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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 Scene-The city of Constanz

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originally conceived, and yet where the invention has done less for the elevation of the great body of the people than in any other part of civilised Europe;—Germany, where not only printing was born, but where, as if to make the glory all its own, the steam-press was first designed, and yet where hardly one such press is to be found throughout the entire length and breadth of the land;—Germany, where the "*Polizei Director*" is still the virtual editor of each newspaper, where the literary class have hardly yet risen above the dignity or boldness of the court-fool, and upon whose people the inventions of their own great countrymen, Gütenberg and König, have been comparatively wasted.*

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(15.)

THE CITY OF CONSTANZ.

The pier of Constanz, from which the accompanying view is taken, has lately been built by the Government, "at a large expense," say the guide-books; for Constanz being situate at the lower end of the lake to which it lends its name, is the principal port for the merchandise of the towns bordering the *Boden See*.

The pier itself reminds one somewhat of Ramsgate, having

* During our stay at one of the Rhenish hotels, at the time of Lord Lyndhurst's bitter speech against the Government of Prussia, the police entered the *saal*, and seized every newspaper, foreign or English, that contained a single paragraph in connexion with his lordship's exposure of the dishonesty of the Prussian government.

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a long curved arm, with a little lighthouse at the end, stretching far before the town. Here in the *Hafen* lie the Constanz steamers, the "HELVETIA," and "BODEN," and "FRIEDRICH," and "STADT CONSTANZ," and others, that are daily engaged in traversing the lake or descending the Rhine to Schaffhausen. Within the harbour are one or two hoys, rigged like the Boulogne fishing-boats, and from the hold of one of these they are now hoisting up furniture on to the quay, which is already littered with tables, cupboards, bedsteads, and chairs.

At the end of the haven by the shore, stands the temporary shed of the steam-boat office, and close beside it the little guard-house-like Custom-house.*

The first impression of Constanz obtained from this point of sight gives one the notion of its being a busy little town, with somewhat the character of our own watering-places; while the immense old palatial-looking building facing the harbour, with its tall dark roof, and peculiar deep valance of wood hanging straight under its eaves, has a half-imposing effect; though for a long time the stranger is puzzled to tell whether it is an enormous Swiss barn, a town-hall, or a warehouse. It turns out, however, to be the old *Consilium's Saal* in which

* Constanz is, despite the dulness of its streets, an agreeable-enough halting-place—owing to the excellent quarters afforded by the "*Hôtel du Brochet*" (German, *Gasthof zum Hecht*)—while making excursions round the lake. Indeed, the Brochet is one of the pleasantest and most reasonable Gasthofs in all Germany, and the attention and civility of the landlord, Herr Kepler, as well as his general intelligence, render it an excellent home for the time being. Herr Kepler, moreover, is an expert angler; indeed, you no sooner set foot in his *salle à manger* than you become acquainted with the tastes of the landlord, for the room is hung round with engravings of the several classes of fish, as well as large paintings of monster pike and trout caught by mine host himself. Here we stayed nearly a month, and experienced so much courtesy, as well as derived so much information from the landlord, that, dull as the town might be, we found the hotel so lively and comfortable that we were loth to leave it.

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John Huss was tried; and is, indeed, one of the most interesting objects in the place.

The open-work spire towering in the distance (*vide* steel-engraving), with the squat bulbous-tipped towers on either side of it, is that of the Constanz Münster; whilst the low, long building at the extreme corner of the picture, is the old Dominican Monastery where Huss was imprisoned, and the remains of his dungeon are still to be seen.

It is the past life of Constanz, indeed, that makes up its present interest to English minds; but this part of the subject we shall treat under a distinct head.

Suffice it for the present to say, that Constanz is considered to have derived its name from its founder, the Roman Emperor Constantius Chlorus, father of Constantine the Great and husband of that remarkably wonderful old lady St. Helena, who, after her husband's death at York, discovered, we are told, the Holy Cross, and founded half the Cathedrals in Germany after her death! (See p. 344.) Before the time of Constantius, however, the Romans had constructed a fortress named Valeria, but this having been destroyed by the peasants in the neighbourhood, Constantius Chlorus not only rebuilt the stronghold, but surrounded it with a town, to which he gave his name, and which soon rose to a high degree of splendour.

From the time of the foundation of the city, Constanz attained great celebrity in the records of the Christian Church.

In the middle ages it was raised to the rank of an Imperial city, and its prosperity continued to increase up to the period of the famous Council, which forms at once the most important and the darkest page in its history. After which its glory began to fade rapidly, and it now serves only to increase the list of worn-out "Holy Cities;" for the same story has to be

told of this *Dom-Stadt* as of all the other Romish Cathedral-towns bordering the Rhine.

The great river begins its ecclesiastical tale at Köln (a tale full of vain attempts to struggle against the Christian Revolution, and to revive the priestly glories of past times), and ends its wretched history at Constanz. The mason's chisel, chipping away at new towers or fresh choirs, rings in the ear, as we have said, at every ancient basilic city that we visit along the Rhine shores; and here, as usual, the same impotent work goes on. The civic chronicles, too, speak only of a like decay in the commerce and industry of the place, telling how the town at one time numbered some 40,000 souls within its walls, and how, at the present hour, it can boast but little more than one-eighth of its former population; while the streets themselves, that are now deserted almost as a city of the plague, form a melancholy contrast with the accounts of its ancient trade, and with even the horde of beggars that formerly swarmed about its colony of convents.

Indeed, the chief town of the Boden-See (as the Germans style the Lake of Constanz) is but a mere civic wreck—a capital that no more belongs to the present time than do the exhumed ruins of Pompeii. Its silent and idle thoroughfares would lead one to believe that it was the sleeping city of romance, the people themselves seeming to be hardly yet wide-awake, or fairly roused out of their mediæval slumber. The very sight of its antiquated chandler-like shops gives the place a half-fossil look, as if it were some Megatherium Hauptstadt that had just been dug out of antediluvian deposits, while the natives have the same lively air as if they had been for centuries immured, like toads, in rocks.

Many of the buildings of Constanz, we are told, remain unaltered since the fifteenth century; but these, unlike the

houses at Schaffhausen, have all the cumbrous inconveniences of past architecture, without any of its beauty,—being mere things of cobwebs and dry-rot, and utterly wanting the quaint grace of old-fashioned forms.

The streets, which are narrow as a Scotch wynd, and close as the Jews' Quarter at Frankfort, twist about like a river, and are paved with big shingles, that surely *must* be petrified potatoes, over which we walk as pleasantly as we should upon a bed of small cannon-balls. Not a cart, nor scarcely an ox-wagon, interrupts your stroll in the road, and you meet as few people by the way as you do in an English country town during church hours on a Sunday.

The places of business here are of the most primitive and unostentatious character. The baker, for instance, writes the price of bread with chalk on a slate that dangles outside the door, and serves his customers with the *Brödchens* through an open pane in his parlour window. The butcher's shop is wired all over in front, and you can just see in the darkness one or two scraps of meat hanging at the back. Not a fruiterer's, fishmonger's, poulterer's, nor even pastrycook's, is to be found in the place; nor do we remember to have seen a milliner's or tailor's establishment within the city walls—though we stopped nearly a month in the town, and trudged over every inch of the paving. Even the bookseller's, one had to hunt for, as diligently as boys are wont to do after the plums in a school-pudding; and here we found a case of matted sticks of sealing-wax and limp "*colle à bouche*" fixed against the door-post. The *Mode-waaren Handlung* (haberdasher's) was the only trade that could boast a regular shop-front; and even this had a sash full of panes hardly bigger than sheets of letter-paper. The sole business that seemed to thrive was the publican's, for every sixth house was a *Weinwirthschaft* or a *Bierbrauerei*, or else a *Gasthaus*, or a *Caffé u. Restauration*.

Round about the town there was, of course, the usual belt of old ricketty rampart-walls and dried-up moats, set at intervals with roofless watch-towers, rotten drawbridges, and city-gates falling from their hinges; whilst in front of every one of these a dapper little Baden soldier was to be seen pacing up and down, restless as a caged hyena, near his red-and-yellow-striped sentry-box — waiting anxiously, we suppose, for the Quixotic general, who was to come and sack the mouldy old place.

But though there seemed to be little or nothing doing within the town, still you were sure to find posted at each of the city-gates a couple of big-cloaked and heavy-piped customs' officers, intent on interfering and stopping even the little business that went on; and we can vouch for the interest the officials took in their work, for we ourselves saw them turn two infants out of a child's chaise, so as to be sure that the "go-cart" was not made a vehicle for smuggling.

Were it not for the morning patrol of milk-women, with their huge churn-like vessels strapped to their backs, or else with their monster tin-cans slung on a kind of velocipede, and wheeled before them through the streets; were it not, too, for one or two straggling hawkers of "new wine," with their carts laden with hogsheads that are ornamented with bunches of flowers at the bung-hole; and now and then a stray peep at a watchmaker at work in some peddling jeweller's shop window, —were it not for such rare sights as these, we repeat, the visitor would really imagine that Constanz was another Zurzach, and that no business was transacted in the city out of the fair time.

This same new wine, by the by, requires a word or two from us, it being unknown in England. It is a decoction that, to look at, has much the appearance of "Soyer's Nectar,"

or, what amounts to the same thing, a dilute infusion of rose hair-oil—or, better still, a mixture of raspberry cream and water. It tastes exactly like crude ginger-beer, feeling somewhat prickly or sharp to the tongue, especially when beginning to "work." To be candid, it was far from pleasant —not to say nasty; for though the Germans called it sweet, it was to us precisely like so much "penny pop" in a state of violent ferment—not having the least flavour of grapes or wine about it. It is sold at about six *kreutzers* (twopence) the quart, and is drunk by the people at vintage time in all the beer and wine-houses; for it seems to be highly esteemed by the peasants. At this season, too, you see casks of the "*neu Wein*" rolled on board the steamers as you ascend or descend the Rhine,—such casks being closed merely with wisps of straw at the bung-holes (for corks could not be kept in them); and as the straw is pulled out after the barrels have been ranged on the deck, the gas rushes from the vents like the spluttering of a liberated soda-water cork in the dog-days.

The Rhine-bridge at Constanz is somewhat peculiar, being bordered with mills along one side of it, and covered over for half its length. At the Constanz end stands a huge city gateway, similar to those about the rampart walls; and on one side, as you enter the broad-covered way, there is a small cabin-like lodge, where you have to pay some couple of kreutzers at your two or three first visits, after which (as you are politely informed by the toll-mistress) you are free of the thoroughfare for life.

The covered part of the bridge is like a long loft, with the rafters and backs of the tiles showing overhead. The side towards the lake is open, whilst on the other side, towards Schaffhausen, the gangway is flanked by a series

of flour and saw-mills. Here the place seems to vibrate with the throbbing of the water-wheels at work between the piers below, and the clatter of the machinery above; whilst there is a kind of mixed smell of new bread and turpentine from the sacks of flour and sawdust hard by. Before the mill-doors, too, stand wagons with sides like plate-racks, and with the unyoked oxen feeding in front of them, as they wait for their load. Here dusty-haired millers are seen lolling out of the square window-holes, and the pathway is littered with huge trunks of trees, sliced three parts down into planks, and looking like immense fans, or logs divided into so many leaves.

Then, as the one wagon crawls by, you can feel the very piles and joists of the bridge totter again; and on your return the wind blows smartly down the long covered way, as if it were some ventilating shaft to the town.

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§ 2.

Of the Moral Creed of the Prussians — Duelling — Sense of Fair Play — Wellington and Blücher — English and Foreign Judges — Deficient Gentlemanly Feeling — Treatment of Poor and Servants.

That the Prussian people are not remarkable as a body for their wisdom — even though there be a greater amount of school-learning in the kingdom than in any other European state — none who have read the preceding articles can for a moment doubt. But if clear-headedness be not their *forte*, they are, perhaps, good-hearted, and are kindly and charitable to one another; and, moreover, impressed with so high a sense of