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978-1-108-06489-7 - Berlin under the New Empire: Its Institutions, Inhabitants, Industry, Monuments, Museums, Social Life, Manners, and Amusements: Volume 1

Henry Vizetelly

Excerpt

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NORTH GERMAN ENERGY.

BERLIN UNDER THE NEW EMPIRE.

I.

EN ROUTE.



ADDLE of gold on a scurvy steed—the quaint past century simile characterizing the capital of the Mark of Brandenburg in the midst of a barren sandy plain—recurred to one's mind while deliberating where to spend an autumn holiday, and coupled with the then approaching meeting there of a triad of Emperors, turned the scale in favour of Berlin.

At this epoch, with the German troops still in France, and Frenchmen brooding bitterly over their uncomfortable reminiscences, the mere repetition at the ticket place of the Paris Gare de l'Est of the words "*À Berlin,*" sufficed to attract scores of angry

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eyes upon one. Rather more than two years previously one had heard the too-familiar formula shouted for the first time by a mercenary Paris mob. "*À Berlin!*"—What scenes those simple words recall! A population worked into a paroxysm of excitement, verging on to madness, by the yells of disguised police spies; two battles and two defeats; the midnight flight of a sovereign, protected by a faithful escort, from Metz; followed by a greater battle and another reverse, more disastrous than all the rest, resulting in the sending of the mock Cæsar into captivity and the overturning of his throne. Then ensued a period during which a people—deprived of its armies, its generals, its engines of war, its means of communication, of everything indeed that constitutes the strength of a state, save patriotism—struggled hopelessly to retrieve its losses. At last came the end, and France, whose power had made the nations tremble, found herself humbled to the dust.

Long resident in the *soi-disant* capital of civilisation, and a witness of its subjugation by the "barbaric hordes of the modern Attila," as the angry Parisians used to style the flaxen-haired, chubby-faced German youth, who for five months held them in thrall, and when all was over bivouacked so peaceably around the monumental Arc de l'Etoile, inscribed over with long lists of assumed German defeats, without so much as obliterating the name of a single apocryphal one—long resident in Paris, I had determined upon a short sojourn in the capital of this new united Germany, which had "issued from the brain of Count Bismarck, sword in hand, as Minerva came of old from the brain of Jupiter"—a capital whose destiny the Prussians fondly dream is to depose Paris from its continental supremacy, and whose inhabitants complacently describe it as the City of Intelligence, the Athens of the Spree.

Bradshaw times the distance between Paris and Berlin at thirty hours, but it was my ill-luck to be several days on the road from the common accident of one's luggage going astray, leading one to the discovery that La Rochefoucauld might have given a wider application to his famous apothegm, the amount of amusement which my fellow-travellers, in common with the railway officials and hotel waiters, derived from my mishap, proving that the misfortunes of perfect strangers, quite as much as those of intimate friends, tend greatly to the gratification of the rest of mankind.

Day after day was I doomed to remain in odoriferous Cologne, with the lions of which one had long since been acquainted, from its marvellous modern mediæval cathedral, with its gimcrack shrine of the Magi and its bones of the pseudo 11,000 virgins, to the house on the Sternengasse, where Rubens was born, and Marie de Medicis—whose apotheosis by the ambassador-artist forms a gallery of itself in the Louvre—died in exile and in misery.

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After spending five days in Cologne and fifty francs in telegrams, attending the arrival of all the trains, scrutinizing every article of luggage from the railway vans, and envying the fortunate possessor of even a solitary *sac-de-nuit*, my baggage at last turned up—one port-manteau with its lock forced and the other slit with a sharp knife to allow of the introduction of a felonious finger and thumb, and the filching of sundry articles of various degrees of value from a pair of patent leather boots to a cake of old brown Windsor.



AT THE FRONTIER.

Distance certainly lent enchantment to the view which I obtained of Cologne as the train rolled over the huge iron railway bridge across the Rhine on its way to Dusseldorf—the birthplace, as one remembered, of the poet Heine and the painter Cornelius—and swept through the Rhine “black country,” past embranchments with long trains of coal-trucks, steaming away to furnace and factory, past Oberhausen and Essen, where the gigantic iron and steel foundries of Jacobi and Krupp are incessantly at work, their forests of tall chimneys belching forth huge clouds of smoke, which hang in dusky canopies over the pair of prosperous and begrimed Westphalian towns. At Essen, which is simply a section of the immense workman’s city, covering the entire coal basin from Dusseldorf to Dortmund, and numbering its 5000 inhabitants per square mile, in whichever direction the eyes are turned one invariably sees heavy locomotives constantly coming and going, and huge black hillocks of coal heaped up all around, with endless phantom chimneys rising like lofty antique obelisks out of the surrounding gloom. To the left is an agglomeration of Babylonian buildings, surmounted by imposing towers and surrounded by a wall high and well nigh solid as a rampart.¹ This is the gloomy abode of the true Iron King, Herr Krupp, “the master

¹ “Herr Krupp,” observes M. Victor Tissot, “is so afraid lest his secret should be surprised that he surrounds his states with a veritable Great Wall of China on which this inscription is incessantly repeated in three languages—‘The public are informed that in asking to view the establishment they expose themselves to a refusal.’”

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gunner of the age, who has sent more heroes to Hades than any artillerist of his time." "Prussia's victories," remarks a contemporary Frenchman, "have been shaped by Herr Krupp; and his cyclops have done more for German unity than Bismarck himself. The military supremacy of the empire is at Essen even more than at Berlin."

Less than half a century ago the father of Herr Krupp began business here with a couple of workmen; five years ago—since which date it has been largely extended—the establishment covered 510 acres of ground, more than one-fourth of which was roofed in, and was connected with three separate lines of railway by branches nearly twenty miles in length, which, with all their rolling stock, were the exclusive property of the firm. There were upwards of 400 furnaces, 250 steam-engines, some of 1000 horse-power, fifty-one steam-hammers, the odd one, weighing fifty tons and costing £100,000 to manufacture, and which sounds like a cannon when at work, being prudently kept employed day and night so as not to lose for a single moment the interest of the capital sunk on it, besides forges, lathes and planing, cutting, shaping, boring, and grinding machines innumerable. Over 10,000 hands were employed at the works, which, with the plant and stock, were valued at upwards of a couple of millions sterling.

Since this period (1871) the value and productive power of the works have been enormously augmented. In 1874 the number of hands was increased to 16,000, while 65,000 tons of steel are produced annually at the establishment. Great stress is laid on the choice of the raw material—which Herr Krupp transports from his own mines in Spain on board his own ships,—and on the proper blending of the composite metal. The steel produced is very pure, close, fine-grained, and free from flaws, and its power of resistance is greater than that of Bessemer steel. Last year, with large orders in course of execution for Turkey, Egypt, Russia, China, and Spain, Herr Krupp was nevertheless able to deliver a hundred cannons a week to the different German artillery depots. His last achievement is a cannon of fourteen and a half inches bore, carrying a shot weighing 330 lbs. capable of piercing a plate of solid iron from twenty to twenty-four inches thick. The Krupp workmen ordinarily receive from one and a half to two thalers per day. Wages were lowered at the commencement of the year, but the men participate in the profits of the establishment. An assurance fund pays the doctor and provides medicine in cases of sickness, besides relieving the widow in the event of death. After sixteen years' service the workman receives an annually increasing allowance from the pension fund, and after twenty years he becomes entitled to a retiring pension for the rest of his life. Attached to the establishment are several schools and a hospital founded

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by Herr Krupp, who once laboured at Essen himself working beside his father in the little forge still preserved near the chief entrance to show what industry and energy will lead to.

Less than an hour after leaving Essen one passes Dortmund, in the heart of the Westphalian coal and iron district, where the famous Vehmgericht—that powerful secret tribunal which bound its members by fearful oaths blindly to execute its decrees, and for a couple of centuries exercised sway throughout the Empire—had its origin, and where the last of the ancient linden trees of the Königshof, under which the Emperor Sigismund himself was affiliated to the grim fraternity, may still be seen.

Whilst the train stopped for a few minutes at Gutersloh, where there was the usual ravenous rush at the refreshments,



one seized the opportunity of tasting the sacchariferous brown bread of the district, the renowned Westphalian pumpernickel, which traces its whimsical name, as the learned in nomenclatures pretend, to the "*bon pour Nickel*" of some French trooper, who detested the over-rated delicacy, but thought it good enough for his horse. Here, as elsewhere along the line, one could not help being struck by the military tone which characterises the Prussian railway service. Almost all the staff have been soldiers, and engine-drivers and guards invariably make a point of saluting the station-master whenever the train enters or leaves the station. It is perhaps these marks of respect received from their subordinates which render the higher railway officials so brusque and peremptory towards the travelling public. Apropos of this an amusing story is told. It appears that, as a train was about starting from Berlin, an individual rushed along the line of carriages, shouting, "Herr Müller! Herr Müller!" when a traveller inconsiderately thrust his head out of the window, and, to his intense surprise, received a smart slap in the face. Highly

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indignant he jumped out and sought the station-master, who, after listening to his complaint, simply inquired his name. "Schultze," was the reply. "In that case," rejoined the station-master, "the matter does not concern you at all; the gentleman inquires for Herr Müller, and you, Schultze, very unnecessarily put out your head. Take your seat again instantly, or you'll be left behind;" and with that he signalled for the train to start.

Hemmed in by trees, under which a few lean kine are solemnly ruminating, one sleepy-looking Westphalian village, with tall tiled roofs and low church spire, is passed after another, the peasants mostly abroad in the neighbouring fields gathering in the final



harvests. As the train rushes swiftly by, at one cottage-door we catch sight of a plump young Gretchen sedately knitting, while the kittens gambol with her rolling ball of scarlet worsted; then of some aged grandsire, embarrassed at having to divide his attention between little Peterkin squatting at his feet and the faithful Tray frisking by his side; and finally of a plump, fair-haired matron, in red petticoat and black head-dress, who spins and sings while some future conscript of the new Empire, in the shape of a merry, chubby-cheeked baby, rolls half-naked in the dust at her side. We now traverse miles of singularly uninteresting country, "generating hard-handed, broad-backed, stubborn carles, whose whole lives are spent in struggling hard to vanquish the natural infertility of the soil. Enormous plains, of barren aspect, stretch away to the horizon, northwards and southwards; every here and there a row of melancholy trees breaks the monotony of the landscape; but other element of the picturesque there is none."

Here one first encounters that peculiar breed of black and white cattle, which is met with all the country through almost up to Berlin, although one looks in vain for the fatted swine yielding the famed Westphalian hams. The train, on crossing the Weser, enters a hilly district, terminating in a narrow defile known as the Porta Westphalica, on emerging from which we find ourselves at Minden. The historic battle-field lies north of the town and westward of the famous "wood-crowned height," whereon, according to the poet, the venturesome Eliza stood, "o'er Minden's plain, spectatress of the fight" at which an English general, Lord George Sackville, showed the white feather, and some regiments of English infantry accomplished what the French commander believed to be impossible—"a single line breaking through three lines of cavalry, ranked in order of battle, and tumbling them to ruin."

One broke the journey at Hanover to glance at Herrenhausen, described by Thackeray as scarcely changed since the unlucky day when the obese Electress Sophia fell down there in a fit, in the avenue her own hands had planted, and went the way of all flesh only a few weeks before the death of Queen Anne paved the way for the accession of the Brunswick Stuarts to the British throne. "I made it my business," observes Thackeray, "to visit that ugly cradle in which our Georges were nursed. The old town of Hanover must look still pretty much as in the time when George Louis left it. The gardens and pavilions of Herrenhausen are scarce changed since the day when the stout old Electress Sophia fell down in her last walk there. . . . You may see at Herrenhausen the very rustic theatre in which the Platens danced and performed masques and sang before the Elector and his sons. There are the very same fauns and dryads of stone still glimmering through the branches—still grinning and piping their ditties of no tone, as in the days when painted nymphs hung garlands round them, appeared under their leafy arcades with gilt crooks guiding rams with gilt horns, descended from machines in the guise of Diana or Minerva, and delivered immense allegorical compliments to the princes returned home from the campaign."

We found the cradle of the Georges slightly different from what it was when Thackeray was there. The Palace of the deposed blind King was falling into decay, and the neglected gardens were subsiding into a wilderness. We threaded their grass-grown rectangular walks, shut in on both sides by lofty walls of clipped foliage, crossed the neglected *tapis vert*, with its troop of mildewed clumsy high Dutch goddesses sculptured in emulation of the graceful marble nymphs of Versailles, past the careless-ordered geometrical parterres to the mouldy-looking stone basin surrounded by roses, laurels, orange trees and cypresses, symbolical, it seems to us, of the love-making, fight-

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ing, marrying and dying of the race of Hanoverian Guelphs. It is here that we found the petty spiral water-works which George the First used to point out to his guests as something uncommonly fine, and which when set to play for our delectation roused up the plump and lazy gold fish from the bottom of the slimy turgid pool. An old gardener, smoking a long German pipe, who showed us over the grounds, drew particular attention to the orange and cypress trees of which he appeared to take especial care. Having heard that Hanover was by no means reconciled to its absorption by the Hohenzollerns, "*Das ist Preussen!*" said I to try the old fellow, pointing at the same time to the ground. "*Das ist nicht Preussen,*" answered he, stamping his foot violently upon the gravel walk sadly in want of weeding—" *das ist Hannover!*"

The city of Hanover is a dull beautified quiet place and the province generally presents all the outward appearances of a sleepy sort of prosperity. Its fertile fields, and wooded hills, and endless sweeps of rolling ground remind one very much of England, and certain parts more especially of the weald of Kent. One misses, it is true, the stately homes of the large landowners and the big thatched barns of the thriving farmers, still all the homesteads have a comfortable well-to-do air, and the invariable tidiness of the peasantry about the heels, shows them to be better off in the matter of shoe leather, not only than the majority of their brethren in Germany, but likewise in France.

At Brunswick, the city of the fiery Guelphs who resisted the Emperors of Germany for a couple of centuries, the Altstadt Rathhaus, a graceful late 13th century Gothic structure unequalled throughout Germany, is worth coming all the way to see. In front of the pillars supporting its rich arcades of perforated stone work, stand characteristic life-size statues of Guelphic princes, all in their habits as they lived. The still flickering grand-duchy of Brunswick hardly impressed one so favourably as the recently snuffed-out kingdom of Hanover, nevertheless as regards fertility it appeared to be largely in advance of Prussian Saxony, which the railway enters just as we catch sight of the mountain chain of the Harz, dominated by the witch-haunted Brocken, the traditional scene of the Walpurgis saturnalia.

Little more than two hours' ride from Brunswick brought us to Magdeburg on the Elbe, a fortified town of the first class, which during the Thirty Years' War, after standing a two years' siege was taken by storm by the Imperialist general Tilly and burnt to the ground, thirty thousand of its inhabitants, according to the Protestant version, being put to the sword or perishing in the flames. "Since the destruction of Jerusalem and Troy," wrote the sanguinary commander of this wholesale butchery, "there has never been seen such a famous victory."

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In the citadel of Magdeburg, constructed on an island in the Elbe, Baron Trenck, the audacious lover of the beautiful and witty Princess Amelia, youngest sister of Friedrich the Great, and the "malevolent fairy" of the family, was confined for nine dreary years, heavily chained to his dungeon walls. Trenck, a handsome subaltern in his majesty's guards, and aide-de-camp to the King, had attracted the princess's regards at some ball, and the result was one of those amorous intrigues such as German princesses of the epoch were prone to indulge in, although Carlyle, in the fulness of his hero worship, cavalierly classes it among the myths. Hints and warnings on the part of Friedrich having failed to put a stop to the perilous intercourse, some breach of military discipline furnished him with an excuse for placing Trenck under arrest, and packing him off to the fortress of Glatz. "Guard well this knave," wrote he to the commandant; but to no avail, for Trenck succeeded in escaping to Vienna, and an inquiry which followed, elicited that the Princess had been supplying him liberally with funds. After some years, spent in one or another northern capital he fell into Friedrich's clutches at Dantzic, when he was transferred to Berlin, and afterwards to Magdeburg, where his dungeon in the Sternschanze forms one of the sights of the place. Lafayette was at one time a prisoner at Magdeburg, while Carnot, the great military administrator of the revolutionary epoch, died there in banishment,—

"And borrowed from his enemies
Six foot of ground to lie upon."

On leaving Magdeburg, the railway crosses a broad sandy plain stretching for miles on either side of the line, with sand hills bounding the view. Dispersed over this barren spot were one or two windmills, while here and there clusters of trees stood like oases in the midst of a desert. Then suddenly, by an unaccountable freak of nature, the parched soil was succeeded by a strip of marsh land where long rank grass grew to the very edge of the line. Then the sandy soil again presented itself covered with short scorched grass varied at intervals by a field of stubble and an occasional flock of geese, or dotted by clusters of pine trees as if only they were sufficiently hardy to grow in this arid waste.

Altogether nothing can be sadder and more desolate-looking than this Mark of Brandenburg, through which the little river Spree winds its way with such inimitable resignation. Well may Berlin wits pretend that their ancestors would never have settled in so forbidding a territory had there not been a deplorable lack of good maps some thousands of years ago. Between Magdeburg and Berlin we pass no towns but merely some miserable cottages grouped here and there around a neglected steeple; the

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country, flat and uniform, is broken only by sand-banks and stunted pines with knotted roots, and casual pools of greenish water at which cows, lean as those of Pharaoh's dream, are drinking.¹ Little windmills perched on piles of stones rise up here and there, agitating their sails as moths do their wings, but not a human being and scarcely a bird meets the eye. Occasionally a few poppies impart a touch of colour to the dreary landscape, rendered all the more melancholy-looking by the lowering grey autumnal sky. Well might the Brandenburg poet sing :—

“ Oh, what a bare and dreary land !
No hill, no vale, only dry sand,
No roses, not an oak !”

After another sandy waste, inducing the belief that we are approaching a seaport town, several beautiful lakes, with fleets of



punts and flocks of swans and wild fowl in the distance, burst suddenly upon our view. Next we pass a forest of pines, then another strip of sand and a few villages, and we are at Potsdam, watered by the Havel and rendered highly picturesque by extensive plantations which thread alike the valleys and cross the surrounding hills ; also by vast and beautiful gardens and elaborate architectural embellishments, for Potsdam counts almost half a score of palaces. Some involuntary exclamations of surprise at the pleasing transformation the scenery had undergone aroused our weary fellow-travellers, most of whom sensibly enough had taken refuge in slumber while the train was traversing the seemingly interminable dreary waste, and heads were at once eagerly thrust out of window to obtain a glimpse of Potsdam and its attractions. In another half hour the train stopped at a small wooden station to which no name was affixed. As every-

¹ *Voyage aux Pays des Milliards*, par M. Victor Tissot.