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The Germans of Pennsylvania

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THE GERMANS OF PENNSYLVANIA.

There are no people within the bounds of our country, so peculiar, and so distinct from all others as the Germans of Pennsylvania. Being among the first inhabitants of the State, they have given a tone to its general character, and although mingled with the descendants of nearly every other European nation, they remain to this day a distinct and peculiar race. An iron wall of partition, rarely broken down by intermarriage, or familiar intercourse, stands between them and the offspring of other races; and to this is owing, in a great measure, that slowness of progress which so distinctively marks them.

The restless ambition of the Grand Monarque, and the horrible cruelty of Turenne, converted the beautiful valley of the Rhine into a smoking desert, and the wretched peasantry of the Palatinate fled from their desolated firesides to seek a more hospitable home in the forests of Pennsylvania.

The greater part of them landed in America stripped of their all, and dependent for the bare necessities of life upon their own exertions. Many were sold to defray the expenses of their passage, and the rest went forth, with nothing but the woodman's axe, to earn a subsistence amid the deep forests of the Schuylkill and the Susquehanna.

They were ignorant and superstitious, and brought with them the wild legends and superstitious rites of their fatherland. The spirits of the Hartz mountains and the genii of the Black Forest were transferred to the woods of Pennsylvania, and the same unearthly visitants which haunted the old castles of the Rhine, continued their gambols in some deserted cabin on the banks of the Susquehanna.

The Germans of this State have been but little changed by time, so far as regards the general character of the race. They have, it is true, made some progress; and many of the distinguished men of Pennsylvania trace back their descent to German origin; yet these are but solitary cases, and, considered as a body, they have been far outstripped by the other races. In manners and customs, and too often in ignorance and superstition, they are the same as when they first crossed the Atlantic. In the darker and more unfrequented districts, the horse-shoe is yet nailed above the door—a sure preventive against the presence of 'some troublesome "spook"'—the ancient and mysterious Black Art is yet secretly practiced, and other ceremonies, relics of Pagan or Romish superstition, are still in vogue.

Rough in their manners, and plain in their appearance, they nevertheless conceal within this uncouth exterior a warm hospitality, and the stranger is seldom turned from the threshold of a German farmer. Having for the most part, by dint of hard labor and perseverance, attained to competence, they yet retain those habits of economy and industry by which they have
risen. Seated by his blazing fireside, with plenty of apples and hard cider, the honest "Dutchman" enjoys his condition with gusto, and perfectly contented with his lot, he is happy in his own ignorance; and firmly believing that the earth is flat, and that the sun, moon and stars, move around it every day, caring for nothing save the cultivation of his own farm, he lives and dies as his fathers did before him.

A LEAF FROM MY HISTORY.

The leaves of the forest shall blossom again,
And the song bird shall carol a soul thrilling strain,
But the lost one whose beauty I used to adore,
To my heart seems to murmur, "No more—never more!"

It is midnight. The hollow winds are sighing around me. The storm rages wildly without. Not a single star breaks through the gloomy veil that curtains the heavens. All is dark, and drear and miserable. This night and this equinoctial storm are to the year what the occurrence I am about to relate was in my history.

I have loved once, and only once. I was just about seventeen when I met Elmira N——. It was at a pic-nic. As I had just returned from college a Junior, I was of course expected to pay some attention to the ladies, for all of them seem to think, when a youngster has rubbed his back against a college wall, he is admirably suited for a gallant. They are quite in the wrong here, however, for nearly every young man leaves college ruder, and less fitted to shine in female society than he was, when first loosed from his mamma's apron strings.

But to my story. The place in which we were assembled, was a small promontory that jutted out into the bright waters of the Chesapeake. On one hand the bank rose like a miniature cliff, to the height of some fifteen or twenty feet, whilst on the other it sloped gently downward to the water's very edge. Above us towered huge oaks that had defied the storms of centuries, their branches lapped and interlapped so closely, that the sunbeams seemed to seek in vain for an entrance. The earth was covered with a carpet of green, soft to the tread as velvet. It was a beautiful spot, almost lovely enough to tempt one to think the general curse had never fallen there. We danced and sported here the live-long day, and the shadows of a beautiful moonlight evening were closing fast around us, ere we dreamed of separating. Just when we were about starting, some of us mounted, and some of us rein in hand, we heard the first notes of a song; the voice was clear and melodious, yet full and strong. Looking out upon the bay, we saw a light schooner skimming along graceful as some ocean bird; the vessel was instantly recognized, and the person at helm, a fine manly slave belonging to Mr. N——, was the singer. I always loved music; and have often felt its No. III.—MAY, 1849 9