The Life of the Moselle

THE LIFE OF THE MOSELLE

[ILLUSTRATED]

BY

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ILLUSTRATED

BY

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Preface (About the Book)

The beautiful scenery of the Moselle has too long been left without notice. It is true, some of our Artists have presented to us scenes on the banks of this river; but English travellers are, for the most part, ignorant how very charming and eminently picturesque are the shores of this lovely stream.

"The Rhine! the Rhine!" is quoted by every one, and admired or abused at every fireside, but the Moselle is almost wholly unexplored. Lying, as she does, within a district absolutely overrun with summer-tourists, it is altogether inexplicable that a river presenting scenery unsurpassed in Europe should be so neglected by those who in thousands pass the mouth of her stream. When the Roman Poet Ausonius visited Germany, it was not the Rhine, but the Moselle which most pleased him; and although glorious Italy was his home, yet he could spare time to explore the Moselle, and extol the loveliness of her waters in a most eloquent poem.

The Moselle, which rises among the wooded mountains of the Department des Vosges, never during its whole course is otherwise than beautiful. Below Trèves it passes between the Eifel and Hunsruck ranges of mountains, which attain to the height of ten or twelve hundred feet above the level of the river.

In the Thirty Years' War the Moselle country suffered severely from the ravages of the different armies; but there still remain on the shores of this river more old castles and ruins, and more curious old houses, than can elsewhere be found in a like space in Europe.

Having in the following pages endeavoured to lay before English readers the interesting scenery of the Moselle, I trust, that although in summer my countrymen do not mount her stream, fearful, perhaps, of discomfort; yet that by the fireside in winter the public will not object to glide down the river, in the boat now ready for them to embark in; and hoping that they will enjoy the reproduction of a tour that afforded me so much pleasure,

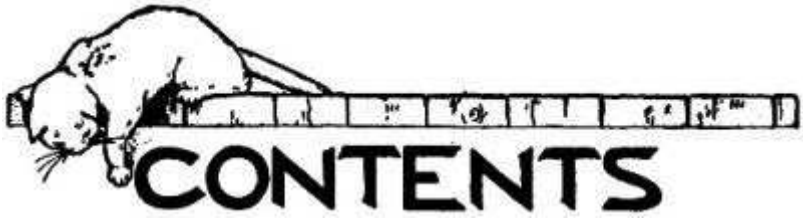
I subscribe myself

Their humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

Richmond, December 1857.

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CHAPTER

THE LIFE OF THE MOSELLE [ILLUSTRATED].....**1**

Preface (About the Book).....**5**

Chapter I.....**12**
BİRTH OF THE MOSELLE.....14

Chapter II.....**23**

Chapter III.....**35**
ADELE AND GUSTAVE.....37
Part II 39
Part III 40
THE HARVEST SONG.....41

Chapter IV.....**50**
THE OLİNDA.....56
THE MİRACULOUS SHİRT.....61
PLOT OF THE CORDELİERS.....71

Chapter V.....**75**
MOSELLE FLOWERS.....76

Chapter VI.....**81**
LEGEND OF THE GREAT CANAL FROM TREVES TO COLOGNE.....84
LEGEND OF THE DOM² OF TREVES.....85
THE RİNG.....88
THE CRUCİFİX IN THE MARKET-PLACE.....88
LEGEND OF ORENDEL.....95
THE GREAT MASSACRE.....93
ST. MATERN.....94
THE FİRST FOUNDLİNG HOSPİTAL.....94
THE ANİMATED WİNE-CASKS.....98

Chapter VII.....**111**
THE FERRY.....117
CHURCH MUSİC.....121

Chapter VIII……**123**
LEGEND OF GENOVEVA……125
TRİTHEMİUS AND THE EMPEROR……...130
THE VİNE……...137

Chapter IX……**139**
PRAİSE OF WATER……..146

Chapter X……..**148**
REFLECTİONS……150
THE CELL OF EBERHARD……...151
THE BLOOMİNG ROSES……..152
LEGEND OF VELDENZ……....155

Chapter XI……**160**
THE BEST DOCTOR……162
THE BAD MAURUS……..166
MORNİNG MİSTS……167

Chapter XII……...**170**
THE PRİZE OF BEAUTY?.....172
THE CASK IN RESERVE……...174
ERMESİNDE……176
MOUNT ROYAL……...181

Chapter XIII……**183**
THE BİSHOP'S RANSOM……..185
THE LİLY IN THE CHOİR……189

Chapter XIV……..**191**
THE VALLEY OF HUSBANDS……...194
THE PALE NUN……...197
THE GOLD CROWN……199

Chapter XV……....**203**
LİNES ON THE KASEGROTTE……211
LİNES ON THE PETER'S BRUNNEN……213
EVENİNG SHADOWS……...216

Chapter XVI……..**218**
THE ANGEL WORKMEN……220
GİSELA……....222
A LİBEL ON NİGHTİNGALES……..223
THE SHİPMASTER'S DAUGHTER OF BEİLSTEİN……..225

Chapter XVII……**228**
LEGEND OF COCHEM……229

Chapter XVIII.....**239**
Ivy-Girt Ruins.....243
Legend of St. Castor.....246
The Perforated Harness.....250
Jutta of Pyrmont.....253

Chapter XIX.....**257**
The Bishop's Sermon.....258
The Last Knight of Ehrenburg.....261
The Timely Warning.....262
Siege of Thuron.....268
The Bird And the Ruin.....269

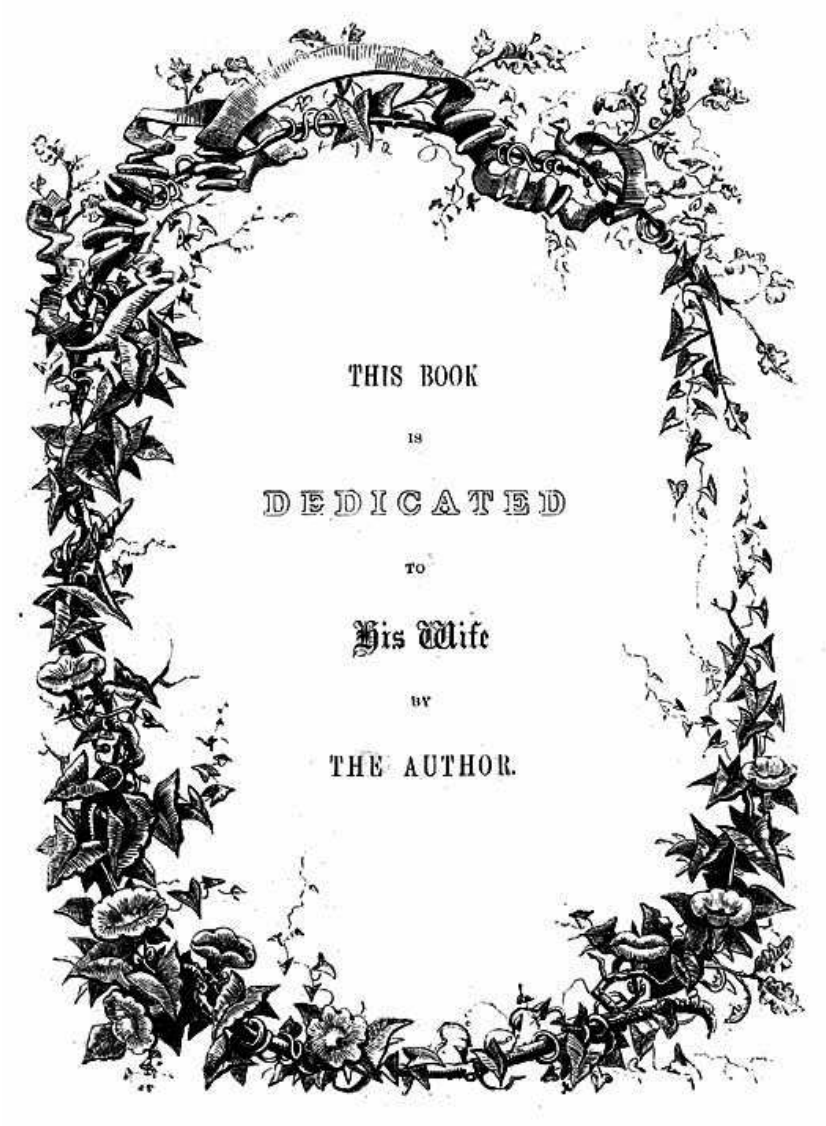
Chapter XX.....**271**
The Red Sleeve.....275
The Hermit of Cobern.....276
The Characteristic Mark of Cobern.....279

Chapter XXI.....**283**
The Succession of the Seasons.....285
The Fate of the False Swearer.....288

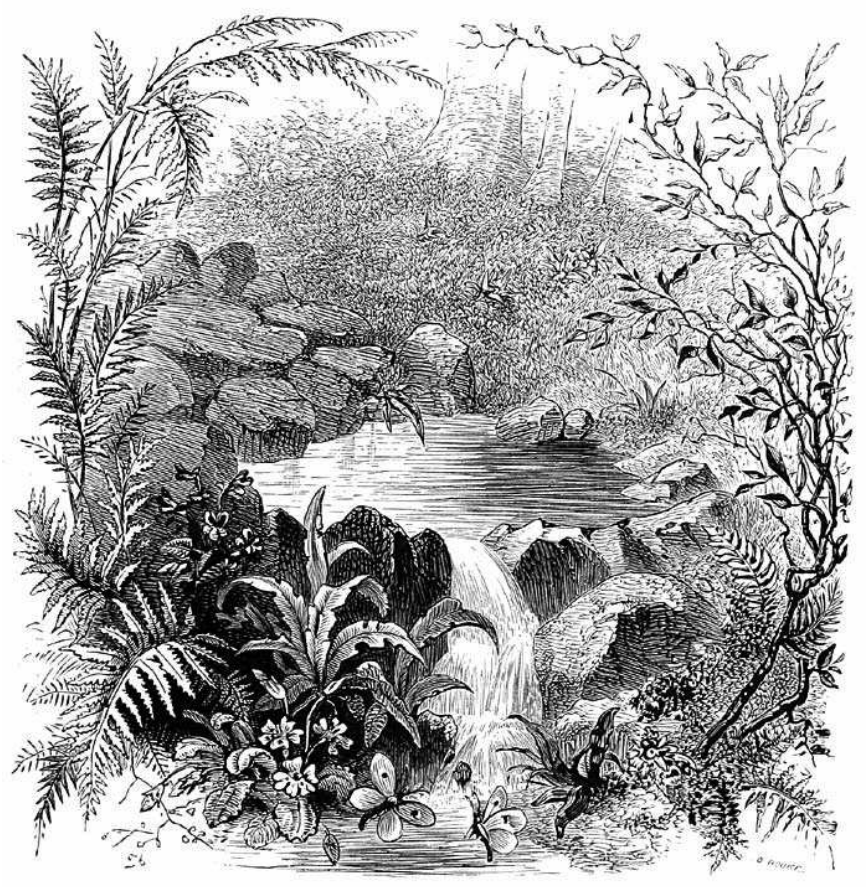
Chapter XXII.....**292**
Legend of the Moselle Bridge.....296
Legend of Mariahilf.....300
Saint Ritza.....301
Corporal Spohn.....302
Henry And Bertha.....302
The Poet's Deathbed.....303






THIS BOOK
IS
DEDICATED
TO
His Wife
BY
THE AUTHOR.

Chapter I



Source.

At a short distance from Bussang, a little town in the Department des Vosges in France, is the source of the Moselle; trickling through the moss and stones that, together with fallen leaves, strew the ground, come the first few drops of this beautiful river.

A few yards lower down the hill-side, these drops are received into a little pool of fairy dimensions; this tiny pool of fresh sweet water is surrounded by mossy stones, wild garlic, ferns, little creepers of many forms, and stems of trees.

The trees, principally pine, grow thickly over the whole ballon (as the hills are here called); many are of great size; they shut out the heat of the sun, and clothe the earth with tremulous shadows—tremulous, because the broad but feathery ferns receive bright rays, and waving to and fro in the gentle breeze give the shadows an appearance of constant movement.

Here, then, O reader, let us pause and contemplate the birth-place of our stream; leaving the world of stern reality, let us plunge together into the grateful spring of sweet romance; and while the only sounds of life that reach our ears are the rustling of the leaves, the buzz of the great flies, the murmur of the Moselle, and the distant ringing of the woodman's axe, let us return with Memory into the past, and leaving even her behind, go back to those legendary days when spirits purer than ourselves lived and gloried in that beautifully created world which we are daily rendering all unfit for even the ideal habitation of such spirits.

And reverie is not idleness; in hours like these we seem to see before us, cleared from the mists of daily cares, the better path through life—the broad straight path, not thorny and difficult, as men are too prone to paint it, but strewed with those flowers and shaded with those trees given by a beneficent Creator to be enjoyed rightly by us earthly pilgrims.

Life is a pilgrimage indeed, but not a joyless one. While the whole earth and sky teem with glory and beauty, are we to believe

that these things may not be enjoyed? Our conscience answers, No; rightly to enjoy, and rightly to perform our duties, with thankfulness, and praise, and love within our hearts, such is our part to perform, and such the lesson we are taught by the fairy of the sweet Moselle.

Birth of the Moselle

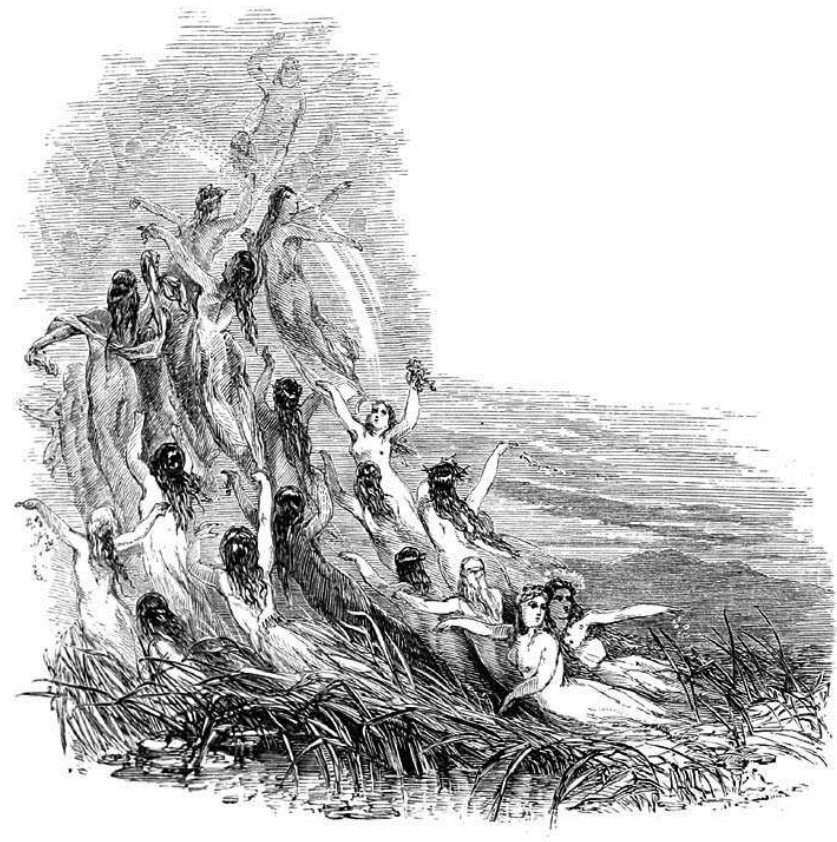
1. The fair Colline slept in sunshine, when from the far horizon a rain-cloud saw her beauty, and with impetuous ardour rushing through the sky he sought the gentle Colline, wooed her with soft showers, and decked her with jewelled drops and bright fresh flowers.

She soon learnt to love the rugged cloud, and from their union sprang a bright streamlet which, cradled in its mother's lap, reflected her sweet image. Then, as the time passed on, the little one increased in strength, and leapt and danced about its mother's knee. Larger and stronger grew the streamlet until its tripping step became more firm, and then it passed into the valley, catching reflections from the things around. And onward went this fairy stream, her source watched over by a mother's love; and her cloud-father fed her as she passed between her grassy banks.

Then girlhood came, and sister streams flowed in, and, whispering to her, told their little tales of life: so now, her mind enlarged, she onward flows, sometimes reflecting on the things of earth, but oftener expanding her pure bosom to catch the impress

of the holy sky; and all the tenants of the sky loved to impart their infinite beauties and their glory to the pure stream.

The age of girlhood passes now away, and she becomes a fair maiden, to gaze on whose beauties towers and cities, castles, spires, and hills, come crowding, and line her path, each giving her the gift of its own being.



Now come the mountains, too, with their crowns of forest waving on their heads, and do homage to her beauty: she gives a sweet smile to all, lingering at every turn to look back upon her friends; but yet she tarries not, her duty leads her on,—nor worldly pomp, or pride, or power, can keep her from her

appointed path; she leaves them all behind, and swelling onwards through the level plain, receives the approving glance of heaven, and meets her noble husband Rhine, who, long expecting, folds her in his arms. And thus her pilgrimage complete, her duty ended, she calmly sleeps that happy sleep which wakes only in eternity.

Such is the history of the birth and life of the Moselle. We have now to wander from her birthplace here, in the Vosges mountains, to where she joins her glorious husband Rhine beneath the walls of Ehrenbreitstein. From time to time we shall linger by the roadside, to pluck a flower from legendary lore; from time to time we shall stop to secure a chip from the great rock of history: storing thus our herbal and our sack as well as our portfolio, we shall follow the many bendings of our graceful river, which, womanlike, moves gently and caressingly along, soothing and gladdening all things.

The fairy and the river are as one, life within life; ever flowing on, yet always present; ever young, and yet how old; ever springing freshly mid the hills and woods, yet ever ending the appointed course.

One life is material, earthly, but still sweet and beautiful; the other life is born of the first, but far exceeds it,—it is the life poetic, whose other parent is the human mind: this life, which leaves the parent life behind, floats upwards on its glorious wings and reaches the highest realms of heaven, carrying with it the souls of those who read this life aright——

Lying here beneath the pines, we recall those old days of the past when, on the borders of our river, only forests waved, amid whose depths tribes of wild warriors dwelt apart,—their only amusement hunting, their only business war, they scorned to cultivate the soil save for their actual necessities.

In this neighbourhood lived the Leuci, whose capital was Toul; lower down, the Mediomatrices had their chief city, Metz; and beyond these again came the Treviri, occupying the country about Trèves.

All these were members of that great German family which gave sea-kings to Norway, conquerors to imperial Rome, and at a later day that champion (Charles Martel) who stayed the tide of Moslem conquest near Poitiers; thus Christianising half Europe, and probably saving all earth from Mahomet's false creed.

Rugged and strong were these old Germans—the huge pines well represent them; glorious in strength, stern in duty, upright, sombre, and picturesquely magnificent: they are recorded as having been of great size, with blue eyes and light hair, inured to every hardship, and never laving aside their arms.

Owning no superior, yet when once they had elected a chief, and raised him aloft upon their shields, they obeyed him implicitly; if unsuccessful in battle they would kill themselves rather than survive, believing that those who died on the battle-field were received by the Walkyren, or heavenly maidens, who hovered over the fight and chose lovers from the dying warriors.

What a picture of barbaric grandeur and indomitable will is given us in the last act of one of their more northern naval heroes! Being mortally wounded in a fight in which he had

conquered his enemies, he caused himself to be placed on board his vessel with the bodies of his slain enemies around him, and all his plunder piled into a throne, on which he sat,—then the sails were set, the pile was lighted, and the blazing vessel putting out to sea, he sought his heaven—Walhalla.

This Walhalla was supposed to contain a great battle-field, on which the warriors fought their foes all day, receiving no hurt; and at evening they returned to carouse and enjoy the caresses of the Walkyren.

Of these immediate tribes, however, Cæsar relates, that "they only worshipped the forms of the gods they could see and whose beneficence they felt, such as the sun, moon, and fire; of others they had never heard." Doubtless, in after days, they adopted many of the Roman divinities, but at the time of which we speak they adored their Creator on the mountain tops; and when Christianity was introduced they built their churches on the tops of hills, and even now the sacred edifices are usually placed on eminences. Some remnant of the old hill-worship still remains, for the Mass is annually read to the Sens shepherds on the Alps; and not long ago the Saint John's fire was yearly lit upon the hill-tops.

Christmas was their most holy time; for then, they said, the gods walked on earth.

The oak and the alder were objects of especial reverence; for from the former man was made, and woman from the latter.

They considered all trees, and flowers, and plants, and stones, and even animals, to be inhabited by beings of a superior order, who came from an intermediate heaven and hell.

Lakes, rivers, and springs, were held in special veneration; and Petrarch relates, that even in the fourteenth century the women at Cologne bathed in the Rhine to wash away their sins.

Strangely in their natures were intermixed the gentle and the savage, the cruel and the terrible, with the honourable and brave. Side by side we find human sacrifices and a festival in honour of the first violet; men who had been mutilated, and sickly children were sunk in morasses, or otherwise destroyed; and we find them with a pure love for woman, whom they held in the highest reverence. Their women were brought up in the strictest seclusion, scarcely seeing any stranger,—an injury offered to female modesty was punished by death, and fines for injuries done to them were heavier than for those to men.

Maidens were portionless, so only married for their merits or their beauty: they seldom married before their twentieth year, and the husband had generally reached his thirtieth; they had but one husband, and the historian Tacitus observes, speaking of them, "as she can have but one body and one life, so she can have but one husband."

Prophetesses were frequent, and great confidence placed in their predictions,—they were called Alrunæ, and lived apart in the recesses of the forests.

They had many ways of interpreting the will of the gods, but of all interpreters the horse was considered the most sacred; white horses were peculiarly venerated, and maintained at the expense of the community, expressly to interpret the divine will,—even the priests themselves considered that they were but the ministers, while the horses were the confidants of the gods.

The priests, as in all semi-barbarous countries, were the real governors of these uncurbed Germans: no control but theirs was submitted to; even in camp they alone had the right to bind and flog, and in all public assemblies they kept order: these functions they assumed as ministers of the supreme, invisible Being. There was, however, no priestly *caste*, and each head of a family could perform religious offices for his own household.

Thus we find, at this earliest period of the known history of our river—its banks occupied by a brave, hardy race, given to dissipation and war, and governed by priests whose bloody sacrifices were offered to a supreme Being, worshipped through His great emblems of sun, fire, and water—they enjoyed a life of action, and looked forward to a death of glory.

Under this rugged nature appear the gentler attributes of love and veneration; and a belief in Fairies, Kobolds, Nixies, and all the different classes of superior existences with which they supposed the whole world to teem.

Savage and grand, loving and honourable, we shall, if we examine history, find them first engaging the Romans on equal terms, then for a while giving place to the conquerors of the world, but ever holding themselves superior to them, not adopting their habits but merely borrowing their knowledge to render themselves more fit to encounter them; and finally, we shall find them supplanting these world-conquerors, and seizing for themselves that crown and dominion, the fairest portion of which remains with the German race to this present day. And, moreover, it is this German race that has carried civilisation over

the whole earth, and whose descendants, the English people, are rapidly populating the great continents of America and Australia.

Back from the train of old history our thoughts return as the evening closes in by the source of our sweet river, and we bend our steps down through the dim woods. The white butterflies flap past, heavily, as though feeling the last moments of their short lives are fleeting fast; frequently above our heads starts out a projecting mass of rock, from whose summit a great pine towers up, first leaning forward, then shooting upwards, its top seems piercing the blue sky.

Ever and anon open out green dells, filled with bright foxgloves and other beautiful flowers; through these dells trickle tiny rivulets that swell the course of our young stream, which through the woods we hear gurgling and gushing on, falling from stone to stone, and wearing many a little pool in the rough ground.

Occasionally we pass a heap of fresh-cut wood, and across our path lie huge trunks of the fallen forest giants; a resinous odour is strongly mixed with the scent of the wild flowers,—one flower, from which the mountain bees make their delicious honey, is peculiarly fragrant and very frequent; occasionally the rivulet is quite hid by the luxuriant carpets of the false forget-me-not that line its banks.

At length we pass from the forest to the cultivated land: the little valley opens into a wider one, which is surrounded by mountains of diverse forms steeped in sunlight; the sun declines, and wreaths of blue smoke ascend from the châlets on the hill-sides, where the evening meal is being prepared for the active,

hard-working peasantry, who, with loads of all sorts on their heads, pass by, saluting politely as they go us and each other.

The young stream dances along by the roadside, and thus we enter Bussang, and close our first chapter of this fairy life.

Chapter II



Confluence.

From Bussang to Remiremont our infant stream gurgles plashingly along; sometimes it conceals itself in little tranquil pools, where the large trout lie deep beneath the roots of the overshadowing trees; sometimes it falls with a gentle splash over an obstruction, leaping, as we do in early life, over all difficulties with a smile, even seeming to enjoy that which at a maturer age too often frets and chafes us, though we conceal our chagrin under an unruffled surface.

Sometimes our stream passes, broken into ripples, over smooth shiny pebbles,—here the trout from time to time suddenly dart up and seize their insect food; and sometimes it glides between

green banks which hem it in (fair setting for so bright a gem): here it is blue, reflecting the sky above.

Through the sultry summer days, hours spent splashing in this little stream, or dreaming on its banks, are most delicious,—but beware, O bather! of the shining pebbles that gleam mid the blue tide, for

- Beneath the waters bright
- The glitt'ring pebbles lie,
- Like nymphs whose eyes the light
- Shines on with brilliancy:
- Like wicked water-sprites
- These rounded pebbles trip
- The bather, who delights
- His body here to dip.
- The timid foot is placed
- Upon the tempting stone,
- Then downward in all haste
- The luckless wight is thrown.
- And when he wrathful tries
- His footing to regain,
- The sprites, with shining eyes,
- Just trip him up again.

2. The scenery down the valley is altogether charming, occasionally grand, but oftener sweetly beautiful; the hills are of considerable height, some cultivated in patches of grain-crops, some covered with trees, while others again are brightly green with turf, except where grey rocks crop out and break the outline. Farther off the large shadowy mountains rise, calmly shutting in the minor hills, the valley, and the stream; the fleecy clouds float gently on, and rest upon their summits.

Groups of trees half hide the houses which frequently appear within the valley; the numerous bridges are generally of wood, some covered as in Switzerland.

The peasant women, in great straw hats or little close caps, work hard amidst the fields storing the hay crop; the oxen yoked together munch their fill of sweet fresh grass, that has grown in the well-watered meadows; round them the children play, piling the hay upon each other until, overcome by the heat, they hasten off to bathe in our cool stream.

Here, at a short distance above Remiremont, is the confluence of two branches of our river; and river the Moselle now becomes. Leaving her infant days she glides forth, with all the sunny joyousness of girlhood, through the valleys of Remiremont and Epinal, then on through the undulating plain, past Toul, to meet her confidant the Meurthe.

Remiremont is a well-built, clean town, with rivulets flowing constantly on both sides the roadway; it contains a fine church, near which are the buildings that formerly held the celebrated Dames de Remiremont, of whom the following account is given.

In the seventh century a monk named Amé arrived at the court of King Theodobert of Austrasia; moved by his preaching, one of the principal officers of the king, named Romaric, embraced the monastic life, and gave an estate to found a monastery of nuns: the mountain on which this monastery was built was called "Mons Romarici," hence the modern name of Remiremont.

A community of monks was established shortly after, near the nunnery, and St. Amé governed both; he dying, Romaric succeeded him: but now the female monastery was governed by an abbess,—it is said, a daughter of Romaric.

To this monastery Charlemagne came to enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and here the unhappy Waldrada, wife of Lothaire II., came to die after her long persecution by the Church.

In the tenth century the Huns penetrated here, and ravaged the monastery; a few years after it was totally destroyed by fire; after this event it was rebuilt at the foot of the mountain: the two communities now separated, the ladies entering on their new abode, and the monks retiring to the mountain.

The ladies lived such scandalous lives that Pope Eugenius reproached them with dishonouring the religious habit; his complaints were useless, and the ladies soon threw off even the appearance of *religieuses*, and remained bound together by a sort of female feudality. The abbesses were people of the best families, and none were admitted as members of the community but those who could prove themselves of noble blood on both sides for two hundred years.

The abbess ranked as a princess of the Empire, and held a feudal court,—a drawn sword was carried before her by one of

the officers, of whom she had many in her service; she received her investiture from the hands of the Emperor himself, and had many rights over different parts of the surrounding country, her power often clashing with that of the Dukes of Lorraine.

The Dukes were bound to appear before the monastery on the 15th of July of each year, and to carry on their shoulders the shrine of St. Romaric; they then signed, in a large book plated with gold and kept for that purpose, a confirmation of all the privileges of the abbey. In consideration of these services, however, they gained certain solid advantages.

One of the most violent quarrels between "les Dames" and the Dukes of Lorraine was owing to Duke Charles III. refusing to carry the saint's relics on his shoulders; eventually the ladies gave up the point on consideration of receiving, in lieu, an annuity of 400 francs.

In 1637 Duke Charles IV. besieged the town, which had been garrisoned by the French with fifteen companies of the regiment of Normandy. These soldiers being driven to extremity, declared, rather than submit without conditions, they would burn the abbess, abbey, and all the ladies, as well as the citizens; the ladies despatched six of their number to the Duke, who, overcome by the tears of beauty, granted an advantageous capitulation to the Norman rascals.

Next year Turenne appeared before the city, which the Duke had left feebly garrisoned; but the abbess, mindful of the Duke's kindness, so stoutly defended it, that after three assaults Turenne retired with considerable loss. After this the abbess obtained from the French king a promise of neutrality.

The power of these extraordinary "Dames de Remiremont" lasted (though somewhat shorn) until the tide of the French Revolution swept away for a time even the name of the town, which was called Libremont. The church and buildings still remain, the last remnants of this extraordinary community.

Having climbed the hills above Remiremont and seated ourselves amid the heather and ferns, the valley in folds of bright green extends itself beneath; the hills around are varied and beautiful, clumps of trees adorn the meadows, and great shadows steal along, presenting to our eyes a constant succession of moving pictures.

One of these shadows we watch roll down the distant mountain-side, leaving it bright and glowing with the grain,—then, coming onwards, it rests upon a great clump of trees, whose contrasted darkness lights up the grass beyond: they in their turn are left behind, and, now quivering in light, they stand backed by the sombre mountain wrapped in a succeeding veil; these clouds roll on, and others quickly following, give to the valley an appearance similar to that of a rolling prairie: now they approach, and envelope the hill on which we sit in gloom; but shortly all again is clear, the sky above is pure, the air is sweet; the meadows glory in their abundance, and our river, bending and turning, now to the far side of the valley, now towards the town, freshens the heated herbage with its limpid stream.

From the valley, beautiful though it be, we turn our eyes to the more glorious beauty of the

Noonday Clouds

- Over our heads the sunbeams quiver,
- The air is filled with heat and light,
- While at our feet the shining river
- Sparkles with thousand dimples bright.
- The distant hills, in sombre masses,
- Sleep calmly on amidst the haze;
- A mighty cloud through heaven passes,
- And from the earth arrests our gaze.
- For in the shadows of that cloud,
- We seem to see extending far
- Valleys and hills, where seraphs bow'd,
- Praising their great Creator are.
- Praising for ever "Him on high."
- Those glorious seraphs also pray,
- That from this planet crime may die,
- From man and earth sin pass away.
- The shades of these hills of central air,
- The gales that spring 'mid their lake,
- Spread over our earthly valleys fair,
- From our souls the weariness take;

- And hope reviving emits its glad beam,
- Which brightens our hearts, as sun does the stream.

3. Where we sit the ground is heaped into all sorts of forms, and covered with ferns and heather,—from the latter rushes a large covey of whirring partridges, and swoops into the valley.

Above, the still forest sends down its treasures of bark and firewood, which are borne in creaking waggons down the steep ascent; the oxen stagger beneath the weight, while the drivers shout encouragement, and their great dogs look calmly from the overhanging bank upon the busy scene.

All the environs of Remiremont are beautiful, and the town itself is a favourable specimen of a French country town: it is much better paved than those towns usually are, and the principal street has arcades under the first floor, beneath whose shade it is pleasant to sit during the midday heat, and hear the water rushing through the tiny canals.

In the little busy inns people come and go rapidly, the fashionable watering-place of Plombières being only some twelve miles distant: the tables d'hôte at these inns are wonderful, the number of dishes, the rapidity with which they are served, and the really excellent cookery. Most of the diners are men, and they one and all make love to the woman who, in conjunction with a lad, waits on some twenty guests, and yet finds time to parry all their jokes with sharp repartee.

Here may be seen a good specimen of the false politeness of the French,—they never help themselves to the *vin ordinaire* without filling up their neighbour's glass, whether he wants more or not, and they almost invariably pick out the choice morsel from the dish which the aforesaid neighbour eyes with longing looks: one, an epicure, reaches over you to secure the oil and pepper, with which to make additions to some vile sauce he is compounding for a coming dish; another *will* have something out of its proper turn, which irritates the handmaid; all eat voraciously, and with knives scoop up superfluous gravy, endangering the fair proportions of their mouths. After dinner (which is at twelve), cards and coffee fill the time until a little gentle exercise brings them to a second dinner at seven, when the knives play their part again.

Travelling in the smaller diligences is very miserable, but the little rattling carts that can be hired are worse and slower. Journeying, again, brings out the *politeness* of the French men,—who secure the best seats if possible, never giving them up to ladies, and fill the vehicle with very bad tobacco smoke.

Leaving them to the smoke and dust, we will go down into the meadows, and walk with our fresh river through the fields it waters on its passage to the gay town of Epinal.