Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

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-Laufenburg

urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-161475

Visual Library

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(10.)

LAUFENBURG.

The rapids here (and fine as they are, they deserve no other title) are termed "the Lesser Falls"—the name of the place being literally "the City of the Current" (Germ. *Laufen*, to run). It is here that the chain of the "Jura" hills traverses the stream, the Rhine separating what is termed the "Swiss Jura," from the Suabian range of the same name.

The bed of the river is no longer silty, nor even pebbly, but has now the appearance of a huge stone trough or artificial channel, as it were, roughly hewn out of the solid rock, the large blocks of which slant up from the water-side, and being of a delicate pink colour (like the lining of a shell, indeed) contrast finely with the deep sea-green tint of the stream.

The Rhine here reminds one somewhat of the Wye between Bronllys and Builth in Breconshire, but the water is infinitely finer, being positively like liquid green glass, and tearing along the narrow gorge, or stone throat as it were, just beyond the bridge, with all the foam and fine fury of a mountain torrent. Though the banks widen into a half-lacustrine expanse a little below the town, and the current there makes the very air simmer again with the continual seething of its shoals—here the channel is like an enormous mill-shoot, and the water like a wraith of white spray; for so narrow is the passage between the rocks that it seems literally but a hop, skip, and a jump, from one side or shelf of crags to the other. Indeed, a few years ago a professional gymnasiast sprang from bank to bank—with a pole some say, and others declare without—the distance at the narrowest point being but 5⅔ yards.

It is impossible even for small boats to descend the stream at this point without being gradually let down by stout ropes, fastened to gibbet-like posts fixed into the rocks; the cargo, of course, whether live or otherwise, being first removed. But the old German topographer, Merian, who wrote in 1642, speaks of the practice of crossing the river in small boats at this part, as being by no means uncommon in his day; he adds, however, that summer is a dangerous season for making the attempt—owing to the stream being fuller at that period from the melting of the Alpine snows. Certain it is that a young English nobleman (Lord Montague, and the last of his line) was drowned here while descending the rapids in a skiff—even with a rope attached to it and guided from the bank—and that, by a curious coincidence, on the same day as his country seat in Sussex was burnt to the ground.

Laufenburg itself is but a poor place, with merely 900 inhabitants. It was formerly the second of the "forest towns" on the left bank of the river—the other two (Seckingen and Waldshut) lying in the territory of Baden, on the opposite shore.

Here, in ancient times, stood an old castle—the castle of "Oftring"—that belonged to the Hapsburg-Stauffenbergs, a younger branch of the reigning house of Austria. Its ruined square turret is now all that remains of the building. You can see it (*vide* engraving), perched on the hill-side, just behind the tall tower of the *Pfarr-kirche* (parish-church), and with the fir-tree sprouting from the top of it—like a broom put up at the mast-head of a ship for sale.

The little town is divided, as usual, into two opposite moieties, rejoicing in the names of *Grosse* (!) and *Klein*. The mud-walled houses are all squeezed up together (like sheep under a bank in a storm), the great half on one shore and the little half on the other.

BLB BADISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK Baden-Württemberg

In true Rhenish fashion, even this old ricketty place has its fortress-gates by which to enter the "city." You can just distinguish the belfry-capped roof of the "*Pforte*" in the picture, rising above the little crowd of slates on the side of the church next the Rhine. The diligence passes under the narrow archway (no bigger than a country church-door) of this gate, whose walls are still flanked with the remains of "rondels," and brings us to a small triangular "Platz" (we suppose we must call it so), where it draws up in front of the Post Inn to change horses.

From this part of the town, a longish narrow lane—the "Haupt-Strasse" of the place, and not unlike our Holywell Street on a Sunday—stretches down to the Rhine bridge, a crazy old thing, half-covered and half-open, and the covered part not unlike the long low sheds that boat-builders are wont to work in.

Looking up the stream, the river is seen flowing, or rather sliding along, in one broad sheet, dimpled all over with eddies, transparent and green as a plate of "*aqua marine;*" but, just before reaching the bridge, it contracts to one-fourth its size, and then comes rushing through the red grey rocks, that form, as it were, a rough and craggy pavement, the thick slanting flags or slabs of which seem to be thrust in end uppermost. Through this the deep torrent of the flood pours, like a stream of lather, with a loud buzz, curving along in its current, and running close under the walls of the houses, so that it is impossible to see many yards of its course. Along the banks here we found workmen busy cutting a tunnel through the solid stone of the hill, and cows dragging the wagons full of rubbish along the new railway lines.

Above this point not a thing was to be seen on the surface of the water, but below were two or three small punts and a little floor of a raft, destined to grow into a large island of

pine-stems before it reached the lower Rhine. The raft lay close in front of the forest on the bank, where the ground was littered with the long trunks of trees that had been recently felled—the axes of the wood-cutters flashing in the light between the stems as the coach rolled by—and where, as usual, we saw the customs officer, in his deep-caped cloak, seated officially on a neighbouring log, and smoking his china-bowled pipe in fine governmental ease.

---

§ 3.

Customs at Birth—"Wickel-kind"-hood—Feeling between Father and Son—"Clanship."

The Prussian customs at the time of birth have but little peculiar about them.

The announcement of the event, however, is usually made in so different a manner from that in which *we* give publicity to an increase in a family, that we will once more take an extract from the German newspapers.

Here, for instance, is a curious (and not particularly delicate) outburst of paternal pride:—

Early to-day my dear wife, Elizabeth M., born S——, after a happy and easy delivery, delighted me with a lively and strong boy, which I do myself the honour to announce to my distant friends and acquaintances.

Cöln, this 12th February, 1855.

Wilhelm M——,
Assistant at the Royal Post.