

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

Strasburg Reminiscences

Very early one morning in August '83, after a weary ride in that most uncomfortable of vehicles for night traveling, a German railway carriage we arrived in Strasburg. We had been detained in Luxembourg until 12 o'clock the night before, owing to some misunderstanding, due to our scanty knowledge of the foreign gibberish of railway officials. I had selected Strasburg as a place for study, not only because of its superior advantages in the way of medical lecturers, but because I felt that my slight acquaintance with the French language would be of service there until I could brush up my German. This I soon found to be the case.

Almost every one in Strasburg speaks French, but not with that [] rapidity which is so characteristic of the real Frenchman. Coming directly from America, with the exception of two weeks spent in Antwerp, the picturesque old town with its medieval architecture, has a peculiar charm for us, the charm of novelty. Every one who has spent any great length of time in a foreign land will agree with me, that a place revisited, however interesting from the associations which cling to it, has lost an indescribable something, which can never be regained. The novelty is gone. Youth, and an active imagination may do much to make a strange place, however dull in itself, interesting for a time. Strasburg is a dull place in fact a stupid place, yet I never weary of thinking of the fourteen months spent within its walls.

I remember the first stroll on the day of our arrival, down the Metzger Strasse (Butcher street, horribly suggestive name to a medical student) to the Raben Brücke (Raven Bridge) over the Ill, a sluggish stream not ill-deserving the name. From this bridge a view presented itself well calculated on the one hand to arrest one's steps, on the other to hasten them forward, up and down the quay bordering the Ill which seems more like a canal than a river, were irregular rows of quaint steep roofed houses with tiers of dormer windows one above the other.

Towering above the roofs in front, was the majestic spire of the Minster. Eager to get a nearer view of this to me the most beautiful structure in Germany, I hurried on through the old fishmarket in the direction of the spire. The next side street, the Kramer Strasse proved to be the one looking directly toward the façade of the Minster. If to be enthusiastic over such a chestnut as some consider the Strasburg Cathedral is a crime or misdemeanor in this club, I plead guilty. It beggars description, and I will not attempt it. I was overwhelmed by it, and though I lived almost under its shadow for months, I never could pass it without stopping,

overcome by a sense of my own insignificance in the presence of such grandeur.

On my way back I wanted a cigar, and stopped into a tobacconists. The spell was broken, leaning against the counter with his back to me was a brother medicus from Cincinnati. I had some compensation in causing him to drop his pipe on the floor and nearly smash his eyeglasses when I called him by name. The usual interrogations and answers followed with an adjournment to the nearest Wirtschaft to discuss the situation at length over a mug of beer. We went to a place named [] on a little side street with a very big name. It was my first visit to a Deutsche Wirtschaft, needless to say not my last. If there is any one German Institution which meets with my unqualified approval, it is the Wirtschaft. I cannot call it Beer Hall. That is too suggestive of its degenerate American cousin-German. The Germans have a few clubs, they call it Cloob, but they are exotic and do not thrive well. The Kneipe gesellschaft is the German equivalent and could it be imported, as it exists there, might supplant our Club life.

It's advantages over our clubs are economy and democracy, the bier madchen or Fraulein is she is courteously addressed is a sine qua non. All efforts to transplant her have hitherto been unsuccessful. She is even a failure on Austrian soil. Prima's attempt to introduce Munchener kimel or Munich beer girl is a farce. The beer girl is generally modest in demeanor, neat in appearance, often buxom, sometimes pretty. She never speaks unless addressed, but if invited to sit down when she is not busy will entertain you agreeably for a half hour. She is not averse to a jaunt in the country on a pleasant day in agreeable company. The Knipe Gesellschaft which meets every evening about the same hour generally occupies the same table and is waited on by the same girl. If the Fraulein be ungracious or is not agreeable to one or more of the gesellschi she is discussed quite warmly by her enemies and adherents, and if a large minority are against her she is judiciously removed to another table and another serves in her stead. There was always quite a rivalry between the girls to serve at our table which was attributed by a few to their personal attractions, but could be better explained by the fact that our [] geld was more liberal than that at other tables. On my first visit to the Wirtschaft I met an American student who had been in Alsace a number of years, in fact had become almost Alsatian, even to being anti-Prussian in his views, he was a member of an Alsatian boat club and through his courtesy I have had a great many pleasant paddles on the Elbe.

With him was another American also long resident in the country, his wife was a type of a certain class of American women seen abroad. I remember he relating in a company of gentlemen a remark made by her little girl whose English had been neglected, on a line in a well-known hymn "let me to thy bosom fly" Mama! Said she what is a bosom fly? "Not a bad thing to be," related one of the men, gazing admiringly at her ample proportions. This reminds me of another story.

One of the fellows whose German was rather deficient, wanted to buy a brush, so got down the dictionary, and after handwork and a careful notation of the umlaut, dug out the following sentence. Bitte zeigen Sie mir ihre schoenste bürste. "Please show me your finest brushes," and armed with this sentence he marched off to the nearest shop, where a couple of pretty young ladies were in attendance. He walked up, and in a stammering voice said to one of the young ladies "Bitte zeigen Sie mir ihre schoenste brüste." He had gotten the r in the last word before the u instead of after it. The effect is left to the imagination.

A few days after reaching Strasburg we started out to reconnoiter, there was a very pleasant road running around the town just within the walls. Every now and then, we came to a little road running upon the embankment constituting the inner part of the wall. Desirous of obtaining an Outlook from the wall we went up this little road and were rewarded by a beautiful view of the Vosges mountains on the one side, the black forest on the other.

My companion busied herself sketching and I hunted around in the grass with a stick turning up some monstrous snails such as I afterwards saw in the restaurant windows as an article of diet. We found this pass time so pleasant that for a number of afternoons we repeated it until one day we were approached by a sergeant, who talked very rapidly and gesticulated very violently. I gathered from what he's said that we were liable to arrest and must get down, I did not want the fellow to know we understood him or that we knew that we should not be there, so I got out my watch and showed him the time of day. He grew quite excited and as I did not know but that he would do us violence we beat a retreat. When we got down we copied the notice on the sign board. "Das Betreten der Festungs walle polizeilich verboten" - which we afterwards learned means "don't go on the wall or you will get arrested." In a few days we got settled in apartments which although not satisfactory we thought would do until we could find better. The apartments were kept by the wife of an amatsman or post office clerk.

They have three children, a girl of eighteen quite pretty who spoke German and French with equal fluency. A boy of 15 or 16 attending the gymnasium and a girl of 14. The day after our arrival, not having opened our trunks I asked our landlady for issue brush. She gave it to me with some surprise. When a few moments after when she heard me blacking my shoes, she ran in horror to her husband who in turn came flying out with a pipe in his mouth in the greatest excitement. He was followed by his three children, the eldest of whom, the girl of 18, snatched the brush from my hands and dropping on her knees began to brush my shoes; that was too much for me, it was my turn to be horrified and I fled in dismay, leaving her and the rest of the family gazing in astonishment. A few days after our arrival in our new quarters we both broke out with a strange disease which looked like an [] of hives; we did not know what to make of it until horrible to relate, we found a flea.

I went to our landlady with great solemnity of manner and asked if the person who had occupied our apartments prior to our coming had kept a dog. "Oh Ja, herr Doctor" he had a fine large dog! That settles it. That dog was the cause of the trouble. I then unburdened myself with the result of the awakening a storm of indignation. There was never such a thing in her rooms and if there were now we had brought them with us. We were greatly agitated, may be we had – may be we had got them on shipboard. We searched our trunks and clothing in vain. At last in great tribulation I spoke very confidently to my American brother doctor, he broke into a laugh and told me that there was not a house in town but was full of them and that the Alsatian ladies carried the little pieces of flannel to catch them with when they were too persistent in one place. When at work in the Laboratory of I succeeded in embalming one of the wretched creatures in Canada Balsam under a cover of glass, and examined him under the microscope; they are villainous looking beasts. I have a magnified photograph of one measuring 3 x 4". He looks a very formidable.

The American lady before mentioned related her experience with this festive animal as follows. Shortly after their arrival they were all afflicted in the same manner as we. They consulted an eminent physician. After a careful examination he learnedly pronounced it "eine Acclimatisation's Krankheit," in other words they were strangers and had not become acclimated and they must take a blood purifier. After having consumed a dozen bottles of medicine they found a flea and the disease was no longer a mystery.

To while away a few weeks remaining until the opening of the fall semester, we decided to take a little jaunt into the black forest, seek out some secluded spot, and devote our time to rest and the study of German, we alighted from the train at Appenweser, a village about two hours from Strasburg. From where we took a carriage to Ottenhöfen a small hamlet in the heart of the mountains midway between Baden-Baden and Strasburg. The ride was a most delightful one, the horses were good travelers, the road was as smooth as a floor, and the surrounding mountains, with every now and then the ruins of some old castle appearing on their summits, very picturesque;

Arrived at the hostelry Spasth of zum Influg (to the plow) we were shown by the refreshingly familiar but respectful chambermaid to our rooms. Assembled at table we found the village schoolmaster, one or two Alsatian families from Strasburg a smartly dressed young man of otherwise good manners, who prefaced each meal with a toilet the instruments thereto being a pocket comb and small mirror. This habit of performing the toilet in public as far as my observation has extended is distinctly German. I shall never forget the impression made upon the number of Americans by a few German officers between the acts at the

Strasburg Opera House, standing facing the audience and deliberately arranging their hair and beards and scrutinizing the results in the irresistible pocket mirror.

To return to our matter at the gasthof table, the remaining guest was what the Germans called a stamm-gast (regular border) A little old fellow whose ways greatly amused us, his program for each day we were there was the same. In the morning after breakfast he adjourned to the bier-stube, drank beer smoked and read the papers until dinner. If at dinnertime he had a half emptied mug of beer he always brought it with him. When dinner was over he again adjourned to the bier-stube, drank and smoked and read until supper, when he would amble quietly in with his beer mug in one hand, a paper in the other, and a pipe in his mouth which last, be it to his credit said he laid aside before sitting down.

The next morning a carriage was ordered to take us to Allerheigen, they said they could only give us an ein-späner, I did not know what this might be but soon learned. An old fiacre with a poll attached, and one scrawny horse hitched to one side of the pole was brought around. I asked what was the matter with the other horse, "oh, this is an ein-späner" explained our good-natured coach man. "Nevermind" I said to my companion if we meet anyone we know, we will tell them we met with an accident and had to shoot our other horse." We soon found however that this sort of a team is no novelty. On the mountaintop in a peasants straw thatched hut, we were served with black bread and milk in one large earthenware bowl with two spoons. There was a sort of tranquility in the life of the peasants living in this hut, and the content with their condition that was a marked contrast to what many of them experienced when they risked their little all to better their chances in the New World.

Shortly after returning to Strasburg we were invited by our landlady to go up on the roof to witness the illumination of the Cathedral in honor of the forestry convention then in Strasburg. All it once a few red, green and blue lights appeared against the dark blue sky. These lights soon began to take definite form, creeping in spiral lines up and up, here running along in a horizontal ribbon of light until at last the whole ferry like tracery of this wonderful structure stood out a gigantic glorious pyramid amid of fire in the heavens.

A Millerite would certainly have donned his judgment robes and been ready to ascend this Jacob's ladder of fire. The platform of the cathedral is over 200 feet in height, the spire that was illuminated, and openwork structure rising 250 feet above, so that the appearance was that of a beautiful revelation of the beyond. A few days after this we ascended to the platform of the Cathedral. It was a perfect afternoon in September. The view is one that the eye never tires of, the broad green valley of the Rhine with its quaint little hamlets scattered here and there like so many arbors in an immense garden, the dark somber hut-lines

of the black forest on the one hand, the Misty base of the blue Alsatian mountains on the other, and then at our feet the quaint steep shingled roofs, the circuitous streets and old walled tower, remains of the ancient fortification, all from a picture that Goethe has immortalized in prose and verse.

Cut into the stone at the base of the spire are the names of Goethe, Herder, Lavater, and Poltaire. Goethe's life in Strasburg was full of incident and formed a very important epoch in his intellectual development. There he met Herder through whom he obtained his introduction to the best English literature. Swift, Goldsmith and afterwards to Shakespeare, to the reading of whose works he himself attributes the development of his dreams. Goethe entered Strasburg in the year 1770 and in his own words occupied small, well located, and cheerful quarters, on the sunny side of the fish market. His companions in the pension in which he took his meals were for the most part medical students, and it was in this way that Goethe, although ostensibly a student of law, interested himself in matters more pertaining to medicine, anatomy, biology and chemistry. He must also have been a frequent of the wards of the hospital according to his accounts in *Dichtung and Wahrheit*.

There is something very interesting in his account of his life in Strasburg as related in this book. Whatever Goethe undertook he seemed to grasp with comprehensiveness of mind that to the average mortal is simply marvelous. This versatility was remarkable not only for its extent but for the profound knowledge he had of whatever he wrote upon. His anatomical knowledge entitled him to rank among the first, and his discovery of the pre-maxillary bone in man, and the deductions he drew from this discovery makes him a first-rate advocate of the evolutionary theory of the origin of man. The narrations of his amorous adventures here form the most naïve bit of reading. His passion for Frederika Brion of Bessenheim seems to have been the absorbing one of his early life, and Goethe has never been acquitted of what may be considered at least unworthy conduct in the treatment of this lovely and high-minded girl. A probable explanation of his infatuation is in the fact that he was then greatly devoted to the Vicar of Wakefield, and the coincidence of her being a parson's daughter, and the circumstances of his meeting her, worked strongly on his imagination. There is also something very attractive about the Alsatian dress, with the drooping bows and the long braids, and black silk hose under the short petticoat and Goethe was what the Germans call an "aufregbarer Kerl" (an excitable chap).

Strasburg since the late unpleasantness has been a very strongly fortified town. The Garrison consisting of the entire 15th Army Corps, about 40,000 men. I was greatly entertained in going to the parade ground and watching the drills. The trials which a poor awkward peasant boy undergoes in being manufactured into a soldier would be pitiable if it were not for his amiable stolidity. I have seen them stand like wooden Indians with perfectly impassive countenances when an exasperated sergeant was calling down upon their heads (unknown) and other

direful million hunden tousanddinnerwettters and other direful calamaties.

As an illustration of some of the conveniences to strangers of the protective policy in Germany, we thought our deck chairs would be pleasant in our rooms, so we sent on to Antwerp for them. In due time they came, and the notice of their arrival was sent me. When I went after them the official at the custom department informed me there were ten marks duty. I remonstrated, he insisted, at last with all the irony I could summon in my rather lame French I told him I would make him a present of the chairs. Not to be outdone in courtesy (for I don't think he suspected irony,) he told me I could take the chairs free of duty.

Since the German occupation of Elsass the anti-Prussian feeling has been very strong particularly amongst the old bourgeoisie. It will be remembered that after the Treaty of Frankfurt, Alsatians were given the option of swearing allegiance to United Germany or of removing to France. About 45,000 took the latter alternative, a great many removing to Paris where they are to this day great anti-Prussian agitators.

When in Paris in '85 I remember seeing the statue of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde draped in black in commemoration of her capitulation. Illustrative of the strong feeling existing at the time of our sojourn in Strasbourg many amusing stories could be told. An old French woman was airing her bed-clothes one morning over the window ledge; they happen to be of the French colors. A police officer ordered her to take in her flag. She answered in the spirit if not the words of Barbara Fritchey. She was put under arrest and compelled to pay a fine for her loyalty. Up to the time of our departure there were a few clubs of a social nature in existence with French names. I have since read in the papers of this suppression.

Some American friends of ours were spending their summer in an hotel in the Vosges Mountains frequented by Alsatians. They were treated with the utmost cordiality and consideration. In a few days a German lady of their acquaintance, an invalid, came to the hotel, and they saw a great deal of her. They noticed however an immediate change in the attitude of the Alsatian families toward them. This German lady was suffering with Graves's disease accompanied by unusual rapidity of the heart's action and great nervousness. One day a post boy was cracking his whip in the courtyard she asked him to stop explaining that she could not bear any noise. The next morning about a dozen post-boys assembled under her window cracking their whips as though they were paid to do it, it was probably the case. The Alsatians had taken this means of getting rid of her. It was effectual, she left the hotel the next day. Why the Alsatians who are essentially Germans by dissent, language, and geographical position should object so strongly to German affiliations is a thing hard to explain. Two hundred years of unwarranted French possession, have not sufficed to make Frenchmen

of them. It would be a wise thing to submit gracefully to the inevitable, for Elsass is irrevocably German, and rightly so.

Had it not been for the foolish temerity of Louis Napoleon, Elsass might now be Alsatian. German rule has already done great things for Strasburg. The circuit of walls has been greatly enlarged, and broad streets and modern houses surround the oldest French portion. About three million marks had already been expended in the direction of handsome and commodious buildings in '83 and the faculties theological, legal, philosophical, and medical embrace some of the best known names in Germany. The atmosphere of German university life is a delightful one. The absence of all restrictions as regards attendance upon lectures is one very striking feature to one used to the ways of American colleges. Whether this absence of restriction is in every way best for the average student is questionable. Fresh from gymnasium, unaccustomed to surveillance of the most irksome nature, and to a life of almost unremitting drudgery without any of the recreations indulged in by our college boys the German student who has passed his maturity examination, suddenly finds himself his own master. With a few exceptions this means at least two years of little or no study and a great deal of bumming.

There are arguments for and against the system of education. The University presupposes that every matriculate enters with the purpose of equipping himself for his life's work. If he stays away from lectures it is his loss, and when it comes to the test of a final examination, he will realize it then if he has not done so before. A student rarely comes up for his degree in the university at which he attended his first semesters. If having heard certain professions in branches in which they are particularly renowned, he cares to enlarge his sphere of observation, he may attend elsewhere after having obtained an honorable dismissal from the University of which he is a matriculate.

There are numerous advantages in the system which are obvious to every thinking person. While to obtain a degree one must be ready to pass a searching examination in all the branches included in a course for that degree, no questions are asked as to the number of lectures actually attended in a given branch, but the ability to pass a searching oral examination, in which the examiner is not restricted in the character or number of his questions, is taken as the only evidence of his fitness for a degree. When a young man enters a university, his education in such topics as constitute a good general education is supposed to be complete. By that I mean he has left behind him the course of prescribed study and entered upon one of voluntary and deliberate preparation for his life's work.

Dilettanteism is not encouraged in the German universities; of course it is in no way prohibited in proportion as a man's efforts in any one line of work have been intelligent and well directed his success is assured. Renan it was I think, who

said that the German universities are not only the schools but the workshops of science. Investigation (Forschung) is the strong point of university education; more stress is laid upon the requirements of the methods of conducting researches, that the student will learn from actual observation and in his turn contribute his might to universal fund of scientific knowledge. As to the corps students who are a conspicuous element of all German universities, their habits of dueling, drinking etc. those silly in themselves are perhaps no more so than many of the absurd practices of American college students. They are rarely followed by serious consequences, and then often only indirectly. A sad affair happened in Strasbourg during our residence there. A young man son of a well-known professor received a challenge to the usual dueling contest, which as is well known can result in nothing more than an ugly mutilation. He was not a believer in the custom and refused to fight unless he might choose his weapons pistols; this being refused him, he declined to fight, and was thereupon "posted" as it is called. He committed suicide. His funeral was attended by the university students and faculty in a body. It was one of the most affecting sites I ever witnessed. This affair caused so much feeling at the time that measures were taken looking to the prohibition of dueling.

I was never particularly attracted to the corps student either individually or collectively, but among the Wilden or neutrals as we would call them I made a number of very agreeable acquaintances. A matriculating Karte always carried in the pocket of the holder confers on him quite a number of benefits and some immunities. He gets a reduction in the price of entrance to the theater, Opera etc., and is entitled to the benefits of the library from which he may carry as many books to his rooms as any reasonable person could wish.

It secures him to ready cooperation of the police in case of any trouble and an immunity from arrest if he should be guilty of any misdemeanor. The nearest I ever came to availing myself of this last named privilege was once when I attempted to take a shortcut home along a railway track. I was stopped by a guard who abused me for the trespass and ordered me back; as it was late and that meant a roundabout way of two or three miles I took to my heels with the guard after me, but I was the better runner of the two and escaped.

One of the pleasantest diversions to be had on a warm summer day is a ride or a walk to the Rhine-lust a delightful garden and restaurant on the banks of the Rhine opposite Kehl. They're a delightful swim may be had in the swift rushing green water of the Rhine after which you may rest and dine in the open air listening to the strains of a military band. There is especially on Sunday afternoon a gay grouping of officers and their families together with the families of the various professors and other gebildete Leute or cultivated people. The view is exquisite—just below, the pale green water of the Rhine, spanned by the bridge of boats, on the other bank the historical town of Kehl, and further off the beautiful

shadowy slopes of the black forest.

Then a ride home to the dear quaint old town with its vast cathedral always before you, rising like a huge giant among the crowd of pigmies. There is something solemnly impressive about this mass of stone the work of countless generations of mortals long since returned to dust, with its mighty bell tolling out the hours of man's little day. Often at night as I have passed through the Munster Platz under the very eaves of the of this rock of the ages, when the gathering fog rendered its huge proportions only more stupendous, I have been almost overcome by the thought of the myriads of mortals who have passed in and out of its giant portals— wither? and the great solemn bell would break the stillness of the night and answer whence – wither –whence –whither.

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