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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

§ 4. Political Condition of the Prussians-Limits of Enlightened Public Government-Political Wickel-kinder-"Concessions" to earn a Living-Potatoes displacing Black Bread-Extreme Poverty-Meanness-a ...

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§ 4.

THE POLITICAL CREED OF THE PRUSSIANS—LIMITS OF ENLIGHTENED PUBLIC GOVERNMENT—POLITICAL WICKEL-KINDER—"CONCESSIONS" TO EARN A LIVING—POTATOES DISPLACING BLACK BREAD—EXTREME POVERTY AND MEANNESS—A ROYAL BANQUET.

"I tink they have all the wisest men in die velt at Berlin," was the confidential opinion of a Prussian to us. Nevertheless the gentleman could hardly be considered a high authority in matters of wisdom, for it was he who had assured us that holy water would not rot. Nor had he any very extensive acquaintance with the sages of the other parts of the globe, seeing that his travels had never gone beyond a penny trip in the Vallendar steamboat.

If, too, we be not sorely mistaken, these same Berlin worthies belong to the palæozoic class of politicians, and have no more right to be ranked with the enlightened statesmen of Europe than the purblind old fogies of owls have to be cited as the ornithological types of profound intelligence.

If every *private* individual duly governed himself, it is manifest that the necessity for *public* government would cease; and that all possess a governing principle within them, the difference between our motives while awake and when dreaming affords sufficient proof. Hence it is simply because the *internal* government of the majority of people is defective that an *external* one is required, in order to prevent the members of society injuring their neighbours, either in person, property, or character; so that as it is every one's duty to respect the feelings and possessions of those by whom he is surrounded, the object of all enlightened government is merely to see that this duty is strictly performed: in fine, it is to prevent the strong op-

pressing the weak, the crafty cheating the simple, and the dishonest plundering the honest.

But though the external government has a perfect moral right to take care that each man does his duty to his *neighbour*, it has no title whatsoever to interfere with any one's duty to *himself;* in a word, though it may justly prevent an individual from destroying the happiness of his fellows, it cannot, with any show of reason, compel him to promote his own. It may, and indeed *ought*, to put a stop to assaults, and robbery, and plunder, but it should *not* prescribe the hour at which we are to go to bed, and clothes we should wear, or food we should eat, or how and where we should worship the Almighty. This, it is manifest, constitutes the broad line of demarcation between enlightened government and despotism—the one deals only with the *public* duties and rights of individuals, whilst the other meddles with their *private* ones.

Plain as the above distinction appears, it has nevertheless taken ages upon ages to make monarchs and ministers comprehend the principle; so that formerly we not only had a curfew-bell to ring the simple people to bed at a seasonable hour, but we had sumptuary laws to regulate the expenses of the different members of society, and which not only prescribed the costume that each was to appear in, but positively limited the length of the shoes to be worn by Masters Brown, Jones, and Robinson; whilst the most frivolous and vexatious restrictions were placed upon trade and business, as if it were the object of government to raise every possible impediment to a man's earning an honest living.

In England, luckily, we have outlived such political tomfoolery, and it has grown into a maxim now with the wisest statesmen, that "the best government is that which governs the least,"—consistently, of course, with security to the persons and possessions of the community.

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The Berlin sages, however, are still in their political dotage, and, like half-imbecile greybeards, cannot help regarding even grown-up people as children; and assuredly the sight of the petrified bones of a megatherium, turned up in the strata at the present day, does not carry the mind more vividly into the past than does the sound of the 10 o'clock bell, which rings at Coblenz every night to warn all good people that it is time to retire to their beds, carry the thoughts backward to the darkest ages.

To the "mind's eye," indeed, the poor Deutschers appear in the nineteenth century as mere political babies—governmental "*Wickel-kinder*," that the old women at Berlin still believe it to be necessary to bind hand and foot in order to render upright—monarchical children, that are not yet able to *go alone*, and who cannot even *speak plainly*, poor little things! but who are obliged to be looked after at every step by their ugly nurses the police, and to be tied so closely to the apron-strings of their *gross-mutterisch* state authorities, that they dare not stir away from home without first asking permission of the "*Direction*."

It requires no little faith on the part of Englishmen to believe what an infinitesimally small amount of liberty Germans are permitted to enjoy.

Not only does the bell toll, as we have said, for all people to quit the wine and beer-houses before eleven, but it is forbidden by the police to talk either upon religion or politics in such places—the landlord, for the first offence, being punished by fine, and for the second by the permanent closing of his use. Now an Englishman, with the recollection of the Hyde Park riots in his mind, would fancy that the tyrannical insolence which presumes to dictate to grown men the subjects that they are to talk upon, would breed, at least, an *émeute*, if not a revolution, in the land. But no!

your German blood is but poor, tepid stuff, compared with the hot liquid that flows through English veins; and the nation which, in former times, permitted an Emperor to send a crier through the town, announcing that it was the imperial will and pleasure that Herr So-and-so should marry Fräulein Such-an-one, still lacks manly spirit enough to feel any indignity in having a royal padlock put upon its tongue.

Nor do the professors, and the physicians, and druggists, and stonemasons, and a hundred other professions and trades, think it in any way despotic that the right, or "concession," as it is called, to pursue their occupation should be at the disposal and consequently the mercy of the government; so that any disaffected member of the State can be immediately deprived of his bread as well as his license, and thus, by his utter ruin, be rendered an example to others. Operatives, moreover, must satisfy the police as to the quality of their work before they can be allowed to set up as masters; so that a political journeyman is compelled to hold his peace, unless he wishes to be doomed to manual labour for life. In other trades, again, a large sum of money must be deposited with the State authorities, and hence such depositors would hardly dare to raise their voice against the government; whilst even the servants are under the special charge of the *Polizei-Direction.*

Consequently it will be seen that the Prussian government takes care to have a finger in every person's business, so that the bread of the several members of the community may be more or less dependent upon the favour or "concession" of the functionaries, and thus silence at least be ensured, if positive good will cannot be obtained.

At present the government is but seldom called upon to exercise its power of ruining, by withholding the licenses of the different tradesmen and professional men of the kingdom. It is enough for English minds, however, that it *possesses* such

a power, and that the merchants and tradesmen of an European State should be in the same position as cab-drivers with us. Nevertheless we *have* heard of persons being deprived of their business, because they were known to be of more liberal politics than pleased the "police directors;" and this has acted as so strong a caution to others of the same turn of mind, that they have been rendered politically dumb—*for the present.*

"To dispose of even a shoestring in Prussia," said one of our informants, "requires a special license from the government, for which no less than 12 thalers (36*s.*) must be paid; and to be caught buying and selling without the gracious '*concession*' of the constituted authorities, would render a man liable to imprisonment."

In such a state of things, when the government raises all kinds of fiscal and political obstacles to a man earning his livelihood by any handicraft, trade, or profession, a large body of spies, of course, become a necessary part of the executive machinery of the State; and certainly, in Prussia, these official vermin crawl about the people wherever they go.

A tradesman in Coblenz, into whose shop we had entered to make a trifling purchase, was so especially obsequious to us, that at the time we attributed his exceeding servility to vulgar trading manners. It turned out, however, that the man had obliged us by mistaking us for a government spy; for, on inquiring of a friend who we were, the shopman coolly told him that he had mistaken us for a "*Spaher*," whom he had seen the day before at Cochem on the Mosel, with a camera, engaged in taking photographs.

"Read that advertisement," said a German to us, pointing to a particular announcement in the "*Coblenzer Zeitung.*" "What of it?" we asked; for it merely stated that Herr Hundertundachtzigfläsche gave private instruction in English, French, and German; whereupon our friend assured us that

the so-called Lehrer, instead of being a private instructor, was really a common informer, for he was known to be employed by Government to furnish them with secret reports concerning the political opinions of those into whose houses he gained admission under the pretext of teaching.

Further, if you happen to have a German with you, supping in a private room in an hotel, he will be sure, before he ventures to speak upon any matter in connexion with the government of his country, to open the door and peep into the passage, so as to assure himself that there are no secret listeners; and even then he will not dare to converse in tones above a whisper, telling you, that in Prussia the very stones in the walls have got ears.

To such an extent does this spy system prevail, and so universal is the distrust of the Prussians concerning any one they meet in society, that it is impossible to get them to speak to you upon any national question before one another; for though they may be living in the same town, and are well acquainted with each other's business, nevertheless they know that if one bore the least ill feeling against the other, neither would hesitate to go privately to the police and repeat what his fellow-townsman had stated.

That we may not seem to be unjustly prejudiced against the character of the Prussians, and blind to the vices of English people, let us here mention the fact that an English lady, resident in Coblenz, did not scruple, on account of some petty quarrel, to report to the *Polizei-Direction* that a countrywoman of hers was giving lessons in English without any concession from the authorities; and the consequence was, —as it is contrary to law in Prussia to earn a living without a permit from government—the poor governess was ordered to quit the town in four-and-twenty hours.

Now, where such a state of affairs prevails—where every

impediment is offered to extension of trade and the increase of arts and manufactures—where general distrust is fostered among the people by the employment of secret police-agents ramifying into every class of society—it is almost idle to state that, despite or through the continual meddling of the wise-acres at Berlin, the great body of the Prussian people are in a state of the most bitter and overwhelming poverty. Not only is the consumption of beef and mutton giving place to horseflesh, but the coarse and the sour black loaves of rye are becoming a delicacy, the less expensive potato being now used instead; and this in a country where white bread has long been regarded in the light of cake. Herr Dieterici, the eminent Prussian statistician, indeed, informs us, that "whereas the corn crops of Prussia may be valued at between 150 and 200 million thalers, the potato crop must be estimated at nearly double that amount, or 350 million thalers." In corroboration of this fact we may state, that one peasant family whom we visited, and which consisted of a man and his wife and six children, had not tasted meat throughout the year: they ate potatoes three times a-week, and the other three coffee and bread. The man and his wife, together with a sister who lived with them, and went out washing, earned among them one thaler a-week upon an average the year through, gaining 1½ thaler weekly in the summer, and in the winter only a few groschens. The woman worked sometimes in the fields, and got three groschens a-day and her "*kost*" (eating); the man was employed upon the roads, and had, when he worked, five groschens a-day, whilst the sister earned from three to four groschens a-day in the summer, and one groschen a-day at spinning in the winter. Their food and household expenses were, weekly, as follows:—½lb. of coffee, 4 groschens (5*d.*); 12 lbs. of bread, 16 groschens (1*s.* 7*d.*); 25 lbs. of potatoes, 10 groschens (1*s.*); soap, 1 groschen;

candles, 1½ groschens; total, 33 groschens (3*s.* 4*d.*). No rent was paid, the cottage having been left the man by his father; while their clothing they had given to them. Hence it would appear, that all which these nine people had to subsist upon was 5 lbs. 4½ ozs. of solid food per diem; and physiologists tell us, that two pounds of substantial nutriment are daily required to keep life in each full-grown individual. As the man and his wife were old, the above may, perhaps, be considered an extreme case; it is cited, however, to give the English reader a notion of how very hard the poor of Germany live, or rather starve.

But coffee and potatoes are by no means an uncommon dinner among the working classes of Germany; and when we tell them that a journeyman baker working in the Rhenish capital gets only two shillings a-week and his board and lodging, they will easily understand how poorly industry is paid in Rhineland. Indeed, during the winter-time, the poor of Coblenz, huddled together in the "*Wasserthurmsmauer*" and the "*Seilerwall*," are often glad to make a meal off a cat or a dog!

Nor are even the so-called rich of Germany much better off than our head clerks, since in Prussia, a person possessing a thousand thalers (150*l.*) a-year, is regarded as being in affluent circumstances, whilst one having three thousand thalers (450*l.*) per year, is looked upon as a positive millionaire. Further, the principal bankers are obliged to do a little in the wine-manufacturing business, as well as money dealing; for the Germans, as a nation, seem hardly to have advanced beyond that monetary state of prosperity which delights in hoarding gold and silver coin in old stockings. Not only are those who possess a few thalers as deficient in enterprise as our superannuated cooks, but, owing to the general distrust existing throughout the nation, such a thing as commercial credit can

be hardly said to exist, the so-called merchants being, generally speaking, about on a level with our chandlers.

The most popular mode of investment consists of loans upon mortgage to small peasant proprietors, so that there is scarcely a farmer who is not, owing to the facility of contracting debt, embarrassed with the responsibilities he has to meet by way of interest every year. Another approved mode of investment is by depositing small sums in different names at the government pawnshops, which serve, as it were, for the Savings' Banks of Prussia: and at which 3½ per cent is allowed as interest to all depositors. Formerly the middle-classes were permitted to invest in these institutions to the amount of 99 thalers, though many had much larger sums in the institution under different names. At present, however, the privilege is restricted to servants, though only nominally so, for many gentlefolks still invest in the names of their domestics, it being difficult to find a Prussian who has spirit enough to employ his money in large commercial adventures; and thus it is that the mining and manufacturing resources of the country remain undeveloped to this day.

But, like all slow-witted people, the Prussians are an almost miserly race, — they will save something out of the smallest weekly pittance; and as the British Chaplain at Coblenz used to say, "you may obtain change for a thaler from apparently the most destitute of them." We have positively known a Herr Lehrer at one of the Government schools, who had money out upon mortgages, have the remains of the fat scraped out of the tins that he had hired to illuminate with on the night of the King's visit to Coblenz, in order that he might turn a groschen by the refuse grease; and further, a learned professor actually assured us, that he sent his daughter down with a scuttle of ashes every night to empty into the cesspool, because the people at Neuendorf

paid a little higher price for the manure when it was "*feste*."

But perhaps we cannot give a clearer illustration of the beggarly meanness, as well as the social hypocrisy, of Prussia, than by citing an incident connected, as Jenkins would say, with the highest person in the realm.

At the time of the King's visit to Coblenz, in order to be present at the betrothal of his niece, the young Princess, to the Prince of Baden, some half-a-dozen of the thousand-and-one German potentates came to take part in the ceremony. Now, we have before stated that the Palace at Coblenz contains nearly the same number of different families as a St. Giles's lodging-house with us, so that every floor and chamber being occupied by some royal or princely progeny, there is scarcely a closet left in which to stow any German Fürst who may come with his carpet-bag to visit his right royal cousins at Coblenz. Such a calamity befel the house of Prussia in the year 1855; for then, either the Kurfürst von Keinhemd or the Gros Herzog von Nich's-nutz had come to eat his *Sauer-kraut* with Friedrich Wilhelm von Cliquot; but, unfortunately, though the palatial furniture could boast the luxury of a spare bed, the palatial linen-chest did not include the extravagance of a spare blanket wherewith to envelope the body of the "high-born" guest. Accordingly, the groom of the bedchamber had to be dispatched to Hoffmanns, the upholsterer, to arrange for the hire of something like a "Witney" for a day or two.

The next day, to his majesty's great horror, no less than three German crowned heads, anxious to avoid the expense of the *table-d'hôte* at the hotels at which they were staying, dropped in to take their "*Mittag-essen*" with the "*Konighihe-paare;*" but, unfortunately, there was not even so much as a potato-salad or "*Dampf-nudel*" in the royal larder. In an instant, the lord-chamberlain was despatched to the nearest

"Gasthof," or tavern, to order five "*portions*" of soup, flesh, fowls, pudding, and fish; and at the dinner-hour we positively saw from our window the royal postilions, in their leathern breeches, hurrying along the parade with the five potages, and the three meats, and the seven "*légumes*" and "*hors-d'œuvres*," and the "*dessert*," and last, though not least, the black bread at discretion. And as the jockeys darted in among the trees, we could not help thinking that one would meet with as much hospitality from our Duke Humphry as he would be likely to experience on dropping in to take "pot-luck" with the King of Prussia.

It was at this period, too, that we had an opportunity of seeing how much love the Rhenish people really bore their monarch; and though the toadying burgomeister of Coblenz printed a pathetic appeal to the inhabitants of the town, calling upon the "flatholders" to treat his majesty to a hearty welcome and an illumination on his arrival, we must confess that a London street-market, on a Saturday night, could boast a greater profusion of light than the principal thoroughfares of the town. At many houses bits of carpet and woollen table-cover were hung out at window as extraordinary decorations; and along the window-sills of others, a few tooth-glasses, painted for the occasion, were made to do duty for coloured illumination lamps. Moreover, when the king drove through the streets, though the mounted police came first, and entreated the people to take their hats off, and cry "*Liberhoch!*" with their best lungs, as his majesty went by, still we do not exaggerate when we say that the shouting of the united voices would not have startled a hare from its form.

Indeed, to confess the truth, his Majesty is anything but beloved by the people of the Rhenish Provinces. This is partly owing to the great majority of Catholics to be found in that part of Prussia — for the Papists do not hesitate to tell the

Lutherans, that "Cliquot is your king, not ours." Moreover, the people generally feel bitterly grieved at the broken faith concerning the promised liberties after the Revolution of 1848.

"We care not how soon Napoleon comes among us," the Coblenzers have whispered in our ear over and over again, "for the Code of Laws which his uncle gave is the only little bit of freedom we know."

"*Ja*," others have said to us, "we do not speak to one another now, but we all know what is silently going on in each other's hearts, and when the next opportunity occurs we shall not be the sentimental fools we were in 1848, but we shall go out armed with long knives, and say merely, Are you with us, or against us?" Such is the political state of Prussia!

For the present degraded condition of the country and people, however, the natives have one invariable excuse. If you banter them upon their bridge of boats and ox-wagons in the nineteenth century, and their lack of water to their houses, and their drainless towns, you are told that it all proceeds from the poverty of the nation rather than from any want of intelligence among the people.

But *why* is the nation poor? If Prussia were nationally wise, it would be nationally rich as well; for surely a knowledge of the means that contribute to the "wealth of nations," constitutes not only a part of the wisdom, but also a part of the policy, of every enlightened kingdom; and though with individuals, it is *not* true that beggars are fools, nevertheless, it certainly holds good with *States*, that *general poverty results from general ignorance*. But it has become a cant among Germans to regard the misery of their countrymen as part of the inscrutable decrees of Providence, and to talk of England as being "the spoilt child of Europe,"—as if her riches, and her comforts, and her enlightened social appliances, had come by some gracious favour of the blind god Fortune,

rather than being the product of the industry, intelligence, and enterprise of her people. Is it not patent to every mind that England, in the world's race, had no particular indulgence shown her? Did the Almighty give her a more genial climate than Germany? or a more productive soil, or finer rivers by which to convey her produce from one point of the land to the other? But, say the Prussians, England is an island; as if they really fancied it was the only bit of land surrounded by water on the whole globe, and were ignorant of the fact that their own territory has a greater length of coast-line than ours! If, however, England's greatness be due to her insular position, the people of Madagascar, and Borneo, and Sumatra, and, indeed, the whole of Polynesia, should, instead of remaining in a savage condition, have long ago disputed with us the supreme power of the world; and even if it be said, on the other hand, that England's greatness is owing to her mechanical inventions, surely Germany had the same power to avail herself of *our* steam-engine and spinning-jenny as we had to make use of *her* printing!

How, then, comes it that the two countries are so different? We answer, Simply because the people differ in energy—in energy of body as well as mind, from each other.

Interpolated Rhenish Scenes.

(19.)

BREGENZ.

This is the prettiest of all the towns on the Lake. It lies in a bay, or large niche, as it were, of the Vorarlberg hills, which rise almost straight up behind it, and are exquisitely modelled