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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-Eglisau

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Visual Library

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(11.)

EGLISAU.

After leaving Laufenburg, the road still continues beside the Rhine, of which we catch occasional peeps, passing by the way the last of the four forest towns, Waldshut, which stands on the skirts of the Black Forest on the opposite Rhine shore. This town consists of a longish cluster of cottage walls, with a large white pedimented dwelling at the back, and perched on the top of a green shelving bank close beside the water. It was formerly a place of considerable importance, but in the 15th century was besieged by the Swiss Confederates, and now contains barely 1000 inhabitants.

A mile beyond this we come to the point of confluence of the *Aar* with the Rhine, where the waters of four Swiss lakes are mingled; for the Aar itself comes from the Lake of Thun, and is joined a few miles above where it flows into the Rhine, not only by the waters of the *Reus*, carrying down the current from the Lake of Lucerne, but by those of the river *Limmat*, which is the outlet to the Lake of Zurich—whilst the Rhine itself brings with it the flood from the Lake of Constanz.

Here the diligence crosses the Aar in a broad platformed boat, which serves for the ferry, and immediately afterwards we pass the little Coblenz, or "*Confluentia*" of the Upper Rhine. In rainy weather it is said that it is possible to distinguish the waters of these different outlets to the lakes as they mingle with the Rhine, for the Rhenish flood is here even greener than ever, being now the very tint of the brightest crystals of copperas; and as the muddier waters of the Aar pour

into it, you can see it mottled like a sheet of polished malachite, and streaked with the yellow and red-brown veins of the mingled lake waters. The Aar, indeed, is as broad as the Rhine itself, which has now increased in width to the breadth of a moderate field.

A few moments more and the horses' hoofs clatter through the village of *Zurzach*, the long desolate streets resounding, almost with a startling effect, with the rattle of the wheels. Here the streets, that are channeled with covered runlets as at Freiburg, consist of one interminable line of shops; but what is most peculiar and striking, not *one* of these "*magazins*" is open, though it is long past noon; all have their black shutters up, and yet it is neither fête, nor fast-day, nor yet the Sabbath. It seems as if the plague were raging in the town, or as if you had reached the "sleeping city" of romance, or—what is more common in these enlightened days—as if the people, in alarm at some prophecy touching the coming destruction of the world, had all run away to some other quarter.

What can be the cause of the deserted state of the village? you ask. Your wonder is soon stopped, however, by being informed that this is the great site of the Swiss fairs (that of Zurzach being the most important of all the commercial gatherings throughout the Cantons), and that the shops of the town are opened only once in the year—and then but for fifteen days—the merchants, who mostly deal in leather and skins, coming from great distances, and some hiring the *magazins*, while others own them and pay rent all the year through. At the period of our visit, the only shops open were the post-office and an establishment for the sale of pipes, though the wonder was how even the solitary snuff-and-tobacco merchant could manage to find customers in such a place.

Beyond Zurzach, the post-road still lies close beside the

Rhine, of which we continue to obtain, as it twists and turns in its course among a perfect amphitheatre of hills, occasional glimpses, flowing between the steep green slopes of its escarped and moat-like channel, broad as a wide street, and green as the vineyards striping its banks.

A few miles farther, and we arrive at the town of Eglisau. As the diligence winds zigzag down the hill on the opposite side of the river to that on which the village stands, the view is pretty enough of the two long lines of houses perched one above the other on the shelving river banks—with the terraced or quai-like roadway stretching at its base, and the tall houses next the river looking as lanky as storks, and giving you a notion—like the old houses in the Cannongate in Edinburgh—of the parlours and kitchens being some four or five storeys high—and with the white walls, too, glittering like so much snow in the sun, and making the green flood immediately below them almost like milk. Then the covered bridge reaching from shore to shore seems as you look down upon it like a long rude Noah's Ark, resting on the almost emerald water that still flows through a sloping channel, the banks of which, as reflected in the stream, are hardly greener than the tide itself.

The hills round about are finely humped and rounded like camels' backs, their summits brown with the red of the autumnal oaks, and their sides here and there loosely girt with a delicate scarf of white mist. As we slide down towards the town—with the horses almost on their haunches—we come to the gate-tower, and then passing the small "*poste bureau*," with a white cross painted on its red sign of a shield without, we enter the long, dark, wooden tube of the bridge,—a covered way that, with its huge timbers at the side and rafters overhead, and with the light streaming in at the portholes along the

sides, is exactly like the lower deck of a ship, and gives one the notion, as the horses' feet tramp on the boards with the same hollow sound as they do on the stage of a theatre, that we are travelling in a mail-coach from end to end of the "*orlop*" of the "Great Eastern."

Then, as the diligence darts into the light at the other extremity, the sunbeams flash in the eyes with the same blinding brilliance as they do when issuing from a railway-tunnel, and the horses begin to labour up the equally steep hill on the opposite shore—the village dwindling and dwindling below as the vehicle ascends.

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§ 4.

Customs at Death—German Cemeteries—Death-Omens—Death-Sacraments—Death-Bills—Fear of being Buried Alive—Funerals—and Time of Mourning.

A country churchyard in England, with its long rank grass, half-hiding the heavy stone tablets on the ground—with its dilapidated and tumble-down headstones, to graves that are barely a score of years old—would lead the foreigner to conclude that we were a nation that cared but little for our dead; whereas the trim garden-like character of a Parisian cemetery, where every grave is a flower-bed—and where you see the toys of the lost children enshrined in glass-cases at the head of their little tombs—where you can tell, too, by the different tints of the wreaths of "*immortelles*," (passing by gentle gradations, from the bright yellow chaplet of almost