

**SKIMMINGS; OR, A
WINTER AT
SCHLOSS HAINFELD, IN
LOWER STYRIA**

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Skimmings; or, A winter at Schloss Hainfeld, in lower Styria by Basil Hall

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BASIL HALL

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SKIMMINGS;

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IN LOWER STYRIA.

BY

CAPTAIN BASIL HALL,
ROYAL NAVY, F. R. S.

—FROM—

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171 MADISON STREET,
CHICAGO.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

HAVING on three different occasions made excursions on the Continent, under circumstances of considerable variety, it lately occurred to me that selections from my journals might perhaps be favourably received, either by persons who had never visited the scenes described, or by those who had already seen them, but might choose to view them again through the eyes of another.

I accordingly set to work to skim off such parts of my notes as, either from the buoyancy of the expression, or from retaining a portion of the freshness of original interest, had floated to the surface.

But I soon found these SKIMMINGS accumulate under my hands in much greater quantity than I had anticipated, or than, I feared, might be relished by others.

In this dilemma, I bethought me of the well-known device of the Aeronauts, or Luftschiffer—literally sky-sailors—as the Germans, with their usual pithy quaintness, call them; and resolved to send off a pilot-balloon to ascertain how the wind set.

The following episode was accordingly selected for publication; and if, when let loose, it take the right direction, or, in other words, if it meet with a current of public favour, I may perhaps venture to cut the ropes of the larger work, now in the course of inflation, and trust the whole to the same friendly notice.

PARIS, 20th May, 1836.

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SCHLOSS HAINFELD;

OR,

A WINTER IN LOWER STYRIA.

CHAPTER I.

THE INVITATION.

It was a bright sunny morning, near the end of April 1834, when, accompanied by my wife and family, I left Rome for Naples. The climate of the "Eternal City," which is grateful to most constitutions, had not proved so to mine; and, for the first time in my life, I had fallen into low spirits, and indolent habits. The endless ruins of ancient Rome—the wonders of the Vatican—the forest of churches—the gorgeous palaces—even the great Colosseum itself, and almost St. Peter's, one by one, had faded into indifference before my languid observation. This was not health; and my physician, who had much experience of the Roman climate,—so fair and treacherous,—declared, that nothing would do me any good but change of air.

Never was learned opinion so quickly verified. At first starting, the warm sun and the clear sky had no charms for me. And this strange feeling, which admitted the good, but felt only the gloom, so long as I continued in the immediate vicinity of Rome, gradually, but perceptibly, began to evaporate as the carriage ascended the gentle slope of the ancient volcanic mountain of Albano. By the time we had gained the height of several hundred feet above the dome of St. Peter's, judging from its ap-

pearance in the distance, I felt as if a load were taken off my lungs, and the nice mechanism which gives activity to the breath, and keeps up the flame of life, was once more free to move. I became enchanted with the blueness of the sky—the sharpness of the lights and shades; and as the gentle puffs of wind crossed our path, I caught myself stretching forward to inhale their new and invigorating freshness. Long before reaching Albano, which stands, I should suppose, about a thousand feet above the level of the Tiber, I became so hungry and happy, that had not some traces of rheumatism tied me by the leg, I should infallibly have leaped from the carriage, and scampered up the hill before the party to order dinner. On arriving at Albano, new objects of interest met our view. Our windows looked full on the open sea—the beautiful, the classical Mediterranean—nowhere, except at Naples, so fertile in associations as near the coast we now looked upon. The beach might be distant about ten or twelve miles; and between us and the sea lay a broad flat belt of alluvial, marshy soil, scantily cultivated, and only here and there dotted with a bright, white cottage. Nearer, and where the land gradually rose towards the volcanic focus, the scenery partook of a more fertile and varied character; being not only cast into all sorts of shapes by the freaks of ancient earthquakes and eruptions of lava, but covered with villas, gardens, vineyards, and olive orchards, every where glowing with the astonishing verdure of an Italian spring.

Peeping through the foliage we could perceive many remnants of ancient buildings, which greatly contributed to characterize the scene. Some of these maintained more or less their old shape of towers and arches—others merely showed, by huge piles of brick and sculptured blocks of marble, what they might have been. Far off to the left, along the shore, in the south-eastern direction, we could just distinguish the island of Ponzo, and still farther off, we were told might be seen, in days of peculiar clearness, the island of Ischia, which forms the northern horn of the Bay of Naples.

Our admiration of this beautiful prospect was interrupt-

ed by the necessity of attending to the arrangements of the journey. As we travelled *veturino*, we had to stop for a couple of hours at Albano; during which time sundry other carriages arrived, and either passed on smartly with post horses, or stopped to take rest as we had done. Amongst these there was one which particularly engaged our attention; and with that sort of feverish curiosity which proverbially belongs to travelling, I set about trying to discover who the people were with whose appearance we had been struck. Great was our pleasure on learning that here was no other than our amiable and accomplished Polish friend, with an unpronounceable name, the Countess Rzewuska. We lost no time in repairing to her apartment to renew so agreeable an acquaintance, though it was but for a moment; for it appeared we were passing on opposite tacks, as she was coming from Naples, and we from Rome. No sooner had we entered than she exclaimed—

“Oh how fortunate! It is only a day or two since I received a letter from Germany, containing a message to you; and had we not now fallen in with each other, I might never have been able to deliver it. My correspondent supposed we were still at Rome together, forgetting that at this season the travellers who crowd there in winter, scatter themselves in all directions, the moment the breath of Spring opens the season. This letter,” continued she, pulling one from her reticule, “contains a message from the Countess Purgstall, an elderly Scotch lady, who, having married forty years ago a nobleman of Austria, has resided in that country ever since. I am desired to ascertain if you be the son of Sir James Hall, one of her earliest and most intimate friends in Edinburgh? And if so, as I believe to be the case, I am requested to invite you, in her name, most cordially, to pay her a visit at her country place, the Schloss, or castle, of Hainfeld, near Gratz, should you think of taking the homeward route through Styria, instead of following the beaten track of the Tyrol.”

It was impossible such an invitation could have been given to travellers less hampered by plans; for we made

it a constant rule to be guided by circumstances as they arose, and not to entangle ourselves by previous arrangements which might or might not prove suitable when the time came. Thus, the map of Europe was always before us, where to choose our place of rest, or rather unrest, and Mrs. Starke our guide. Having looked at the various routes, studied them, and made our calculations as to time and place, we came to the resolution that, provided we received, in due season, a somewhat more specific invitation, it might be no bad sport to visit a German castle, as something fresh, and out of the ordinary course of jog-trot travelling. In order to prevent all mistakes, I thought it best to communicate at once with the lady herself.

I accordingly wrote a letter, mentioning the number of which our party consisted, giving a sketch of our plans for the summer, and requesting farther information about roads, and the best seasons for travelling in Germany.

To this letter I received two answers, the second being written under an erroneous impression that the first was misdirected; and as there are several parts of these letters which help to elucidate the character of our future hostess, I shall venture to make free extracts from both. As yet our purpose of paying her a visit was quite undecided; but we felt our interest in the project, and our curiosity as to the character and situation of our distant and unseen friend, greatly heightened by these communications. I should mention, that all we knew of the Countess Purgstall was, that she was sister to Mrs. Dugald Stewart, widow of the celebrated writer on moral philosophy; that she had married a German nobleman, late in the last century, and proceeded with him to Austria, and that she had never revisited her native country. We had also a vague recollection of having heard that she had been extremely unfortunate in her family, and was left solitary in the world; moreover, that she was remarkably clever, and rather eccentric. But we formed no just conception of this extraordinary person from any such glimpses of character as these letters, or other accounts afforded us. On reading them now, it is true, when familiar with the whole topic, we can discover many touches which might