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A steam voyage up the Rhine

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Letter XXI. [Fortsetzung]

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of the tower; to which she answered, making the sign of the cross, "The *Maüsethurm!*" Then she related to me, how, in older times, at Mayence, there was once a wicked archbishop named Hatto, also abbot of Fulda; "a covetous priest," said she, "opening the hand to bestow benedictions rather than benefactions." In a year of scarcity he bought up all the corn, in order to sell it dear to the people. Then came famine, and the peasants along the Rhine were all dying of hunger, so that they crowded round the burgh of Mayence, crying aloud for bread, which the archbishop haughtily denied. The story now becomes dreadful. The starving people, refusing to disperse, thronged the archbishop's palace; when, lo! the enraged Hatto surrounded them with his archer guard, who, seizing the men, women, and children, shut them up in a barn, and set fire to it; a scene, said the old lady, "that would have melted rocks of stone." Hatto, however, only laughed, and on hearing the wretched beings scream in the flames, remarked, "'Tis but the squeaking of rats!" The barn was now in ashes, and Mayence unpeopled and deserted; when suddenly a multitude of rats swarmed forth from the barn, like worms from the sores of Ahasuerus, making their way through the fissures of the walls, defying the foot that spurned them, multiplying at every moment, inundating the streets, citadel, and palace, cellars and chambers; in fact, a divine plague and visitation! Hatto fled from Mayence, pursued by the rats into the fields, and took refuge in Bingen, which was surrounded by lofty walls. It was there the archbishop had built a tower in the middle of

the Rhine, to which he proceeded in a boat, round which his archers beat the water. But, lo! the rats also took to the river, crossed the Rhine, clambered up the tower, gnawed the doors, windows, roofs, ceilings, and floors, and finding their way to the lower ditch, in which the cruel bishop was hid, devoured him alive!

The malediction of heaven and the indignation of man have laid the finger of scorn upon that fatal tower, now called the *Maüsethurm*. It stands deserted and decaying in the middle of the river, and a reddish vapour is sometimes seen at night issuing from the walls, like the smoke of a furnace; according to the superstition of the spot, the soul of Hatto returning to haunt its scene of condemnation.

Did you ever remark, that history is often immoral, while tales and fictions are moral, virtuous, and decent? In history, the law of the strongest is always good; tyrants are victorious, and headsmen prosper; the monsters fatten; the *Syllas* become honest burghers, and *Louis XI.* and *Cromwell* die quietly in their bed. Fictions always command a view of the infernal regions; no delinquency but what has its chastisement; no crime but it ensures its penalty; no sinner but eventually becomes penitent, or meets with his fitting doom. This arises from history moving in infinite space, and fiction being restricted to the finite. The author of a fiction does not assume the right of laying down the facts without exposing the consequences: for he works in the dark; is sure of nothing; must teach, advise, expound; and would not dare invent incidents without an immediate conclusion. God, who

creates history, divulges only what seemeth to Him good! The consequences of historical events often lie at too wide a distance from their origin to be readily retraceable.

Mäusethurm is an appropriate name. One finds there all that it promises. But there are minds which consider themselves matter of fact, and are simply barren; which would fain extinguish all the poetry of life, and say to the imagination as the gardener did to the nightingale, "Will you *never* be quiet, stupid beast?"

Such people as these pretend that the name of Mäusethurm comes from *Mäuse* or *Mauth*, signifying *toll*; and pretend that, in the tenth century, before the river was widened, the Rhine was only navigable on the left side, and that the town of Bingen exacted, by means of this tower, a toll from all the craft upon the river. They back this assertion by the fact of there being two such towers close to Strasbourg, devoted to such a purpose; and, in like manner, called "Mäusethurme." For such grave reasoners, utterly inaccessible to legendary lore, the tower must remain a toll-bar, and Hatto a custom-house officer!

For all well-thinking old women, myself among the rest, Mäusethurm derives its name from *mäuse*, which is derived from *mus*, which means a rat; and for *us*, the pretended toll and custom-house officer are mere vulgar fictions.

After all, the two opinions may be reconciled; for about the sixteenth or seventeenth century, after Luther and Erasmus, the municipal authorities may have utilized the tower of Hatto, and installed some

tollage in the haunted tower. Why not? Rome established her custom-house in the temple of Antoninus; and the outrage she offered to history Bingen may have offered to tradition! By this rule, *Mauth* would be right, and *Mäuse* wrong. However it may be, ever since my old nurse related to me the story of Hatto, it has remained one of the familiar visions of my mind. Every man has his favourite phantoms, just as all have their hobbies. Night is the realm of dreams. Sometimes a gleam, at others a flame, brightens our souls. The self-same dream may bring "airs from heaven," and "blasts from hell!" Imagination throws up her Bengal lights, colouring all things with their fantastic hue.

I must observe that the Mause tower always appeared to me a tale of especial horror; and that when my fancy urged me towards the Rhine, my first thought was neither the Cathedral of Cologne, the dome of Mayence, nor the Pfalz, but the Mause tower! Imagine therefore the feelings of a poor credulous poet, as well as impassioned antiquary, when, twilight having succeeded the parting day, the hills became less defined, the trees black, with a few stars twinkling thereon, the Rhine murmuring unseen, and the road fore-shortened as night approached, losing itself, as it were, in mist a few steps before me. I walked slowly on, my eyes peering into the obscurity. I knew I was approaching the Mäüsethurm, that mysterious ruin till now an hallucination, which was about to become a reality.

A Chinese proverb says "Strain the bow, and the arrow swerves!" Such is the case with the mind.

By degrees the vapour called reverie mounted into my brain. The rustle of the foliage was hushed. The faint ring of a distant forge clinked in my ear from afar off; and, lost in the vague current of my own ideas, I forgot both rats and mice, the toll and the archbishop; and listened, as I walked along, to the remote clang of the anvil, which, among the varying voices of evening, of all others wakes in my mind the wildest range of ideas. Even when it had ceased, I seemed to hear it still, and at the expiration of a quarter of an hour, I had composed the following effusion, as a sort of accompaniment to my measured march:—

L'Amour forgeait. Au bruit de son enclume,
Tous les oiseaux, troublés, rouvraient les yeux;
Car c'était l'heure où se répand la brume,
Où sur les monts, comme un feu qui s'allume,
Brille Vénus, l'escarboucle des cieux.

La grieve au nid, la caille en son champ d'orge,
S'interrogeaient, disant: Que fait-il là?
Que forge-t-il si tard?—Un rouge-gorge
Leur répondit: Moi je sais ce qu'il forge;
C'est un regard qu'il a pris à Stella.

Et les oiseaux, riant du jeune maître,
De s'écrier: Amour, que ferez-vous
De ce regard qu' aucun fiel ne pénètre?
Il est trop pur pour vous servir, o traître!
Pour vous servir, méchant, il est trop doux!

Mais Cupidon, parmi les étincelles,
Leur dit: Dormez, petits oiseaux des bois.
Couvrez vos œufs et répliez vos aîles,
Les purs regards sont mes flèches mortelles;
Les plus doux yeux sont mes pires carquois.

Just as I had strung my verses to an end, sud-

denly turning, I halted, when lo! at my feet lay the Rhine, crushing through the bushes, hoarse and impetuous; to the right and left were mountains, or rather dense masses of darkness, their summits vanishing in the clouds, which here and there were transpierced by them—the horizon forming a vast curtain of shade.

In the middle of the river, in the distance, rose from the still and dead waters a high black tower of hideous form; from the summit of which proceeded, by fits and starts, a reddened nebulosity. This gleam, resembling the reverberation of some red-hot pipe or furnace, threw out its glare upon the hills, setting forth on the right bank an isolated ruin,—the lengthening shadow of which was reflected in the water, even to my feet. Imagine, if possible, this sinister landscape, defined by such singular effects of light and shade. Not a voice or cry of bird intruded upon the chill and mournful silence, save the monotonous ripple of the Rhine.

The Mäüsethurm was before me! I had conceived it to be more imposing. All was there that I could require—the solemn night, the trembling reeds, the roar of the Rhine, as though hydras were hissing under its waters; the fitful moaning of the wind, the red glare from the tower, the soul of Hatto! And yet I was disappointed! No matter! I clung to the work of my fancy; and a work of fancy it was fated to remain.

I felt inclined, in spite of the lateness of the hour, and without waiting for day-light, to visit the edifice. The apparition was before my eyes, the night dark, the pale phantom of the archbishop

visible on the water. Surely this was the very moment to visit this formidable tower.

But how was I to proceed? where to find a boat? At such an hour, and in such a place, to swim across the Rhine was too great an effort for the sake of a spectre. Besides, had I been a first rate swimmer, and rash enough for the attempt, within a few yards of the spot is the well known whirlpool of Bingerloch, which formerly swallowed up vessels with as much ease as a shark a herring, and to which the best of swimmers would prove a mere gudgeon. I was consequently somewhat perplexed!

On my road towards the ruin, I recalled to mind that the vibrations of the silver bell, and the ghosts of the donjon of Velmich do not prevent excellent vines from flourishing near the walls, and that it was to be presumed the river, even here, must contain fish. I might therefore probably find the hut of some salmon-fisher at hand. As the vinedressers defy Falkenstein and its Mäuse, the fishermen may well confront Hatto and his rats!

I was not mistaken. Nevertheless I proceeded some distance without success, reached the nearest point to the ruin, and, on passing it, found myself at the confluence of the Nähe. Already I had begun to despair of my purpose, when, on approaching the willows on the bank, I perceived one of those spider-like nets I have already mentioned. A few paces off a boat was moored, in which lay a man enveloped in a blanket. I woke him up, and pointed to the tower, but he did not understand me. I then showed him a Saxon dollar, a sign which he understood in a moment; and some minutes after-

wards we were gliding along like two spectres, in the direction of the Mäusethurm.

As we approached the tower from the middle of the river, it appeared to diminish in consequence of the breadth of the Rhine. This effect was of short duration. As I got into the boat above the tower, the current soon carried us thither; my eyes being fixed on the red glare still issuing from the summit of the tower, which I now saw increase in size at every stroke of the oar, so as to become really imposing.

On a sudden I felt the boat bend beneath me, and the shock jerked my cane from out of my hands. I looked towards my companion; who, steering coolly on by the sinister guidance of the glowing Mäusethurm, said aloud "*Bingerloch!*" We were passing the whirlpool!

The boat swerved, the man rose, and seizing a pole with one hand, and a rope with the other, plunged the first into the water, and leaning on it with all his weight, ran along the plank on the side; I felt the boat grate harshly against the rocks beneath!

This difficult manœuvre was executed with marvellous dexterity, and without uttering a word. Suddenly withdrawing his pole from the water, he held it up horizontally, and threw out a rope into the water. The boat immediately stopped. We were arrived.

There stood the lonely and formidable Mäusethurm, with its base deeply furrowed, as if the rats of the legend had gnawed through the very stones!

The glare had now become a fierce and brilliant

flame, throwing forth its rays far and wide, and bursting from the crevices and fissures of the tower, as if through the holes of a gigantic magic-lantern. I seemed to hear within a harsh and continuous noise as if from grinding. I now landed, and bade the boatman wait for me, and approached the ruin.

I had at last then attained the object of my wishes! *This* was the rat-swarming tower of Hatto, close to me, before my very eyes. I was literally on the threshold, able to touch, feel, pluck the grass from the very stones of the nightmare of my youth. Yes! an embodied nightmare, real and genuine, was before me. What extraordinary sensations must arise from so strange a contact!

The front before which I was standing had a glazed loop-hole, and four windows of unequal sizes; two on the second, and two on the third story. At about the height of a man's head, under the lower windows, was a low wide door, open, and communicating with the ground by means of a heavy ladder with only three steps. From this door issued more light than from the windows. As I proceeded towards it with caution, over the sharp and pointed rocks, something round and black passed rapidly by me, almost between my feet, and I could have fancied it to be an enormous rat flying towards the reeds. I still heard the hoarse grinding within, and, in a few more strides, found myself before the door.

This door, which the architect of the wicked bishop had constructed high above the soil, to render the access more difficult to the rats, had formed the entrance to the lower room of the tower, when it had upper and lower rooms. But now both

floors and ceilings have fallen in, and the tower of Mäüsethurm has four high walls, rubbish for floor, and the sky for roof. I looked however into the space from which I had heard the grinding, and seen so strange a light; and there observed two men in an angle, their backs turned towards me; the one bending, the other leaning upon a kind of rod, which by a slight exercise of the imagination might have been converted into an instrument of torture. Their arms and feet were naked, covered with rags, with a leather apron to the knees, and a hooded jacket on their back. One was old and grey, the other young, with light hair, reddened by the reflection from a vast furnace in the opposite angle of the building. The hood of the old man inclined to the right, like a Guelph; that of the young man to the left, like a Ghibeline. But they were neither the one nor the other, nor even devils, but simply two smiths.

Their furnace, in which was a red-hot bar of iron, filled the building with the glare and reddened smoke, constituting the soul of Hatto transformed by the powers of hell into fiery vapour. The grinding proceeded from a file. Near the door was an anvil with two huge hammers, the sound of which an hour before had prompted my poetical effusion.

And thus the Mäüsethurm has progressed into a forge! Why then might it not as well have been a custom-house? Decidedly, my dear friend, *Mauth* was the true version!

Nothing can be more dilapidated than the tower, both within and without. The walls, from which were once suspended episcopal hangings, and after-

wards, according to the legend, gnawn by the rats with the name of Hatto, are now naked, worn by the rain, covered by the moisture without with a green coating, and by the furnace within with a black.

The two smiths proved to be worthy people. Having ascended the ladder, they showed me into the building; and near a chimney pointed out a narrow door leading into a turret without windows, and almost inaccessible, in which the archbishop is said to have sought refuge. They also lent me a lantern to visit every part of the diminutive island; which is a long and narrow tongue of land, with a belt of reeds and rushes, and the *Euphorbia officinalis*. At every step in this island, the feet knock against hillocks, or sink into galleries; for moles have succeeded to the rats.

The Rhine has left uncovered the eastern point of the island, which seems to stem like a prow the current. On lowering with my lantern, I found the tower to be built on red marble, which has the appearance of being veined with blood. The Mäuse tower is square. The turret, of which the smiths showed me the interior, presents a picturesque feature, looking towards Bingen. The pentagonal form of this lofty turret is evidently of the eleventh century, and the rats seem to have particularly wreaked their vengeance upon its base. The apertures in the tower have so completely lost their form, that it would be impossible to infer a date. The stone facings are so time-worn as to resemble hideous leprosy. The stones which once constituted embattlements might

pass for the teeth of the walrus or mastodon cemented into the walls.

Above the tower floats a black and white rag—fit emblem, Heaven knows, of the decaying structure; but, upon nearer inspection, I found it to be simply the Prussian flag. The duchy of Hesse terminates at Bingen, and Rhenish Prussia begins. Mind I only speak thus disrespectfully of the effect produced, not of the flag itself. All national flags are glorious. Above all, the man who respects the flag of Napoleon must render due homage to that of Frederick II.

After gathering a sprig of euphorbia, I quitted the Maüsethurm. The boatman was fast asleep. As we rowed away from the island, and the two smiths returned to the anvil, I heard the heated iron hiss aloud, as it was plunged into the water. Half an hour afterwards I reached Bingen, and after supper, though I was much fatigued, and all the people were in bed, by means of a dollar I managed to ascend to a dilapidated old castle, called the Klopp. I was rewarded with a scene worthy of closing such a day, having seen so much, and indulged in so many fancies. It was dead of night. Beneath me lay a mass of black houses, like a vast lake of darkness, there being but seven lights visible in the town. By a strange chance, these seven lights, like seven stars, exactly represented *Ursa major*, which, at that moment shone pure and bright in the heavens, so that the majestic constellation, millions of miles above us, seemed reflected at my feet in an ocean of liquid jet.

LETTER XXII.

LEGEND OF THE HANDSOME PECOPIN AND THE BEAUTIFUL
BAULDOUR.*Bingen, August.*

I PROMISED you some of the famous legends of the Falkenberg, perhaps the most interesting, that of Guntram and Liba. But why relate a tale you may find in any guide-book, and probably better told than I could narrate it? Since you exact a wonderful story to amuse your children, here is one which you will find in no collection extant.

I send it in the state I wrote it down under the very walls of the old manor, with the fantastic forest of Sonn before my eyes, and as it were under the magic influence of the birds, trees, and winds of the ruins. I had been conversing with the veteran, now turned goatherd on the mountain side, grown wild and almost witch-like,—a singular destiny for a drum-major of the thirty-seventh light infantry; and this brave soldier of the republic seemed to have acquired as much faith in the fairies, sprites, and hobgoblins, as formerly in the emperor. Such is the influence of solitude upon the mind, developing the poetry innate in the soul of man. Shepherds are usually an imaginative race. As I said before, I wrote this wonderful tale concealed in the very

ravine, seated upon a fragment which was once a rock, though in the twelfth century a tower, and now a rock again!—gathering from time to time some wild flower to refresh my spirit by inhaling its own—one of those ground-ivies that smell so sweet, and die so quickly—gazing by turns at the wild flowers and the glorious heavens, while the sweeping clouds, sailing gloriously past, seemed to tear their skirts against the jagged ruins of Falkenberg. And now to my story!
