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A steam voyage up the Rhine

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Part XIII.

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PART XIII.

SUCH AS THE INN IS, SO IS THE DINNER.

As he was attempting to decipher the ironically hidden sense of this inscription, the door gently flew open, and the horse entered.

Pecopin felt like one who passes from the mid-day sun into a cellar! On his first entrance he thought himself suddenly gone blind; but still he perceived at a distance a faint bluish light. By degrees, as his eyes, dazzled by the surpassing light of the splendid halls he had quitted, modified their powers to this obscurity, he began to distinguish, as if through a vapour, thousands of monstrous columns in a Babylonian hall. A blue light in the centre served to define the outlines; and the knight soon perceived, amid a multitude of twisted columns, a long table lit by a seven branched candlestick, in the holders of which glimmered seven blue trembling flames.

At the head of this table sat a brazen giant, Nimrod the Great. At his right and left sat upon iron stools, pale and silent, guests, some wearing the Moorish turban, and others headgear more covered with pearls than the King of Bisnagar.

Pecopin here recognized all the famous hunters who have left a name in history:—The King Mithrobuzane; the tyrant Machanidas; the Roman consul, Æmilius Barbula II.; Rollo, king of the sea; Zuentibold, the unworthy son of the great Arnulphus, King of Lorraine; Haganon, the favourite of Charles of France; Herbert, Count of Vermandois; William the Flaxen Headed, Count of Poitiers, founder of the illustrious house of Rechinevoisin; the Pope Vitalianus; Fandulphus, Abbot of St. Denis; Athelstan, King of England; and Aigrold, King of Denmark.

By the side of Nimrod sat Cyrus the Great, who founded the great Persian empire, two thousand years before the Christian era, bearing his escutcheon upon his bosom, which, as every one knows, represents a silver lion, crowned with a laurel, *or*, on a ground of *or* and *gules*, surmounted by eight trefoils with the stem *argent*.

This table was served according to the rules of imperial etiquette; and at the four angles sat four distinguished huntresses: Queen Emma, Queen Ogive, mother of Louis d'Outremer, Queen Gerberga, and Diana, who, in her quality of a goddess, had a canopy and saltcellar of gold, like the three queens.

Neither of the guests ate, spoke, or even looked at each other. A large space in the middle of the cloth seemed to await the repast; but there were numerous bottles on the table, sparkling with the palm-wine of India, the rice-wine of Bengal, the distilled water of Sumatra, the arrack of Japan, the

pampis of the Chinese, and the pechmez of the Turks.

Here and there, in richly enamelled pitchers, foamed the beverage called by the Norwegians *wel*, by the Goths *buska*, by the Corinthians *bo*, by the Esclavonians *oll*, by the Dalmatians *bieu*, by the Hungarians *ser*, by the Bohemians *piva*, by the Poles *pwo*, by the French *bière*, and by the Great British *beer*.

Negroes resembling devils, or devils resembling negroes, it is all one, served at table, with napkins on their arm, and a ewer in their hand. Every guest had a dwarf by his side, except Diana, who had her greyhound. The eye of Pecopin, gradually penetrating the mysterious and vaporous atmosphere of this hall, discovered among the forest of columns a multitude of spectators, all, like himself, mounted and equipped for the chace. Shadows, from their mistiness; statues, from their immobility; spectres, from their silence. Among the nearest, he thought he recognized some of the knights who had accompanied the old man in the forest of lost footsteps. As I have already stated, the most awful silence prevailed; you might as well have expected a voice from the very stones of which it was composed, as from the grisly assemblage.

It was icy cold in this utter darkness. Pecopin was frozen to the marrow, yet a cold dew started from all his pores. Suddenly the yells of the chace were renewed, distant, but violent as ever; amid which the horn of the old man sounded in triumphal splendour a call or *hallali*, which, some centuries afterwards, was recovered by Roland de Lattre, in a

nocturnal inspiration; and which procured to that great musician, the 6th of April, 1574, the honor of being created by Gregory XIII. knight of the golden spur, *de numero participantium!*

At the sound the mighty Nimrod rose from table; the Abbot Fandulphus half turned round; and Cyrus, who was leaning upon his right arm, suddenly transferred his attitude to the left.