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Adolphus Slade

Excerpt

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CHAPTER I.

STEAM-BOAT — HELIGOLÄND — STADE DUES—CUXHAVEN —
BREMEH-HAFEN—BREMEH—HANSE TOWNS—COMMERCIAL
UNION—HANOVER.

As the London custom-house clock was striking six on the morning of August 1st, 1838, the paddle-wheels of the “Britannia,” bound for Hamburgh, began to revolve. The water was smooth and the wind fair, with a Scotch mist—anglice drizzling rain. In ten minutes more, the steamer was dashing along the noble stream which offers the surest evidence of England’s power and prosperity. We soon afterwards passed one of the steam leviathans, the Sirius, then about to make a first run to St. Petersburg. The towers of Greenwich and the docks of Woolwich were soon also left behind. A stranger ascending the Thames has no occasion to be told that he is approaching the mighty capital of a great people. The crowded river on which he is gliding, bearing contribu-

B

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tions from every clime, the towns and villages he passes in rapid succession, the gay villas and green meadows in the intervals, then the dense throng of shipping in the "Pool," the stores, the docks, and hotels on either bank, and lastly the Tower with its sad and stirring recollections, the bridges destined to be monuments of the past when London shall be a gone-by wonder, and the busy hum of the distant million, all make him exclaim, this has no parallel: here Rome and Carthage appear to be combined.

At eight o'clock, the passengers, who had embarked the preceding evening, began to emerge, blinking, from their dark dormitory, and sat down to the well furnished breakfast-table presided at by the attentive captain. I recognised an old Malta friend in Captain Walker of the engineers, and hailed his appearance with pleasure as a certain relief to the tedium of the passage, for, in addition to friendship in this case, the officers of the engineers and artillery are in general full of information and of the world's usage. We had much pleasant chat of old lang syne in the bright sunny isles of the Mediterranean. Ham-burgh traders and Jews formed the greater part of the passengers' list. There were besides a Spanish hidalgo, named Martinez, with three

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GERMAN LANGUAGE.

3

dark sons, and a fine youth, the brother of Lord Ward, who was proceeding to Germany with Capt. Walker to look at the *frauen* and learn the unharmonious language, unharmonious even in their pretty mouths. I respect the German language because it is the root of English, but I consider the child more graceful than the mother, sliding more easily over the tongue, and winding a gentler course through the auricular labyrinth. I respect the German language on account of the thought and feeling embodied in it, but I look on Shakspeare (so do most Germans) as superior to all that Germany ever produced, while in modern times the laurels of Walter Scott and of Byron are as bright as those of Goethe and of Schiller. I respect the German language because freedom sounded with it her earliest and most constant triumphs, because Luther rescued with it truth from the mazes of perversion, because monarchs learned with it the sublime lesson that to rule tranquilly they must render their people happy; but I still think the tongue is harsh to the ear, and when sung on the stage it seems to jar the orchestra, at least in the estimation of those accustomed to hear the same music accompanying Italian accents.

We saw Heligoland the second morning. As

B 2

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we gazed on the queer-looking spot through a grey mist, we did not envy the honourable situation of its governor.* This fisher's rock is the leading mark for the Elbe; as such we planted our banner on it, as on nearly every other island in the world, situated in an advantageous locality. We now only want Candia to make our ocean zone complete with gems. We captured Heligoland in 1809 from the Danes, to whom it had belonged immemorially. The island was valuable to us in the war to harbour smugglers in, and for watching thence the proceedings of the enemy in the river. The possession is rather onerous now on account of the necessity we are under of keeping up a lighthouse for all the world, while none but English vessels pay for the convenience. This is not as it ought to be, as everybody would perceive were we to put out the light—which of course we could not do. While Heligoland belonged to Denmark, the Hamburgers maintained the light, and in return were allowed to levy a duty on every vessel arriving at their ports. As this was a profitable undertaking, the

* Major-General Sir Henry King. The salary is 600*l.* a year. The civil establishment of the island consists of a secretary to the governor with a salary of 137*l.* a-year, and an old woman to watch a buoy.

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HELIGOLAND.

5

senate offered at the general peace to continue to light Heligoland on the same conditions. The English Government, however, very properly declined the proposition, on the consideration that it would ill become England to allow a stranger to light up one of her lighthouses, but proposed at the same time that the senate should levy the dues, as heretofore, on all vessels arriving at Hamburgh; and as the Heligoland light is an European rather than an English one, and is of more service to Hamburgh than to any other place, nothing could be fairer. Ten foreign ships enter the Elbe for one English ship. The senate refused to collect the dues on our account, and in consequence the burden falls solely on English vessels, from which it is collected by the English consul at Hamburgh. The evasion was conceived in a narrow mercantile spirit unworthy of a free city like Hamburgh. The amount levied on English vessels pays for the expenses of the light: were it divided amongst the vessels of all nations which navigate the Elbe, as justice demands, it would be unfelt.

The Hamburghers acted inconsistently with themselves in refusing to collect the said light dues for England, because they collect the Stade dues which equally belong to a foreign

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state (Hanover) and are of an exceptionable nature. As this duty is beginning to attract notice, a few words about it may not seem out of place. The right of levying a toll on every vessel ascending the Elbe, in proportion to her value, was granted by the emperors of Germany to certain of the Hanse towns for the improvement and protection of the navigation of the Elbe; and Stade, a convenient spot on the left bank, not far from the mouth of the river, was fixed on for the purpose. In the present day, none but fishing boats and other small craft pay the duty at Stade: vessels of burthen proceed on to Hamburgh, and there acquit themselves.

When Sweden conquered Bremen, in the seventeenth century, with the adjoining territory on the left bank of the Elbe, she became also receiver of the Stade dues, which were then considered a goodly item of revenue. Sweden, however, did not long enjoy them. England assisted the Elector of Luneburgh to drive out the Swedes, and from that time the produce of the Stade duty has belonged to the Hanoverian government. All vessels are subject to it, excepting those of Denmark and Hamburgh, as belonging to riverain states. Considering the connexion between England and Hanover, the duty has fallen very hard on the English trade,

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STADE DUTY.

7

and the rigid maintenance of it is a remarkable exemplification of the affection with which the Guelphic race has ever regarded its hereditary dominions. No minister in England would ever interfere with Hanover. The Stade dues have caused much irritation and remonstrance since 1820; yet the ministers of George the Fourth and William the Fourth would not, or could not, induce those monarchs to yield or modify them.

Since the separation of Hanover from England the subject has been taken up with earnestness by the English government, and already some modifications have been obtained. At the same time his Hanoverian Majesty may think it rather hard that he should be required to abandon a duty* which forms an important item in the revenue of a small state, when the wealthy monarchs of Great Britain and Hanover combined enjoyed it unquestioned for more than a century. He may deem himself entitled to expect a compensation, for if duration gives a right, no duty rests on a clearer foundation; it is, perhaps, the most ancient one in Europe. A convenient compensation, suiting all parties, might be found in the cession of Heligoland to Hanover. In

* The Stade dues collected by the Hanoverian government amount to near 30,000*l.* a year, of which sum English vessels contribute about 13,000*l.*

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that case, the Hanoverian government might abandon the Stade duty which is obnoxious and of unequal pressure, and in part compensation thereof exact a light-due on *all vessels* which enter the Elbe, at which no one could reasonably murmur. As England has no sovereign rights in the Elbe, the possession of Heligoland will never enable her to make any vessels besides her own pay for the light; whereas Hanover, being in possession of such rights, would have the power to enforce a just rate on ships of all nations. The Heligolandiers would profit greatly by the change of masters: they are peculiarly aggrieved by the Stade dues, from which they were exempted, as subjects of Denmark, till their island became annexed to England. It rarely happens that any people suffers by coming under the English rule, but these poor islanders certainly have done so. They depend principally on fishing for their livelihood. They carry the produce of their nets to Hamburgh, where, owing to the Stade duty, to which they are liable as non-riverains, they have not a fair chance in the market with the Blankenese fishermen who are exempted from the duty as subjects of Denmark. In addition to this immediate and direct disadvantage which the Heligolander suffers, the detention at Stade to have his cargo entered

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CUXHAVEN.

9

and rated may cause him to lose a fair wind and tide, seeing at the same time his Danish rivals take advantage of both.

An old English gun-brig lies off Stade, and composes the Hanoverian navy.

I did not proceed so far up the river, but stopped at Cuxhaven. Having an idea of returning to England by the same route, I thought that one visit to Hamburgh would suffice. At the moment of landing I found myself embarrassed with a saddle which I had brought for the purpose of riding through European Turkey to Constantinople. I had intended to forward it from Hamburgh to Vienna by *wagen*, but feared now the loss of it, if I trusted to the captain's eyes to see it booked. I did not like to increase my *impedimenta*—(expressive word!)—by taking it with me; for although a saddle takes up very little room on a horse, it is a most impracticable article in a carriage. From this dilemma one of our fellow-passengers, a merchant of Hamburgh, relieved me, by offering to see it forwarded securely. He kept his word. I found my saddle with his correspondent at Vienna; but the charges of the worthy trader rather surprised me. The expenses at Hamburgh (how incurred I could not guess, for the duty on goods for consumption is only half per cent., and

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none is charged on goods for transit) amounted to more than eleven florins, while the cost of carriage to Vienna was less than three florins. Mr. H. Karsten, a merchant of Bremen, changed his intention of returning home by Hamburgh, and offered me his company, which proved very acceptable.

Cuxhaven appeared Turkish in my eyes. The square was little better than a swamp; the streets were unpaved, and the houses chiefly built of wood. But the place had that in which every Turkish town is deficient, not even excepting Pera, viz. a good inn; where, while our carriage was preparing, we discussed an excellent breakfast for the moderate charge of one shilling a-head. We found also a notable bathing establishment, and a ball-room, for the benefit and amusement of the Hamburghers. Many of the citizens, however, as the water at Cuxhaven is rather brackish, prefer sea-bathing at Nordeneye, a small island belonging to Hanover at the mouth of the Weser, where the air is considered particularly invigorating. A steamer runs, in the season, between Hamburgh and Nordeneye. The Crown Prince of Hanover has frequented Nordeneye each season since his father's accession, and the spot has consequently risen in estimation, though the exe-