

**MY VISIT TO
STYRIA; PP. 4-34**

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"Twixt Will and Fate," "The Slinkensmirk Family," &c.



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the ascent meanwhile being 1,520 feet, the descent to Mürzzuschlay 700 feet—is a masterpiece of ingenuity and perseverance, reflecting honour on the memory of its planner and constructor, our talented countryman, the late Mr. Hall.

Upon entering the Pass, the train slackens its speed. Besides being a necessary precaution, it is agreeable in that we get a good view of the truly beautiful panorama around us as we journey along.

Above : towering steeps, some barren, dark and jagged, others rich in every shade of vegetation and foliage, while others again, in the distance, are monuments of icy splendour, reflecting the myriad tints, while at the same time withstanding the warmth of the early summer's sun. Beneath : the peasant's cot, occasional groups of villages huddled together, quaint little churches dotted here and there, winding streams like serpents with shining skins of silver and gold, and humankind little more than perpendicular black-beetles in comparison with the huge, overhanging heights.

The Railway Stations alone are a gallery of pictures. O'erhung with festoons of clematis, jasmine, and trellised vine, with (supposing it to be Sunday, as it was when I first made the acquaintance of the charming Semmering Pass) gaily-dressed damsels tripping along on the arm of their *galants*; happy-faced children offering for sale gorgeous bouquets of mountain flowers, the snowy *edelweiss* arranged in all manner of devices; or glasses of "*frisches Wasser*" and plates of tempting fruit,—they resemble

scenes from opera-bouffe rather than the dreary monotony of our English country stations.

But this fairy-like scene terminates with the Semmering Pass. The train resumes its usual speed (which is never desperate on the Continent—aggravatingly the other way sometimes), and we pass through forests of pine and fir (deliciously odoriferous and health-giving), towns, villages, etc., until we come to Gratz, the capital of Styria.

As some little time is allowed here, I alighted, made a hasty repast at the buffet, then had a look round. Everybody was amused at the air of importance I assumed, and ready to do the polite and agreeable to the young *Engländerin*. The self-esteem of the English in a foreign land is proverbial. I was no exception.

Gratz is a pretty and somewhat interesting place. It is situated on the river Mur, crossed by a chain bridge. Its Cathedral contains a fine altar painting by Tintoretto, besides the tomb of Ferdinand II., husband of the Fair Phillippina, whose pictures abound in Munich and Vienna, and whose romantic history is deserving of a passing word.

It seems that the exceeding loveliness (together with many other rare and surpassing charms let us hope, for men are very stupid) of the lowly-born daughter of the Munich Burgomaster was powerful to affect the heart of the heir to the throne; indeed, to such a considerable and lasting extent, that nothing less than prostrating himself at the maiden's feet and suing her hand in marriage could satisfy the devotional yearnings of the royal lover. Witness,

then, His Highness paying thus his humble devotions, and uprising an accepted suitor, shortly to appear in the new rôle of a happy Benedict!

But, alas! the frantic ravings of his august father—His Serene, yet irascible Majesty, Ferdinand I. ! Nought could appease his wrath; he raved and he swore. But in this he was mistaken; for, upon the first appearance of the bride, (who, by some feminine artifice, had gained an audience) in all her youth and beauty, becomingly bowed in sweet humility and gentle grace while telling her touching story, and suing, not for herself, but for her prince, her husband and adored—Ferdinand, the elder, (for though an emperor he was but man!) gave in, and, with arms extended, and, doubtless, feeling a spice of envy of his son and heir, swallowed his wrath, and murmured a paternal blessing over the heads of the happy young couple.

Quitting Gratz the scenery is very fine. First, we come to the grand old Castle Schlossberg, which, if the walls had tongues, might tell many a wondrous tale of troublous times. It presents a somewhat gloomy spectacle in its ruined grandeur, and suggests wild ideas of midnight, of a lady *revenante*, with raven tresses stained with gore, and from a pair of very material lungs joining in shrieking concert with the night birds, never at rest. Possessing a weird fascination for the imaginative, it likewise lends a special charm and dignity to the truly magnificent and varied scenery.

By-and-bye we reach Marburg, a military station whence

a line branches off to the Tyrol. The names of the places here are unpronounceable by English tongues; a conglomeration of consonants and diphthongs, nothing more. Welsh is easy to it. At intervals appear the ruins of many an ancient and still stately pile: conspicuous, Castles Eggensberg, Gösting, Buchsögl, and Schöckel, each having its own romantic legend, which I should dearly like to recount if space would permit.

But we must get on, as I did, only I was tired, and grubby, and lonely, and, perhaps, a trifle disagreeable, which I hope you are not.

At last, at last we reached Pöltzschach! I was apprised of this fact by the forcible method of a big, burly guard entering, and, seizing me round the waist, lifting me out of the carriage as though I were a bale of goods, not even "Glass, with care." When I opened my eyes and gazed, half-dazed, around, all that I was conscious of was a wretched wilderness of a place, with a sickly attempt at lamp-light. And then, oh, such a Babel fell on my poor distracted ears! A motley throng surrounded me, all clamorous for a *trinkgeld* (in vulgar parlance, a "tip,") which I showered abundantly upon them from a big purse of English farthings, provided specially,—my money-box deposits of over a year.

Elbowing his way through the swarm came a trim little fellow, who, touching his hat, handed me a note. It was from my hostess—the Baroness Adelman Von Vay, and contained many apologies and regrets for being unable

herself to meet me at the station, on account of a bad cough, and the late hour and coldness of the night. That sufficed. I stayed not to peruse the whole contents, but, turning to the footman, explained in my best German all about my luggage. Alas! not a word did he understand. He was Hungarian; loquacious, and extremely obliging, but he might have been a Hottentot for the use he was to me. It was a plight to be in; nevertheless, I laughed and enjoyed it immensely. The coachman was fetched, an Austrian, speaking some queer *patois*, and ultimately all was made right. I jumped into the carriage and was driven away, feeling quite jubilant, notwithstanding physical exhaustion and the strangeness of the situation and surroundings.

It was then past eleven o'clock, and although so far south (not far north of the Adriatic) and well on in the month of May, a bitterly cold night, yet one of the most brilliantly starlight I ever remember. So clear it was, that every object was distinguishable as we proceeded on our two hours' drive.

* In spite of my thirty-six hours journey from Frankfort, without sleep, I could not desist from looking out at the country we were passing through, appreciating and enjoying it none the less. First impressions are often the deepest: these were mine of the Styrian scenery.

* Here let me put in a word of thanks to the Countess Clarice Karolyi, who kindly invited me to join her party, travelling to Buda-Pesth, via Vienna, and who took such care of me that the journey was truly a pleasant one to the time of our parting.

Dark lowering summits, relieved only by an occasional grey stone church set up on the brink of some precipice ; black, fir-clad mountains, sanctified by the figure on the cross ; treacherous ravines, with mad-rushing streams at the bottom ; rude altars with gaudy embellishments, standing, at intervals, along the white highroad. We passed through a village or two, but they were of a strangely primitive order, and their inhabitants were evidently in the land of Somnus, all was so still ; only a savage looking object turned out, twice or thrice, to take toll, and, judging from these apparitions, I was disposed to fancy I had climbed Jack's beanstalk, and was in the land of Blunderbore, and other terrifying heroes of childhood. But nothing tragic occurred, and I was permitted to arrive at my destination in full possession of my luxuriant locks, not one hair of which had "turned white in a single night." Perhaps it was a trifle disappointing, it was a fact, nevertheless. *

Approached by a pair of ponderous gates, was the mountain home of my host and hostess, the Baron and Baroness Von Vay. Entering, a refreshing breeze of delicious perfumes was wafted across my face, and repeated again and again as we threaded the blossom-lined groves.

The Baroness came running out to meet me, giving utterance to her delight in welcoming her young English friend. Not expecting me until the morrow (up to the time of getting my telegram, that evening), the Baron had that morning set off with Prince Hugo of Windisgrätz, (who had gone to re-join his regiment at Marburg) and had