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A steam voyage up the Rhine

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Letter XXI. [Anfang]

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LETTER XXI.

Bingen, August 27.

FROM Lorch to Bingen is about two German miles. You know my habit of making my journeys on foot, as far as possible. Nothing more delightful than such a mode of travelling. On foot, you are free and light-hearted, and have all the incidents of the road to yourself. You may seek your breakfast at a farm, enjoy the shade of the trees, or the solitudes of a church; you go or stay, free from interruption or restraint. Exercise fosters reflection, and reflection softens fatigue; the beauty of the country beguiles the length of the journey, which is no longer travelling, but wandering, yielding at every step some new idea, as if a swarm of thoughts were hovering, gnat-like, round one's head. Sometimes seated in the shade, on the side of a high road, near some bubbling spring emitting life and strength, an elm full of birds for my canopy, a hay-field hard by, quiet, serene, dreaming dreams of joy, I have viewed with compassion the travelling carriage rolling past—that sparkling and rapid affair which contains stupid, heavy, and wearied beings—like a flash of lightning impelling a tortoise.

Oh! how quickly would those travellers, people often possessing both mind and heart, escape from

their splendid prison, where the harmony of the landscape is lost in the stifling dust of the road, could they but know what myriads of flowers lie hidden in the bushes, what gems are concealed in the flint, what houris among the rural nymphs they pass without a glance. Oh! rich and endless joy of the pedestrian. *Musa pedestris*.

To the man on foot, moreover, not only ideas, but adventures, occur in throngs. Some men delight in inventing such things: I own I prefer the reality.

This reminds me that, about eight years ago, I went to Claye, a few leagues from Paris; I forget for what purpose. All I remember is derived from the following few lines in my note-book: which I transcribe, as pertinent to what I am about to narrate:—

“A canal on the ground-floor, a burying-ground on the first story, a few houses on the second, constitute Claye. The cemetery has a terrace with a balcony upon the canal, from which the manes of the peasants of Claye may hear the music in the passage-boats from Meaux. In that country, you are not interred, but interraced—as good a mode of interment as any other.”

I was returning to Paris on foot, having started early, when, about noon, the shade of the Forest of Bondy tempted me, near a sudden turn of the road. I sat down at the foot of an oak, and began to scribble the note you have just been perusing.

As I finished the fourth line, which I perceived to be written at an unusual distance from the fifth, I raised my eyes, and beheld upon the other side of the ditch, not far from me, a bear, sternly contem-

plating me: it was no night-mare. But one is often deceived by the shape of a tree, or some rock of unusual form. "*Lo que puede un sastre*" is fearful in the darkness of the night; but at mid-day, in the month of May, with a beautiful sun, one is not apt to have hallucinations.

It was, in short, a *bonâ fide* bear, as hideous as well could be. He was gravely seated, so as to exhibit his dusty hind-feet, his paws being voluptuously crossed upon his bosom. His jaws were half-open, jagged, and bleeding; his lower lip being half torn off, showing his bared tusks. One of his eyes was wanting, and with the other he gave me a supplicating look. Not a creature was visible, not even a woodman in the forest. I confess I felt somewhat nervous. Accosted by a strange dog, one gains courage by familiarly calling out Fox, Soliman, or Azor; but how is one to address a bear? above all, how came a bear in such a place, on the high road from Claye to Paris? Strange and ridiculous as you may think it, I was considerably perplexed. I did not stir, neither did the bear; in fact he appeared disposed to be neighbourly. His expression of face was as agreeable as could be expected of a one-eyed bear. His jaws were certainly apart, but open as becomes a mouth. It was not a rictus, but a legitimate yawn; not ferocious, but rather literary. There was an air of politeness, a beatitude about this bear, a look of sleepy resignation, such as I have observed to be habitual to the faithful adherents to our classic drama. In short, his countenance was so prepossessing, that I also resolved to put a good face

upon the matter. I accepted the bear as an inoffensive spectator, and resumed my fifth line, which, as I have said already, is wide apart from the fourth, from having at first kept my eye fixed upon the bear.

While writing, I saw a large fly settle on the lacerated ear of my spectator, on which he raised his paw, and gently passed it over his ear, with an exquisitely feline grace. The fly flew off; he watched it for a moment; then seizing his hind-feet with his two fore-paws, paused in that classical attitude, and began to contemplate me.

By this time he had inspired me with the deepest interest; and finding myself completely at my ease, I began to trace the sixth line of my note, when I was interrupted by a rush of hurried steps; and, behold! a black bear made its appearance, the first being yellow! The newly arrived bear came up at a brisk trot, and perceiving the yellow bear, rolled himself gracefully at its feet, but he was heedless of this familiarity, and the black bear equally so of *me*.

I must confess that at the approach of this new apparition my hand trembled. I was about to write the line about the dead hearing the music, and my manuscript shows a wide interval between the words, which may be accounted for by the arrival of the second bear.

TWO BEARS! Two bears on the high road to Paris! I was petrified. The yellow bear at last acknowledged the acquaintance of the black, and both, rolling in the dust, became uniformly grey. I stood up, and hesitated whether I should go and pick up my cane, which lay a few feet from me,

when another bear trotted up, red, diminutive, and ill-shaped, still more lacerated and bloody than the first; then a fourth, a fifth, and a sixth!—These last crossed the road like walking gentlemen at the back of the stage, without looking right or left, and as if pursued. I now heard howls and shouts at a distance, and seven or eight men, armed with iron-shod sticks, struck across the road, tracking the bears. One of these men halted, and while the others had seized upon the animals and were carrying them off muzzled, he explained the meaning of my curious adventure.

The director of the Circus at the *Barrière du Combat* having sent his dogs and beasts to exhibit in the town of *Meaux*, the animals travelled on foot. At their last halt the bears had been unmuzzled to feed, and in the absence of their keepers had escaped and taken to the road. These bears were nothing but strolling players. I should have lost the diversion of this adventure, however, but for travelling on foot.

Dante relates, at the beginning of his divine poem, that he met a panther one day in a wood, then a lion, afterwards a wolf. If tradition be true, the Seven Sages of Greece, in their travels in Phœnicia, Egypt, Chaldea, and India, met with many such adventures. They each met a different animal, just as every sage possessed a different order of wisdom. Thales of Miletus was long pursued by a winged griffin: Bias of Priene journeyed side by side with a lynx: Periander of Corinth scowled back the advance of a leopard: Solon of Athens advanced boldly upon a fierce bull: Pittacus of Mity-

ene faced a rhinoceros: Cleobula of Rhodes was attacked by a lion; and Chylon of Lacedæmonia, by a lioness. Upon a closer examination of all these feats, we might, perhaps, discover that the animals were mere show-beasts escaped from their van, while travelling for the purpose of exhibition.

Had I related my own adventure in a suitable manner, in two thousand years I should have been pronounced an Orpheus. "*Dictus ob hoc lenire tigres.*" My friends the Circus bears furnish a key for many prodigies, and, with due respect to the poets and philosophers of Greece, I have little faith in the virtues of a strophe to repel a leopard, or in the power of a syllogism to subdue a hyæna, though of opinion that man has possessed for ages the secret of subduing lions and tigers, of deteriorating the animal species, and brutalizing the beasts!

Man has always imagined that he achieves a prodigious feat when, by dint of skilful tuition, he substitutes stupidity for ferocity. Everything considered, it may be so; for otherwise I, as well the seven sages, might have been devoured. Since I am embarked in the chapter of reminiscences, let me relate you one more adventure.

You remember G——, that erudite old poet, who proves that a poet may be patient, a sage amusing, and old age youthful; who walks as if only twenty years of age. In April, 183—, we made an excursion together in the Gatinais, and were rambling side by side one fine morning: I, who love truth, but who delight in paradox, know no one more amusing than G——, who is versed in all established truths, yet capable of inventing all sorts of paradoxes.

It was just then his pleasure to insist upon the existence of the basilisk. "Pliny mentions it," said he. "It is known in the country of Cyrene, in Africa; is twelve fingers long, has a white spot on its head, forming a sort of diadem; and when it hisses, the serpents fly." Holy writ assigns wings to the basilisk. It is asserted, that in the time of St. Leo there existed at Rome, in the church of St. Lucius, a basilisk, which infected the city with its breath. The sainted pope approached its pestilential retreat, and Scaliger says, in rather grand style, "extinguished it with prayer." G— was further pleased to assert, on seeing my incredulity as to the basilisk, that particular spots possess peculiar influences upon certain animals: that at Zarifa, in the Archipelago, the frogs do not croak; that at Reggio, in Calabria, the crickets do not sing; that the boars are mute in Macedonia; that the serpents of the Euphrates do not sting the natives, even when asleep, but merely foreigners; whereas the scorpions of Mount Latmos, innocuous for foreigners, give mortal stings to the inhabitants. In this way he kept putting a thousand questions to me, or rather to himself. "Why," said he, "are there such an abundance of rabbits at Majorca and none at Yvica? Why do the hares die at Ithaca? Why is it impossible to find a wolf at Mount Olympus? a screech-owl in the island of Crete? or an eagle in that of Rhodes?"

On seeing me smile, he interrupted himself: "Laugh, if you will," said he; "but such are the opinions of Aristotle."

To which I replied, "My dear friend, such learn-

ing is obsolete. There is dead erudition, just as there are dead languages."

G— replied, with his usual serene air, "You are right. Science has its span of life: art alone is immortal. One man of science casts his predecessor into the shade; but as to the great poets of old, they may be equalled, but never surpassed. Aristotle has met with his master; but Homer remains unapproached." And having fallen into a reverie at the close of these observations, he began to look for flowers in the grass under his feet, or poetry in the clouds over his head.

In this guise we arrived at Milly, where you still see the vestiges of a ruin, famous in the seventeenth century for a trial for witchcraft. A loup-cervier, or horned wolf, desolated the country. The noblemen belonging to the king's hunt, assisted by a vast retinue of varlets, pursued the beast into these ruins, which were presently surrounded. They entered, and found a hideous old woman, under whose feet lay the wolf-skin, which the devil had not found out in time to carry off. The old lady was burnt upon green faggots, before the portal of the cathedral of Sens!

This took place in 1636, the year in which Corneille's 'Cid' was first represented.

As I was relating the story to G—, "Listen!" said he; and lo! we heard, at hand, the trumpet of some mountebank. G— had always a taste for that sort of music. "The world," said he, "is full of strange imposing sounds, of which the tin trumpet is the parody. While lawyers plead upon the political stage, while rhetoricians personate

upon the scholastic stage, I wander into the meadows, class the insects and the blades of grass, and adore the greatness of my Creator. It delights me, on the other hand, to listen to that emblem of the insignificance of man, this mountebank and his ironical blast. The mountebank completes my study; and I fix the human insect upon a card, pin him there like a scarab or a butterfly, and class him among the ephemera."

G— enticed me towards the spot from whence arose the noise—a mean hamlet called, I think, Petit Sou, reminding me of that burgh of Asculum, upon the road from Trivicum to Brindes, which was the cause of those lines by Horace:—

“ Quod versu dicere non est
Signis perfacile est.”

Ascūlūm in fact cannot form part of an Alexandrine line.

It was the village festival. The place, the church, and the mayory were all in their holiday clothes. The heavens themselves appeared coquettishly decked out with white and rosy clouds, to greet the auspicious day. Chubby children and young maidens were gazing calmly on the scene, or sporting upon the greensward beside their elders; and farther on, a crowd was gathered round a kind of stage, constructed with two boards and a ladder. This was covered with the well-known blue and white check awning, in which originated the classical costume of the clowns or *paillasses* all over the Continent.

Near the stage was the entrance to the tent,

a mere slit in the canvas; and above was suspended a placard inscribed in capital letters with the word

“ MICROSCOPE.”

A multitude of unheard-of chimerical monsters, such as were neither seen by St. Antony nor dreamed of by Callot, fluttered around it. Two personages were already figuring upon this stage: one, dirty as Job, bronzed like Ptha, his beard grown like that of Osiris, and bewailing himself like Memnon, having a wild Egyptian look, beating the big drum, and occasionally blowing a pipe; the other looked on, being a sort of Sbrigani, with a bearded and ferocious face, wearing the Hungarian costume.

Around the exhibition stood an assemblage of astonished and bewildered peasants of both sexes, their mouths and eyes wide open. In the rear of the tent the children were cunningly perforating the blue and white canvas, so that they could easily examine the interior. As we approached, the Egyptian's drum became hushed, and Sbrigani began to speak. G—— listened attentively.

With the exception of the “ Walk in, walk in, and you shall see,” &c. &c., I must declare that the Sbrigani lingo was incomprehensible to us all, even to the Egyptian, who had assumed a posture of basso-relievo, and appeared to listen as religiously as though assisting at the dedication of the great columns in the hall of Karnac by Meneptha, father of Rhameses II.

No sooner had the mountebank uttered his first words, than G—— began to tremble, and after a few minutes, inclining towards me, he observed in a

low voice, "You, who have good eyes and a pencil, do me the favour to take down the words of that man."

I was on the point of inquiring the reason of so strange a wish, but his attention to the proceedings seemed more engrossed than ever. I therefore acquiesced; and the mountebank delivering himself slowly, I wrote down as follows:—

"The family of the *Scyrii* is divided into two classes: the first has no eyes; the second has six, which distinguishes it from the species *cunaxa*, which has two, and from the species *bdella*, which has four." Here G—, who was listening attentively, took off his hat, accosted the mountebank with a courteous voice, and said, "Pardon me, Sir, you forgot to mention the group of *arachnoidea*." "Who is it that interrupts me?" inquired the lecturer of his clown, without either surprise or hesitation. "Yonder old gentleman." "Know, then, sir, that in the group of *arachnoidea*, I only find one species, the *dermanyssus*, parasite of the whistling bat."

"I thought," replied G—, timidly, "that it was a *glyciphagus cursor*."

"Wrong," replied the mountebank. "There is a great gulf betwixt the *glyciphagus* and the *dermanyssus*. Since you devote yourself to such profound questions, study nature; consult Degeer, Hering, and Herman. Observe the *sarcoptes ovis*, which has at least one of the two posterior feet complete, and carunculated; the *sarcoptes rupicaprae*, whose posterior feet are rudimental and setigerous, without vesicles; the *sarcoptes hippopodos*, which is probably a *glyciphagus*."

"Are you sure of that?" interrupted G—— with deference. "Not absolutely," replied the mountebank with an air of authority; "I owe it to the sacred cause of truth to admit that I am still uncertain; but I *am* sure of having picked a glyciphagus from amid the plumage of a grand-duke, and I am also sure that in visiting the galleries of comparative anatomy I have found glyciphagi in the cavities, between the cartilages and under the epiphyses of the skeletons."

"Prodigious!" exclaimed G——.

"But," resumed the mountebank, "this leads me too far; I will talk to you again upon the subject of the glyciphagus and psroptes. The extraordinary and formidable animal I am about to show you is the sarcoptes. Wonderful and terrible to relate, the acariates of the camel, instead of resembling that of the horse, is more like that of mankind. Hence a possible confusion, in which may originate terrible results. Let us consider these monsters, gentlemen. The shape of the one and the other is much alike, but the sarcoptes of the dromedary is longer than the human sarcoptes; the intermediary pair of the posterior feelers, instead of being smaller, is larger; the ventral facies has also its peculiarities. The ring is more detached in the *Sarcoptes hominis*, and has an aciculiform point which does not exist in the *Sarcoptes dromedarii*. The latter is largest. There is also considerable difference in the claws at the base of the posterior paws: in the former species they are simple; in the second, bifid."

Wearied of taking down all these profound and imposing words, I could no longer refrain from

jerking the elbow of G——, and asking what the deuce the man was talking about.

“Of the itch and its parasites,” replied G——, so gravely, that I shouted with laughter, till my notes fell from my hand. G—— picked them up, and, regardless of my gaiety, more attentive than ever to the mountebank’s lecture, took down his words, in the absorbed and Raphael-like attitude of a disciple of the School of Athens.

The peasants, more and more bewildered, shared the beatified admiration of G——; for the extremes of science and ignorance meet in the extreme of simplicity.

The dialogue of the formidable mountebank had completely mystified the unsophisticated natives of Petit Sou. The populace, like children, admire what they do not understand; they delight in the obscure, ludicrous, and declamatory style. The more ignorant a man, the more he prefers the obscure; the more barbarous his mind, the more he likes the complex. Nothing is less simple than a savage. The idioms of the Hurons, Botocodus, and Chesapeaks, are so many forests of consonants; through which, half engulfed in the mud of ill-digested ideas, are strained huge and hideous words, just as the antediluvian monsters wallowed amid the inextricable vegetation of the primitive world. The Algonquins express the brief and pleasing word “France” “*Mittigouchiouekendalakiank!*”

The moment the doors were open, the impatient crowd rushed in to behold the promised wonders. The *mittigouchiouekendalakiank* of mountebanks are usually merged in a shower of pence, or more exalted

coin, according to the order of the people they have addressed.

An hour afterwards we resumed our walk, and reached the border of a small copse. G— had not yet addressed a single word to me, in spite of all my efforts at conversation. Suddenly waking from his absorption, and as if replying to himself, he said: "And he spoke so well too!"

"On the itch?" said I, timidly. "On the itch!" replied G— with philosophical firmness; gravely adding, "That man made some excellent microscopic observations—real discoveries!"

I ventured to observe, that he had perhaps studied the subject on the person of the Egyptian who officiated as his valet and musician. But G— still pondering, exclaimed, "How prodigious! What a melancholy subject of meditation! A disease that follows man into the grave! The human skeleton itself infected by the itch!" And he was again silent.

"Such a man is wanted in the third class of the Institute," was his next observation. "There are many Academicians, who are mountebanks; here we have a mountebank worthy to be an Academician!"

Methinks, my dear friend, I see you laughing, and inquiring in your turn, "Is this all? What a striking adventure! Boast, if you will, of your pedestrian travelling, which brings you acquainted with a herd of bears, and a rogue of a juggler, who, in the interval of swallowing a sword, compares the vermin of the camel with that of mankind, inflicting on country bumpkins a lecture upon comparative itch

A good travelling carriage is wretched work after such glorious diversions!"

As you please. For my part I know not whether it be the emanations proceeding from the springtide and heyday of youth which render those reminiscences delightful; but I own they still possess an inexpressible charm! Laugh, if you will, at the foot-traveller. I am always ready to start; and if such adventure happened to me again this very day, should be more than satisfied.

Such encounters, however, are unfrequent, and when I set out on foot, provided the sky be clear, the villages cheerful, the grass pearled with dew, the labourer at work in the fields, the sun shining in the heavens, and the birds singing on the boughs, I thank the mercy of God, and require no other recreation.

The other day, at five in the morning, having given orders for forwarding my baggage to Bingen, I left Lorch and crossed to the opposite side of the Rhine. If ever you go that road, follow my example. The Roman, Gothic, and Gaulish remains possess far more interest for the pedestrian than the slate of the right bank.

At six o'clock I rested myself, after a fatiguing ascent, through vineyards and brush-wood, upon a volcanic ridge which overlooks the castle of Fürstenberg and the valley of the Diebach. I have already stated that the huge tower of Fürstenberg is said to be round without and hexagonal within. From the spot where I stood, I saw deep into the tower, and can affirm, if the thing interest you, that it is

round both inside and out. Its elevation is prodigious, and its outline singular. Having immense embattlements, and narrowing from the base to the summit, without apertures of any kind, except long loop-holes, it resembles the mysterious and massive donjons of Samarcand, Calicut, or Canganor; and you would sooner expect to behold on the summit of this all but Hindoo structure the Maharadja of Lahore, or Zamorin of Malabar, than Louis of Bavaria or Gustavus of Sweden.

Nevertheless, this ancient citadel has played an important part in the history of European warfare. Just as I was reflecting upon the variety of ladders successively applied to the ribs of this stone giant, and upon the triple siege of the Bavarians in 1321, the Swedes in 1632, and the French in 1689, a woodpecker was rapidly running up its walls! What produced the mistake of the antiquarians is a turret which defends the citadel on the side of the mountain, which, round without, is crowned at its summit with embattlements divided into six compartments. They mistook the turret for the tower, and the outside for the in.

At this early hour of the morning, thanks to the heavy fog, I only distinguished the summit of the donjon, the outline of the wall, and the high crests of the hills. Beneath me the landscape was hid under a white mist, illumined by the rays of the sun, as if a cloud had descended to the earth. As I heard seven strike by the clock of Rheindiebach, a hamlet at the foot of the Fürstenberg, the woodpecker flew off, and I rose from my seat. During my descent the mist ascended, and I reached the village

at the same time with the rays of the sun. Some minutes afterwards, I had left it behind, having forgotten to interrogate the famous echo of its ravine; and paced gaily along the Rhine, exchanging nods with the young artists proceeding towards Bacharach, their baggage on their backs. Whenever I meet three young men ill-accoutred, walking together on foot, their eyes sparkling as if reflecting the faery realms of the future, I cannot refrain from praying for the realization of their dreams, and remembering the three brothers, Cadenet, Luynes, and Brandes, who, two hundred years ago, set out one fine morning for the court of Henri IV., having but one cloak for the three, each of them wearing it in turns; and who, fifteen years later, under Louis XIII., were the Duke of Chaulnes, the Connétable de Luynes, and the Duke of Luxembourg!—Dream on, young men, and push forward!—Your time may come!

These travelling parties of three seem to be the fashion on the Rhine, for I had scarcely gone half a league, near Niederheimbach, when I again met three young men journeying on foot. They were evidently students from one of those noble universities which at once foster old Teutonia and civilize young Germany. These youths wear the classical cap, long hair, a waist-girdle, and close surtout; have a staff in their hand and a porcelain pipe in their mouths, and, like the artists, a knapsack on their shoulders. Upon the pipe of the youngest a coat of arms was painted. They seemed engaged in warm discussion, as were the artists near Bacharach. As they passed me, one of them cried out, taking off his cap, "*Dic nobis, domine, in qua parte*

corporis animam veteres locant philosophi?" I replied, saluting him, "*In corde Plato, in sanguine Empedocles, inter duo supercilia Lucretius.*" All three smiled, and the eldest exclaimed, "*Vivat Gallia regina!*" To which I replied, "*Vivat Germania mater!*" and with another bow we parted.

I approve the custom of travelling in parties of three:—a pair of lovers, if you will; but always a trio of friends!

Above Niederheimbach are seen the tips of the trees of the gloomy forests of Sann or Sonn, among whose venerable oaks stand two ruined castles, Heimberg, which was Roman, and Sonnech, the stronghold of banditti. The Emperor Rodolph destroyed the latter, and time the former. A still more lonely ruin lies concealed among the mountains, called Falkenberg.

I left, as I told you, the village behind me. The sun was ardent, while the reviving breeze from the Rhine was become heated in its turn. To my right was an outlet from a charming defile between two rocks, swarming with birds; a brook of spring-water swollen by the rains, falling from rock to rock, assuming the airs of a torrent, sweeping away daisies and exterminating gnats, while forming noisy cascades among the stones. Beside the stream lay a path partly concealed by wild flowers, amaranthis, bindweed, wild pinks, and Solomon's-seal, welcome to the eyes of the poet.

There are moments when I could almost believe in the intelligence of inanimate things; and it seemed as if in this ravine a host of voices murmured to me, "Whither goest thou? To seek a spot

apart from mankind, and where traces of the divinity abound, that thou mayest establish the equilibrium of thy soul by that of solitude? Thou wouldst fain have light and shade, peace and vitality, change yet serenity; thou seekest the spot where the word reigneth in silence, where life is on the surface of things and eternity in their depths; thou lovest the desert, yet hatest not mankind; thou seekest the grass and moss, moist leaves, sap-swollen branches, warbling birds, rippling waters, and fragrant perfumes. Behold, therefore, and enter; for lo! this path deserves to be thy road."

Thus urged, I proceeded on my way. To describe what I felt in that lonely spot; how the bees sang round the purple foxglove; how the copper-hued necrophoræ and the blue beetles took refuge in microscopic cells hollowed by the rains under the roots and briars; what wings fluttered against the leaves; what sprung with a dull sound in the moss; what twittered in the nests; the indistinct murmur of vegetation, mineralization, and mysterious fecundization; the gaudiness of the beetles, the industry of the bee, the gaiety of the grasshoppers, the patience of the spiders; the aroma, hues, blossoms, moans, distant cries, contests of insects, catastrophies of anthills, the dramas proceeding in the grass, the exhalations breathing from the rocks, the sun-rays smiling through the boughs, tears distilling from flowers, revelations issuing from all; the calm harmonious working of all these beings and things, living nearer to the Almighty, to all appearance than man himself:—to describe all this, my dear friend, would be to paint the ineffable, invisible, and

infinite of the creation. As in the ravines of St. Goarhausen, I wandered with a soul full of worship and prayer. Ask me not of what I thought! There are moments in which thought itself sinks oppressed by the confusion of the thousand new images and instincts. Amid these lonely mountains, everything flattered my fancy and harmonized with my imagination; verdure, ruins, phantoms, landscapes, reminiscences, the memories of those who have vanished in these solitudes, the history which once irradiated their solitude, the sun which brightens it still.

"Like myself," thought I, "Cæsar perhaps once reached this stream, followed by the soldier who bore his sword. Almost all the voices which have swayed human intelligence, have invoked the echoes of the Rheingau and Taunus. These mountains are the same which rose to the sky when prince Thomas Aquinas, so long surnamed *bos mutus*, first preached the doctrines in which his roar re-echoed through the world. '*Dedit in doctrinâ mugitum quod in toto mundo sonavit.*' Over these hills did John Huss, foreseeing Luther, as if the rent of the veil of the Temple at the last hour disclosed the mysteries of futurity, breathe from his burning pile at Constance his prophetic warning, 'To-day, you only roast a goose.* But a hundred years hence, the swan shall rise from its ashes!' And lo! a hundred years afterwards, at the hour predicted, Luther sent forth his formidable fiat: 'Rather let the princes, bishops, monasteries, cloisters, churches, and palaces be destroyed, than that one soul should perish.'"

* Huss has the signification of 'goose.'

It seemed to me, that in this wilderness the ruins put forth their voices to reply, "Oh, Luther! the bishops, princes, monasteries, churches, palaces, have obeyed thy bidding." Compared with those inexhaustible and vital things which grow, bud, and flower, from age to age, and conceal her under their eternal vegetation—say! is History great or insignificant? Decide the question, if you can!

For my part, I feel that contact with Nature, which approaches so nearly to the divinity, sometimes heightens, sometimes depresses the dignity of man. It is something for us to be proud of, that we possess an intellectual existence, apart from the rest, having its own laws, effects, and purposes, and taking its ground among the higher works of the creation. In presence of an ancient oak full of centuries but full of sap and vigour, thick with foliage and populous with birds, it is something to have the superior power of recalling to mind the shade that once was Luther, the spectre that was John Huss, the soul of departed Cæsar.

I must confess, however, that at one moment of my walk every reminiscence had vanished from my mind, where man had ceased to exist, for God reigned supreme in my heart. I had reached the summit of a high hill covered with brush-wood, having somewhat the appearance of the ilex of Provence, while at my feet was a wilderness, a beautiful wilderness: I saw nothing more beautiful throughout my excursion on the Rhine.

I forget the name of the place, but as far as the eye could reach were intermingled mountains, meadows, soft mists of various hues, streams of

gold subsiding into the distant blue of the horizon, enchanted forests waving their verdant plumes, remote distances diapered with light and shade. It was one of those favoured spots where Nature exhibits her marvellous variety of hues, rivalling the vain-glorious gorgeousness of a peacock's tail. Behind the hill where I sat, upon an eminence covered with pines, chestnut-trees, and maples, I detected a solitary ruin, a colossal mass of brown basalt. One might have conceived it to be a mere mass of lava, shaped by a giant's hand into the form of a citadel. Curious to examine this mysterious structure, I hastened towards the ruins. An antiquary, who describes a ruin much as a lover draws the portrait of his mistress, while he delights himself, is most likely to weary other people. To indifferent persons all women, as well as all ruins, are the same. I do not promise, however, utterly to abstain from describing old edifices, for I know you are a passionate lover of both art and history, as becomes a man pertaining to the intellectual, not to the vulgar herd. On the present occasion, however, I will only refer you to my circumstantial picture of the *Maus*, and you will readily conceive the same brambled walls, broken roofs, disfigured windows, and, above all, four or five grim, black, formidable old hags of towers.

I was wandering among these ruins, seeking, routing, questioning, and overthrowing, in the hope of finding some inscription tending to point out a fact, or some sculpture assigning a date, when, through an aperture, formerly a door, I noticed a passage under a vault, and a single ray of light penetrating

through a crevice. I entered, and found myself in a loopholed chamber, the form of whose openings proved that it had been used for the discharge of falconets and other ancient pieces of ordnance.

On looking through a loophole, I discovered below a gloomy valley, or rather rent in the mountain, once traversed by a bridge, of which one arch remains. On one side, detached earth and rocks, on the other, water, apparently blackened by its basaltic bottom, seemed to precipitate themselves towards the ravine. A few stunted trees shaded a grass plot, rank as the verdure of a cemetery. I know not whether it was illusion or the effect of the shade and wind, but I thought I perceived upon the high grass enlarged circles, slightly defined, as if some mysterious nocturnal rounds had trampled it here and there. This valley is both solitary and gloomy; one might fancy it destined for sinister purposes, and that in the darkness evil and supernatural deeds are there perpetrated. Even in the noonday sun-shine it seems stricken with sadness and horror.

In such a valley one discerns, even in the daytime, that the chill and gloomy hours of night have passed over its head, bequeathing to the very odour of the grass, to the colour of the earth, and to the form of the rocks, their vague, dreary, and oppressive influence.



As I was about to leave the vaulted chamber, the angle of a tumular stone protruding from the rubbish fixed my eyes: I stooped, of course, to examine it—with what anxiety, you may readily imagine. I was perhaps about to receive the explanation

I desired concerning the origin and name of this mysterious castle.

Carefully removing the rubbish, I discovered a beautiful sepulchral slab of the fourteenth century, in red Heilbron freestone; upon which lay, in almost full relief, a knight armed *cap-a-pie*, with the head only deficient. Under the feet of this warrior was inscribed, in Roman capitals, these words, somewhat defaced, but not entirely erased:

VOX TACVIT PERIIT LVX NOX RVIT ET RVIT VMBRA
VIR CARET IN TVMBA QVO CARET EFFIGIES.

After the perusal, I knew perhaps less than before! The castle was an enigma, of which I wanted to find the solution; and to which I had now obtained the key, in an inscription without date, an epitaph without a name, and a knight without a head: a confused and unpromising solution, you must allow.

To whom could this doleful and somewhat barbarous distich refer? If one must believe the second line upon the sepulchral slab, the skeleton beneath like the figure above, was also headless. What is the meaning of the three X's detached from the inscription in great letters? On looking more closely, and wiping away the dust from the slab with a handful of grass, I discovered more strange characters; three ciphers inscribed in three different places: the one on the right, XXX; another on the left,  and the last, .

These three ciphers are but

three different combinations of the same monogram. Each is composed of the three X's which the engraver

has made prominent in the inscription. Had this tomb been in Brittany, it might have alluded to the Combat of the Thirty; had it been of the seventeenth century, the three X's might have referred to the Thirty Years' War; but in Germany, and in the fourteenth century, what possible meaning could they have? Or was the employment of this funeral cipher, rendering all problems insoluble, purely accidental? I confess I was thoroughly at fault.

I remembered, however, that this mysterious mode of alluding to the memory of those who are decapitated, has been in use at all periods and with all people. At Venice, in the ducal gallery of the great council, a black frame fills the place of the fifty-seventh doge; while above, the relentless republic has inscribed this sinister memento:

“*Locvs Marini Falieri decapitati.*”

In Egypt, when the weary traveller arrives at Biban-el-Molouk, he finds in the sand, among the ruined palaces and temples, a mysterious sepulchre, that of Rhamsés V., upon which is inscribed a hieroglyphic signifying to the people of the desert, “who is without a head.”

But in Egypt, as at Venice—at the ducal palace, as at Biban-el-Molouk—one knows where one is; and that the legend relates to Marino Faliero or Rhamsés V. But here I knew neither the place nor the man! My curiosity was at the highest pitch; and this dumb, mysterious spot put me almost out of temper. One cannot concede to a ruin or a tomb the privilege of such profound silence.

When about to quit the vault, enchanted to have

discovered so curious a monument, but disappointed in deriving so little advantage therefrom, a sound of loud and mirthful voices suddenly assailed my ears. In their dialogue I distinguished the words, "Fall of the mountain;" "Subterranean passage;" "Very ugly footpath;" and a moment afterwards, as I was quitting the tomb, three slim young ladies dressed in white, having lovely faces, with blue eyes and fair hair, stepped suddenly into the vault, and on seeing me halted in the sunbeam that struck across the sill. What more enchanting to the eyes of a man ruminating on a tomb, than such an apparition in such a light! A poet had every right to behold in them angels and seraphs. I own, however, that I saw in them only Englishwomen. I must also confess that the very prosaic idea of inquiring of these angels the name of the castle suggested itself to my mind. I argued thus: "These English ladies—for so they must be, being fair and beautiful—are probably come on a party of pleasure from some part of the surrounding neighbourhood; Bingen, or Rüdesheim. The castle is the object of their excursion, and they must have been pre-acquainted with the spot thus selected." This reasoning decided me; there only remained to hazard the attempt at conversation, and I resorted to the most awkward pretext for the purpose. Having opened my sketch-book, in order to appear at my ease, I called to my aid the little English of which I am master, and looking through a loophole at the landscape, murmured, as if to myself, the following ejaculations: "Beautiful view! Very fine! Charming waterfall!" &c. &c. The young ladies, who had

been at first alarmed at finding me there, now began to whisper and laugh among themselves. They appeared to be charming girls, though I was evidently the object of their quizzing. I therefore cut short all ceremony, and though pronouncing English like an Irishman, advanced towards the group, and addressing myself most courteously to the eldest of the three, "Miss," said I, correcting the laconism of the phrase by the prolongation of my obeisance, "What is, if you please, the name of this castle?"

The beautiful creature smiled. As I deserved and expected a shout of laughter, I was grateful for such mercy. Then looking at her two companions, and slightly blushing, she replied in legitimate French, "Sir, this castle is that of Falkenberg. So at least we have been informed by a goatherd, who is talking to my father in the great tower. If you like to go there, you will find them."

The fair strangers were French, not English! Her neat and well-expressed language had immediately so convinced me: but the beautiful girl added, "There is no need of our speaking English, for we are French, as well as yourself."

"How did you find me out to be a Frenchman?" was my next inquiry.

"By your English, sir," replied the youngest girl. But her eldest sister assumed a look of reproof, if beauty, grace, youth, innocence, and joy can ever assume such looks. I was laughing, however, in my turn.

"But you yourselves were speaking English just now, ladies," said I.

"Only to amuse ourselves; or rather, to improve

ourselves," observed the elder. This authoritative rectification was lost upon the younger lady, who ran towards the tomb, and raising her gown to avoid the stones, exhibited the prettiest feet in the world. "Come hither," she exclaimed; "here is a statue on the ground without a head. It is a man." "A knight," observed the eldest, who had joined her; and again a kind of reproach modified the tone of voice in which it was uttered; as if implying "Sister, a young person ought never say 'a man.' It is more decent to say 'a knight!'"

This is the way with all women. They recoil from images which, when properly clothed with words, they accept without scruple. The naked word, however, does not suffice—the raw word disgusts them. There must be paraphrases, and the phrases of polished life must be brought into requisition. Later, *too late*, they find out how much signification may exist in the *all but*, which approaches the simple fact. Most women slide, and many fall, upon the dangerous ground of half-defined expressions.

The slight distinction made by the two sisters, between "it is a *man*,"—"it is a *knight*," expressed the state of their young hearts. The one was profoundly asleep; the other wide awake. The eldest of the sisters was already a woman; the younger a child. Yet there were but two years difference between them! The youngest of the three alone had the character of girlhood. Since they came into the vault she had blushed a great deal, smiled a little, and said nothing.

Meanwhile all three stooped over the tomb, and the fantastic reverberation of the sunbeams defined

their beautiful profiles upon the granite. A moment before, I wanted to learn the name of the phantom below; now all I wished for was that of these beautiful girls: and I can scarcely describe my feelings, perplexed by these two mysteries; the one fraught with terror, the other with delight.

By dint of listening to their gentle whispers, I caught the name of one of them, that of the youngest, and prettiest, a creation resembling the princess of a fairy tale. Her long fair eyelashes concealed deep blue eyes, without, however, veiling their lustre. There she stood, betwixt her elder and her younger sister, like modesty between grace and innocence—a soft reflection of both. She looked at me twice, but without a word; she was the only one of the three whose voice I had not heard, though the only one whose name I knew. For I had heard her younger sister whisper to her, “Look, dear Stella!” and never till then recognised the beauty and charm of that name of the stars. The youngest made her observations aloud: “Poor man! (the reprimand was already forgotten) they seem to have cut off his head. In the olden time they had little scruple about cutting off heads.” Then suddenly interrupting herself, “Oh! here is the epigraph; but it is Latin! *Vox—tacuit—perit—lux*. How difficult it is to read: I should so much like to know what it means!”

“Let us go to my father,” said the eldest, “who will explain it:” and away they flew like three wild roes.

They did not deign so much as address themselves to me for the interpretation: my English

having, no doubt, given them but an unfavourable idea of my Latin! There happened, however, to be some mortar left upon the tomb, levelled with a trowel; and having taken up my pencil, upon that opportune page I traced the following lines:—

“ Dans la nuit la voix s'est tué,
L'ombre éteignit le flambeau ;
Ce que manque à la statue
Manque à l'homme en son tombeau !”

The young ladies had not been gone two minutes, when I heard exclamations of “This way, this way! father.” I therefore hastily finished my last line, and escaped.

Whether they found my explanation, I know not. I wandered about the ruins, and saw them no more.

Neither did I discover the name of the decapitated knight. A cruel destiny his! What crime had he committed, that man should have doomed him to death, and providence to oblivion? Obscurity upon obscurity! His statue was deprived of its head—his name erased from the legend—his history from the memory of man! Doubtless the sepulchral stone itself will soon be reduced to atoms. Some vine-dresser from Sonneck or Rupertsberg will one day or other disperse into dust the bones which perhaps it still covers, and, cutting the tomb in two, convert it into the doorway of a public-house;—and the peasants will drink, the old women spin, and the children dance round the statue decapitated by the headsman and sawn asunder by the mason. For in these times, in Germany, as in France, ruins are turned to account; and out of old palaces they construct new hovels.

Alas ! old laws and old communities are subject to nearly the same species of transformation ! Let us look on, meditate, and be content ! There is a providence over the fall of a sparrow !

Still, I sometimes cannot choose but ask myself, Why is it that the poor wretch, not content with the superiority of being alive, always retains a sort of jealousy of the sovereign who lies dead and buried ?

But I am rambling away from Falkenberg. Let us return to our castles. It was delightful to find myself in this nest of legends, and to be able to address myself boldly to these tottering towers, still standing on their feet, though dead, and letting fall their mouldering limbs upon the grass. But as you may not know the various adventures of which this famous castle was the scene, I will relate them. I thought especially of Guntram and Liba. It was upon that very bridge that Guntram met two men bearing a coffin ; it was on those very stairs that Liba threw herself laughing into his arms. A coffin ? No, that coffin was a nuptial couch !

It was near yonder chimney, still adhering to the wall without flooring or ceiling, that stood the couch she pointed out to him. It was in the court, now overgrown with hemlock, that Guntram, leading his bride to the altar, saw before him, visible for *him* alone, a knight in black mail and a veiled lady. In that dilapidated chapel, where living lizards now creep over lizards carved in marble, at the very moment he was putting on her finger the consecrated ring, an icy hand seized his—the hand of the maiden of the castle, who used to comb her

hair all night in the forest, singing beside an open grave. It was in that vault that Guntram expired, and that Liba died of witnessing his death. Ruins give rise to legends; but legends confer on ruins immortality in return. I remained many hours amid all this desolation, seated under impenetrable verdure, indulging in a vague current of ideas. *Spiritus loci*. My next letter will perhaps convey them to you. About three o'clock, I grew hungry, and, thanks to the goatherd of whom the fair travellers had spoken, reached a village on the Rhine; I believe, Trechlingshausen, the ancient *Trajani castrum*. I could find nothing but a beer-house, and, to appease my hunger, a tough leg of mutton, which a student who was there smoking assured me had been already abandoned as a hopeless case by a hungry Englishman. I did not answer, like Marshal Créquy before the Genoese fortress of Gavi, "That which Barbarossa (or red-beard) could not take, the Greybeard will!" But I set to work and conquered the mutton.

About sunset I set out again; the landscape, though rugged, was beautiful. Having left behind me the Gothic chapel of St. Clement, to my right was the right bank of the Rhine, all slate and vineyards; and the last rays of the sun cast their red reflections upon the far-famed hills of Assmanshausen, at the foot of which a cloud of smoke pointed out to me Aulhausen, the village of the potteries. Above the road I was following, stood in echelon, from hill to hill, three castles: Reichenstein and Rheinstein, demolished by Rodolph of Hapsburg, and rebuilt by the Count Palatine; and Vaugtsberg, inhabited, in

1348, by Kuno of Falkenstein, and lately restored by Prince Frederick of Prussia.

The Vaugtsberg played a prominent part in the feudal wars. The Archbishop of Mayence mortgaged it to the Emperor of Germany, for forty thousand livres of Tours. This reminds me that Thibaut, Count of Champagne, not knowing how to acquit himself towards the Queen of Cyprus, sold to his beloved lord, Louis, king of France, the counties of Chartres, Blois, Sancerne, and the viscounty of Châteaudun for the like sum—about the price a retired tradesman now pays for his retreat in the neighbourhood of Paris.

I paid but little attention, however, to the landscape; and since the approach of evening, entertained only a single idea—that before arriving at Bingen I should see, at the confluence of the Nähe, a curious edifice in ruins, standing solitarily among the rushes in the midst of the river, betwixt two high mountains. This ruin is the Maüsethurm.

In my childhood there was an old woodcut suspended near my bed, hung up there by an old German nurse, which represented an ancient, mouldering, isolated ruin, amidst fogs and mountains. The sky was charged with black and threatening clouds, and every evening, after offering up my prayers, and previous to closing my eyes, I used to gaze till the last moment upon the woodcut. In the night I saw it in my dreams, and connected it with terrible ideas. The tower seemed immense. Water poured, and lightning fell from the clouds, while the wind from the mountains seemed to groan heavily. One day I inquired of the nurse the name