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The upper Rhine

the scenery of its banks and the manners of its people

Mayence to the lake of Constance

Mayhew, Henry

London, 1858

Preface

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PREFACE.

The present volume is necessarily somewhat discursive in its arrangement, owing to the interpolation of the descriptions *illustrative* of the illustrations. There is, however, a method in its apparent incoherence.

It consists of two parts, which, though involved, are nevertheless distinct—the one descriptive and the other critical: this explaining the peculiar aspect of certain scenes and places in the Upper Rhine; and that treating of and testing the manners and opinions of the people of the Rhenish capital, according to the ethical and political standards of our own country.

With respect to the so-called "Interpolated Scenes," they have been interspersed through the more connected matter of the book, simply for the purpose of distributing the engravings uniformly throughout the volume; while the descriptions have been, generally, written with the object of giving the untravelled reader something like a sense of the places touched upon.

This pen-and-ink delineation of strange places, or making known the unknown, is no very easy task—especially by means of a non-imitative art like literature; for it is as difficult to convey in words a sense of even the simple process of tying a shoe, as it is to produce in music a "movement descriptive of a gentleman changing his religion."

Of all painting, word-painting is perhaps the most difficult and subtle. It is worse than "writing on water," being indeed a species of drawing in the air—a style of spectral landscape.

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sketching, where sounds, ideas, and imagination have to do duty for pencil, colours, and canvas. It can only attain its end suggestively—that is to say, by making the reader conjure up in his own mind the image that the author desires to present to it. High-class literary description is, so to speak, a continual series of ghost-raisings—the excitation of a succession of pictorial apparitions; so that a kind of phantom panorama, or visionary drama (according as we are treating of men or places), shall flit before "the mind's eye" with all the "counterfeit presentment" and illusive reality of a dream.

There are three ways, apparently, of describing unknown objects,—(1), By detailing the qualities or circumstances in connexion with them; (2), By comparing them to some known objects; and (3), By setting forth the effects or feelings produced by them.

The first constitutes, in its *literal* phase, the "cataloguing" process, and belongs rather to the plainness of science than to the coloured rhetoric of literature; whilst, in its *picturesque* aspect, it not only approaches the conciseness of logical definition, but in seizing upon the literary "essence," as it were, or signal peculiarity of an object, discovers the precise point of *cognition* and *re-cognition* in connexion with it—that is to say, the *one* particular quality by which it is immediately apprehended in the mind; and thus, instead of clouding the idea with a mass of words, conjures up in the fancy a sudden and vivid image of the thing, scene, or character intended. Shakspeare and Milton possessed this picturesque power of description to a wondrous degree.

The second mode of description, or that which conveys an idea of unknown objects by comparing them to known ones, is at once brilliant and striking. The simile, indeed, is essentially a figure of enlightenment as well as beauty. Not only is there an exquisite charm in discovering some unexpected resemblance (and this, indeed, is the main source of the pleasure produced by imitative arts in general), but the very vividness of the "gay surprise" which is excited by the cunning of the comparison serves

also to intensify the perception of the idea sought to be conveyed, and thus at once to illuminate and colour the text—like a flood of light suddenly let in through some bright painted window.

The last descriptive process, or that which deals with the effect rather than the object itself, is, however, the highest and most artistic of all. This constitutes the mythic and poetic methods of representation, conveying a sense of the object by means of the feelings it inspires. Thus the fields are made to "smile," the brooks to "murmur," and "the jocund morn to stand *tiptoe* on the misty mountain top," whilst the gladdening and maddening spirit of wine is typified as a youthful god wrapped in a tiger's skin, and attended by a train of dancing satyrs.

There is, indeed, a high and low style of word-painting, as with all the representative forms of art. The literal, or cataloguing method of literary description, hardly ranks as an artistic process, any more than pictures of "still life," or "railway overtures," or "farm-yard symphonies"—or any other merely imitative rather than suggestive species of rendering—can be regarded as æsthetic performances. For as the photograph gives but the *particular* and accidental look of an individual for the mere moment that he is in front of the camera, whilst high-class portraiture depicts the *general* expression distinctive of the character of the man, and thus paints his very spirit as it were—even so the "inventory-taking" style of literature, which is so popular at the present day, utterly fails in rendering the picturesque features and *feeling* of a scene or a place—the *genius loci*, as it were—the mythic and unseen spirit, haunting the landscape as the dryads of old were supposed to do, and lighting it up like a soul.

The author is well aware how signally he has failed in reaching the standard of excellence he has laid down. Indeed, it is the misfortune of every work of art that it never satisfies the educated artist himself; none can be so fully cognisant of his short-comings, or so sour a critic to his work, as he who knows best the choice composition he meant to produce, and the sorry

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daub he has turned out. "Ah, you should see the books I *haven't* written!" said Rousseau to a friend who was praising his works.

Let the writer of the present volume speak, therefore, only of what he *purposed* at the commencement of his task. In the description of the Rhine Falls he was desirous of seeing whether it were possible, by mere verbal signs, to convey a conception of the "largest cataract in Europe" to those who had never visited the spot. In the articles, on the other hand, upon Worms and the "*Concilium's Saal*" at Constanz, his object was to use the local associations as means of conjuring up a livelier sense of the early struggles of the Reformation; whilst in the chapter on Strasburg he wished not only to impress the reader with a sense of the picturesque mongrel character of the town—(French in its government-institutions, German in the manners and customs of its people, and Dutch in its canal-lined streets), but also to paint in words the choice Gothic grace of its Cathedral, as well as the curious automaton movements of its celebrated clock. In the other "Scenes," however, he proposed merely to render such peculiarities of the places as would serve to give those at home a rough ideal of the Rhenish country and the towns.

With reference to the more continuous portion of the book—that which professes to give an account of the Domestic Manners of the Rhenish Prussians—it should be explained, that it is an attempt to regard German society and German character from a purely English point of view. It has long appeared to the author, that travelling southward from England is like going backward in time—every ten degrees of latitude corresponding to about a hundred years in history; for as in France we see society in the same corrupt and *uncomfortable* state as prevailed in our own nation at the beginning of the present century, so in Germany we find the people at least a hundred years behind us in all the refinements of civilisation and "progress;" whilst in Spain, we are assured, we live a positive mediæval life, among the same dirt and intellectual darkness, the same beggary and bigotry, as

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preceded the Reformation in our own land. In Russia, again, we find the state of villeinage and serfdom still existing; whilst in Central Africa, among the Ashantees, we reach the absolute condition of nature and barbarism.

It is difficult to make foreigners understand this: as a rule, even our Gallic neighbours are supremely ignorant of English institutions and English habits; indeed, we have but to take up a French drama or a French novel, of which the scene is laid in England, to perceive that the intelligent and educated classes of France know no more of us than they do of the Esquimaux.

Nor is it possible to make continental people comprehend the social and moral enormities that offend English families directly they set foot on foreign soil. The more refined sense of decency, which makes us regard their habits in many cases as little better than bestial, they look upon as mere affectation and squeamishness on our part; for as scavengers and dustmen are never seen with flowers at their button-hole, even so those who are accustomed to physical and moral filth become utterly insensible to the delicate graces of life.

It is customary for vain-glorious Frenchmen to speak of their country as "*la plus civilisée du monde;*" but, surely, if morals, comfort, and mechanical developments are to be taken as the tests of civilisation—rather than fashion, show, and bowing and scraping —Englishmen can say with justice that there is no nation, either past or present, which will, for a moment, admit of comparison with their own. There is an inner life pervading the heart of England, graced with home-feelings and affections, that renders our national character, in a measure, a sealed book to foreigners. On the Continent, however, all is external life and outward display: people live out of doors, and wear their hearts on their sleeves, for ever tapping at their bosoms—like vintners do at wine-casks—to show how full they are. There are no internal springs of action,—as with puppets, they are all moved from *without*. You want hardly "six lessons" to study a foreigner,—you know him "all through" in a few quiet half-hours. There is no

necessity in his case to crack the nut in order to discover the "maggot" in it,—for, in true butterfly fashion, it creeps out of its own accord. At the very first sitting, Frenchmen delight to tell you everything about themselves; taking care, of course—like persons who come to have their portrait taken—to trick themselves out in all their best: so that, if you be at all skilled in moral photography, you require to see them only for a short time afterwards—just to know the precise colours in which to paint them.

We appear, however, in our modern love of masquerading in French fashions, and aping French manners, to be losing a good part of our native honesty and simplicity. Instead of following nature, we copy, like poor artists, from mere dressed-up dolls or lay-figures. Old English hospitality is fast passing into those mere dress parades termed "receptions," and friendship growing as obsolete among us as chivalry; while Dean-Paulism and British-Bankolatry show that religion and charity are lapsing into a mere species of pharisaical "trumpet-blowing," or social and commercial puffery (your Bank Director always entering into his "closet" when *he* prays, but never "*shutting* the door")—a trick of trade,—a convenient screen behind which to sand the sugar—a "stall" to cover pickpockets.

The materials for that portion of the present volume which treats of the manners of the Rhenish Prussians have been classified under six heads:—

1. *The Household Arrangements* of the people, including the various domestic appliances, means of comfort, and habits of cleanliness and decency among them.

2. *The Style of Living;* under which head is given an account of the species of food, mode of cooking, and manners at table prevailing in Rhineland.

3. *The Classes of Amusement* that are generally popular.

4. *The Forms of Etiquette and "Manners,"* in the more limited sense of the term.

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5. *The Family Customs:* such as those usual at birth, marriage, and death, and the feelings uniting the several members of the "house,"—father with sons, husband with wife.

6. *The Opinions, Sentiments, and Creed* of the people: the Opinions setting forth their intellectual condition, the Sentiments indicating their moral state, and the Creed showing the amount of enlightened religion among them.

Now to those who are in the habit of hurrying through Germany at the same rate as Queen's messengers, and whose knowledge of the people is limited to such as are seen in Anglicised hotels, the view here given of the national character may perhaps appear somewhat harsh and prejudiced; whilst bookworms (who in their estimate of the German mind reflect the light of such intellects as Jean Paul Richter, Goethe and Schiller—Kant, Hegel and Fichte—as well as Schlegel and Niebuhr—Liebig, Argelander, and Bessel, over the whole people, and believe every German to be a small philosopher and great sceptic) will doubtlessly find cause to quarrel with us about the low mental average we have struck for the entire nation. It should be borne in mind, however, that the great body of English people are neither Shakspeares nor Newtons; nevertheless, it is but due to ourselves to add, that our opinions on the thoughts and manners of the people have been drawn chiefly from the more enlightened portion of the middle classes—such as professors, teachers, and professional men in general; for with the aristocracy of the country we profess no acquaintance, and with the artizans and labourers we may probably deal on a future occasion.

Finally, the general reader may fancy, that in the chapters comparing the intellectual condition of the Rhenish Prussians with that of our own people we have gone upon the fabular principle that "there is nothing like leather," and attributed too much to the influence of the English press in the formation of the English character. But when the social condition of this country at the present time is contrasted with that prevailing at the latter end of the last century, and the question asked, "What

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new institution has been developed among us since that period to which such a change can be fairly ascribed?"—there is, so far as we know, *but one* answer. Assuredly the moral and social improvement of our people cannot be referred to increased energy and zeal among the clergy, or to our more enlightened government of late years, for these are themselves the consequences rather than the causes of the reform. In a word, a new power has sprung up among us—a means of knowledge as vast as the very inventions of the alphabet and moveable types themselves—a moral court of judicature, where the public acts of all men are daily tried; ay, and though we ourselves belong to the fraternity, let us add, in all conscience—tried by judges as honourable, fair, and upright, as those men of iron integrity, the legal barons themselves.

Consequently, where no such social and political machinery as a free and honourable press exists, we should expect to find society in the same corrupt state as it was with ourselves a hundred years ago. A trip across the Channel enables us to put the matter to the test of facts.*

* P.S.—The German names of the towns and places have been adopted throughout this book, in preference to those barbarous French corruptions of the local titles which are in common use.

It may, on a cursory consideration, smack somewhat of pedantry to persist in calling the town which the French dub *Cologne* by its native cognomen of *Köln*; as well as *Mayence*, *Mainz*; *Spires*, *Speier*; *Bâle*, *Basel*, &c.; but, surely, we might with as much philological reason speak of "*Wilhelm Meister*" under the French "*incognito*" of "*Maître Guillaume.*"

The term *Cologne* is a clumsy attempt to convey, by altered orthography, the sound of the German *Köln* to French ears: as, however, the change of spelling cannot possibly aid *Englishmen* in apprehending the German pronunciation, little or no good can result, and a great deal of inconvenience may, from a continuance of the barbarism.

Besides, the rule with us (for mere postal convenience) is to write foreign names of places according to their local orthography, and not according to their local pronunciation. Thus, the title we give to the French capital is *Paris*, because Frenchmen so write it; and not *Parrhy*, because Frenchmen so pronounce it.

The French, however, adopt a different rule, and delight to call London, *Londres*; Dover, *Douvres*; Aachen, *Aix-la-Chapelle*, &c.; though, surely, there is no reason for *our* adopting such verbal absurdities.

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