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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

§ 2. Respect for Woman-Domestic Feeling among the Married Classes-Divorces-and Public Vice

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Visual Library

Bernard in the end taking his adversary prisoner, and the Duke de Rohan perishing in the last conflict.

The town fell into the hands of the French in 1744, and in 1801 was made over to Switzerland, to which country it now belongs. The population at present numbers only 1500: and how even this small body of individuals manage to exist in a place that is utterly destitute of manufactures, commerce, and even traffic, beyond the daily diligence—the noise of which in the streets seems to startle the people like the railway engine bewilders cattle in the fields—is more than the stranger can possibly divine.

Rheinfelden forms one of the four ancient "forest towns" situate in these parts, viz. Rheinfelden, Seckingen, Laufenburg, and Waldshut.

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§ 2.

Respect for Women—Domestic Feeling among the Married Classes—Divorces—and Public Vice.

Among the Eastern nations it is well known that woman was, and indeed is, regarded as a mere animal necessity, — a creature designed to be the object of man's lowest passions rather than his highest and purest affections; and a creature, moreover, that the "blessed Prophet" Mahomet held to be as unworthy of immortality as even the beasts of the field.

The refined Greeks, too, whom classical taste would teach us to admire, regarded women from scarcely a higher point of view—considering them inferior to men, and qualified to discharge only the subordinate functions of life. Aristotle

states, that the relation of man to woman is that of "governor to subject;" and even the gentle Plato says, that "a woman's virtue consists in managing the house well, and obeying her husband."

The "barbarous" Gothic nations, however, valued women more highly, and treated them more respectfully, than the polished states of the East. Women among the Anglo-Saxons were allowed to inherit as well as to transmit landed property; they were permitted to sue and be sued in the Courts of Justice; they shared in all the social festivities; they were present at the meetings of the parliament and the municipal corporations; "and they possessed," says Sharon Turner, from whom we quote, "all that sweet influence which, while the human heart is responsive to the touch of love, they will ever retain in those countries which have the wisdom and urbanity to treat them as equal, intelligent, and independent beings."

If this be true of all the ancient Teutonic tribes, the Prussians must have lapsed sadly from the nobility as well as kindliness of the parent stock; for assuredly a German wife of the present day is but a servant, whom the master of the house has the right of cohabiting with, and using, without the inconvenience of wages.

Indeed, it is a peculiar verbal illustration of the merely cohabitatory character of the matrimonial state in Germany, that a married lady always speaks of her husband as "*her man*"—(*Mann*); and a husband of his wife as "*his woman*" —(*Frau*); there being no special terms in the language to signify either a *married* lady or gentleman.

We have, however, known some Rhenish households where the *Frau* was treated with the same affection as an English wife, and regarded in every way as the man's partner and equal; where the couple not only possessed

everything in common, but thought in common; and where, instead of individual or selfish interests, there had grown to be, through love, one common good.

These, however, it must in truth be added, are but exceptional cases, and what we have stated above refers, we repeat, to the *general* tone of society rather than to individual examples. In Coblenz we knew among the townsmen one who had been thrice married, and when he was questioned as to his inducement for entering so often into the matrimonial state, he was candid enough to confess that, being a teacher of music as well as the keeper of a music-shop, he required some one, whom he could trust, to attend to "the business" during his absence from home, and therefore had wedded three wives, or rather three shop-women.

Nor is this merely an isolated case: on the contrary, it is by no means uncommon for a widower in Coblenz, if he have many children, to commence looking for a second "marriage partner" as soon as the funeral ceremonies in connexion with his first are completed.

When we were first informed of this fact we exclaimed, as you, doubtlessly, do, English reader—"Surely it cannot be true!" "And why not?" inquired our simple German informant, by way of reply. "What is the poor man to do? He must a servant have his '*Kinder*' to look after. Oh, no, we do not nothing of it here think. I would the same myself do if my *frau* was to die to-morrow."

Now surely there can be little feeling in a nation where it is *customary* (rather than extraordinary or unnatural) for a man to marry *within a month after the death of his former wife*—before, indeed, he has accustomed his mind to the terrible absence of his "marriage partner" from the house—before the poor creature's funeral knell can be well out

of his ears, and her last look out of his mind's eye. To place another "woman" in the bed in which a week or two before his wife had died—and which, surely, even in the numbest brain, must revive a sense of the lost one's death-struggles—seems so intensely horrible to *our* natures, that it is impossible to believe wretches who are capable of such enormities to be instinct with the same emotions as ourselves.

Further, in illustration of the tone of feeling existing between German men and women, we may add, that we were once in company with a party of young German ladies, one of whom wore her betrothal ring, and on the circumstance being alluded to, another, who had none, told us that she did not envy her friend, as she was affianced to a German. "You," she said, "are married, I have heard, and so I can tell you without seeming bold, that I would rather marry an Englishman than the best, the wisest, or the richest man in all Germany."

At first we regarded the speech as a mere compliment, but when we sought the reason for the young lady's preference for an English husband, our own observations taught us that there was too much truth in all she said to think of attributing her remarks to mere politeness.

"You Englishmen," she proceeded, "do not leave your wives to mope at home alone every evening, while you go out to drink wine, and smoke, and feast, by yourselves, as the Germans do; and when you walk out together your wife takes your arm, and you keep her by your side as if you really cared for her. I am told, too, that in England the houses, even of your merchants and tradespeople, are more comfortable and pleasant inside than our palaces; and that of a winter's evening the whole family sit by the fire together, while the daughters play, and sing, or read aloud; and that,

indeed, it is as uncommon for the English husband to pass an evening away from home as it is for a German one to remain after dusk among his family."

This may sound harsh and exaggerated, perhaps, to some English ears, but those who have spent any time in "Rheinland," and have had means of judging as to the domestic state of feeling among the Rhenish Prussians, will readily agree with us, that in Germany home-feeling, and indeed the home-virtues which are so essentially distinctive of English life and English character, are comparatively unknown among the modern Teutonic tribes.

"How long have you been in Coblenz?" said a Rhenish philosoph (!) on being introduced to us some months after our arrival there.

"Nearly six months," we replied.

"*Lieber Gott!* and I have never seen you at the Casino!" This exclamation the philosopher uttered as if he thought it was impossible for human existence to be continued unless the latter part of the day were passed in the big Coblenz "pot-house," nicknamed a club; and yet the "*wieser*" had a family like ourselves, though he delighted, perhaps, to astonish his befuddled fellow-townsmen with his scientific braggadocio about oxygen and hydrogen, rather than to cultivate the mind and affections of his own flesh and blood at home.

Indeed, rather than one common interest and common heart pervading every Deutsch household, there are as many different desires as there are different individuals composing it.

Again, the Germans are utterly deficient in that chivalry of feeling towards the weaker sex which makes every educated man in England regard women as persons whom the Al-

mighty, by his very constitution of them, has exempted from all the rougher forms of labour; and though these leaden-pated Preussen affect an admiration for the poetic forms of nature, it is difficult to make them understand how it is man's duty to wrest the subsistence both of himself and wife from the elements around him.

"But why should not women work as well as men?" the uncivilised boobies will ask you, though you know immediately, by the question, that it is hopeless to make such creatures *feel* the reason.

Accordingly, in Prussia, most of the husbandry work is performed by women. In the vine-countries the women carry heavy loads of manure up the steep mountain-sides, and in the towns and at the river-side you will pass them harnessed like beasts of burden, and dragging after them carts or vessels, that with us horses only are used to draw. Again, in the streets you will see the scavengers' work done by the gentler sex; and, indeed, females performing every kind of office to which we should consider it *unmanly* to put a woman.

Hence it is not to be wondered at, that where so low an esteem for the female character prevails, the weaker sex are *not* considered to be naturally sacred from blows at the hands of those whose strength should be used to protect rather than injure them. A German argues, that if a woman can work as well as a man, she ought to be able to defend herself in the same manner; so that, though even the schoolboys in England believe it to be the climax of cowardice to strike a girl, your German gentleman finds no lack of heroism in the act. Hence it is *not at all unusual* to see some urchin, while returning from school to his "*Mittag-essen*" (mid-day meal), hit some little girl in the face until the blood spirts from her nose. Nor does the cowardly act excite the least indignation in the minds of the passers-by: for though the poor little thing goes scream-

ing through the streets, with its mouth crimson with the effects of the blow, not one Prussian will stay to heed or help her. Our own child was treated in a similar manner, from mere brutal wantonness, whilst coming from her lessons, and we were assured it was useless appealing to the police, for the "*Polizei*" troubles its head with no such trifles. Indeed, whilst we are writing, an English friend has just stepped in to tell us that he has seen a hulking boy strike a girl over the mouth with a thick stick, and that the Coblenzers were astonished to see the Engländer snatch the cane from the lout and thrash him soundly for the act. We ourselves have seen a female dragged along the street by two armed policemen, and witnessed, too, because she was loth to be carried to prison, that her movements were quickened by sundry kicks from the heavy boots of the Prussian *gens-d'armes*. Further, we have been credibly assured that it was customary at the Coblenz Casino for the steward to enforce obedience to his orders by blows dealt out, with strict impartiality, to the *waitresses*, as well as waiters. Moreover, when it is remembered that Austria is not *widely* different from Prussia, and that in the former country flourished Haynau, the field-marshal who delighted in maltreating women, we can readily understand how the same cowardice should prevail in the latter kingdom; and how English draymen should be so much superior to German officers and gentlemen in this respect, that they should be able to give a rough, but still impressive lesson upon humanity, to these mean-hearted Deutsch generals.

From such a picture of the internal economy of a Rhenish household, as well as the state of feeling throughout Rhenish society, the reader will not be astonished to learn that divorces are by no means uncommon, especially as they are

cheap; and perhaps the State is sufficiently needy and commercial to make "an allowance if a quantity be taken."

The Divorce question is one that appears to lie at the very foundation of social decorum; and it certainly admits of doubt whether divorces "for the million" are quite as good an institution as music, or even pine-apples, for the same large class. Is it politic for a State to admit of *temporary* marriages—to allow people to take a wife as they job a carriage—by the day, month, or year?—(to make divorces easy of attainment amounts to the same thing)—or, in other words, is it advisable to relax the stringency of the marriage contract, and reduce the necessity of conjugal life to the liberty of cohabitation?

There is no decree of Providence more merciful than that which has ordained that the wanton should be barren, and thus made the propagation of the human race to depend upon the continuous rather than the promiscuous intercourse of the sexes. Hence marriage has been rendered a necessity, for the sake of the future family; for, as there is no other young animal that remains in a state of helplessness so long as a human being, and the rearing of the children has been specially confided to the woman (the weaker creature of the two), it is obvious that the man was designed to *continue* with the family, with the view of providing a living for them, and hence that the husband and wife were never meant to be united *for a time merely.*

Still, a great difficulty arises with "ill-assorted alliances," —as to whether the marriage, under such circumstances, should not be annulled, and the parties freed from the continual irritation of their chains. In cases of crime it is admitted that such a course *should* be pursued, but in cases of "dissension" it is still doubted by some whether it be expedient to put an end to the union. But, say those who

take an opposite view of the matter, why drive people to crime before you grant them their liberty?

If, however, divorces are obtainable upon the plea of incompatibility of temper, a matrimonial squabble may be ranked under that category; and, surely, to make marriages revocable for a mere difference of opinion is to make the tenure of the wife as doubtful as that of the concubine.

Again, if it be expedient to allow the rich to enjoy the privilege, why, in the name of justice, should the poor be denied the luxury? In fine, why shouldn't divorces be as easy of attainment as summonses at police-courts? and if so, how many months think you, intelligent reader, would be the average duration of the union? or how long would it be before the state of English female society sank to the degraded level of the Continent?

In Germany, divorces are obtained by a legal process as simple and inexpensive as an action at law with us; and this "divorce-made-easy" system may perhaps be a necessary consequence, not only of the mode in which marriages are contracted in that country (without the least choice on the part of the lady), but owing also to the fact that a girl *before* marriage has no more liberty allowed her than if she belonged to a harem; whereas, *after* marriage she is free, even to licentiousness, to act as she please.

Mr. Drummond, the Member of Parliament, (he who, it is said, has a knife and fork laid at his table every day in expectancy of the re-advent of the Messiah,) told a story in the House of Commons of a Teutonic whist-party, at which the partners consisted of the husbands and wives, past and present, of two couples that had been divorced.

A friend of our own, too, assured us that he once knew as many as four distinct families belonging to one man and wife. The "man" had been married thrice, and his second

frau, from whom he had been divorced, was still alive; all the three wives, too, had borne him children. The "woman," on the other hand, had been married twice, and divorced from her first husband, who was still alive. *She*, likewise, had had a family by each marriage. The names of the children, for sake of illustration, we will assume to be as follows:—

Otelia,	aged 18 years,	daughter of the husband by the first wife.	
Mina,	„ 12 „	„ „ „	second wife.
Agatha,	„ 10 „	„ „ „	„
Karl,	„ 19 „	son of the wife by the first husband.	
Marie,	„ 18 „	daughter „ „	„
Ernst,	„ 2 „	son of the wife by the second husband, and consequently son of the husband by the third wife.	
Ottocar,	„ 3 months,	son of the husband by the third wife.	

All these families dwelt in one house, or rather on one floor together, and with the man's own mother among the tribe; whilst the husband and wife lived, as our friend styled it, "like cat and dog;" and truly, had they been those animals in a state of metempsychosis, they could hardly have had a more indiscriminate progeny.

In cases of divorce it is customary to divide the family almost after the manner of "gavel-kind"—share and share alike—the man taking the boys and the woman the girls.

Whether it be owing to the facility afforded for obtaining divorces, or whether it be from utter indifference on the part of the married folk, matrimonial squabbles (so far as we have been able to judge, and others, who had better means of coming to a conclusion on the subject, were of the same opinion) are

not so frequent as in England. Certainly in the house in which we lived, though there were some four couples located in it, we were never once disturbed by the least "family jar;" and English friends dwelling in German households have told us that they never overheard any dispute between man and wife. Hence, according as we attribute the domestic tranquillity to the one or other of the above causes, so must we admit either that the dread of a divorce places a considerable restraint on the temper of the parties, or else that a deficiency of affection is not calculated to produce the same misunderstandings among married people as a greater amount of attachment. The latter, we imagine, is the *principal* cause. Jealous persons, for example, may be said to have an excess of love, and yet in what house is there so little peace as where this feeling prevails between the better and the worser half? Thus it would appear, that when the passions are cooled down to callousness, and the wife is regarded merely as a servant, whilst the husband is recognised as the master whom she is bound to obey, a state of slavishness is likely to be engendered, amid which dissensions must be of rare occurrence.

This, we are convinced, is *one* of the keys to Rhenish domestic tranquillity;—in a word, the peace at home is owing to "phlegm" rather than love.

In the Rhenish capital, it must be admitted, there certainly *appears* to be little of what is styled "public vice" in connexion with women. It is not right, however, to infer from such a phenomenon that female virtue is higher in Germany than in England; for, according to the best accounts we could obtain, we should be inclined to conclude that it was at a much lower ebb—German married ladies acting, we were assured, quite as loosely as French ones. The conjugal indifference, too, which, as we have said, generally

prevails between the heads of each Rhenish family, would lead us to assume that there was some truth in the assertion; for love is essential to a woman's existence, and it is but natural, that if she fail to obtain it at the hands of him from whom it is her due, she will seek it elsewhere—especially when from marital neglect she be left *free* to do so.

Whether such really be the case or not in Germany, we have no positive knowledge. France is said, with a fine Rochefoucauld morality, to be "the Paradise of married women"—French wives being allowed an extent of liberty tantamount to licentiousness. The French wives, however, are notoriously incontinent; and they *are* so, we believe, partly from the reason we have here given. Nevertheless, as the German ladies appear to be of much colder natures than the French, the chances are, that they would bear neglect with less peril to their morals.

The German youths, however, have certainly less amorous propensities than *our* young countrymen; for it is well known to residents in Prussia, that at many of the "Student Societies" in the University-towns the youthful members agree among themselves to impose a fine of some few thalers upon any one indulging in immoral practices. Moreover, the young men with whom we ourselves were acquainted during our stay in the country seemed to be as thoroughly free from all lascivious notions as fish; while, on the other hand, the middle-aged and elderly gentlemen were fond of indulging in gross allusions and indecent discourse, even in the presence of ladies.

But a still more cogent reason as to why less *public* vice exists in the Rhenish capital than any English town is simply because it is not permitted by the police. The few infamous houses that formerly existed in the city have recently been prohibited by the Government. Nor are any "ladies of the *pavé*" allowed. Such females as are found guilty of offences

against public morals have a broom put into their hands, and are set to sweep the streets.

Still human nature will have its way—despite of the "*Polizei-Direction;*" and we were credibly assured by a professor, that since the repeal of the soldiers' houses in Coblenz the number of illegitimate children has considerably increased. Again, almost all the "respectable old gentlemen" are well known to have some young mistress secreted in the town; so that though, as in Paris, judging from the streets, one would imagine the city to be far more moral than a monastery, still, immediately we begin to look beneath the surface, we find that the decency, as with many other social forms now-a-days, is merely outside show after all.

All those who have troubled their heads with the solution of the more difficult social problems know full well, that every civilized community must choose between one of three bitter evils; for, so long as human nature prevails, there must be, in every state, either (1) illegitimate children, or (2) public women, or (3) early marriages; and certainly it is hard to decide which is the least dangerous to the well-being of the community.

Clergymen, of course, are advocates for the last-mentioned; but "Economists," on the other hand, declare that alliances contracted before the parties have arrived at years of discretion—and consequently before they have the means of providing subsistence for their future families—tend not only to flood the country with paupers and criminals, from the neglect of the children, but, by over-populating the nation, to reduce the price of labour so as to render subsistence difficult even for the prudent. Moreover it is urged, that at an early age the passions have not yet come under the control of the moral principle, and the young man, mistaking

lust for love, inseparably ties himself to a young woman, and finds out, when it is too late, the vast difference between an evanescent animal appetite and a pure permanent affection. Then he soon gets to feel the burden of a partner, for whom he has neither intellectual nor moral admiration; and then ensue all those domestic dissensions and that neglect of offspring which proceed from ill-assorted natures at home.

Economists, therefore, think "public women" a lesser evil than either youthful alliances or illegitimate children—the latter being essentially the class from which the thieves and vagabonds of every community are recruited, for it is proved by prison statistics that juvenile crime is simply the result of defective parental control. Nor should the holders of these opinions, in making such a selection among the three evils, be considered as exhibiting a preference for immoral courses. If they be wrong, their error can but proceed from a mistaken view as to what really constitutes the welfare of a nation, since it is merely a sense of this welfare that prompts them to make the choice; and assuredly they may, while so doing, regret, as much even as clergymen themselves, the *necessity* for the existence of any such evils.

Once more, then, we say, that Governments must make up their minds to submit to one of the above three social ills; and though the authorities of Coblenz have decided that no public women shall exist "within the walls," still it would appear, from the statistics of the town, that they have merely given an undue impetus by such means, not only to the maintenance of private mistresses among the wealthier classes, but to the increase of illegitimate children among the poorer; whilst from the latter result they must naturally expect to reap a more abundant crop of paupers and criminals in after years.

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