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

i. Religious Creed continued-A Modern Prophecy-Canonized Dolls-Pharisaical Processions and Puplic Praying

urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-161475

Visual Library

On the 7th July, 1850, the railway was opened, and this was also the first *Eisenbahn* in connexion with the Boden See.

¶ i.

Religious Creed continued—A Modern Prophecy—Canonized Dolls—Pharisaical Processions and Public Praying.

During our residence at Coblenz, too, a report was circulated that a prophecy had been made, which, with the usual and very convenient vagueness of such matters, foretold that on the 1st of July, 1855, something dreadful was to happen somewhere to somebody. At length the prophetic rumour took a more definite form, and resolved itself into a statement that some one, whilst in a trance at Coblenz, had declared that the world was to come to an end at the expiration of the month of June, at which period the Protestants, we were politely informed, were to be all destroyed, and the Catholics to live on. As the time drew near for the fulfilment of the predicted catastrophe, the German Papists became more and more alarmed, and on the morning of the 1st of July all were a-gog, wondering in what manner, and at what moment, the dreadful event was to come to pass. At length an announcement was made at one of the schools that a telegraphic message had been received, stating that the Pope had been assassinated in his bed early that morning; and immediately there was one general exclamation of, "*Das ist die Prophezei!*" uttered by the great body of Catholics, who seemed to have wholly forgotten that the prediction referred to a totally different circumstance.

Nor should it be imagined that we here chronicle the sentiments of the mere vulgar upon the subject; for at the

fashionable watering-place of Ems, where the German nobility and gentry love to sip their hot salts every summer, such was the belief in the tale, that the Catholic church-bells were tolled and funeral masses performed throughout the day.

Moreover, it must in truthfulness be added, that the worship of the gaudily-dressed religious dolls, representative of the Virgin, has not the *most* elevating effect upon the minds of the people. At the corner of the street by the "*Korn Pforte*," in Coblenz, there stood a huge puppet of the "*Mutter Gottes*" in a glass case, and this was tricked out in a fresh dress almost every month through the year. In Lent it was in deep black; in May, in sky-blue and silver-tinsel; next it would be decked in white robes, and these again would give place to drab and Dutch metal; whilst each time the poor peasants and ox-cart drivers went past the figure, they would bow the head and cross themselves in very awe of the sanctified Judy.

But not only does this doll-worship go on in the public streets, but there is scarcely a Catholic old baby of a woman who has not in her room some puppet, either of the Virgin or her patron saint, that she prays to and amuses herself with, and makes clothes for, as the very children do with us—with the exception, however, that our little ones are not quite simple enough to worship the lumps of wax or wood that they dress up. A "prayer-sister," whom we knew, and who, a Catholic told us, was "full to the throat with the number of gods (wafers) she had swallowed," spent a good part of her time in dressing and undressing a big "Marionette" figure that she had dubbed St. Francis; and at the "*Drei Schweizer*" (*Trois Suisses*) hotel, where we passed the winter of 1854–55, the old maid of a landlady had another such puppet, but this was tricked out in female robes, and christened the "Holy Virgin;"

and though the ancient *Fräulein* continually said her prayers to it, and had it always before her eyes, we can answer that it by no means influenced her conduct in life: for if she told her beads to the doll at one moment, she would fall to cheating hard the next; so that, despite the "*real presence*" of the blessed wax Virgin, she tried to impose upon us to an enormous extent, and, indeed, seemed really to have more fear of the police than the "Mother of God;" for it was only on our protesting that we would go to the office of the Commissary concerning her overcharges, that she consented to take no less than 10*l.* off a bill of 30*l.* odd.

Nor is it only in the matter of canonised dolls that this human degradation goes on. Once we were in an ironmonger's shop at Coblenz, when a peasant, who was making a few purchases, requested to be shown some brass images of Christ upon the Cross; whereupon the shopwoman took down a brown-paper packet full of stamped sheet-brass, that looked like a bundle of finger-plates for doors, but which, in reality, turned out to be a whole quire of mere thin shells of crucifixes. The peasant selected the one that pleased her best, and having purchased some showy nails by way of garniture to the article, the shopwoman proceeded to chalk her reckoning on the counter; and there it ran, something after the following:—1 iron pot, 7 groschens; 1 reaping-hook, 4 groschens; 1 basket headpad, 1 groschen; 1 butter-stamper, 1½ groschen; 1 *Jesus Christus*, 5 groschens; and so on.

Further, we cannot end this section of our subject without raising our voice against those public displays of religion in the streets, which partake more of the flaunty character of theatrical pageants than the unostentatious ceremonies befitting the worship of Him who entered Jerusalem on a jackass. We know that the dignitaries of the Romish Church lay great

stress on what they term "the *external* aids to religion;" but surely to those who have faith in the injunction that, in our religious observances, "we are *not* to be as the hypocrites are, who love to appear praying in the streets, that they may be seen of men," the long trains of priests and choristers chanting portions of the Church service through the thoroughfares of almost every Catholic town in Germany cannot but appear as the external aids to *hypocrisy*.

In the month of June, on St. Peter and St. Paul's day, occurs the "*Trohn-leichnams-fest*" (*Corpus Christi* feast, or, as the French call it, *La Fête Dieu*), and for some time before the anniversary, in 1855, we heard on all sides that "God" was to be carried along the streets, and the "Heaven" borne through the town—which blasphemy we afterwards found to signify that the head of the Catholic Church was to carry the large silver hand-screen called the "*Monstranz*," or "host," under a tawdry blue silk canopy, not unlike the upper part of a small four-post bedstead, and which is dignified by the name of the "*Himmel*." Prior to the fête our *braves Mädchen* was busy with the white muslin dress which she had kept, she said, for fifteen years, and used only for such street-shows; and this was duly washed and starched, so that she might make her appearance in public as one of the chanters; a pound of prunes, moreover, being eaten immediately after breakfast, in order to clear her voice for the anthems. On the morning of the event all the shops were closed, the carriage-ways of the town strewn with flowers, and the sides of the streets literally walled with green boughs, whilst in every open place there was erected a tawdry altar, with as extensive a show of candles as a tallow-chandler's shop-window; and at these the priests were to stop and pray, like the very hypocrites spoken of by Christ, so that there might be no mistake about their being *seen* of men.

BLB BADISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK Baden-Württemberg

The sight was wondrous to those who had heard tell of "educated" Prussia and the "philosophic" Germans—to behold government ministers, noblemen and generals, judges, advocates, physicians, and professors, as well as the great majority of the people, all out in the streets, singing anthems at the tail of an old gold-beplastered priest, who went stalking along under the bed-canopy called the *himmel*, and with a bellman at his side, ringing away as he displayed the bugaboo "*Monstranz*" to the awe-stricken multitude, every one of whom bared the head and fell upon the knees at the mere sight of the silver ornament.

Such street-displays as the above are far from being uncommon occurrences in the Rhenish capital, for, during our stay there, scarcely a month passed but what there was some similar religious show going on in the thoroughfares. Either it was the feast of St. Aloysius, the patron saint of little children, and then every Catholic school in the town turned out with the boys and girls, duly "got up" for the occasion, squalling along the highways; or else it was Green Thursday, *i. e.* the Thursday before Easter, when good Catholics live principally on "green-stuff," and the priests go in procession to administer the sacrament to all the sick in the town; and then the silver chalice, called the "*Ciborium*," which the simple people tell you contains their gods (*Ang.* wafers), is carried ostentatiously through the principal *Strasser*, and the multitude go down on their knees in the gutters at the mere sight of the holy wafer-box.

Not only, however, are these street religious shows got up by the priests, but they are even indulged in by private individuals, who seem to be by no means anxious to "retire to their closet and *shut the door*," when they are about to pray, but, on the contrary, take especial care to obtrude their piety upon the notice of the public in general. This spirit of public

praying and religious ostentation constitutes the great pharisaical vice of the age. The far-seeing people of the Stock Exchange have the following saying,—"The man who goes to church *once* on the Sunday, trust him; the man who goes *twice*, beware of him; the man who goes *thrice*, have nothing at all to do with him!" and assuredly the desire "to be seen of men" during our devotions, and love of "*trumpeting*" our charity, according to the Sermon on the Mount, rank as hypocritical rather than Christian observances.

On Ash-Wednesday the Catholics walk through the town with long dirty streaks on their foreheads, as a sign that they have been marked with the embers by the priest; and on White Monday the girls parade the streets in book-muslin and long veils, for two or three days after their first communion. At other times you will meet a small band of young ladies marching through the town in the costume of ballet-dancers, and carrying huge bouquets that they are going to present to some schoolmaster or schoolmistress on his or her saint's day, the lady or gentleman remaining at home the while, in order to receive the customary gifts from the pupils; and which gifts consist generally of coffee-cups, or flowers, or cakes, or sweetmeats, or wine, or a pound or two of prunes: though occasionally a canary is given, and we *have* heard of the presentation of a silver teapot, that was subscribed for by the whole school and duly blessed by the priest—whilst, in return for such favours, the young scholars are treated to a farthing picture of some apocryphal saint or mythical "*schutze-engel*" (guardian angel).

Indeed, the German Papists seem to be determined not to "hide their light under a bushel," but find especial pleasure in sticking it on some street or road-side altar, as well as in carrying candles through the public thoroughfares, so that people may be the better able to see how holy they are.

BLB BADISCHE LANDESBIBLIOTHEK Baden-Württemberg