of proscribed vermin! Nature at all events will not stand dictation; and so far from the insects being exterminated, they have got so much a-head in some parts of the country, that the proprietors of fruit-trees and bushes have had serious thoughts of cutting them all down!"

"Possibly," said I, "the authorities neglected to enforce their mandate by personal example. A Police Director might think it beneath his dignity to arrest a maggot; and a mounted gendarme would probably disdain to pursue a creeper." "Yes," added Markham, "and a ponderous Head-Burgomaster might naturally decline to swarm like 'possum up a gum-tree,' after an illegal caterpillar."

This conversation brought us to our lodgings, where we found my Uncle just recovering from "a warning," which had been accompanied by rather singular circumstances. It appears that at the Civil Casino, to which foreigners are liberally admitted, he had formed an acquaintance with a Mr. Schwärmer, who spoke a little English, and had offered to be his Cicerone to the Kuhkopf, the highest hill near Coblenz, and celebrated for the splendid view from the top. Probably our Hypochondriac was a little blown by the steepness of the ascent, or rendered rather dizzy by the height: however, feeling some unusual sensations on reaching the summit, he immediately took it for granted that he was "going suddenly;" accordingly, deliberately preparing himself for his departure, first by sitting and then by lying down, he "composed his decent head to breathe



"EASY DOES IT."

his last." His calmness and business-like manner, I suppose, gave him an appearance of wilful premeditation to the act; for, according to Nunkle's account, he had no sooner intimated to his companion what was about to happen, than the other, falling into one of those suicidal fits of exaltation, so prevalent in Germany, burst out with, "It is one sublime tort!—and here is one sublime place for it; I shall die too!" Whereupon, without more ceremony, he pulled a little phial of Prussic acid, or some other mortal compound, from his waistcoat pocket, and was proceeding to swallow the contents, when the dying man, jumping up, knocked down the bottle with one hand, and Mr. Schwärmer himself with the other, and then, totally forgetting his own extremity, walked off in double quick time, nor ever stopped till he reached his own door. Two full hours had elapsed since the occurrence, but between the walk home and his moral indignation, he had hardly cooled down when we arrived. "I'll tell you what, Frank," he said, on ending his story, "I never liked the four cross-roads, and the stake through a suicide's body, in England; but when I saw Mr. Swarmer going to drink the deadly poison, hang *me* if I wasn't tempted to drive my own walking-stick into his stomach!"

"Perhaps, sir," said Markham, "you are not aware that there was formerly a Club of Suicides in this very country. They were bound by a vow not only to kill themselves, but to induce as many persons as they could to follow their example. I have not heard that

they made any proselytes, but they all died by their own hands—the last blew out his brains, if he had any, in 1817.” “They ought to have been hung in effigy,” said my Uncle. “A great many suicides,” continued Markham, “were attributable to Werther, who brought *felo-de-se* quite into vogue.” “That Vairter,” said my Uncle, “ought to have been ducked in a horsepond.” “He was a mere fiction, sir, a creature of Goethe’s,” said Markham. “Then I would have had Gooty ducked himself,” said my Uncle. “Even at this day,” said Markham, “there is Bettine, an authoress, who proclaims that one of her earliest wishes was to read much, to learn much, and to die young.” “And did *she* kill herself, sir?” inquired my Aunt. “No, madam, she married instead; but her bosom-friend, drest in white with a crimson stomacher, stabbed herself, in such a position as to fall into the Rhine. Then again there was Louisa Brachmann, alias Sappho, so inclined to die young, that at fourteen years of age she threw herself from a gallery, two stories high.” “And was killed on the spot, of course?” said my aunt, with a gesture of horror. “No, madam,—she lived to throw herself, five-and-twenty years afterwards, into the Saale.” “How very dreadful!” shuddered out my Aunt. “Yes, madam, to English notions; but her German Biographer, or rather Apologist, says, that her first flight in her fourteenth year was only a lively poetical presentiment of that which weighed her down in her fortieth, namely, the beggarliness of all human pursuits compared with the yearnings of the

soul." "She must have been a forward child of her age," remarked my Uncle, "to have seen and known the world so soon." "Now I think of it," said my Aunt, "I remember reading in the work of a female traveller in America, that on describing to a lady her emotions at the sight of Niagara, she asked her if she did not feel a longing to throw herself down, and mingle with her mother earth?" "That was a German lady, you may be sure," said Markham, "or at least of German origin. The fact is, these people kill themselves for anything or nothing: for instance, I should be loth to trust a sentimental Prussian with himself, with his pipe out and an empty tobacco-bag. Young or old, 'tis all one. Only the other day there was a reward offered in the Rhein-und-Mosel-Zeitung for the body of an aged grey-haired man, describing his cap, his suit of hoddan grey, his blue woollen stockings, and buckled shoes. One would have thought that such a John Anderson might have had patience to "toddle down" the hill of life like a Christian; but no—at the end of the advertisement there was an intimation, that he was supposed to have thrown himself into a neighbouring river! Talking of drowning—the same element is fatally used, as I have been well informed, in a very different manner. As ball-cartridge is not always to be got at, a common soldier inclined to self-murder, after loading his musket with powder, pours a quantity of water into the barrel; by which his head, provided it be held close to the muzzle, is frightfully blown to atoms. One fact more and I have done, for it literally out-Herods

Herod. A Doctor whose name I forget, but it was given in the newspapers, not only determined to kill himself, but to bury himself into the bargain! With this view he dug a grave, in which he shot himself; the pistol, at the same time, firing a sort of mine filled with gunpowder, by the explosion of which, though the experiment only partially succeeded, he expected to be covered with earth and sand." "And, for my part," began my Uncle, "if I had been the Coroner for Germany"—"In Germany, my good sir, there is no Coroner." "Egad! I thought as much," cried my Uncle, "and, as it seems to me, no Schoolmaster or Clergyman either, or the people would know that, as Shakspeare says, the Almighty has fixed a canon against self-slaughter."

"Seriously," said Markham, "this propensity to suicide is a reproach which the Germans have to wipe away before they can justly claim the character of a moral, religious, or intellectual people. The more so, as it is not the vulgar and ignorant, but the educated and enlightened,—Scholars, Doctors, Literati—men that would be offended to be denied the title of Philosophers, —women that would be shocked not to be called Christians,—who are thus apt to quench the lamp of life in unholy waters, or to shatter with a profane bullet 'the dome of thought, the palace of the soul.'"

And now, Gerard, as a sermon concludes the service, these grave strictures shall end my letter. My best love to Emily and yourself. Yours ever truly,

F. SOMERVILLE.

P. S.—We kept Markham to dine with us, after which he and I took a stroll to the other side of the Moselle Bridge, where the sight of a little chapel brilliantly lighted up, led to a conversation on the religious characteristics of the natives. According to our friend there is a good deal of bigotry extant in Coblenz, and a very active Propaganda with a professional layman or two at its head, who aim at conversions wholesale and retail. “As an instance,” said he, “there was an English family residing here, all Protestants. The head of it was occasionally absent on his travels, and one fine day at his return home—hey presto!—he found his wife, her aunt, and all his children, Roman Catholics!” By a whimsical coincidence the anecdote had scarcely left his lips, when, turning a corner into the high road, who should we come upon plump, trudging up the hill at her best pace, with a huge unlighted wax-taper in her hand, but Martha, my Aunt’s maid! The surprise pulled us all up short; but, before I could utter a word, she pitched her candle into the hedge, wheeled right-about with the alacrity of a Prussian soldier, fairly took to her heels, like a mad cow, and, aided by the descent, was out of sight in “no time at all.” Markham, who understood the matter, burst into a loud laugh, and then explained to me the whole mystery; for which, if you are curious on the subject, you may consult the inclosed verses.