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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,—This morning I again called on our friend, and found him in company with a little man of such marked features, that between his physiognomy and his London-like pronunciation of English, it was impossible to disconnect him with old clothes, and oranges, Holywell Street, and the Royal Exchange. He was, however, a Prussian, and had simply carried the German pronunciation of W—which is identical with the Cockney way of sounding it—into our own language.

I had scarcely been introduced to this Mr. Isaac Meyer, when another visitor was announced, who was likewise “extremely proud and happy to make my acquaintance:”—but just in the middle of his pride and happiness, a glance at the little man stopped him short like a stroke of apoplexy. All his blood seemed to mount into his head: the courteous smile vanished; his eye glistened; his lip curled; his frame trembled; and with some difficulty he stammered out the rest of his compliment. In anticipation of a scene, I looked with some anxiety towards the other party, but to my surprise he was perfectly calm and cool; and was either unconscious of the other's perturbation, or took it as a matter of course. Any general conversation was out

of the question: after a very short and very fidgetty stay, during which he never once addressed the object of his dislike, the uncomfortable gentleman took his leave, and the other soon after concluded his "visit." When they were gone, Markham explained the phenomenon. "The little man," said he, "is of the Hebrew persuasion; and the big one belongs to a rather numerous class, described by Saphir—whose satirical works, by the by, I think you would relish,—in short he is a Jew-hater—one of those who wish that the twelve tribes had but a single neck. You saw how he reddened and winced! As Shakspeare says, 'some men there are love not a gaping pig, some that are mad if they behold a cat,' and here is this Herr Brigselbach quite set aghast, and chilled all over into goose-skin, at the sight of a human being with black eyes and a hook nose!"

"But surely," said I, "such a prejudice is rare except amongst the most bigoted Catholics and the lower orders?"

"Lower orders and Catholics!—quite the reverse. I presume you heard of a certain freak of Royal authority, forbidding the Hebrews the use of Christian names, and enjoining other degrading distinctions. Such an example in such a country was enough to bring Jew-hating into fashion, if it had not been the *rage* before. But you must live in Germany to understand the prevalence and intensity of the feeling. You will not rank the editor of a public journal, or his contributors, in the lower and ignorant class: nevertheless

my little Isaac the other day lent me a local paper, and the two very first paragraphs that met my eye were sarcastic anecdotes against his race. One of them was laughable enough, indeed I laughed at it myself; but in this country such stories are circulated more for malice and mischief than for the sake of the fun. It ran thus:—A certain cunning old Jew had lent a large sum of money, and charged interest upon it at nine per cent. instead of six, which was the legal rate. The borrower remonstrated; and at last asked the usurer if he did not believe in a God, and where he expected to go when he died?—‘Ah,’ said the old Hebrew, with a pleased twinkle of the eye and a grin—‘I have thought of that too—but when God looks down upon it *from above*, the 9 will appear to HIM like a 6.’”

“And what does Mr. Meyer say,” I inquired, “of such attacks on his brethren?”

“Little or nothing. When I alluded to the paragraphs, and expressed my indignation, he merely smiled meekly, and said a few words to the effect that ‘suffering was the badge of all his tribe.’ In fact they are used to it, as was said of the eels. By the by, Von Raumer speaks of a Prussian liberal, who abused Prussia, as no better than a beast;—but he surely forgot this oppressed portion of his countrymen. As to love of country in general, he is right—but has the degraded inhabitant of the Juden Gasse a country? To look for patriotism from such a being, you might as well expect local gratitude and attachment from a pauper without a parish! No, no—that word so dear, so holy, to a

German, his Fatherland, is to the Jew a bitter mockery. He has all the duties and burthens, without the common privileges, of the relationship—he is as heavily taxed, and hardly drilled, as any member of the family; but has he an equal share of the benefits—does he even enjoy a fair portion of the affection of his brothers and sisters? Witness Herr Brigselbach. As for his Fatherland, a Jew may truly say of it as the poor Irishman did of his own hard-hearted relative —‘ Yes, sure enough he’s the parent of me—but he trates me as if I was his Son by another Father and Mother!’ ”

By way of drawing out our friend, who, like the melancholy Jaques in his sullen fits, is then fullest of matter, I inquired if the bitterest writers against the country were not of Meyer’s persuasion.

“ Yes—Heine abused Prussia, and he was a Jew. So did Börne, and he was a Jew too, born at Frankfort—the *free* city of Frankfort, whose inhabitants, in the nineteenth century, still amuse themselves occasionally, on Christian high days and holidays, with breaking the windows of their Hebrew townsmen! What wonder if the galled victims of such a pastime feel, think, speak, and write, as citizens of the world! As Sterne does with his Captive, let us take a single Jew. Imagine him locked up in his dark chamber, pelted with curses and solider missiles, and trembling for his property and his very life, because he will not abandon his ancient faith, or eat pork sausages. Fancy the jingling of the shattered glass—the crashing of the window frames—the guttural howlings of the brutal

rabble—and then picture a Prussian Censor breaking into the room, with a flag in each hand, one inscribed Vaterland, the other Bruderschaft—and giving the quaking wretch a double knock over the head with the poles, to remind him that he is a German and a Frankforter. Was there ever such a tragi-conical picture! But it is not yet complete. The poor Jew, it may be supposed, has little heart to sing to such a terrible accompaniment as bellows from without; nevertheless the patriotic Censor insists on a chaunt, and by way of a prompt-book, sets before the quavering vocalist a translation of Doctor Watts's Hymn of Praise and Thanksgiving for being born in a Christian Land!"

Amused by Markham's *extempore* championship of the twelve tribes, by way of jest I insinuated that, during his admitted scarcity of cash, he had perhaps been supplied with moneys by means of his clients. But he took the jest quite in earnest. "Not a shilling, my dear fellow,—not a gros. But I am indebted to them for some kindness and civility: for they certainly hate us far less than some sects of Christians hate each other. It's my firm belief that the Jews possess many good qualities. Why not? The snubbed children of a family are apt to be better than the spoiled ones. As for their honesty, if they cheat us now, in retail, we have plundered them aforesaid by wholesale,—and like master like scholar. But there's little Meyer, a Jew every inch of him, and with the peculiar love of petty traffic ascribed to his race. He will sell or barter with you the books in his library, the spoons in his cupboard,

the watch in his fob, and yet in all my little dealings he has served me as fairly as if he had flaxen hair, blue eyes, and a common journeywork nose, with a lump, like a make-weight, stuck on the end. The extortions and cheating I have met with were from Christians; and what is singular, the only time I ever had my money refused in this country, it was by Jews. There are many poor Hebrew families in Bendorf, and other villages on the banks of the Rhine, and it is a pleasant sight to behold, through the windows of their cottages, the seven candles of their religion shining,—like the fire-flies of a German night—the only lights in their darkness, to an outcast people in an alien land. In one of these humble dwellings at Sayn, I once left my hat and coat in exchange for a cap and kittel, preparatory to a broiling hot excursion farther up the country. During my metamorphosis, I happened to take notice of a sickly-looking crippled boy, about nine years old, who was sitting at a table in a corner of the room; and the mother informed me, with a sigh too easy to interpret, that he was her first-born, and her only son. On my return I resumed my clothes, and offered the poor people a trifle for their trouble, but they had already been overpaid by a common expression of sympathy; and refused my money so pertinaciously, that I could only get rid of the coin by pressing it into the wasted hand of the helpless child. Poor little fellow! I wish I could hope to give him another,—but he was already marked for death, and his thin, sharp, sallow face, seemed only kept alive by his quick black eyes!"

"In England," continued Markham, "we have seen a Jewish sheriff of London, but I verily believe if any thing could excite a rebellion in these provinces, it would not be the closing of the coffee-houses, and the suppression of the newspapers, but the making a Burgomaster of the race of Israel. However, all other brutal sports and pastimes are falling into decadence with the progress of civilisation: Bear-baiting is extinct; Badger-drawing is on the wane; Cock-throwing is gone out; Cock-fighting is going after it; and Bull-running is put down: so put on your hat, my dear fellow, and let us hope, for the sake of Christianity and human nature, that Jew-hating and Jew-running will not be the last of the line!"

Our first stroll was through the market-place, which was crowded with countrywomen, many of them afflicted with goitre. It has been supposed to arise from drinking snow-water; but as this country abounds in excellent springs, such a theory can scarcely be entertained. In Markham's opinion it is caused by the sudden stoppage of perspiration, and contraction of the pores, by keen blasts from the mountains, whilst the women are toiling bare-necked in the heat of the sun. I asked him if the accounts were correct of the unremitting industry and hard labour of the Germans. "In the towns," said he, "perhaps not: the men are either more indolent, or have less physical strength, than the English. I have frequently seen three or four fellows carrying or drawing loads that would be a burthen for only one or two in London. Sometimes



THE TRUCK SYSTEM.

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you see a leash harnessed to a small truck of wood ; perhaps there is a woman along with them, and I have remarked that *she* is always in earnest, and, like the willing horse, does more than her fair share of the work. Indeed the softer sex has the harder lot here, for, besides what are with us considered masculine employment, in the fields and on the water, they have all the in-door duties of a woman to perform. As regards the peasantry, great labour is a matter of necessity : by the hardest labour, the land being highly taxed, they only procure the hardest fare ; and there being no poor-rates to fall back upon, they must either work hard or starve. You may read in their faces a story of severe toil and meagre diet. Look at those country girls, poor things—

“Nay,” said I, pointing to a group, “I see round ruddy faces and plump figures, and, thanks to the shortness of their petticoats, that they have very respectable calves to their legs.”

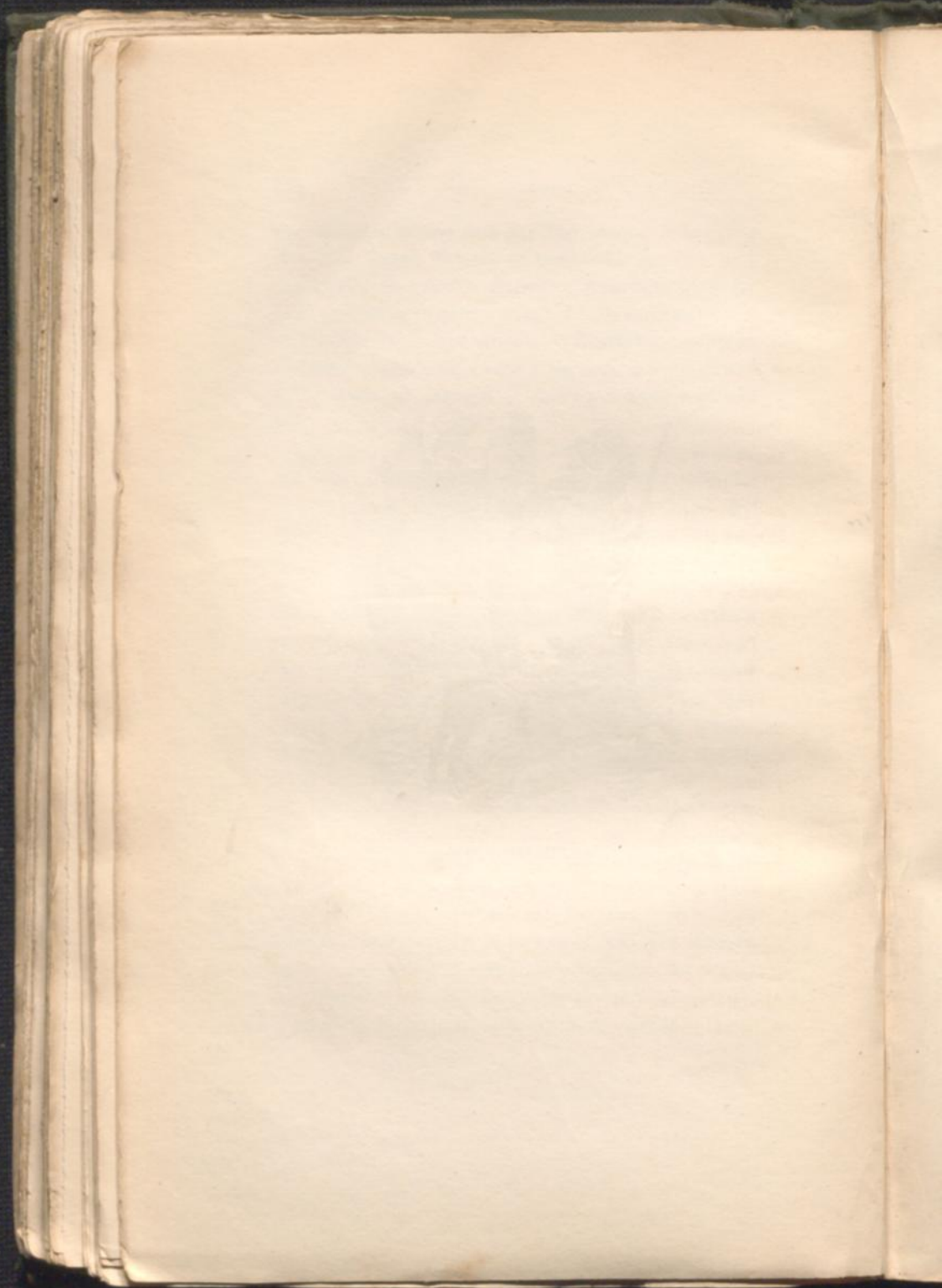
“Phoo ! phoo !” replied Markham, “those are nurses or nursery-maids, and come, witness their peculiar dress, from another country ; Saxony, perhaps, or Bavaria. But look at those yonder, with their wrinkled foreheads, and hard sharp features, more resembling old mothers, than young daughters ; observe the absolute flatness of their busts, and the bony squareness of their figures, making them look so like men in women’s clothes. And no wonder—the toil they go through for a trifle, is sometimes painful to contemplate. Last summer we purchased a small cask of wine from a woman who owns a little vintage ; and when it was delivered, we

were shocked to find that she had carried it from her village, a league distant, on her head! In fact, time and trouble, so valuable elsewhere, seem here to go for little or nothing; and the waste of both is occasionally quite surprising. For instance, it is nothing unusual in the streets of Coblenz, to see a big man, a big dog, and a big stick, all engaged in driving a little week-old calf."

Luckily I have seen this illustration of Markham's, and made a sketch of it; and will now attempt to describe the toilsome and tedious operation. The Big Man with the Big Stick goes first; then comes Staggering Bob; and lastly, the Big Dog. In a very methodical manner, the Big Dog jumps about from side to side of the calf, who with a natural doubt whether these gambols are not meant for its amusement, makes a dead halt, and indulges in an innocent stare at its four-footed companion. As this stops proceedings, the Big Man immediately begins to haul at the rope, as if he wanted to pull the poor creature's head off, which, of course, drags backward as lustily as it can. Thereupon the Big Man gives up pulling, and going to the rear, begins pushing with all his might; but the only result is, that after tottering a step or two to the right or left, the Calf *jibs*, and suddenly appears with its head where its tail ought to be; namely, towards the place from whence it came. Bob has then to be turned, and put straight again; an operation of considerable difficulty; for during this manœuvre, the Big Dog sadly embarrasses matters, by jumping about and between both parties. Here,



AN OVERDRIVEN CALF.



then, the Big Stick comes into play, which the Big Man shakes at the Big Dog, who scampers away some dozen yards—the Calf, in a sportive fit, runs after him—the rope winds round the two other calves, to wit, the Big Man's—and the whole affair is in a tangle! “Potztausend!” but at last all is clear. Still the perverse Calf, though strictly brought up on Temperance Principles, persists in staggering from one side of the street to the other, and finally refuses to stir a foot at all;—the Big Man gives it a poke with his Big Stick, and down it tumbles! So in despair the Big Man throws the 'live veal over his shoulder,—carries it till he is dead tired—then puts the Calf on its own legs again—then the Big Dog jumps about as before—and then—*Da Capo!*

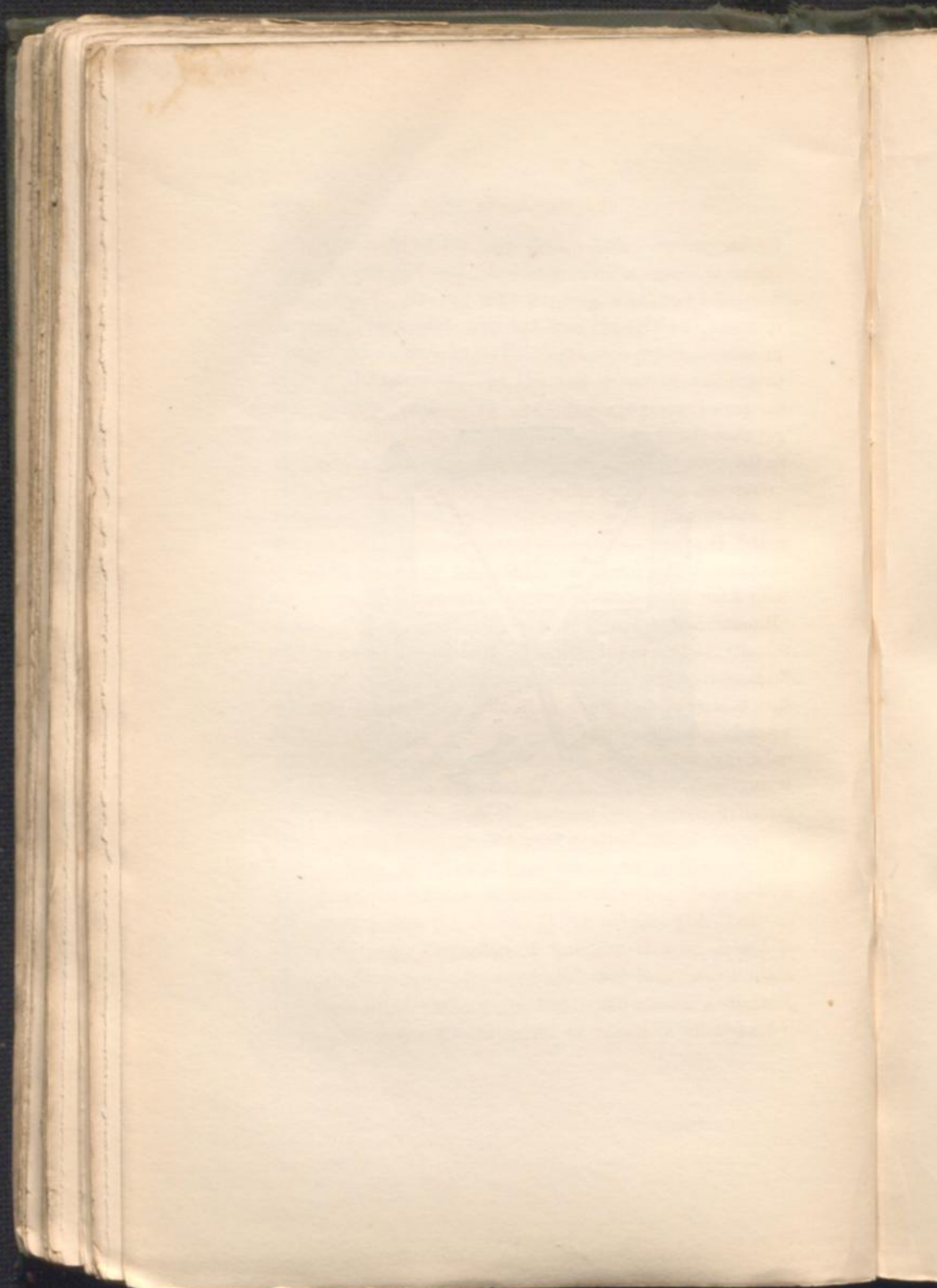
To resume—I continued my queries to Markham, as to Prussia and its happy, free, proprietary peasantry. “Free!” said he, “how are they to be free, where no one else is, or can be, under the *Unitarian* rule of a single will? As for their happiness you may judge yourself. Go into any of the villages that look so picturesque from the Rhine,—look in at an open door, and you will see a dark, dirty, squalid, comfortless room, hardly furnished enough to invite an execution. Ask yourself what makes the gaunt, sallow, toil-worn faces, that gaze on you from the window, so gloomily phlegmatic—what renders the children about the street so stunted, so spiritless, so prematurely old? On the Moselle, the proprietary peasantry are notoriously in a state of distress; and their wines, at a ruinous price,

are bought up by the capitalists. But a remedy has been discovered," said Markham, with a bitter smile, "they are to give up wine growing, and breed silkworms! This notable plan has been strongly advocated in the "Rhein-und-Mosel Zeitung," with grave calculations of the great value of the raw material, and its still greater value when manufactured into satins, sarcenets, and Gros de Naples. Only two points have escaped these sages: mulberry-trees are not of remarkably rapid growth, and how are the poor peasantry to subsist in the meantime? But supposing the trees full grown, the worms hatched, fed, transfigured, and inclosed in myriads of cocoons, is it not probable that the same untoward causes and commercial obstacles which denied them a preferable market in the wine trade, will be equally adverse to the sale of their silk? Besides, Moselle wine is only grown on the Moselle; whereas in the other article there will be a competition. But the system is in fault, not the commodity; and when a man does business on a losing principle, it is all one whether he deals in figs or in tenpenny nails!"

In our progress from the market, we arrived at a small square, in the midst of which stood an extraordinary vehicle, that, except for the inscription, might have been taken for a Mammoth's travelling caravan. On measurement, it was nine (German) feet wide, and thirty-six long. Markham pointed at it with great glee. "That unwieldy machine," said he, "was the invention of one of the military contractors, a Mr. Bohne, or Bean, who ought to be called Broad Bean



A BROAD JOKE.



for the future. A fortnight ago it left Berlin, with eleven thousand schakos, two thousand of which it has delivered by the way, at Erfurt and Mayence; the rest are bound to Luxemburg. The Germans have a proverb, that if you can get over the dog you can get over his tail; but in the present case, the hitch was comparatively at the tail. The Monster Machine had got over the greater part of the journey, when it stuck in the gate of Baccharach, stopping the eil-wagen, the extraposts, and every other carriage in its rear. Next it was two whole days in getting through, or rather round, Boppard, for it had to be taken to pieces, and to circumvent the town by water—and now here it is, with a few more such difficulties, between itself and its ultimate destination. However, the thing carries a moral. Göthe charged the English with want of reflection, that they did not look backward enough; and here is a proof that the Germans do not sufficiently look a-head;—in short, whilst our object is pace, and our only cry is ‘hark forward!’ they are perpetually trying back, with a cold scent, towards their great-grandfathers and grandmothers.”

There! You have had a tolerable course of Markham; but you will be interested in the tone of his mind, as well as in the course of his fortunes. He afterwards took me up to Ehrenbreitstein, where we met with a friend of his, Captain Walton, an Englishman by birth, but in the Prussian service. On comparing notes with this gentleman, it came out, that I was familiar with several of his friends in Kent; and from what I heard of him,

it is likely that we shall be intimates. From the Fortress, we proceeded to view an ancient Roman Tower, in the vicinity, where I picked up a hint for the story you will find inclosed. Love to Emily from

Yours ever truly,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.