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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

§ 3. The Religious Creed of the Prussians-Religious Intolerance among Sects-Governmental Interference-Religious Hypocrisy-Confessional Spies-Religious Displays, &c.

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§ 3.

THE RELIGIOUS CREED OF THE PRUSSIANS—RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AMONG SECTS—GOVERNMENTAL INTERFERENCE—RELIGIOUS HYPOCRISY—CONFESSIONAL SPIES—RELIGIOUS DISPLAYS, ETC.

The London Exeter-Hall folk are possessed by two "vulgar errors" concerning Germany. The one is, that "philosophic infidelity" prevails among the greater portion of the people; and the other, that it is the land of toleration, where the members of the different creeds live in peace and charity among one another.

The Germans, assuredly, cannot be cited as a religious type of the zoological "happy family," where the Hebrew hawk roosts quietly on the same perch with the Moravian sparrow,—where the Catholic owl, that rejoices in the mediæval darkness, sits blinking meekly in the light of modern times, in association with the Protestant church-mouse,—and the Methodistical old crow caws amicably beside, instead of being continually pecking at, the Anabaptist water-wagtail. So far, too, from there being any laxity of religious zeal in Deutschland, we never lived in a country where the towns were more like monster porcupines, from the multiplicity of steeples, and never walked along streets garnished at the corners with more showy religious dolls, or more ghastly crucifixes; or where the thoroughfares were more frequently stopped by processions of squalling peasants, with a matronly-looking priest surrounded by banners at their head.

"They tell me dat dare a town in America is," said a German friend of ours, who had suffered not a little from the priestocracy of the country, "vare not one church exists. Oh,

dat is die place I should like to go to! Why, it must be like the Garten of Eten for die happiness of die people. Only tink," added he, "not one pfaffe, nor one parson, nor one preacher, as you Engländers call dem, to look after you, and take care dat you tink as dey do. Yes, dat must be the glücklichest spot in all die velt; for dare die people cannot abuse one another for being dark or double-faced; and I believe, if die great Lord vere to come again on earth, dat is die place he should go to."

Had the reader had the same experience as ourselves as to the extent of the brotherly love, as well as the amount of religious liberty, prevalent in Prussia, he would be able to find some excuse for the sentiments in the preceding speech. Had he heard, as we have, the German Protestants affirm that the Catholic Sisters of Charity, who wait upon the residents every month for alms for the poor, make a practice of putting the money in their own pockets; and that the nuns, who go round the market begging of each peasant woman for vegetables for the hospital soup, do so only that they may get a good dinner themselves,—had they known the Catholics, on the other hand, to declare that the "*Blankopfs*" (which is the popular name for the Lutherans) were a dark set of people, and had none but dismal-faced hypocrites among them,—were they aware, too, that throughout "tolerant" Germany there are Catholic and Protestant butchers, and bakers, and grocers, and that one who belongs to the "*Evangelische*" portion of the community would never think of buying even so much as a "*Wasser-brödchen*" (water-roll) of one who is "*Katolische*," and that, on the other hand, a "*good* Catholic," as the phrase runs, would never drink Protestant coffee, nor eat Protestant beef,—had he been present while ladies discoursed upon the advantage of some Fräulein starting in business as a milliner, and urged, "That as she was a Protestant, every Lutheran

lady in the town would, of course, buy their bonnets at her shop,"—had they seen, too, the "Protestant Weekly Journal," (*"Kirchlicher Anzieger der evangelischen Gemeine zu Coblenz,"*) containing announcements of Evangelisch pastry-cooks and Lutheran bookbinders*—indeed, had they witnessed and listened to but one tithe of the want of charity and loving-kindness that prevails among the several sects in a German town, they would have agreed with us, that religious liberty, though it is upheld by the State in Prussia, is certainly *not* carried out by the people.

In proof of this general intolerance on the part of one sect towards another in Germany, we may remind the reader (for the fact was chronicled in the English newspapers at the time) that Herr Sontag of Coblenz was publicly excommunicated at the *Castor-kirche* in 1856, and that merely for having committed the heinous sin of marrying a Protestant lady!

Scarcely a day passes, too, but you are told some wretched bit of religious scandal that has been propagated by the intolerant bigots of this same tolerant country. Either you are assured that, during the exhibition of the "Holy Coat" at Trèves, some gentleman's servant requested leave of his master to make a journey into the country in order to visit his dying father, and that the master, being called away from Coblenz to some town on the banks of the Mosel, saw—while looking out of window at the procession of pilgrims on their way to Trèves—his own servant among the troop, limping along

* A copy of this same journal, for the 22nd Sunday after Trinity, contains (after giving a programme of the services and preachers, lessons and psalms, at the different Protestant churches in Coblenz throughout the week) a short list of business-notices (*"geschäftliche Anzieger"*), of which the following may be cited as a sample:—

"The Widow Müller, by the Market, urgently recommends her meal and flour warehouse to the Evangelical community. She sells meal in small as well as large quantities."

upon a pair of crutches; and who thereupon confessed, on being taxed with the imposition, that the Herr Pastor at his church had given him 40 thalers to go as a cripple to Trèves, and be "*miraculously cured*" immediately he was brought into connexion with the sacred garment. Or else some one who has a relation at an Apotheke's in a country town, will declare to you that the Lutheran clergyman of the village was wont, while out on his rounds, to drop in at the chemist's and ask them to oblige him with a glass; whereupon he would draw a bottle of some strong water from a secret pocket and toss off a portion of it, saying, that it would never do for one of his cloth to be seen entering a "*Weinwirthschaft*" (common tavern).

Nor are these the tales of mere ignorant gossips, but stories repeated by the educated teachers at the principal schools; so that when such intolerance prevails, even among the Lehrers, the German children may be said to learn fanaticism with their very alphabet; and though the people, in after life, cannot openly persecute, still it is impossible to prevent them secretly slandering the members of any opposite church to their own.

Moreover, while we are on the subject of clerical scandal we may mention that one, who knew the priests well, declared to us, that it was by no means unusual in the German country villages to see the gown of the Herr Pastor's cook hanging on a nail beside the ghostly (*geistlich*) gentleman's coat behind the door. Now, we would not for a moment unjustly doubt the chastity of these worthies; but, as unprejudiced individuals, we must confess, that there certainly *does* appear to be some reason for the report which insinuates that their Catholic reverences are frequently inclined to live on very intimate terms with their housekeepers: for the bishops have ordained that no pastor shall have a maidservant living with him under fifty

years of age,—an order that is said to have been enjoined with the view of preventing any little tell-tales appearing in the village. There is a Deutsch Joe Miller current throughout Germany, that a bishop having put up one evening at a village parsonage, a buxom young damsel made her appearance at the "coffee-drinking" with the cups, whereupon the bishop stared, first at the girl and then at the Herr Pastor; but he had hardly recovered from his surprise, when another young and equally good-looking serving-maid entered with the "*Hörnchens*" and the cakes. This was more than the right reverend father could bear; so, immediately the servant had quitted the room, the dignitary asked the pastor whether he was not aware of the injunction which prohibited priests from having maid-servants resident with them under fifty years of age. The Herr Pastor replied that he was; but, as one of the girls was twenty-six and the other twenty-four, the bishop would see that he had possessed himself of the entire *volume* of years, though he had preferred taking it "in two parts."

Nor has the Prussian Government itself such a respect for religious liberty as would at the first glance appear; for a few months' residence in Germany is sufficient to teach one, that though there be no particular Church connected with the State in that country, there is a greater amount of religious tyranny, and (as it is impossible to make people devout by Act of Parliament) a greater amount of religious hypocrisy, than obtains in any other land. Indeed, we know of no nation in which parsons have such entire sway over the people.

In the first place, no person can be married unless able to produce their confirmation papers; nor can they obtain any situation under government, unless they be provided with the same documents. Again, all who fill any government post must go to church once, at least, on the Sunday; and professors

at schools must not only do the same thing themselves, but keep no servant in their family who absents herself from church service.

Now, all this extreme religious rigour is reported to be owing to a letter that was addressed by the Pope to the various crowned heads of the Continent, after the kingdom-panics of 1848, and in which his Holiness is said to have informed the monarchs that the several national disturbances had arisen from the lack of religious care for the people throughout the various governments: though surely his far-seeing Saintliness might have called to mind, that it was only in those countries where priestcraft was rampant that revolutions had broken out, and that England—where there were fewer priests, and soldiers, and police agents, than in any other European State—was about the only throne that escaped. Nevertheless, Prussia, in its wisdom, became immediately determined to employ no one in the administration of its public affairs who was not a *devout Christian* (or what would well pass muster as a *profound hypocrite*); and the consequence is, we meet German professors and government officers on their way to church, who whisper to you, as they wink their eye, to let you see they have no faith in the mockery, that they are going to "eat their god" according to law. Moreover, it is a rule that every true Catholic must confess at least at Easter, (if not oftener throughout the year), under pain of excommunication—whilst excommunication brings loss of office, and friends, and living. Hence, at Easter you are freely informed, by those whom you know to be merely *official* devotees, that they tell all manner of lies to the priests in order to obtain their license to play the Christian for the ensuing twelvemonth.

The religious tyranny of Prussia, however, is not merely part and parcel of the government institutions, but it extends

itself throughout every form of society. We have already spoken of the hatred, or, at least, the contempt which the members of the different churches bear towards one another, and how each is but too glad to give circulation to any tale that tends to detract from the reputation of the opposite sect; and we have now to add to the list of sectarian virtues, that every member of society in Prussia acts, as it were, as a religious spy upon the conduct and speech of his associates. This is more especially the case with the Papists; because, owing to the system of confession, the priest's ear can be made the secret receptacle of all the religious gossip and slander throughout the town. Again, by such means the Catholic shepherds are enabled to learn who are their *true sheep*, as well as who are the hungry wolves among the flock who *will* have meat even on the Friday; so that there is hardly a Romist in all Prussia who does not live in positive dread, not only of being maligned by the Protestants, but of being reported to his priest, either as a Friday meat-eater or as a backslider of some kind or other.

"*Lieber Gott, Frau Fresser!*" cries a "prayer-sister," as she pokes her head in at the door and begins sniffing, while she steals towards the kitchen; "I suppose you are ill, my dear, as I smell meat, and it is Friday."

Accordingly, the next time the "prayer-sister" visits the confessional, she takes care to include among her sins the great temptation she underwent at Herr Fresser's, whose family was going to have meat on a fast-day.

But not only are the prayer-sisters thus used as Papal police, but the Catholic servants of every household act as the same kind of spies upon the master and his friends.

"I think, madame, there will be enough meat for supper," said our maid, (for dining at midday makes an early supper equivalent to a late dinner,) "even though the Herr Doctor

will be here, as you say; for *he* is a good Catholic, and would not eat flesh *to-day*."

The Herr Doctor, however, when he visited us in the evening, was more inclined to veal cutlets and salad than to the dietetic ceremonies of the Romish Church, so he supped heartily off the forbidden dainties, much to the horror of the maid, who looked significantly at his plate as she removed it from the table. And when we told the Doctor at a later hour of the evening of what the servant had said in the morning, he turned pale, and we could see by his look that he knew he would be duly reported to the priests at the next confession.

Indeed, Catholics themselves have told us, that it is impossible to conceive the amount of priestly despotism that is practised in Prussia, where servants act as spies upon every household—and where every Catholic friend or acquaintance is but too ready to play the informer against those whom he visits or meets in society—where the priest hears of every little thing that occurs in every family—and where, when he finds an individual who is lax in his observances of the forms enjoined by his religion, he considers it his *duty* to privately *warn* the members of his flock against the dangers of holding any communion with such a character; so that Catholic tradesmen occasionally find their Catholic customers dropping off one by one, and gentlefolks their friends and visitors growing daily less and less in number.

Indeed, we have known Catholics in Coblenz who refused to keep a servant, because, if she were of their own religion, she could act as a tale-bearer to their priest; whilst they would not dream of admitting a Protestant cook into their family. Others, again, we knew, who, though they dreaded and hated the tyrant "*Pfaffen*," made every one of them that they met in the street the most profound bow as they passed, merely to *seem* to respect them; and others, moreover, who have

assured us that they were not acquainted with one Catholic in all Coblenz whom they could or would implicitly trust.

Now, the Protestant bigot must not rub his hands with glee, under the belief that we cite these facts as arguments against the practice of confession in a *religious* point of view. We say again, we have nothing to do with the particular forms or ceremonies that different sects may imagine to be acceptable to the Almighty, and we have too sincere a regard for the principles of religious liberty, which we are here advocating, to dream of reviling or mocking any body of people for matters which concern themselves and the Creator only. We repeat, that it is merely as a *social* institution that we here speak of the confessional and other church ceremonies, and whose effects upon the community we believe we have a perfect right, as what the Scotch call "humanists," to criticise.

It is in the same spirit that the following remarks are made; for our opinions, so far from being dictated by any sectarian feeling, proceed rather from a true Catholic feeling: our objections being raised not against the *creed* of the people indulging in such observances, but merely against the observances themselves, as being *degrading to mankind*, and having a tendency to foster the worst errors of the dark ages, rather than to propagate the enlightenment of the present.

The art of healing, for instance, was in the ignorance of past times regarded as being more intimately connected with religion than with medicine; so that the priests in those days were the sole physicians, and the multitude were taught to drink at Holy Wells, or to kiss the bones of defunct "saints," as the only means of getting cured of their diseases. Within the last few centuries, however, different notions have come over the people; we have learnt that the Almighty Power that

made the human body has ordained certain laws of health in connexion with it, and that it is merely by studying and conforming to these that we can hope to continue in, or to be restored to, a state of bodily or mental sanity. Surely, too, we may say, without being accused of "philosophic infidelity," that experience teaches us that disorders are oftener healed nowadays by medicine than by prayer—the very principles of medicine itself being but the scientific rendering of the Creator's sanitary commandments; and whereas the doctrines taught by the physician inspire us with the highest sense of the wisdom and goodness of Him who framed us (showing us that bodily affliction comes either from an ignorant or wilful infraction of some health-law), the therapeutic principles taught by the priest, on the other hand, tend only to make mankind regard the Creator as some evil power dispensing afflictions from mere malevolence, and consenting to remit them only after long penance and supplication. So that, making every generous allowance for the faith of zealots, we must confess that we cannot help regarding the priests who still lead people forth to drink at Holy Wells and pray at Holy Shrines as impudent charlatans—the Morisons, and Holloways, and Parrs of the altar, who grow fat, not only upon the bodily miseries, but upon the mental and spiritual degradation of the poor whom it is their duty, as Christian ministers, to protect.

"*Ja! mein Herr*," said our Catholic servant to us, "they have, indeed, got the key of heaven at the '*Jesuiten-kirche*,' and it's made of solid gold."

Now, there is no other view to be taken of such teaching as this but that it is the dissemination of *deliberate lies* among the people; since the priest who told it to the poor ignorant girl must have known either that there was *no* such key in the church, or else that it was *not* the key of heaven. Nor can Catholics shuffle out of the iniquity by saying that it was

merely "a pious fraud," since it is impossible to find any holy intention in filling the minds of the people with the most degrading notions of an after-life..

But cheats like the above are daily practised, not only upon the so-called "educated" populace of Germany, but the children as well. At the school which our little girl attended in Coblenz, a Herr Capellan used to come weekly to instruct the classes upon matters of Bible History, &c.; and this fellow had the audacity to tell the young pupils that the Cross of Christ, when it was dug up by St. Helena 328 years after the Crucifixion, was found to be in a complete state of preservation, and to have none but *gold* nails about it! Moreover, the mere infants, as it were, are made to believe that Christ himself puts all the presents on the Christmas-tree: so that the very first lesson they get in religion is a *lie*.

How, then, is it possible for a country to hope to take rank among the enlightened nations of Europe, when the very children have their minds stuffed with these and similar falsehoods as the highest truths; and where the people must either remain with scarcely more sense than zoophytes in order to have faith in such things, or else, if they have brains enough to discover the imposition, they ultimately come to think even the belief in a Creator to be one of the follies engendered by superstition?

"But, papa," said our little girl, after seeing at the Church of St. Ursula at Cologne *a* thorn that was said to be from Christ's crown, "if that is n't true, how do we know that all things told us about Jesus are not stories?"

Again: the servant, whilst out one day with our child, dropped in at the "*Jesuiten-kirche*" to obtain a phialful of holy water for the little crockery watch-pocket-like font that she kept in the corner of her bed-room. "Is it *fresh?*" asked the maid of one of the choir-boys, as if she were speaking of a

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tap of beer rather than so much prestigiated "*aqua pumpi.*" "Oh, yes!" was the lad's reply, as she dipped her bottle into the little stone basin; "I have only just got it from the hands of the pastor." On hearing this, the *Mädchen* tried to prevail upon our child, also, to take a little of the water, telling her that she need not be afraid of thunder and lightning so long as she had got *that* by her; for in the most violent storm she had only to sprinkle the room with a few drops of the blessed liquid, and it would be impossible for her to be struck dead after that.

Hence, on such poor wretches as these, the great discovery of Franklin has been utterly wasted, the German populace being still taught to regard the Almighty as a kind of Romish Jupiter—a Papal Thor, who delights in dealing out death by thunderbolts.

A few weeks after our family had been enlightened as to the electric power of holy water, we saw two priests among the audience at one of the lectures given by Herr Finn upon "*Galvanismus und Electricität;*" and as the lecturer explained and illustrated the properties of the marvellous fluid, we could not help wondering whether these same priests would have the honesty to tell their flock that a metal rod was the only safeguard against lightning, and that the virtue of holy water, in such cases, had been proved to be a mere flam.

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(17.)

FRIEDRICHSHAFEN.

The royal villa of Friedrichshafen is one of the most striking objects on the shores of the Lake of Constanz. Its