

**A TRAMP ABROAD.
IN TWO VOLUMES.
VOL. II**

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A Tramp Abroad. In Two Volumes. Vol. II by Mark Twain

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MARK TWAIN

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BY

MARK TWAIN

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'TOM SAWYER' 'AN IDLE EXCURSION' ETC.



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A TRAMP ABROAD.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WE located ourselves at the Jungfrau Hotel, one of those huge establishments which the needs of modern travel have created in every attractive spot on the Continent. There was a great gathering at dinner, and as usual one heard all sorts of languages.

The *table d'hôte* was served by waitresses dressed in the quaint and comely costume of the Swiss peasants. This consists of a simple *gros de laine*, trimmed with ashes of roses, with overskirt of *sacre-bleu ventre saint gris*, cut bias on the off side, with facings of *petite polonaise* and narrow insertions of *pâté de foie gras* backstitched to the *mise-en-scène* in the form of a *jeu d'esprit*. It gives to the wearer a singularly piquant and alluring aspect.

One of these waitresses, a woman of forty, had side whiskers reaching half way down her jaw. They were two fingers broad, dark in colour, pretty thick, and the hairs were an inch long. One sees many

women on the Continent with quite conspicuous moustaches, but this was the only woman I saw who had reached the dignity of whiskers.

After dinner the guests of both sexes distributed themselves about the front porches and the ornamental grounds belonging to the hotel, to enjoy the cool air; but as the twilight deepened towards darkness, they gathered themselves together in that saddest and solemnest and most constrained of all places, the great blank drawing-room which is a chief feature of all continental summer hotels. There they grouped themselves about, in couples and threes, and mumbled in bated voices, and looked timid and homeless and forlorn.

There was a small piano in this room, a clattery, wheezy, asthmatic thing, certainly the very worst miscarriage in the way of a piano that the world has seen. In turn, five or six dejected and homesick ladies approached it doubtingly, gave it a single inquiring thump, and retired with the lockjaw. But the boss of that instrument was to come, nevertheless; and from my own country—from Arkansaw. She was a brand-new bride, innocent, girlish, happy in herself and her grave and worshipping stripling of a husband; she was about eighteen, just out of school, free from affectations, unconscious of that passionless multitude around her; and the very first time she smote that old wreck one recognised that it had met its destiny. Her stripling brought an armful of aged sheet music from their room—for this bride went

'heeled,' as you might say—and bent himself lovingly over and got ready to turn the pages.

The bride fetched a swoop with her fingers from one end of the key-board to the other, just to get her bearings, as it were, and you could see the congregation set their teeth with the agony of it. Then, without any more preliminaries, she turned on all the horrors of the 'Battle of Prague,' that venerable shivaree, and waded chin-deep in the blood of the slain. She made a fair and honourable average of two false notes in every five, but her soul was in arms and she never stopped to correct. The audience stood it with pretty fair grit for a while, but when the cannonade waxed hotter and fiercer, and the discord-average rose to four in five, the procession began to move. A few stragglers held their ground ten minutes longer, but when the girl began to wring the true inwardness out of the 'cries of the wounded,' they struck their colours and retired in a kind of panic.

There never was a completer victory; I was the only non-combatant left on the field. I would not have deserted my countrywoman anyhow, but indeed I had no desires in that direction. None of us like mediocrity, but we all reverence perfection. This girl's music was perfection in its way; it was the worst music that had ever been achieved on our planet by a mere human being.

I moved up close, and never lost a strain. When she got through, I asked her to play it again. She

did it with a pleased alacrity and a heightened enthusiasm. She made it *all* discords, this time. She got an amount of anguish into the cries of the wounded that shed a new light on human suffering. She was on the war-path all the evening. All the time, crowds of people gathered on the porches and pressed their noses against the windows to look and marvel, but the bravest never ventured in. The bride went off satisfied and happy with her young fellow, when her appetite was finally gorged, and the tourists swarmed in again.

What a change has come over Switzerland, and in fact all Europe, during this century. Seventy or eighty years ago Napoleon was the only man in Europe who could really be called a traveller; he was the only man who had devoted his attention to it and taken a powerful interest in it; he was the only man who had travelled extensively; but now everybody goes everywhere; and Switzerland, and many other regions which were unvisited and unknown remotenesses a hundred years ago, are in our days a buzzing hive of restless strangers every summer. But I digress.

In the morning, when we looked out of our windows, we saw a wonderful sight. Across the valley, and apparently quite neighbourly and close at hand, the giant form of the Jungfrau rose cold and white into the clear sky, beyond a gateway in the nearer highlands. It reminded me, somehow, of one of those colossal billows which swell suddenly up be-

side one's ship, at sea, sometimes, with its crest and shoulders snowy white, and the rest of its noble proportions streaked downward with creamy foam.

I took out my sketch-book and made a little picture of the Jungfrau, merely to get the shape.

I do not regard this as one of my finished works, in fact I do not rank it among my Works at all; it is only a study; it is hardly more than what one might call a sketch. Other artists have done me the grace to admire it; but I am severe in my judgments of my own pictures, and this one does not move me.

It was hard to believe that that lofty wooded rampart on the left which so overtops the Jungfrau was not actually the higher of the two, but it was not, of course. It is only 2,000 or 3,000 feet high, and of course has no snow upon it in summer, whereas the Jungfrau is not much short of 14,000 feet high, and therefore that lowest verge of snow—on her side, which seems nearly down to the valley level—is really about seven thousand feet higher up in the air than the summit of the wooded rampart. It is the distance that makes the deception. The wooded height is but four or five miles removed from us, but the Jungfrau is four or five times that distance away.

Walking down the street of shops, in the forenoon, I was attracted by a large picture, carved, frame and all, from a single block of chocolate-coloured wood. There are people who know everything. Some of these had told us that continental shopkeepers

always raise their prices on English and Americans. Many people had told us it was expensive to buy things through a courier, whereas I had supposed it was just the reverse. When I saw this picture I conjectured that it was worth more than the friend I proposed to buy it for would like to pay, but still it was worth while to inquire; so I told the courier to step in and ask the price, as if he wanted it for himself; I told him not to speak in English, and above all not to reveal the fact that he was a courier. Then I moved on a few yards, and waited.

The courier came presently and reported the price. I said to myself, 'It is a hundred francs too much,' and so dismissed the matter from my mind. But in the afternoon I was passing that place with Harris, and the picture attracted me again. We stepped in to see how much higher broken German would raise the price. The shopwoman named a figure just a hundred francs lower than the courier had named. This was a pleasant surprise. I said I would take it. After I had given directions as to where it was to be shipped, the shopwoman said, appealingly—

'If you please, do not let your courier know you bought it.'

This was an unexpected remark. I said—

'What makes you think I have a courier?'

Ah, that is very simple; he told me himself.'

'He was very thoughtful. But tell me—why did you charge him more than you are charging me?'