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Up the Rhine

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The Lahn.-an Eclogue

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THE LAHN.—AN ECLOGUE.

PICTOR AND PISCATOR.

Pis. STAY! here we are, at the likeliest place on the whole water. Come, put together your rod.

Pic. O my friend, what a sweet picturesque river is this you have brought me to!—But surely one of the worst for angling in the whole world!

Pis. Nay, you shall find passable sport here, I warrant you. There be good Perch herein, and Chub of an arm's length, and Barbel, and what is better, as you are a Tyro, not shy and suspicious, like the experienced fish in your well-angled English streams, but so greedy and simple as almost to catch themselves. The Germans, however contemplative, are no followers of the gentle art.

Pic. My friend, you mistake me. My speech aimed not at the fish or the water, whereof I have had no trial, but at the beautiful scenery, which will distract me so, I shall never be able to watch my float or my fly. What feudal Ruin is that which overlooks us from the top of the bushy hill?

Pis. It is called Lahneck, and belonged aforetime to a Commandery of Teutonic Knights. But come, make ready your tackle; for here is a notable place at this rapid, where the current rushes and eddies amongst the large stones.

Pic. Now I am ready. But by your good leave, being only a beginner, I will use a worm rather than a fly.

Pis. At your own pleasure. For my part, I prefer to fish at the top. Look!—I have one at the first cast!—A huge Chub! A rare struggle he makes at the outset, but he hath a faint heart at bottom—anon you shall see him come into the landing-net as tame as a lamb.

Pic. How beautifully it comes out!—

Pis. Ay, doth he not?

Pic. —Against yonder dun-coloured sky. Then all those grey tints and verdant stains! And those little feathery flying clouds!

Pis. They run very large here. You may hear them chop at the flies and chafers like a dog! And though they be reckoned elsewhere the very worst of dishes for the table, let me tell you, in this country, where they do not get fish from the great deep, a chub is a chub, as the saying is. I make bold to say, I shall obtain store of thanks from some good woman of a house for this same loggerhead.

Pic. Of course there is a tale to it!

Pis. A what?—a tail?—It would be a rare sort of fish without one!

Pic. I cry you mercy! I was thinking of the old feudal castle, and some marvellous legend. There must needs be some romantic story about it, amongst the rude peasantry. How beautifully the light plays upon the

crisp fragment! Marry, 'tis quite a picture! I should like prodigiously to take such a one.

Pis. And so you would,—provided you would bait as I do with a 'live chafer or a white moth? But hist! I have him! A still larger chub than the other!

Pic. It must be many centuries old!

Pis. How? I did not know the chub was so long-lived. But perchance you were thinking of a carp. In the moats at Charlottenburg there be Carps so venerable that their age is unknown; and the moss has grown on their backs. But see,—you have a bite; Your float is gone half-way across the river!

Pic. Truly, I was gazing another way. Lo! here he comes. It is a fine perch.

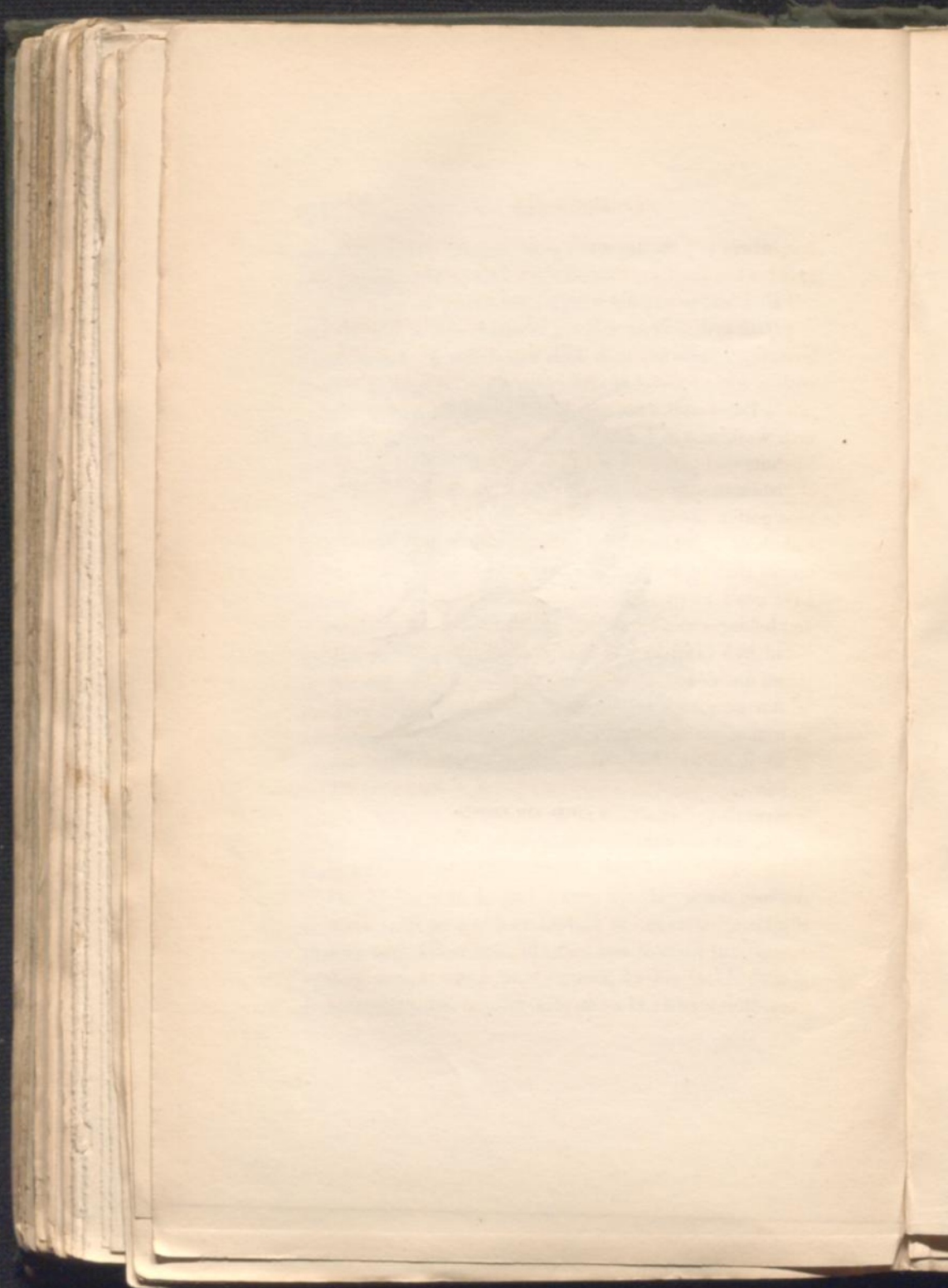
Pis. They are caught here of four and five pounds weight, and especially nearer to Ems; for they delight in the warm springs which thereabouts bubble up in the very midst of the Lahn. But here comes an old fisherman from the village. How he stands and stares at our prey, with his mouth in a round O, as if he would take a minnow!

Pic. What is the aged man discoursing of, with such a vehement gesture and emphatic voice, in the German tongue?

Pis. He says he is gospel-sure we have some smell or some spell to our bait beyond the natural—seeing that he hath fished here the two last days all through, without a fin! And little marvel, for his tackle is a German hook like a meathook, and a line like a clothes-



STICKS AND STRIKES.



line, wherewith, if he entice a fish, he throws it clean over his head. But, look again to your cork!

Pic. Pish!—'tis only a very young perch.

Pis. Nay—a Pope or Ruff. Some naturalists opine, forsooth, that on being hooked, this same fish is seized with a sort of fit or spasm, which gives him the lock-jaw. But he bites far too boldly to be troubled with such weak nerves. But say they, when he is hooked he shuts up his mouth, which is contrary to the practice of fishes in the like case. And truly, when he hath once gotten the bait, instead of gaping like an idiot, or a chub, or a child with a hot morsel of pudding, he doth indeed shut up his mouth, as much as to say, "What I have got I mean to keep," and so locks up his jaws, and holds on like a bull-dog. But for a fit from fright—not he! Just look at his face, full front, how determined and desperate in his physiognomy! How fiercely he stares with his big black eyes—for his temper is up as well as his back-fin! Verily if he resemble a Pope at all, it is Pope Leo and not Pope Innocent.

Pic. Ay, truly, it is part and parcel of Popery: but it makes a pretty object in the landscape!

Pis. What object?

Pic. The little Popish chapel yonder, on the crest of the mountain. O, my friend, I thank thee most heartily for bringing me to angle in so fair a scene. How serene it is!—and how much more silent for the presence of that ancient Ruin, where so much riot hath been aforetime! How largely doth an old castle, that

hath made a noise in history, enhance the present peace! Should we feel half so still or so solitary if there had never been those Knights Hospitallers, dwelling aloft, with all the shoutings of warfare and revelry, but presently dumbfounded by Time? Where now is the bold German baron, with his long line of ancestry—

Pis. He's gone—a murrain on him—line and all!

Pic. Eh! what?

Pis. The heaviest chuckle-headed fellow, with such a length of gut!

Pic. The bold German baron!—

Pis. No—a chub, a chub!—But stop! I see it—he's entangled. If haply I can but leap on to that biggest stone—

Pic. How audibly the fishes sre splashing and floundering in their disport! The sun is sinking beyond the Rhine. Oh my friend, look at the beautiful cool tone of that gray mountain—then the dark reflection of the village and its trees in the glowing water,—the feudal Castle on the other hand—half in shade—and then these rocky stones in the foreground—but—grace be with us!—what hath chanced to you?

Pis. Chanced—why I have fallen into the Lahn! And the while you were poetising I have helped myself out again!—Fye, what a watery figure I am!

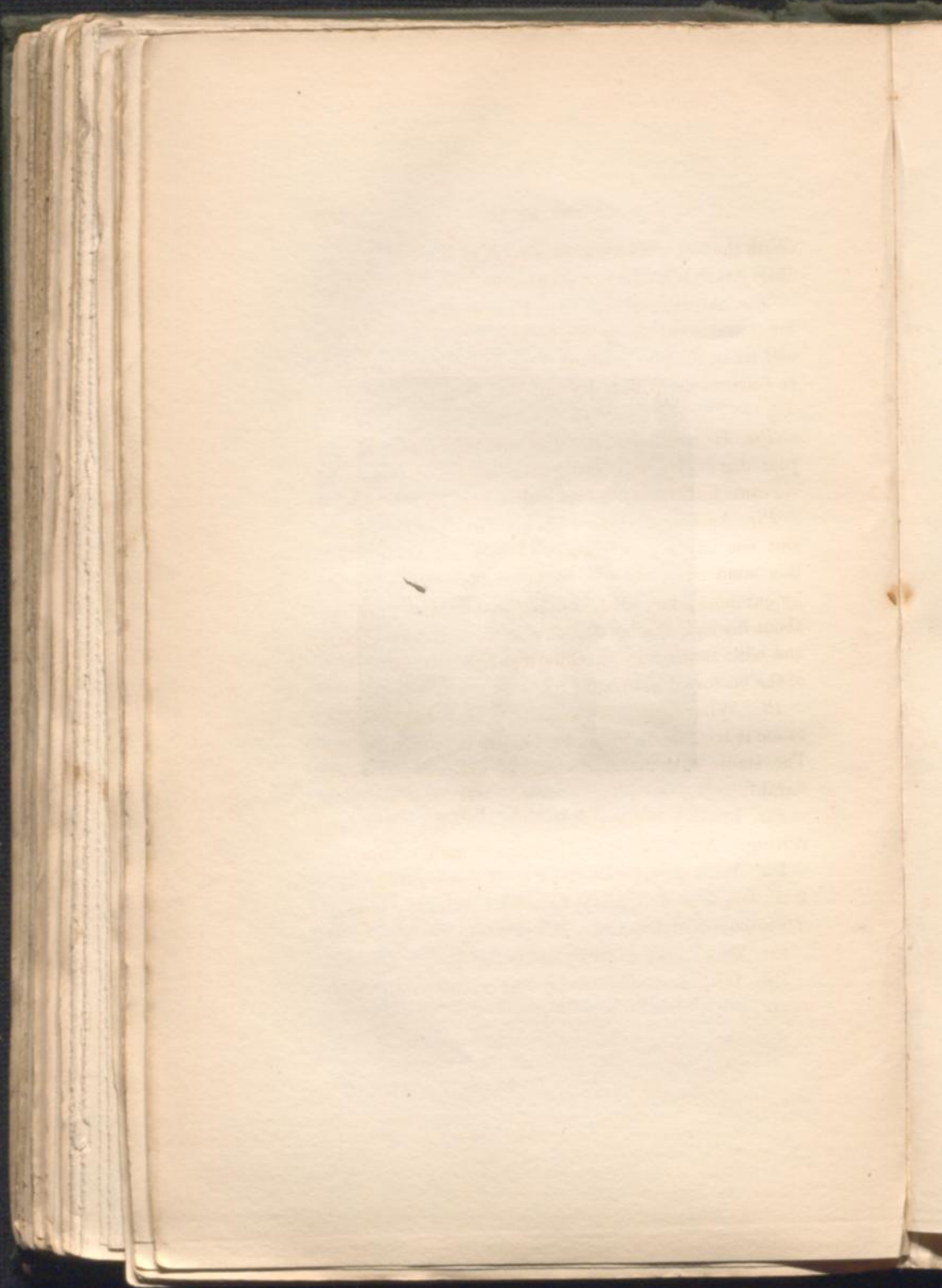
Pic. Beautiful! Nay, stop—pr'ythee do not stir—pray, pray, pray, stay as you be!

Pis. What for?

Pic. For one mere single minute. There! Just so.



A WATER KELPY.



With the low setting sun glowing behind—and all those little jets and liquid drops, each catching the golden light—

Pis. A plague on it! Am I standing here, dripping, for a water-colour picture? Come, put up, put up, and let us back to our inn. I must beg of our civil host to befriend me with a dry suit, and to chain up the big dog!

Pic. It will be well. But wherefore dismiss the poor dog? He was very gentle and friendly to us as we came hither. Of all animals I do love a dog!

Pis. And so do I too—in my own proper plumes. But one day a poor piscatory friend of mine fell into this same river, and was so furnished with dry clothes by our host; but after snuffing awhile and growling about his legs, the big dog flew at our unlucky angler, and with much ado was hindered from stripping him of the borrowed garments.

Pic. What marvellous sagacity! How I should like to see it tried! It would be a study for a picture!—The staunch Hound springing at Conrade of Montserrat!

Pis. I'faith I thank you heartily. Come, let us be stirring. A frize on it! How the fishes are rising!

Pic. What dainty colours on those changeful clouds! Well, fare thee well, feudal Lahneck! With thy visions of Teutonic Knights.

Pis. There must needs be trouts here!

Pic. With helmeted heads, and gauntlets on their hands!

Pis. In the season, haply, even salmon swim up this river, from the Rhine!

Pic. With an ancient minstrel before them, twanging melodiously on the harp! Nay, but stop—stop—stop!

Pis. What hath miscarried?

Pic. Nothing—but, an it please you to walk a little more slowly—to let us enjoy the scene. How the creeping shadows steal over the prospect, at every moment producing a new effect! Do look at those sportive swallows dipping into the sober-tinted wave, and producing a coruscation of burning light on ring and ripple! How soothing this stillness! How refreshing, after the noon-tide heat, this cool evening zephyr!

Pis. Ay, with a dry shirt, and unducked nether garments! But here is the ferry-boat; come, step in. Honest Charon, there is a goodly chub for thy supper, and prythee thrust us speedily to the other side. Gentle, pretty country Damsels, wherefore huddle so far away from me, like a flock of timid sheep? I am but a wet man, not a wicked one. Moreover, if you crowd so to one side of the boat—ah, say I told you so!—

[*The ferry-boat heels on one side, fills, and is scamped. Fortunately, the river is low, and nobody is drowned.*]

Pic. [Looking round him, up to his neck in water.] What a subject for a picture! What a singular effect!