

# **Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe**

**Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe**

## **A steam voyage up the Rhine**

**Hugo, Victor**

**London, 1843**

Letter XVIII.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124984](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-124984)

## LETTER XVIII.

*St. Goar, August.*

A WEEK can be well employed at St. Goar; taking care to put up at the Lily, a most comfortable inn, and to secure a room overlooking the Rhine. At St. Goar, you are midway between the Cat and the Mouse. To the left, you have the Mouse, half-lost, at the verge of the horizon, in the mists of the Rhine; to the right, and before you, the Cat, a stern-looking donjon, flanked with turrets, which form on the summit of the hill the apex of a triangle, of which the picturesque village of St. Goarhausen forms the base towards the Rhine; marking the angles with two towers, one round, the other square.

The two castles frown defiance at each other across the landscape: for though a donjon be in ruins, its shattered window still stares out with the unmeaning gaze of an eyeless socket.

In front, upon the right bank, as if to part the two antagonists, stands the colossal spectre of the castle of Rheinfels, belonging to the Landgraves of Hesse. If you remain at home, you command a fine view of the Rhine, crowded with sailing boats, and eight or ten steam omnibuses, with their

streamers, going up and down the river, lapping the water like a huge dog swimming in the Rhine.

Farther on, upon the opposite bank, you discover the Nassau soldiers at drill, in their green jackets and white trowsers, and hear the pompous drums and fifes of a little insignificant sovereign duke. Under the window you see the women of St. Goar passing to and fro, with their light blue caps, and hear the voices of children sporting with the shallower waters of the Rhine. Why not? Those born in a seaport town presume to sport with the ocean. The little Germans are charming. None of them exhibit the forbidding and surly look of English children! their faces have a good and indulgent expression, like those of aged village curates.

On leaving the house, you may cross the Rhine for three pence, the price of a Parisian omnibus, and progress as far as the Cat.

It was in this same castle of the Barons of Katznellenbogen that occurred the sad adventure of the chaplain, John of Barnich. It is now a ruin, rented by a Prussian officer of the Duke of Nassau, for five florins per annum. Three or four tourists suffice to pay his rent. I turned over the pages of the visitors' book, and found there for the course of a year scarcely a single French name, several English, but numerous Germans, and a few Italians. The interior of the Katz is completely gutted; the lower apartment, where the chaplain prepared the poison for the Countess, is now a cellar, and some meagre vines entwine themselves upon a trellis, in what used to be the picture-gallery. In a small room, the only one having door or window, they have stuck up an

engraving representing Bohdan Chmielnicki, under which you read, "*Belli servilis autor (sic) rebelliumque Cosaccorum et plebis Ukräynen.*" The formidable Zaporavian chief, muffled up in a costume partaking of the Muscovite and Turk, appears to squint at two or three reigning princes hanging near him; perhaps through the want of skill of the artist.

From the heights of the Katz the eye looks down upon the celebrated whirlpool called the *Bank*, between which and the square tower of St. Goarhausen there is only a narrow channel. On one side the whirlpool, on the other a shoal; another Scylla and Charybdis. To secure themselves across this dangerous passage, the rafts throw out on the left side the trunk of a tree, which is called a *hund* or dog; and at the pass betwixt the bank and the tower they cast the tree towards the whirlpool, which sucking it in, maintains the raft aloof from the tower. When the danger is past the cord is cut, and the whirlpool swallows the tree—a sop for Cerberus.

When you desire the guide on the platform of the Katz to show you the Bank, he points out a little ripple in the Rhine, which literally is the whirlpool. Things are not to be judged from appearances. A little farther than the bank is the Rock of Lurley, rising perpendicularly from the Rhine, with its thousand blocks of granite, somewhat resembling a broken-down stone staircase. It is said that an echo here repeats all you sing or say, seven times.

If I were not apprehensive of passing for a man

desirous of disparaging the fame of Echo, I would observe that I could not catch more than five repetitions. It is possible that the Oread of Lurley, once so courted by princes and mythological counts, begins to get husky and tired of her vocation. This forlorn nymph has now only one admirer, who has hollowed out two cavities in the opposite rock, and devotes his time to blowing his horn and firing his rifle at her. This individual, who gains his livelihood by "worshipping the echo," is a veteran French hussar.

Nevertheless, to the tourist unprepared for the exhibition, the echo of Lurley is very extraordinary. The little boat which takes you over makes a most formidable noise. Shut your eyes, and you might fancy yourself in a Maltese galley of fifty oars, each pulled by four criminals in his galley-chains.

On quitting the Katz, before leaving St. Goarhausen, you must go visit an old house in a street parallel with the Rhine; a charming specimen of the German *renaissance*, and of course despised by the natives. Then passing to the right, you follow a bridge over a stream, and penetrate, amid the noise of water-mills, to the "Swiss Valley," a superb ravine, almost Alpine, formed by the high hill of Petersburg, one of the hindmost summits of the Lurley.

The Swiss Valley is a delightful walk. You first visit the highest villages, and then penetrate into the gloomy and solitary glens, in one of which I saw the earth freshly furrowed up by the snout of a wild boar. Or you may follow a deep ravine, between Cyclopean walls, among thickets of alder and

willow trees; wandering the whole day long, absorbed in thought, in a wilderness of wild flowers, and enjoying the sweet converse of the torrent and the mountain path. By re-approaching the beaten track, you find everything pre-arranged and grouped, as if to sit for its portrait to Poussin: a half-naked shepherd watching his flock, blowing wild melodies from an antique pipe; a car drawn by oxen, such as I used to admire in my youth in the cuts of Herhan's Virgil, having between the yoke and forehead of the animal a small cushion brilliantly embroidered with scarlet; and young maidens with naked feet, like the nymphs seen in the sculptures of the Lower Empire. Some of them were really beautiful; one especially, seated beside a smoking oven, drying fruit, who raised towards heaven a pair of large blue melancholy eyes, shaped like almonds, upon her bronzed face, her neck being adorned with beaded ornaments, the better to conceal an incipient *goître*. With this deformity impairing her beauty, she looked like an Indian idol crouched near her altar.

After crossing a meadow, the jaws of the ravine suddenly unclose, and you discern a beautiful ruin on the summit of a hill. This is the Reichenberg, where dwelt during the feuds of the middle ages one of the most formidable of those baronial depredators self-styled "plagues of the country" (*Land-schäden*).

Under his exactions the neighbouring town uttered its groans in vain; in vain did the emperor cite the escutcheoned brigand before the diet. The man of iron, shutting himself up in his granite den,

persevered in the work of blood and rapine, living out of the pale of the church, condemned by the diet, and hemmed in by the emperor, till his grey beard fell down his knees from age.

I visited the Reichenberg, where nothing now exists but the wild scabious, the shadows cast by the broken windows waving among the ruins, and the remains of a mutilated escutcheon over the principal entrance, where, among heaps of stones through which reptiles have worn a way, two or three cows browse upon the intrusive verdure.

I likewise visited, behind the hill of Reichenberg, some remains of a decayed village, formerly known by the name of the village of the Barbers, of which the following is the legend:—

His Satanic Majesty, disapproving the numerous crusades of Frederick Barbarossa, determined to cut off his beard; a shrewd idea, worthy the vengeance of the devil upon an emperor. With the connivance of some Dalilah of the place, he devised means by which Barbarossa, on visiting Bacharach, might be put to sleep, and in this condition shaved by one of the numerous barbers of the place. But Barbarossa, then only Duke of Suabia, had at the period of his intimacy with the beautiful Gela conferred an obligation on the fairy of the Wisper, who was resolved upon defeating the project of the devil.

This fairy, about the size of a grasshopper, went in search of a giant, her friend, of mean capacity, and begged him to lend her a sack. This giant readily complied, and even offered to accompany her, a proposal at which she was enchanted. The little fairy managed, I conclude, to assume vaster propor-

tions; and, proceeding to Bacharach on the night of the emperor's journey, seized every barber in the town, one by one, and put them into her sack; which she desired the giant to throw over his shoulders, and go wherever he wished. The giant, who, owing to the darkness and his own stupidity, had not observed the fairy's proceedings, set off across the country with immense strides, the sack full of barbers swinging at his back.

Meanwhile the barbers of Bacharach, knocking against each other in the sack, began to awake; and the giant, alarmed by their noise, to double his strides. As he was passing the castle of Reichenberg, on raising his leg to avoid the great tower, one of the barbers, having a razor in his pocket, drew it forth, and cut a hole in the sack, through which the barbers slipped out, and falling amongst the briars, shrieked aloud. The giant, thinking he had ten thousand devils on his shoulders, made off as fast as his seven-leagued boots would carry him. Next day the emperor passed through Bacharach, and not a barber was to be found in the place. The devil also made his appearance—when a facetious crow, perched upon the gate of the town, addressed him thus:—"My worthy friend, you have something attached to your head longer than the beard of the emperor Barbarossa; even a pair of ass's ears!"

From that time, till now, not a barber can ever be found at Bacharach. As to those who slipped out of the sack, they established themselves where they fell, and from that period the village was called "the village of the barbers." Such are the means



by which Frederick Barbarossa preserved his beard and his empire.

In addition to the Katz, the Maus, and the Lurley, the Swiss Valley, and the Reichenberg, there is still the Rheinfels near St. Goar, to which I have alluded. This interesting spot exhibits a mountain excavated in all directions, crested with ruins, having prodigious internal galleries, vast halls with arched openings fifty feet wide, dungeons plunged below the stream, animated by the rattle of the water-mills in the valley behind the castle. Through fissures in the wall the steamers on the Rhine appear no bigger than large fishes trained to carry people on their backs. The feudal palace of the Landgraves of Hesse has become a heap of ruins, with embrasures for catapults and cannon, which resemble the dens of wild beasts seen in the Roman circus; the weeds sprouting from every crevice, the rough-cut slates and basalts assigning to the groinings the profiles of saws and open jaws: and all this to be seen for the price of two sols.

There seems to have been an earthquake in this scene of ruin and desolation. But the earthquake was produced by Napoleon, who blew up the Rheinfels in 1807, when, strange to say, the whole structure fell, with the exception of the four walls of the chapel. It is difficult to stand in this holy place, preserved as it were miraculously amid universal destruction, without profound emotion.

In the embrasures of the windows are placed devout inscriptions, two in each window:—“*Sanctus Franciscus vixit 1526—Sanctus Dominicus vixit*

(erased)—*Sanctus Albertus vixit 1292—Sanctus Narbertus, 1150—Sanctus Bernardus, 1139—Sanctus Bruno, 1115—Sanctus Benedictus, 1140.*” There is another name effaced : then, recurring back several centuries, these three majestic lines present themselves : “*Sanctus Basilius magnus, Episc. Cæsareæ Cappadoci, magister monachorum orientalium, vixit anno 372.*” By the side of Basil the Great, under the door of the chapel, these two names are inscribed : “*Sanctus Antonius magnus ; Sanctus Paulus Eremita.*” This is all that escaped from the shells and mine of the Imperial army.

The castle of Rheinfels, demolished by Napoleon, was likewise threatened by Louis XIV. The old ‘Gazette of France,’ which was printed in the Louvre, announces, under the date of January 23, 1693, “The Landgrave of Hesse-Cassel takes possession of the town of St. Goar and of the Rheinfels, ceded to him by the Landgrave, Frederick of Hesse, who has determined to end his days at Cologne.”

In a following number, the same journal announces, “Five hundred peasants are working with the soldiers at the fortifications of the Rheinfels.”

A fortnight afterwards, we read, “The Count of Thingen is suspending chains and constructing redoubts upon the Rhine.”

And what is the meaning of this flight of the Landgrave? Why these five hundred peasants added to the troops? Why those redoubts and chains so hastily thrown up? Simply because Louis XIV. was pleased to knit his brow, and that the campaign was about to open in Germany.

The Rheinfels, over the door of which the ducal

coronet of the Landgraves still remains, is now the mere outhouse of a farm! A few vines climb about the walls, and gnats browse on the ground-floor. At dusk, the whole mass defined against the evening sky produces a superb effect.

Returning up the Rhine, about a mile from St. Goar (the Prussian mile, like the league of Spain, and the hour's march of the Turk, comprehends two French leagues), you suddenly discern, in the space between two mountains, a beautiful Gothic town, situated on the declivity of a hill, and sloping to the brink of the Rhine; with antiquated streets, such as we only see in the scenery of the Opera, fourteen embattled towers overgrown with ivy, and two vast churches of the purest Gothic.

This is the warlike Oberwesel, whose old walls are riddled with the havoc of shot and shells. Upon them you easily recognise the trace of the huge cannon-balls of the bishops of Trèves, the Biscayans of Louis XIV., and the revolutionary grape-shot of France. At the present day, Oberwesel resembles an old veteran turned vine-dresser; and excellent wine he produces.

Like the other Rhenish towns, Oberwesel has its castle in ruins, called the Schonberg; one of the most remarkable ruins in Europe.

It was in this castle dwelt, in the tenth century, the seven cruel and scoffing young ladies, who may now be admired through the fissures of their castle, transformed into seven rocks in the Rhine!

An excursion from St. Goar to Oberwesel is amply repaid. The road runs parallel with the river, here narrow and confined between high hills.

Neither house nor traveller is visible; and all is wild and lonely. Piles of slate arise out of the river, covering the bank like heaps of gigantic scales. Every now and then you perceive among the bushes a kind of immense spider, formed by two transversal rods, crossed and confined in their centre by a stout knot, suspended from a lever, while the four extremities remain in the water; and amid the silent solitude of the place, you every now and then perceive the lever shake, and the rods suddenly spring up, holding in the net they sustain a lively salmon, twisting and leaping in his prison.

In the evening, after one of these exhilarating excursions, which serve to open every cavity of the stomach, you return to St. Goar, and find two or three silent smokers seated at a table, at the end of which is laid one of those excellent and simple German suppers which exhibit the partridges the size of fowls. With such fare you may recruit your strength, especially if you know how to conform to local customs, like the wise Ulysses, and have the good sense to take in good part certain fantastic incongruities, such as a roast duck dressed with apple marmalade, or a boar's head with apricot sauce.

Towards the end of the supper, the sound of horns and firing is heard; and on looking out, you find this to be the work of the veteran hussar, waking up the echo of St. Goar; scarcely less marvellous than that of Lurley. A pistol-shot becomes as loud as the discharge of a cannon; and every note of the trumpet is repeated with the most perfect exactness in all the depths of the valleys.

These delicate symphonies, remote and faint, appear to become ironical, at once deriding and delighting the attention. As it is difficult to suppose the huge and heavy mountain endued with so delicate a vein of irony, at the end of a few minutes you become the dupe of your illusions, and, however matter-of-fact in your nature, are ready to swear that in those dark recesses, in some fantastic retreat, there must exist supernatural beings—some fairy, some Titania, who diverts herself by parodying human music, and throwing down a mountain every time she is insulted by the report of a pistol. All this is as charming as it is startling. The effect would be still more perfect, if we could forget that we were standing at an inn-window; and that the extraordinary phenomenon is served up like an extra dish for the dessert of a table d'hôte. The enchantment ends of course in the most natural manner. The operation over, a waiter, holding a tin plate, presents it to all present, while the veteran hussar stands with stern dignity in a corner, watching the operation; after which all retire from the field, *every man having paid his shot!*

te and faint, ap-  
 deriding and de-  
 cult to suppose  
 ended with so  
 of a few minutes  
 ons, and, however  
 e ready to swear  
 e fantastic retreat,  
 ings—some fairy,  
 lf by parodying  
 mountain every  
 of a pistol. All  
 ng. The effect  
 uld forget that  
 ; and that the  
 ed up like an  
 e d'hôte. The  
 most natural  
 watter, holding  
 resent, while the  
 lignity in a cor-  
 which all retire  
 id his shot!

*[Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*