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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

§ 1. The Intellectual Condition-Konwledge of Latin and Greek-Scientific Ignorance-Teutonic Savants-Worldly Stupidity-Want of Scientific Appliances-a German Fire-a Philo-Cockchafer

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have risen up amid the booming, as though it were the smoke veiling some vast elemental war.

The arrangement of the rocks of Switzerland teaches us beyond the shadow of a doubt that the very Alps themselves are comparatively creations of our own period, and we are thus led to conceive the time when the Rhine was *not*—to imagine the days when the solid earth, tossed and heaved in billows like the sea, till the very impress of the monster land-waves became fixed in the mountain chains themselves; and thus to think of the melting of the first Alpine snows, which called the Rhine into existence, and caused the new-born river to trickle across the land. Here, too, in the Falls, we see written in the water the story of some equally vast, though more modern convulsion.

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§ 1.

THE INTELLECTUAL CONDITION — KNOWLEDGE OF LATIN AND GREEK — SCIENTIFIC IGNORANCE — TEUTONIC SAVANTS — WORLDLY STUPIDITY — WANT OF SCIENTIFIC APPLIANCES — A GERMAN FIRE — A PHILO-COCKCHAFER.

"Every baker in Germany," said that Manchester Solon, Mr. Cobden, "can serve you with bread in Latin, as well as in his own language."

Now this was intended to give the English people a sense of the high state of education prevalent throughout Germany; and doubtlessly, to a man of Mr. Cobden's calibre, a knowledge of Latin and Greek appears (as with all vulgar people, who have failed to learn the classics in their youth) to constitute the very climax of wisdom.

The statement is, however, simply untrue. "*Salve,*

magister," we said to the Deutscher who brought our batch of "*milch brodchens*" (milk breadlets) on the morning after reading the Manchester exaggeration.

The "*Bäcker*" threw up his floury eyebrows and shook his head, as he answered, "*Ich verstehe nicht Englische*,"—(I do not understand English).

Moreover, when we spoke to the Germans themselves as to the classical acquirements of their butchers and bakers, they laughed, and replied that Herr Cobden had said as much only because he had been soundly rated in the Cöln and other papers for his abuse of the Germans, in his speech about the Foreign Legion.

Nevertheless, there is doubtlessly a greater waste of time in German schools upon languages that the lads will never, perhaps, have occasion to use in after-life, than there is in English academies. Many a German youth, who has bothered his brains till he could write a theme in Greek with almost the same fluency as in his native tongue, settles down in life as a clerk in a post-office perhaps, or shopman to a dry-salter, or some equally classical occupation.

We ourselves wasted seven of the best years of our life at Westminster School, where we were not even taught our own language, nor even writing nor reckoning, but bored to death simply with the dead tongues; and in proof of the advantages derivable from such a system of education we can safely say, that by the time our whiskers had begun to sprout, and we were sent into the world to get our living out of the elements by which we were surrounded, we were in the same beastly ignorance as any Carib—not only of the physical world about us, but of our own natures and our fellow-creatures, as well as of all that was right, true, beautiful, or indeed noble in life.

When Latin constituted the universal language, as it

were, of the learned world, and when books were written *only* in that tongue, to be ignorant of it was to be incapable of holding communion with the wisest minds. When, too, the New Testament was to be read merely in the original Greek, and it was therefore necessary for those who were not Grecian scholars to obtain their only knowledge of the doctrines through the interpretation of priests and monks, a knowledge of that language became almost essential to every one desiring to be either wise or good.

But surely such a state of things has long since passed away, and these same dead tongues come to be mere intellectual fopperies—the flashy ornaments with which learned dandies like bedizen their minds; even as some personally vain fool thinks it a bit of glory to have his fingers and shirt-front tricked out with jewels.

Now, as we have said before, you see in Prussia the same state of things as existed in our country about a century back; and as English people were classically mad many years ago, when the Porsons, the Bentleys, and the Parrs, constituted the great literary prodigies, so you find the Germans to this day exulting in the full vigour of the antiquated tomfoolery.

"Oh, you really *must* be introduced to the Herr von Sägespäne," said a German friend of ours, "for he has written nineteen volumes upon the antiquities of Coblenz alone."

Such is the Prussian *beau idéal* of literary excellence. But so far was it from ours, that when we had got to know the above-mentioned old fogie by sight we always, immediately we saw him coming towards us, rushed down the first turning as precipitately as if the learned antiquary had been a mad bull, for fear that some of our friends might be sufficiently spiteful to introduce us to what Carlyle

would certainly have styled the "Windbag." During the latter part of our stay in Coblenz, too, we lived in dread of having two or three of the antiquary's nineteen cart-loads of old rubbish shot into our minds.

The reader must not misunderstand us in our banter, for we would not have it thought that we hold it waste of time to acquire a knowledge of the past. All we wish to imply is that such matters should be the *appendices* to education, and not made to constitute the entire text-book itself.

It seems to us, as indeed we said years ago, that a man's true sphere of action lies in the future, and that he should be so educated as to have his mind continually turned in that direction, and taught how to infer from present phenomena events to come; for as all happiness is either of a physical, intellectual, or moral character (and education is of use only as a means of promoting the happiness of the being himself, or those among whom his life is to be passed), so really good schooling appears to us to consist in teaching the future man the laws of the physical, intellectual, and moral universe surrounding him; and thus to give him power, not only over the elements of material nature, but over the minds of his fellow-creatures as well, and, moreover, over those propensities and passions of his own heart, without the ability to govern which he is but little removed from the animals about him. In a word, we would have the youth instructed in all kinds of scientific knowledge, and trained, also, to a perception of the beautiful, by the study of the various arts in connexion with it; and, further, inspired with a fervent love of all that is good and noble, not only by the continual contemplation of the lives and acts of those who have constituted the best, and kindliest of our race, but by infusing into his heart such a

pervading sense of all that was done and said by the great Teacher, that the Saviour's precepts should constitute his mainsprings of action, and the Saviour's life the bright example by which his own should be shaped.

This is what appears to us should form the body and bones of education, and compared with which surely the pedantry of languages, and even the fripperies of grammar and the display of accomplishments, are pure vanity. The one deals with things, and men, and acts, and the other with merely words and books. The one seeks to breed wisdom and goodness, while the other tends to foster only learning and prejudice.

Measured, then, by such a standard as the above, the German classical studies dwindle into the purest frivolity.

In the report of the British Association concerning the means of improving the position of science and its cultivators in England, Sir Charles Lyell contrasts the state of Germany with that of our own nation, with reference to the teaching of physical truths. He says, "In Germany, not only in cities where there are universities—but almost everywhere in places where there exists a school of considerable size, for boys under the usual university age—there is at least one teacher to be found whose business it is specially to give instruction in Natural Philosophy and Natural History, and who has charge of a collection of natural objects. Frequently," he adds, "these masters are so much devoted to some one of the branches which they teach as to be authors of original papers in scientific periodicals."

The above observations are upon a level with those of Mr. Cobden, as regards the *strict truth*.

Sir Charles doubtlessly made a rapid tour through the country, and, being a scientific celebrity, saw chiefly the

scientific society whenever he became the guest of a native in any German town. Finding, therefore, all the company to be, like himself, possessed of considerable scientific acquirements, and little dreaming that the assembly of all the wise heads in the place had been gathered together under one roof, in order to meet the London *savant*, he came to the conclusion that there was a general cultivation of "Wissenschaft" throughout Deutschland.

Now we have lived for many long months in the capital of the Rhenish provinces, and though the town contains more than 20,000 inhabitants, the whole of the *savans* comprised in it can easily be stowed in a small back-parlour. Nor does the place boast any museum, or collection of paintings, or public library, or Mechanics' Institute, or, indeed, any establishment of any kind for the teaching of scientific knowledge to the people. And yet it is the permanent residence of the Crown Prince, and often the temporary one of the King himself: so that there would be no lack of patronage for such appliances, if there were any disposition on the part of the people for the foundation of them.

True, there is at the Gymnasium (which is about equivalent to one of our grammar-schools) a professor of Natural Philosophy, to instruct the boys upon Mechanics, &c.; and again, at the Protestant School, there is a gentleman, who is perhaps the most eminent follower of science in all the town, for the teaching of botany to the children; and, moreover, at the other schools there may be an occasional exhibition of a solar microscope by some travelling possessor of such an instrument. But this, we believe, in all honesty, makes up the entire machinery for scientific teaching extant in the capital of the Rhenish provinces,—the more learned professors at the schools being about equivalent in talent and

status to those gentlemen who teach chemistry and astronomy now-a-days at the greater proportion of our own seminaries.

Moreover, so that we might do the people no injustice, we attended a grand meeting of the united "Wissenschaft" at Coblenz, in a back-room at one of the hotels. Here the entire congregation consisted of not more than two score people; and among the number were some dozen officers, who, having dropped in merely to kill the time, were not long in falling asleep, and then amused the company by snoring through the lectures. At this meeting we heard a paper read upon "drinking water" by one of the physicians of the town, and in which an attempt was made to prove that the *goître*, so prevalent in the districts, was due to a deficiency of carbonate of lime in the fluid (!); we heard, too, a lecture on the formation of the "Laager See;" as well as a brief exposition of the principle of complementary colours, illustrated by pieces of tinted paper.

Surely none of these matters tend to bear out Sir Charles Lyell's assertion as to the superior machinery existing throughout Germany for the dissemination of scientific knowledge; especially as there is hardly a town in England without a Mechanics' Institute, boasting its library and classes, and bi-weekly lectures, all purposely designed for the teaching of persons engaged in commerce or handicrafts, and whereat the lectures delivered would certainly bear comparison with the papers read at the United Wissenschaft of Coblenz.

Further, judging by the utter ignorance of all the middle-class Germans with whom we were acquainted as to the commonest scientific truths, there is assuredly no comparison between the people of England and those of Prussia upon such matters.

"Ah! you Englishmen all know something of science,"

said a Coblenz *savant* to a friend of ours, so as to mark the difference between the acquirements of our countrymen and his own. The German, too, was as well fitted as Sir Charles to speak upon such matters, for he was a regular attendant at the meetings of our British Association.

But not only had we an opportunity of judging of the *general* attainments of the Rhenish people, in this respect, from the meetings of the United Wissenschaft of the Capital; but during our stay in Coblenz an English scientific gentleman, well known throughout Germany, not only for the elegance and lucid character of his experiments, but also for the beauty and completeness of his illustrative models and machinery, visited the town to lecture on the subject of Static and Voltaic Electricity; and though it was generally admitted that such apparatus had never before been seen by the Coblenzers—and many even of the *savans* had never set eyes on a galvanic battery in all their lives—few of the people, or indeed of the "learned professors," thought it worth even five groschens (6*d.*) to be enlightened on the subject.

So ignorant, too, was the principal analytic chemist of the Rhenish capital concerning all that was shown on the occasion, that he did not scruple to take drawings of every instrument shown; and we ourselves had to pay for a Herr Lehrer before we could prevail upon him to witness the exhibition.

"I would rather have my '*Flasche*' of vine than five groschens pay for all the '*Electriticät*' and '*Galvanismus*' in the velt," said the refined and wise German, on being pressed to visit the place.

Further, we may add, that the chief analyst of the town had so little knowledge of the names of those English chemists to whom the world is indebted for the principal discoveries in that branch of science, that though one side of his room was

covered with portraits of LIEBIG and BERZELIUS, MISTERLICH and ROSE, and LAVOISIER and BERTHOLLET, and DUMAS—and, indeed, every foreigner who had added the least mite to the chemical knowledge-fund—yet not one British face ornamented his walls.

But "surely," said we to the Doctor, "PRIESTLEY, the discoverer of oxygen, is worthy of a place among the others—and BLACK, the discoverer of 'latent heat'—and CAVENDISH, too, he who first resolved water into two gases—and WOLLASTON, who originally taught metallurgists how platinum could be wrought—and DAVY again, who added more, perhaps, to chemical philosophy than any *one* mind that ever lived; DAVY, the discoverer of the alkaligenous and terrigenous metals; DAVY, who demonstrated chlorine to be an element, and thus deepened our insight into the affinities of things to an extent that chemists alone can appreciate—and DALTON, to whom we owe the atomic theory, a theory that has been as valuable to chemistry as that of gravitation to astronomy—and last, though certainly not least, FARADAY, the discoverer of 'magneto-electricity,' whose *Experimental Researches* have poured such a flood of light upon the subject, that all who have a reverence for the great wisdom-teachers of the world cannot but entertain a worshipful feeling for one to whom they owe so much knowledge and so much happiness."

But let us put the scientific attainments of the Rhenish people to a *practical* test. Do not let us deal with scientific *persons* but with scientific *things*, for if there be a greater knowledge of natural philosophy among the Germans than with us, we shall, of course, find in Deutschland a greater application of it than in England, to the purposes of everyday life.

Now, in a preceding volume we have informed the reader that a "bridge of boats," as it is called, constitutes at Coblenz

the only communication between the two opposite banks of the Rhine. This bridge of boats consists of some thirty odd old barges, about as elegant in construction as the vessels which carry our coals along the Thames, whilst the gangway over them is formed of rude and shaky planks resting on the gunwales of the craft.

Surely such a construction cannot be cited as an overpowering evidence of engineering skill? But when the reader hears that this same boat-bridge has positively to be pulled to pieces each time a lighter or steamboat goes by the town, and that the traffic between the opposite shores is often thus delayed, for half-an-hour in the summer time, whilst in the winter—previous to the frost setting in—the barges have to be removed altogether, so that it frequently occurs that all communication is cut off for weeks between people but a few hundred yards apart— when an Englishman, we say, is told this, he will not be very long in making up his mind as to the scientific acquirements of a country in which such a state of things is tolerated. Neither can it be urged that the bridge of platformed barges is necessitated by the masses of ice that descend the river in winter, for the same rude contrivance still exists at Cöln, which is the principal merchant-town of the Rhine.* And, even if it were impossible to build a stone bridge from such a cause, a suspension one could not be open to the like objection; besides, there is our own grand construction over the Menai Straits for the inert Deutschers to copy.

Be assured, then, reader, that the most distinctive feature of the ordinary Prussian mind is its *utter ignorance upon all scientific matters.* Granted there are great and brilliant ex-

* While we are writing, the King of Prussia is just going to lay the foundation-stone of a permanent bridge at that town. Oct. 1st, 1855.

ceptions among the people, but LIEBIG, and SCHÖNBEIN, and ARGELANDER, and BESSEL are no more types of the ordinary intellect of Germany than all Englishmen are SHAKSPEARES, or NEWTONS, or HERSCHELS in mind.

While we write, for example, there crawls past our window the same ox-wagon as the people used when the Romans were

OX-WAGON AT PRESENT USED IN GERMANY.

ANCIENT ROMAN PLAUSTRUM (*copied from a bas-relief at Rome*).

here teaching them the arts of civilised life; and if we walked down to the Rhine we should see the very same rude, square-bowed boats that Germanicus originally taught them to build —now nearly 1800 years ago! Their ploughs, too, remain to this day the models of the old Roman "*aratra;*" and even the "*Haar-nadels*" and "*Runde-mütze's*" worn by the peasant-women on the banks of the Middle-Rhine are merely the

remains of the old Roman fashions — as witness the subjoined engravings..

ROMAN "ACUS"
(*from an engraving given in Montfaucon*).

GRECIAN "MITRA"
(*copied from an ancient vase*).

Hence, with the Rhenish people, the world seems to have stood still since the time of Tiberius, or at least, Charlemagne.

"But have the Coblenz people no gas in their streets?" it may be asked. "Yes, they have," is the reply; "but a Frenchman manufactures it for them."

"Have they no steam-engines?" "Certainly; but they are all constructed in England."

Their steam-vessels are built by English shipwrights. Their railways, again, are cut by English navigators, and managed by English directors; their mines are almost all worked by Englishmen; and Englishmen, too, are mostly at the head of their factories.

Indeed, the German mind is naturally so slow, and the people so innately averse to any land-conveyance that travels at a quicker pace than an aged cow, or to any vessel that cuts through the water at a more rapid rate than a Dutch "*trek-schuit*," that at the last Revolution the populace fired at the steam-tugs as they passed up the Rhine, and we were credibly assured, that should another such outbreak take place, every engine in the land would be destroyed.

Now, did you ever happen, sapient reader — we suppose

we must call you so—to see a fire in any of the German towns? Were you ever roused from your slumbers in the dead of the night by the "*Nacht-wacht*" who sits perched up in the church-steeple, bellowing with his horn through the air like some spectral bull? Did you ever hear the watchman, who ordinarily whistles the hour through the streets at night time, roar "*heraus*," as he banged at the shutters of all the houses in the street?—for in this most scientific country there are neither knockers nor bells to the doors; no! nor any fire-brigade connected with the town—every citizen being compelled by law to assist at the extinction of the flames.

Did you ever, at such a time, hasten to the burning house, and witness the *wonderful* scientific attainments of these highly-educated Deutschers? Have you seen them, as we have, bring the water in barrels from the river-side?—the nation of *savans* having neither mains in the street nor cisterns in the houses? Have you ever heard of whole towns being destroyed owing to the defective appliances throughout Germany upon these matters—as well as the utter ignorance of the people where to throw the thimblesful of water that they bring, one by one, to the spot? Did you ever read that it was an English engineer (Mr. Lindley) who extinguished the great fire at Hamburg, after the poor, simple Germans, had let it burn on for three days and nights, destroying nearly 2000 houses and upwards of 60 streets?

Let us add, too, that at the time the Coblenz prison was on fire, it was the English chaplain who stayed the ravages of the flames, as was testified by the public thanks of the town voted him in consequence. And we ourselves have been forced to show these wiseacres how to act on a similar occasion.

In fine it may be said, without injustice to the nation, that the peculiar complexion of the German mind is of that childish

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or simpletonic quality which English young gentlemen delight to denominate as "verdant," and that often their acknowledged *savans* devote their whole lives to the study of the most frivolous subjects.

Once we were introduced to a German *Weiser*, who, a Teutonic friend assured us, bore a high reputation in the Rhenish provinces. We naturally begged to be informed to what point of science he directed his attention. Was it Astronomy, we wondered, by which he sought to fathom the infinite ocean of space? Or was it Geology that he studied, in order to read the wondrous story of creation graven on the everlasting tablets of the rocks? Or was it Physiology that he was striving to unriddle, so as to get even a glimpse into the profound mysteries of life and organism? or Chemistry? or Mechanics? or Botany?

No! it was none of these. Neither the stars, nor the rocks, nor the flowers, nor human life interested him: only—*Cockchafers!*

He was, we were assured, the greatest "*Coleopterist*"—or rather cockchaferist, in all the world.

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(14.)

THE LAKE OF CONSTANZ AND ISLANDS OF MAINAU AND REICHENAU.

The Lake of Constanz (Germ. *Boden See*) and the Lake of Leman are the two frontier-lakes of Switzerland, and that of Constanz performs for the Rhine the same process of filtration as that of Leman effects for the Rhone. The Rhine