

ON SAXON SOIL. — II.

SAXON SWITZERLAND.

And now we are afloat, having received strict injunctions from our landlady to avoid the draughts on the steamer. Our point of departure is the wharf of the Bohemian and Saxon Steamship Company, and our destination Wehlen, three miles up stream.

About an hour before reaching Wehlen, the stone-quarrying, which forms so important a part of the industry of the Elbe Valley, begins. This adds a human interest to the scene, but mars its beauty. Not so, however, with the boats, rafts, etc., which navigate the little river, and are one of the most charming features. The diminutive size of everything, the signs of quiet and ordered activity, together with the highly picturesque character of the scenery, the shut-in aspect of the whole, and the ever present, gently-flowing stream, leave an impression on the mind as of a painted scene presenting all the serenity and beauty of life and nature, with every coarser element left out. The boats above alluded to are varied, both in color and form; the majority are of a pale burnt sienna tint, and they, as well as the tiny rafts, float down the river peacefully propelled by it alone, neither sail nor oar being seen. Many of the boats were covered in by a sort of low, sloping roof which gave them the quaintest possible appearance and caused Tim to dub them Noah's Ark boats; great was her curiosity as to their contents, and if the sole object of our expedition had been to discover the secret of their cargoes, her questions could not have been more frivolous, nor her suppositions more unfounded. Later we learnt that many of them were laden with fruit—picked by pretty Bohemian girls—on its way to Hamburg.

The morning following our arrival in Wehlen, after drinking our morning portion of coffee, we felt inclined for a ramble in the lovely woods which form one of the chief attractions of the neighborhood, and lead through the "Uttervalder ground"—ravine or gorge—up to the "Baster" or Bastion, the most conspicuous point of the cliffs which at this point rise to a considerable height above the river. The formation of the rocks in this part of the country, and indeed, throughout Saxon Switzerland, is peculiar, the sandstone being deeply scored down and across—the surface more or less rounded, showing no angles, so that in many places it looks as if boulder had been piled upon boulder by giant hands, and gives free play to an imaginative people for the invention of saga and legend. The rocky walls of the ground presented this same peculiar appearance, and the picturesque effect was heightened by the moss-covered boulders at the base of the cliffs, with ferns and bilberry bushes nestling in their crannies, and here and there a pine-tree, tall and stately, measuring its majestic height against the rocks. Referring to the brilliant lichen with which the cliffs were painted I asked Tim if she knew why the rocks were so yellow? She confessed she did not.

"Thereby hangs a tale," I replied, "which you would have known, if, according to contract, you had read up the sagas of this district. It is related that his Satanic Majesty tried to smoke out an anchorite who lived in this ravine, and whose devotional habits annoyed him. He didn't succeed, but the sulphur used for the purpose stuck to the rocks and disclosed his malign intention to all succeeding generations."

"Poor old Devil!" said Tim sorrowfully.

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed, greatly shocked.

"Oh! nothing, only I always sympathize with the losing side."

"That's an amiable weakness if it isn't carried too far; where human beings are concerned I admit that extenuating circumstances."

"And why not here too? The poor old chap may have been terribly bored down there," pointing mysteriously to where she supposed the centre of the earth to be, "and in need of some slight diversion, which of course, with him would take the form of mischief."

"You make an excellent special pleader, Tim, but you will allow that the saga accounts for the color of the cliffs."

"Yes," answered Tim, glibly, "but not for the milk in the cocoanut."

"Only a Celtic intelligence would be equal to that feat. Suppose you exercise your fertile brain upon it."

"I should like to give the matter the consideration it deserves, and when the chocolate man appears, he shall take me to a South Pacific isle, and providing me with all appliances necessary for studying the problem in the place where it grows, take himself off, or, in more eloquent language, disappear."

"Where to?" I asked, in some amazement.

"Beneath the horizon, of course. I could not tolerate chocolate men lounging about the horizon as long as I'm engaged solving problems; it would disturb the philosophical atmosphere too much."

Just at this point we came to a charming spot, and while eating our lunch here Tim became attracted by an iridescent blue and green beetle on its back among the pine-needles, struggling wildly, with its half dozen legs in the air, to regain its normal position.

"There's a pretty bit of color. Poor thing; put him on his legs again, won't you?"

"So that he may get into my boot? No, thank you, he remains on his back."

"I do call that mean; you shouldn't hit a man when he's down," quotes Tim, rather inappropriately.

"I do hope he'll win, poor dear," says Tim, meditatively. "What would you do if he did?" turning to me.

"Turn him on his back again," I say decisively, clutching at my umbrella.

"Oh, you savage!"

"Don't call names, Tim. You know you would be the first to lose your senses if he began to crawl about your sacred person."

"Beautiful creature!" continues she, after a pause, "how he does shine and glitter in the sun! Do you know," coaxingly, "I should like to see his back; I think it must be pale blue with green stripes."

Whereupon she begins to manipulate him with the end of her parasol. Presently she is on her knees bending over her treasure and seems absorbed in silent admiration; in a minute, however, there is a piercing shriek, and Tim is dancing like a wild Indian beneath his red cedar-tree. It does not need her gasping ejaculations to tell me what has happened, and I would hasten to her aid were I not laughing too much to rise. At last I control my mirth, and taking a few steps towards her, say in sympathetic tones:

"In your boot, dear?"

"No," screams Tim, "up my sleeve and round my back and everywhere. Oh!" with a long-drawn sigh, "I can feel him walking over me. I shall die in a minute."

To avert such a catastrophe, I overcome my dread of anything with a multiplicity of legs and in a few minutes Tim is freed from her tormentor, but by this time is in tears of fright and anger, stamping her foot and calling the beetle names; he is again sprawling on his back, and Tim, after exhausting her vocabulary of abuse, says she can't imagine what Noah wanted to put a thing like that in the ark for.

"Come, Mephisto," she concludes, "take me away. I don't see how you could bring me to a place like this, infested with reptiles."

I remain in speechless indignation for a moment, but as I am about to lead the way out of the wood, ask her if she wouldn't like the beetle wrapped up in paper and take him home, stripes and all.

Again we are afloat. I have got Tim and her belongings on board, with the help of all the members of the baker's family, where we have been lodging, and there is nothing left behind but good impressions and more current coin in the way of *trinkgeld* than I quite approve of, but when one is told one's ideas in money matters are microscopic, and it is hinted that one hasn't any soul to speak of, then, I say, it requires more firmness than some people possess, not to turn a mark into two, and two into a thaler, which piece of juggling consequently took place, leaving the common purse more debilitated than ever, for one of Tim's amiable weaknesses is the amount of *trinkgeld* she expects to get out of a ten-mark piece, and pay the rent with the remainder.

We were passing one of the prettiest bits of the river, when I saw Tim coming towards me from the direction of the conductor's office, looking supernaturally good. This is one of her best performances, for anything so sublime in the way of expressions as she can assume when on her way to, or coming from, a bad action, must be seen to be appreciated. I knew what it was. She had been tipping the handsome conductor and tipping him out of all proportion to his expectations and our means.

"Look here, Tim," I said crossly, "this won't do, our funds are getting alarmingly low and we shall soon be stranded high and dry upon the barren shores of penury."

"Our funds are getting low," repeated Tim dreamily, leaning over the gunwale of the boat, "so is the Elbe, and there is every probability of our being stranded a little further on, as the bed of the river is scarcely covered. I thought in that case it didn't much matter who had our small change, Mephisto," said Tim solemnly, and straightening herself as though to look the worst in the face, "prepare to meet your fate like a man and a dev—I mean, a woman and a sister."

But I was not thus to be turned from my purpose of reprimanding Tim for a reckless expenditure of copper-coin.

"Tim," I said, fixing her with a gaze she could not evade, "you gave that man twopence, and you know he would have been perfectly satisfied with a penny."

Here Tim changed her tactics. She threw off the disguise of a heroine of romance—six foot high at the lowest computation—ready to step into a watery grave without a shiver; and descended rapidly to the mental condition of a girl baby of three and a half years old; frisked and