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Up the Rhine

Hood, Thomas

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To Gerard Brooke, Esq.

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TO GERARD BROOKE, ESQ.

MY DEAR GERARD,—You must have wondered at the unusual pause in my correspondence, and I will at once proceed to show cause. Ten days ago, my Uncle, after so many false alarms, was taken ill in earnest, without any warning at all. Just after breakfast, he was seized with violent cramp, or spasms, in the chest and stomach, and for some hours was in great pain, and even some peril. Very much against his will, for he persisted that nobody but Truby understands his constitution, we called in medical advice, and as the case was urgent, sent for the Doctor next at hand.

Now that the danger is over and gone, it is curious to recal how much farce was mingled with proceedings that seemed so serious at the time. The Ex-Patient himself laughs heartily whenever he speaks on the subject, and especially of his medical treatment, which he says will be “nuts to Truby, when he gets back to Kent.”

The truth is, however the philosophers and professional men of this country relish a despotic government, they are particularly fond of placing themselves under the tyranny of a ruling idea. Hence all kinds of extravagance. As Markham says, “A German is not content to take an airing on his Hobby in a steady old

gentlemanly sort of way. He gives it a double feed of metaphysical beans, jumps on its bare back, throws the bridle over its ears, applies his lighted pipe to its tail, and does not think he is riding till he is run away with. At last, the horse comes to some obstacle, where there is a great gulf fixed. He naturally refuses to leap; but not so his master. No true German would give a doit for a ditch with a further side to it; so down he gets, takes a mile of a run, swings his arms, springs off with 'one bound that overleaps all bounds,' and alights on his head, quite insensible, somewhere 'beyond beyond.'"

Their physicians afford striking examples of this ultraism. Thus Hahnemann, having hit on the advantage of small doses, never rested till he had reduced them to infinitesimals. In the same manner, Herr Bowinkel, having convinced himself that bleeding, in some cases, is improper, ends by scouting Phlebotomy altogether; whilst Herr Blutigel, in the next street, arrives at quite the opposite extreme, and opens every vein he can come at with his lancet. In short, your German is fond of fiddling, à la Paganini, on one string.

One of these empirical professors, it was our fortune to call in to my Uncle, in the person of Doctor Ganswein, who, after a very cursory inquiry into his patient's malady, pronounced at once that it was a case for the Wasser-Kur. How this cure was to be effected you will best understand from a conversation which took place between the Physician and my Aunt. I must

premise that my Aunt began the colloquy in French, as it was taught in Chaucer's time at Stratford on Le Bowe; but after having puzzled the Doctor with sundry phrases, such as "son habit est si plein," meaning, "he is of such a full habit," she betook herself to her mother-tongue.

Aunt. And as to his eating, Doctor?

Doctor. Nichts; noting at all.

Aunt. And what ought he to drink?

Doctor. Kalt Wasser.

Aunt. Would it be well to bathe his feet?

Doctor. Ja——mit Kalt Wasser.

Aunt. And if he feels a little low?

Doctor. Low?—vat is dat?

Aunt. Out of spirits;—a little faint like.

Doctor. Faint—ah!—So you shall sprinkle at him wiz some Kalt Wasser.

Aunt. And nothing else?

Doctor. Ja——I shall write something (*he writes*). Dere! you shall send dis papier to de Apotheke in de Leer Strasse, almost to de Rondel. Your broder shall drink some flasks of Kissingen.

Aunt. Kissingen—what's that? Is it any sort of wine?

Doctor. Wein! nein! It is some sort of Kalt Wasser.

Aunt. Oh, from the Baths!

Doctor. Ja! ja!—it shall be goot to bath too—in Kalt Wasser. (*To my uncle*) Sare, have you read my leetle boke?

Uncle (in pain). What's it—about—Doctor?

Doctor. De Heilsamkeit of de Kaltes Wassers. I have prove de Kalt Wasser is good for every sickness in de world.

Uncle. Humph! What for—water in the head?

Doctor. Ja—and for wasser in de shest. And for wasser in de—what you call him? de abdomen. It is good for every ting. De Kalt Wasser shall sweep away all de Kranken, all de sick peoples from de face of de earth!

Uncle (to himself). Yes—so did—the Great Flood.

Doctor Ganswein had no sooner taken his leave, than my Uncle called me to the bed-side. “Frank,—I've heard before—of wet-nurses—but never of—a wet Doctor. It's the old story—of the prescription that was nothing—but aqua pumpy. He mustn't come again. I shall be drowned—before I'm cured. Nothing but watering, watering, watering—Egad! he takes me for a sick Hydrangea!”

Having prevented any *relapse* of Dr. Ganswein, it became necessary to find a successor; and by the advice of our Bankers, I sent for a Dr. Wolf, who was making a temporary stay in Coblenz. This selection, however, was anything but palatable to my Aunt: two of the strongest of her prejudices rose up against a physician, who was not only a foreigner, but a Jew; his mere name seemed ominous; and, unfortunately, with a very unprepossessing physiognomy, his manners were abrupt and repulsive. I suspect *he* also had a hobby of his own; for one of his first questions to his patient

was, whether he had ever tried a Mud Bath—a boggy remedy, of which you may read in Dr. Granville's account of the German Spas. "What's a Mud Bath?" inquired the Patient. "It is," said Dr. Wolf, "for to be in some black mud up to your middle." "If that's it," replied my Uncle, "I've had it of a dirty day—in the streets of London. And I can't say—it was any benefit."

On our return to the drawing-room, the physician made his report. His patient's disorder, he said, originated in over-fatigue, the disarrangement of ordinary habits, a strange climate, unusual diet, a cold, perhaps, and a want of the necessary quantity of sleep. Knowing, by experience, that such evils are apt to beset travellers on the Rhine, I was quite satisfied; but my Aunt was more inquisitive. "Hist!" said the Doctor, significantly laying his fore-finger on the side of his nose; and then with more than common mystery, he drew her aside into a corner. "Good heavens!" is my dear brother in any danger?" "He is quite so bad as one can wish," answered the Doctor, with a series of solemn little nods. "Hear to me,"—and he fixed his black eyes on the changing face before him—"is your Broder rishe? Have de mosh moneys?" To my apprehension, this question merely had reference to the recommendation of some expensive baths; but it met with a darker interpretation from my Aunt. "It is rather a singular question," said she, "but my brother is what is called an independent gentleman." "Dat is goot,—ferry goot," said Dr. Wolf, nodding, winking, rubbing his hands, and looking very well pleased.

“ Now hark to me”—and he approached his mouth to her ear—“ whilst he is so bad in his bed, you shall rob him.” “ WHAT!” exclaimed my Aunt, in such a voice that the ringing monosyllable seemed to echo from every side and corner of the apartment. “ You—shall—rob him”—repeated the Doctor, still more distinctly and deliberately—“ you shall rob his chest.” My Aunt looked petrified. “ Do not you not understand me?” asked the dreadful Doctor, after a pause. “ I am afraid I do,” said my Aunt, giving a sort of gulp, as if to swallow some violent speech, and then hurried into the adjoining room and locked herself in. The Doctor followed this manœuvre with his hawklike eyes, which, when the door closed, he turned upon me: but before I could attempt any explanation, he snatched up his hat, made me a low bow, and with a shrug that said as plainly as words “ those unaccountable English!” he bolted out of the room and down the stairs.

When he was gone I could not resist a laugh, which was hardly suppressed by the reappearance of my Aunt, who, after an anxious look round the chamber, to make sure of the absence of the detestable Doctor, cast herself down on the sofa with a fervent “ Thank God!”—“ Frank!—What a monster!—Wolf by name and wolf by nature; did you hear what the wretch proposed to me?”—and she launched off into a tale so ludicrously distorted and coloured by her own extravagant suspicions, that I could hardly preserve my gravity. “ But I foretold it,” she said, “ from the very first glimpse of him! There was villain stamped in his face. Did

you ever before see such horrid cunning eyes, or hear such an artful insinuating voice? Now I think of it, he is the very picture——” She was stopped by the entrance of Martha with a bottle of medicine, which her mistress had no sooner inspected than the expression of her countenance changed from indignation and disgust to vexation and mortification. “It’s really very provoking!” she exclaimed—“So very absurd!—How uncommonly annoying! But it’s all his own fault for not speaking better English,” and handing to me the explanatory phial, I read as follows :

“Esquier Orchardt,
For to rob him with on the chest.”

Thanks, however, to Dr. Wolf and the robbing, or a sound constitution, my Uncle recovered, and is now as well as ever. In the mean time, the grand Military Manœuvres commenced under the eye of the Prince Royal. Verily it was playing with soldiers on a royal scale, some 15,000 troops being collected for the purpose, much to the inconvenience of the town and villages where they were quartered, and still more to their own discomfort in camp, where, owing to the heavy rains, there was a considerable mortality from a disorder which led to a police bull of excommunication against all plumbs. As a military spectacle, taking into account the number of performers, the extent of the theatre, and the magnificent scenery, it was superb. By rotation, it should be represented at Coblenz once in eight years ; and in consequence of the great expense

of paying for the damage in a cultivated country, it was said the piece was never to be repeated: nevertheless the show attracted scarcely any of the natives, excepting the day when the Prince Royal was present: some few travellers from our own country, a half-dozen of English and Hanoverian officers and ourselves, were the only spectators. To a novelist, who might have occasion to describe the operations of warfare, even such an experience would have been invaluable: enhanced as the mock battles were by a most picturesque country. For my own part, although a civilian, I took an extreme interest, akin to that of the chess-player, in these manœuvres, the purport of which I tried to penetrate, but with little success, as might be expected not merely from my ignorance of the science, but from the intricate and difficult nature of the country. The commander-in-chief was the governor of the Rhenish provinces,—the veteran General Von Borstell, who, in addition to his high reputation as a cavalry officer, nobly proved his *moral* courage, during the War of Liberation, by refusing to obey the order of Marshal Blücher for the decimation of a Saxon regiment. For such conduct there is no earthly decoration: and therefore, having received all the orders which his country, or rather his sovereign, has to bestow, the brave, able, and humane General Von Borstell must look forward for the most precious and enduring of rewards, for the best and brightest act of his life, from the King of Kings.

As might be expected, several real casualties occurred during the sham warfare; and on the last day there

happened an accident peculiar to these Manœuvres. As only half charges are allowed, the excited soldier, who wishes to make a little more noise, puts a load of earth or gravel into his musket. Sometimes, probably, a worse motive comes into play: however, we had just turned homewards, whilst the victors of the day were firing their *feu de joie*, when on the brow of a hill we saw a poor fellow, sitting under a tree, with his jacket off, and the blood flowing down his arm. He had been shot, a minute before, with a stone, above the elbow, and was in the hands of the regimental surgeon. My Aunt immediately insisted on having him into the carriage, a proposition which the doctor embraced with gratitude and avidity, as otherwise his patient must have been jolted two or three leagues in a common cart. So, supplying my Aunt with some drops, in case the man should faint, the surgeon ran off to fresh claimants on his services: in fact we saw four or five of the common soldiers drop down from exhaustion, like dead men, by the side of the road. A little damped to reflect that these instances of human suffering had occurred on merely the *play-ground* of the "School of War," we returned to Coblenz, and delivered up our unlucky charge at the Military Hospital. "I do hope," said my Uncle, "the King of Prussia will double that poor fellow's smart-money; for if anything can be galling to a soldier, it must be to have all the pain and disablement of a wound without any of its glory."

You are not aware, perhaps, that *every* Prussian subject must be a soldier, consequently there can be no

servicing by substitute as in our militia. One morning, whilst listening to the performance of the capital military band, I was addressed in tolerable English by one of the privates, who inquired how I liked their army. He was a master baker, he told me, in Oxford-street, and at the earnest entreaty of his father had left his rolls for the roll-call, his basket for a musket, and his fancy bread for brown tommy, in order to serve his two years, and avoid the forfeiture of his civil rights. Instances are on record, of individuals (Stulz, the celebrated tailor, I believe, for one) who, having realised fortunes abroad, were seized on their return to Prussia, treated as deserters, or sent into the awkward squad. Even the schoolmasters do not escape, but are compelled to join the march of body with the march of mind. As an *indulgence* they have only a six weeks' drill—how different to the six weeks at Midsummer of our schoolmasters!—but then in that time they are expected to become proficient. What a weary time it must be for the poor pedagogues! Fancy a sedentary usher, summoned from his professional desk, round-shouldered, stooping—shambling—suddenly called upon to unlearn all his scholar-like habits, and learn others quite the reverse—to hold his head very much up, to draw his back very much in, to straighten his arms, stiffen his legs, and step out, instead of his old shuffle, at so many strides to the minute. Imagine him stuck up as a sentry on gusty Ehrenbreitstein, or more likely undergoing an extra drill, in marching order, for wool-gathering, with a problem of Euclid, and wheeling to

the wrong-about face instead of the right! Verily it must seem to him like a bad dream, a doleful piece of somnambulism, till convinced of the hard-reality by finding himself thrust, instead of his late sober academical coat or gown, into a Prussian blue jacket, with red collar and cuffs, and feeling behind, instead of the flowing philosophical locks, the bald *regulation* nape!

Pray comfort with this outlandish picture your neighbour the graduate of Oxford, who used to complain so bitterly of the irksomeness of drilling little boys in Latin and Greek. A schoolmaster's business in Hampshire may be a sufficient *trial* of Christian patience: but what is it to the complex duties of these schoolmasters abroad? Instead of his annual vacation, let him suppose himself, as a respite from teaching, being taught—to drum! Let him conceive himself planted, with his noisy parchment, and two brass-headed sticks, practising day after day, hour after hour, his monotonous rub dub dub, rub dub dub, under the walls of Ehrenbreitstein! Even as a listener, I have been so disgusted with this wearisome Tambour-work, that I have quite prayed for a little Flosculous Relievo!

On the parade I met the Captain, who told me that his regiment—an infantry one—was under orders to return to its proper locality Prussian Poland. Perhaps there was some inspiration in the martial music, but the thought struck me of joining company, at least as far as Berlin. The Captain caught at the idea, and as my Uncle makes no objection to my absence, the whim is likely to prove more than a freak of fancy. At least

I am seriously on the look-out for a horse: so as to have no more foot exercise than may be agreeable. As the marching-order has not long to run, my next will probably be dated from quarters, for I shall give you a sketch of my military promenade.

This morning, as usual, I strolled about with Markham, and, Englishman-like, I proposed on passing the hotel to walk in and look at the newspapers. "Newspapers!" said he; "you will find none here but the 'Rhein-und-Mosel Zeitung,' and I can give you a tolerable idea of the contents beforehand. First, the king has graciously been pleased to confer on Mr. Bridge-toll-taker Bommel, and a dozen other officials, the 'Adler' order of the fourth class. Messrs. Kessel and Co. have erected a steam engine of two-horse power; and the firm of Runkel and Rüben have established a manufactory of beet-root sugar. Then for foreign news, there are half a dozen paragraphs on as many different countries—our own amongst the rest, probably headed 'Distress in Rich England,' and giving an account of a pauper who died in the streets of London. As to local intelligence, the Over Burgomaster has ordered the substitution of a new post for an old one, in the Clemens Platz, and a fresh handle to the pump near the Haupt Wache. A sentimental poem, a romantical tale, and the advertisements, fill up the dingy sheet." In fact, on entering the saloon of the hotel, such a meagre-looking fog-coloured journal, as he had described, was lying on the dining-table. Markham took it up, and glanced over it. "Yes, here they are, the list of

Eagle orders and crosses, and the foreign paragraphs. From Italy, Professor Crampini gives his opinion on an ancient pan. From Spain nothing—for affairs are going against Don Carlos. From Greece, king Otho has displaced a native functionary, and put a German in his place. From Russia—the distinguished reception of Baron Hoggenhausen at the Imperial Court. From Austria, that Strauss has composed a new waltz. From Saxony, the price of wool, and a proclamation of some petty Sovereign, who, having no transmarine possessions, ordains that all vagrants, beggars, and vagabonds in his dominions, shall be transported beyond seas. From England—zounds!—is it possible that Englishmen have allowed a namesake of the immortal Shakspeare to go ragged about the streets! To be sure the bard himself has asked “what is there in a name?”—and, on the principle implied, we ought to hang the very first Patch or Thurtell that came in our way. There is no sentimental poem in this number; but there *is* a romantic story, and it well illustrates the exaggerated notions of English wealth, which, to the natives, serve to justify a dead set at their pockets. What do you think of this? A lady residing in Euston-square, New-road, loses her only child, a little girl. The afflicted mother advertises her in the papers and offers as a reward—how much do you think?—Only 50,000*l.* per annum, a mine in ‘Cornwales,’ and 200,000*l.* in East India shares!”

“Are you serious?” I asked. “Perfectly: it is here, every word of it. Finally, there are the adver-

tisements, some of which even are characteristic—for instance, Mr. Simon, the notary, offers fifty dollars for the discovery of the parties who last night broke into his garden and stole and mutilated his statue of Napoleon:—and a lady promises a reward to the finder of a bracelet, containing the locks and initials M. J.—P. von F.—R. I. D.—L. A.—C. de G.—P. P.—A. von N.—and J. St. M.”

I forgot to tell you, that on a former visit to the hotel, I found sitting at the table, with as long a face as he could make of a round one, our fellow-traveller the Cockney; being by his own contrivance a détenu. Having as usual delivered up his passport at Cologne, he persuaded himself that the printed Dampfschiff document he obtained at the packet-office was something equivalent to the police permit; and only discovered the error on arriving at Coblenz. “So here I am,” said he, “kicking my heels, till my passport comes upwards from Cologne;” and then added, in a genuine Bow-bell voice, “Well, arter all, there’s no place like Lonnon!” He now told me of a subsequent adventure. By one of those unaccountable mistakes which happen amongst “foreigners on both sides,” he became included in a shooting party, at a grand battue, in the woods of Nassau. Cockney-like, he provided himself for the occasion with a great dog, of I know not what breed, but pointer or mastiff, the animal was equally out of place and rule. However the master was permitted to retain the beast on condition of keeping him at heel, which he effected, by tying Bango with a string to the

button-hole of his trouser-pocket. In this order our Cockney was planted, at a convenient post for shooting down an avenue, at whatever game might pass across it. For some time nothing stirred, but at last there was a rustle of the leaves, and a fine hare scampered along the path. Away went Bango after the hare, and away went a huge fragment of kerseymere after Bango, leaving the astonished sportsman in even a worse plight than Sterne, when he treated the starved Ass to a maccaroon! "If ever I shoot again," said he, "it shall be round Lonnon: they're up to the thing there, pinters and all."

Apropos of sporting, the example of Markham and his friend has brought angling into fashion with some of the officers of the garrison. Amongst the rest we found a captain of engineers, making his maiden essay on the banks of the Moselle; but he complained sadly of the shyness or inappetence of the fish, which had refused even to nibble, although for the two last hours, as he took the trouble to prove to us by pulling up his line, he had been fishing at the bottom with an artificial fly! The only drawback to the amusement is the fall of large stones, not meteoric, but projected by the first idle Coblenzer of the lower class, who may happen to pass by. To such a pitch was this nuisance carried, that the military piscators were obliged to post men to intercept and punish the runaway offenders. "I can only account for so malicious a practice," said Markham, "by supposing that as the amusement is English, the low-born are infected with the same petty jealousy



“ THE POMPS AND VANITIES OF THIS WICKED WORLD. ”

as their betters occasionally exhibit towards our country, from Prince Pückler Muskau, down to Mr. Aloys Schreiber. But you have not perhaps seen the latter's sketch of the English in Baden? I have entered his description of an Englishman in my pocket-book, for fear of meeting one without knowing it. Here it is:—

“ ‘ If you meet a man in a great-coat that reaches down to his ancles, wide enough to inclose a whole family, and with pockets, in each of which a couple of folios might be concealed, its wearer having a careless gait, and taking notice of nothing so much as of himself, it is, without doubt, an Englishman. If he quarrel with a coachman about his fare, and with an ass-driver about his drink-money—be sure it is an Englishman.’

“ Now for a companion picture. If you meet a man in a frock-coat as glossy as if it had just come through a shower of rain, with pockets big enough to hold a bale of tobacco in one and a gas-pipe in the other—its wearer strutting with an indescribable swagger, so full of himself that there is no room for sour krout, beyond question he is a German. If he catches up his umbrella and his precious meerschaum, leaving his wife and child to scramble after him as they may—be sure he is a German. If he has a little cross, or a snip of haberdashery at his button-hole, and a huge ring on his ungloved forefinger, you may set him down as an Aulic Counsellor into the bargain. If you see a young lady—but no, I will not imitate Mr. Schreiber in his want of gallantry to the daughters of the haughty ‘ *Isle of Shopkeepers*,’ a phrase borrowed from England's

bitterest enemy, and therefore sufficiently expressive of the *animus* of the ungrateful Guide-Book-man towards so great a majority of his Courteous Readers."

As you are a meteorologist, I must not omit to inform you, that during our walk we had an excellent sight of a water-spout. It came down the Moselle, and at first seemed a whirlwind of dust, in the midst of which some unlucky jackdaws were flapping about in a very bewildered manner. In a few seconds the dust or vapour cleared away, and the water-spout made its appearance, extending from the water to a vast height in the clouds, where it terminated in a ragged funnel-shape, like the untwisting strands of a rope. Against the black sky behind it, the general resemblance was to a long narrow grey ribbon, bellying a little before the wind, with several smaller curves towards the top, as if from different currents of air. In this order it crossed the Rhine, rather deliberately, where, surging against the bank, it caught up a wash of linen—as it had previously carried off some skins from a tannery—and, passing to the right of the fortress, was lost to sight behind the hills. It had scarcely disappeared, when, at an exclamation from Markham, "there's a screw loose in the sky!" I looked up, and saw a long black cloud slowly revolving, parallel with the earth, and pointing with its sharp end—the other was almost flat—to the course taken by the other phenomenon. We have since heard, that the water-spout dropped the linen and leather, and expended itself, after trifling damage, not far distant from Ems.

And now, as the Convolvulus says to the setting sun, it is time for me to close. How I wish, Gerard, you could stand beside me, rod in hand, some fine evening, on the banks of my favourite Lahn. But as it cannot be, I send you a sketch instead.

Dear love to Emily, from

Yours ever truly,

FRANK SOMERVILLE.