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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

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes-Mannheim

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burnt, and then handed over to their servants to make an infusion for the kitchen breakfast.

In fact, in a true middle-class German household, the children hardly know the taste even of sugar.

"Help *her*, indeed!" said a German lady, in reply to a request for charity on behalf of a widow who had "seen better days;" "not I! for your grand ladies who *must* have milk and sugar in their coffee should be taught to know what want is."

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(3.)

MANNHEIM.

As Coblenz stands on the tongue of land at the very junction of the Mosel with the Rhine, so is Mannheim situate on the narrow Cape of marshes formed by the meeting of the river Neckar with the great German stream. It is, indeed, the City of the Confluence of the "*Ober-Rhein.*"

But the beauty which the lower "*Confluentia*" derives from the union of the two rivers, pouring from out their different mountain channels, is utterly lost at Mannheim—the river scenery at that point being as flat and unpicturesque as that of Battersea, at the "*eck*" where the muddy Wandle trickles into the drab-coloured Thames.

Nor is the architecture of Mannheim more attractive than the scenery amid which it is set. The new stucco Stadt is, indeed, the civic antithesis to the quaint old tumble-down towns of Worms and Oppenheim, being closely allied in urban

ugliness to *Neuwied*—the paradise of the Moravian Brothers, where the streets are cut as trim and square as a Quaker's coat, and the town has been devised after the parallelogram primness of some "New Harmony," or "Abode of Love."

The ground-plan of Mannheim, indeed, is a kind of civic chess-board, where rectangular blocks of houses stand for the "chequers," and cross-bar streets, intersecting each other at equal distances, represent the lines separating one square patch from another. In a word, the reader has but to imagine a town laid out like a draft-board, with a palace (about as palatial in design as an Industrial School) situate at the upper end, and a suspension bridge (fashioned after the style of our own *Pont de Hammersmith*) at the lower one; and with a broad street running *up* between the "chequers" from the *Neckarbrücke* to the *Schloss*, and an equally wide roadway stretching *across* the civic draft-board, and planted with a few stumpy trees;* while here and there one of the chequers, as it were, is left blank, so as to serve for an open "*Market Platz*," or "*Parade*," or "*Theater*," ditto;—the reader, we repeat, has but to form a mental bird's-eye view of such a town in order to have a tolerable notion of the architectural beauties of Mannheim and its principal thoroughfares.

Moreover, the street nomenclature (if such a term can be applied to thoroughfares that have only initial letters and figures to mark them), has the same uninviting air of "system" about it as the laying out of the town itself—the different blocks of residences being distinguished like policemen with us, as A 1, A 2, &c.; B 1, B 2, and so on; so that an inhabitant of the town, instead of boasting a square, or terrace, or crescent,

* This planted roadway is the only thoroughfare in Mannheim that rejoices in the singular distinction of a name—it being known as the "Planken" (*Planches*).

for his address, must content himself with a simple letter and number—as if he were living in a "pigeon-hole" for papers rather than in a human habitation. For instance: a townsman will tell you that he resides at Q 1, 16; which means, *not* that he lodges at No. 16 in Q 1 street (there being, as we said, no names at all given to the streets—the square clumps of buildings being christened instead), but simply that he is to be found at the 16th house in the first block of dwellings along the row marked Q; a state of things that would assuredly drive an English postman mad.

The blocks of houses here spoken of are each about a hundred yards square, and almost all built in the baldest Italian style, with eaves projecting as far forward as a French cap-peak, and the broad acres of walls unbroken by the least attempt at ornament; while every window is fitted with venetian-blinds, that are painted the same colour as the houses themselves; that is to say, either drab, or olive-green, or light pickled salmon, or pale nankeen colour: so that it does not require a very lively imagination to conceive the degree of ugliness that must prevail in an entire town built upon such tasty principles.

The public buildings, too—like the Kaufhaus and the Stadthaus in the open Platzes—all appear to partake of the clumsiness of the telescopic cupola-style of our own Horse Guards; while the *Jesuiten Kirche* (Jesuits' Church), which is considered to be the most remarkable edifice in the town (you can see it in the engraving, with its huge pepper-castor-like dome and bulbous-tipped towers peeping above the trees by the river side), is in the same heavy dustman's-bell-like order as the other structures; and though fitted up inside with white marble and gold, is oppressive rather than imposing with the massiveness of its decorations.

The Palace, moreover, has not an architectural grace to

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recommend it to the eye, being merely one long, ungainly, barrack-like building (indeed, a wing of it forms the quarters of the Baden cavalry), with so-called "gardens" at its rear, extending to the river side; though the said gardens are little better than a mangey coppice, and certainly not equal in beauty or neatness to the humblest of our parks.

Mannheim, however, is but a mere mushroom city—a Stadt that can trace its bricks and mortar back no farther than the 17th century; for it was founded in 1606 by Frederick IV. Elector-Palatine of Germany, who built a castle near the mouth of the Neckar. But this, together with the first mural attempts at a city, was rased to the ground long before the rooks had time to build their nests in the sapling elms around the Royal Residenz.

The town was afterwards rebuilt and strongly fortified by the Elector Charles Philip; but the fortifications intended for its defence were the cause of its being repeatedly besieged, and converted either into a mass of cinders, or levelled with the dust, at frequent and regular intervals. Indeed, during the religious wars, the city had to be twice rebuilt within a century.

The story runs that the French Commander, who in 1689 caused the placed to surrender, summoned the people immediately after his entry into the city, and told them that his master, Louis XIV., had given strict orders that the town should be reduced to a rubbish-heap. However, he added, that as a mark of special favour, he would allow them twenty days to rase their houses to the ground themselves. But the townspeople wanted the heart to destroy their own dwellings; accordingly, at the expiration of the term, the General summoned his soldiers to execute the work, and they having driven out the lingering inhabitants, fired all the houses and

churches, and left not one stone of the ramparts standing on another.

In the year 1794, the city was again bombarded by the French, and once more in 1795 by the Austrians, when only fourteen houses remained uninjured. In fact, from the very first moment of the fortifications having been constructed, Mannheim became the seat of continual warfare; but since its ramparts have been removed, it has been changed into a place of such special security, that it has risen to be one of the principal merchant-towns of the Upper Rhine, with harbours and railways on both sides of the river, and with a bevy of English residents pervading the domiciliary "blocks" from A 1 down to T 4.

Goethe styles it the "friendly, cleanly Mannheim;" and it must be admitted, that though the place has no picturesque advantages, it has social comforts that, in a Rhenish town, are sufficient compensation for its want of beauty; for (prodigy of German "progress!") it has actually "trottoirs" and streets without an open sewer meandering down the middle of them. It boasts a theatre, too, that has long ranked as one of the best in the south of Germany; for it was here that Schiller's play of "the Robbers" was produced under his own direction in 1782—the author having resided on the Parade Platz, in the house called "*zum Karlsberg;*" and it was in one of the dwellings opposite the principal entrance to the theatre that Kotzebue, the author of "the Stranger," was assassinated by the mad student Sand.

With this brief catalogue, however, end all the points of interest in connexion with the "friendly, cleanly" (and anything but pretty) Mannheim.

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