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A steam voyage up the Rhine

Hugo, Victor

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Part IX.

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PART IX.

HOW A DWARF MANAGES TO AMUSE HIMSELF IN A FOREST.

ONE evening, having journeyed all day among the rocks, seeking a path that might lead him towards the Rhine, Pecopin approached a forest of fir, beech, and maple, which he did not hesitate to enter. He had proceeded more than an hour, when he struck into a thicket of holly, juniper, and wild raspberry, close beside which was a marsh. Exhausted by thirst, and attenuated by hunger, he looked out eagerly for a cottage, a charcoal furnace, or shepherd's cabin; when suddenly a flock of sheldrakes passed near him, flapping their wings. Pecopin trembled upon seeing these strange birds, who build their nests under ground, and which are called by the peasants of the Vosges the rabbit-ducks.

Putting aside the hollies, he discovered stonicroft, angelica, hellebore, and the larger gentian. As he was stooping to gather some, a muscle shell, falling at his feet, arrested his attention. He picked it up, and found it to be one of those muscles of the Valogne which contain pearls.

Pecopin began to be ill at ease; on raising his eyes, a bustard was hovering over his head.

These hollies, raspberry bushes, sheldrakes, magical herbs, the muscles,—all these produced

some emotion in his mind, and he was beginning to marvel where he was, when a distant strain struck his ear. He listened: it was a hoarse, gruff, angry voice, at once subdued and shrill. The following was the purport of the song:

Mon petit lac engendre, en l'ombre qui l'abrite,
La riante Amphitrite et le noir Neptunus ;
Mon humble étang nourrit, sur des monts inconnus,
L'empereur Neptunus et la reine Amphitrite.

Je suis le nain, grand-père des géants,
Ma goutte d'eau produit deux océans.

Je verse de mes rocs, que n'effleure aucune aile,
Un fleuve bleu pour elle, un fleuve vert pour lui ;
J'épanche de ma grotte, où jamais feu n'a lui,
Le fleuve vert pour lui, le fleuve bleu pour elle.

Je suis le nain, grand-père des géants,
Ma goutte d'eau produit deux océans.

Une fine émeraude est dans mon sable jaune,
Un pur saphir se cache en mon humide écrin ;
Mon émeraude fond et devient le beau Rhin,
Mon saphir se dissout, ruisselle et fait le Rhône.

Je suis le nain, grand-père des géants,
Ma goutte d'eau produit deux océans.

Pecopin could no longer doubt, poor exhausted traveller as he was, that he had attained the fatal forest of the lost footsteps, full of labyrinths and mazes, and inhabited by the dwarf Rollo, a native of a lake of the Vosges country, situated on the summit of a mountain; and because he thence dispatches one brook to the Rhône, and another to the Rhine, this boastful dwarf conceives himself to be father of the Mediterranean sea, nay of the ocean itself! His delight is to wander in the forest, and

mislead travellers. The man who enters the wood of the lost footsteps is rarely known to escape.

The voice and song were clearly those of the mischievous dwarf; and Pecopin, sorely distressed, threw himself upon the ground.

"Woe is me!" exclaimed he; "never again shall I behold my beloved Bauldour."

"*Nil desperandum!*" said a mysterious voice beside him. "Such true lovers will meet again."