THE FIRST DAY

FROM MILTZOW TO LAUTERBACH

EVERY one who has been to school and still remembers what he was taught there, knows that Rügen is the biggest island Germany possesses, and that it lies in the Baltic Sea off the coast of Pomerania.

Round this island I wished to walk this summer, but no one would walk with me. It is the perfect way of moving if you want to see into the life of things. It is the one way of freedom. If you go to a place on anything but your own feet you are aken there too fast, and miss a thousand delicate joys that were waiting for you by the wayside. If you drive you are bound by a variety of considerations, eight of the most important being the horses' legs. If you bicycle — but who that loves to get close to nature would bicycle? And as for motors, the object of a journey like mine was not the getting to a place but the going there.

Successively did I invite the most likely of my women friends, numbering at least a dozen, to

walk with me. They one and all replied that it would make them tired and that it would be dull; and when I tried to remove the first objection by telling them how excellent it would be for the German nation, especially those portions of it that are still to come, if its women walked round Rügen more often, they stared and smiled; and when I tried to remove the second by explaining that by our own spirits are we deified, they stared and smiled more than ever.

Walking, then, was out of the question, for I could not walk alone. The grim monster Conventionality whose iron claws are for ever on my shoulder, for ever pulling me back from the harmless and the wholesome, put a stop to that even if I had not been afraid of tramps, which I was. So I drove, and it was round Rügen that I drove because one hot afternoon when I was idling in the library, not reading but fingering the books, taking out first one and then another, dipping into them, deciding which I would read next, I came across Marianne North's *Recollections of a Happy Life*, and hit upon the page where she begins to talk of Rügen. Immediately interested — for is not Rügen nearer to me than any other island? — I became absorbed in her description of the bathing near a place called Putbus, of the deliciousness of it in a sandy cove where the water was always calm, and of how you floated about on its crystal surface, and beautiful jelly-fish, stars of purest colours, floated with you. I threw down the book to ransack the shelves for

a guide to Rügen. On the first page of the first one I found was this remarkable paragraph: —

'Hearest thou the name Rügen, so doth a wondrous spell come over thee. Before thine eyes it rises as a dream of far-away, beauteous fairylands. Images and figures of long ago beckon thee across to the marvellous places where in grey prehistoric times they dwelt, and on which they have left the shadow of their presence. And in thee stirs a mighty desire to wander over the glorious, legend-surrounded island. Cord up, then, thy light bundle, take to heart Shylock's advice to put money in thy purse, and follow me without fear of the threatening sea-sickness which may overtake thee on the short crossing, for it has never yet done any one more harm than imposing on him a rapidly-passing discomfort.'

This seemed to me very irresistible. Surely a place that inspired such a mingling of the lofty and the homely in its guide-books must be well worth seeing? There was a drought just then going on at home. My eyes were hot with watching a garden parch browner day by day beneath a sky of brass. I felt that it only needed a little energy, and in a few hours I too might be floating among those jelly-fish, in the shadow of the cliffs of the legend-surrounded island. And even better than being surrounded by legends those breathless days would it be to have the sea all round me. Such a sea too! Did I not know it? Did I not know its singular limpidity? The divineness of its blue where it was deep, the clearness

of its green where it was shallow, lying tideless along its amber shores? The very words made me thirsty — amber shores; lazy waves lapping them slowly; vast spaces for the eye to wander over; rocks, and seaweed, and cool, gorgeous jelly-fish. The very map at the beginning of the guide-book made me thirsty, the land was so succulently green, the sea all round so bland a blue. And what a fascinating island it is on the map — an island of twists and curves and inland seas called Bodden; of lakes, and woods, and frequent ferries; with lesser islands dotted about its coasts; with bays innumerable stretching their arms out into the water; and with one huge forest, evidently magnificent, running nearly the whole length of the east coast, following its curves, dipping down to the sea in places, and in others climbing up chalk cliffs to crown them with the peculiar splendour of beeches.

It does not take me long to make up my mind, still less to cord up my light bundle, for somebody else does that; and I think it was only two days after I first found Marianne North and the guide-book that my maid Gertrud and I got out of a suffocating train into the freshness that blows round ryefields near the sea, and began our journey into the unknown.

It was a little wayside station on the line between Berlin and Stralsund, called Miltzow, a solitary red building on the edge of a pine-wood, that witnessed the beginning of our tour. The carriage had been sent on the day before, and

round it, on our arrival, stood the station authorities in an interested group. The stationmaster, everywhere in Germany an elaborate, Olympic person in white gloves, actually helped the porter to cord on my hold-all with his own hands, and they both lingered over it as if loth to let us go. Evidently the coachman had told them what I was going to do, and I suppose such an enterprising woman does not get out at Miltzow every day. They packed us in with the greatest care, with so much care that I thought they would never have done. My hold-all was the biggest piece of luggage, and they corded it on in an upright position at our feet. I had left the choosing of its contents to Gertrud, only exhorting her, besides my pillow, to take a sufficiency of soap and dressing-gowns. Gertrud's luggage was placed by the porter on her lap. It was almost too modest. It was one small black bag, and a great part of its inside must, I knew, be taken up by the stockings she had brought to knit and the needles she did it with; yet she looked quite as respectable the day we came home as she did the day we started, and every bit as clean. My dressing-case was put on the box, and on top of it was a brown cardboard hat-box containing the coachman's wet-weather hat. A thick coat for possible cold days made a cushion for my back, and Gertrud's waterproof did the same thing for hers. Wedged in between us was the tea-basket, rattling inharmoniously, but preventing our slipping together in sloping places. Behind us in the hood were the

umbrellas, rugs, guide-books, and maps, besides one of those round shiny yellow wooden band-boxes into which every decent German woman puts her best hat. This luggage, and some mysterious bundles on the box that the coachman thought were hidden by his legs but which bulged out unhideable on either side, prevented our looking elegant; but I did not want to look elegant, and I had gathered from the remarks of those who had refused to walk that Rügen was not a place where I should meet any one who did.

Now I suppose I could talk for a week and yet give no idea whatever of the exultation that filled my soul as I gazed on these arrangements. The picnic-like simplicity of them was so full of promise. It was as though I were going back to the very morning of life, to those fresh years when shepherd boys and others shout round one for no reason except that they are out of doors and alive. Also, during the years that have come after, years that may properly be called riper, it has been a conviction of mine that there is nothing so absolutely bracing for the soul as the frequent turning of one's back on duties. This was exactly what I was doing; and oh ye rigid female martyrs on the rack of daily exemplariness, ye unquestioning patient followers of paths that have been pointed out, if only you knew the wholesome joys of sometimes being less good!

The point at which we were is the nearest from which Rügen can be reached by persons coming up from the south and going to drive. No one

ever gets out there who is bound for Rügen, because no one ever drives to Rügen. The ordinary tourist, almost exclusively German, goes first to Stralsund, is taken across the narrow strip of water, train and all, on the steam ferry, and continues without changing till he reaches the open sea on the other side of the island at Sassnitz. Or he goes by train from Berlin to Stettin and then by steamer down the Oder, crosses the open sea for four hours, and arrives, probably pensive for the boats are small and the waves are often big, at Göhren, the first stopping-place on the island's east coast.

We were not ordinary tourists, and having got to Miltzow were to be independent of all such wearinesses as trains and steamers till the day we wanted to come back again. From Miltzow we were going to drive to a ferry three miles off at a place called Stahlbrode, cross the mile of water, land on the island's south shore, and go on at once that afternoon to the jelly-fish of Miss North's Putbus, which were beckoning me across to the legend-surrounded island far more irresistibly than any of those grey figures the guide-book talked about.

The carriage was a light one of the victoria genus with a hood; the horses were a pair esteemed at home for their meekness; the coachman, August, was a youth who had never yet driven straight on for an indefinite period without turning round once, and he looked as though he thought he were going to enjoy himself. I was sure I was going to enjoy

myself. Gertrud, I fancy, was without these illusions; but she is old, and has got out of the habit of being anything but resigned. She was the sop on this occasion thrown to the Grim One of the iron claws, for I would far rather have gone alone. But Gertrud is very silent; to go with her would be as nearly like being alone as it is possible to be when you are not. She could, I knew, be trusted to sit by my side knitting, however bumpy the road, and not opening her lips unless asked a question. Admirable virtue of silence, most precious, because most rare, jewel in the crown of female excellences, not possessed by a single one of those who had refused to walk! If either of them had occupied Gertrud's place and driven with me would she not, after the way of women, have spent the first half of the time telling me her secrets and the other half being angry with me because I knew them? And then Gertrud, after having kept quiet all day, would burst into activities at night, unpack the hold-all, produce pleasant things like slippers, see that my bed was as I like it, and end by tucking me up in it and going away on tiptoe with her customary quaint benediction, bestowed on me every night at bedtime: 'The dear God protect and bless the gracious one,' says Gertrud as she blows out the candle.

'And may He also protect and bless thee,' I reply; and could as ill spare my pillow as her blessing.

It was half-past two in the afternoon of the middle Friday in July when we left the station

officials to go back to their dull work and trotted round the corner into the wide world. The sky was a hot blue. The road wound with gentle ups and downs between fields whitening to harvest. High over our heads the larks quivered in the light, shaking out that rapturous song that I can never hear without a throb of gratitude for being alive. There were no woods or hills, and we could see a long way on either side, see the red roofs of farms clustered wherever there was a hollow to protect them from the wild winds of winter, see the straight double line of trees where the high road to Stralsund cut across ours, see a little village a mile ahead of us with a venerable church on a mound in the middle of it gravely presiding over the surrounding wide parish of corn. I think I must have got out at least six times during the short drive between Miltzow and the ferry pretending I wanted flowers, but really to enjoy the delight of loitering. The rye was full of chickory and poppies, the ditches along the road where the spring dampness still lingered were white with the delicate loveliness of cow-parsley, that most spiritual of weeds. I picked an armful of it to hold up against the blue of the sky while we were driving; I gave Gertrud a bunch of poppies for which she thanked me without enthusiasm; I put little posies of chickory at the horses' ears; in fact I felt and behaved as if I were fifteen and out for my first summer holiday. But what did it matter? There was nobody there to see.

Stahlbrode is the most innocent-looking place — a small cluster of cottages on grass that goes down to the water. It was quite empty and silent. It has a long narrow wooden jetty running across the marshy shore to the ferry, and moored to the end of this jetty lay a big fishing-smack with furled brown sails. I got out and walked down to it to see if it were the ferry-boat, and whether the ferryman was in it. Both August and the horses had an alarmed, pricked-up expression as they saw me going out into the jaws of the sea. Even the emotionless Gertrud put away her stocking and stood by the side of the carriage watching me. The jetty was roughly put together, and so narrow that the carriage would only just fit in. A slight wooden rail was all the protection provided; but the water was not deep, and heaved limpidly over the yellow sand at the bottom. The shore we were on was flat and vividly green, the shore of Rügen opposite was flat and vividly green; the sea between was a lovely, sparkling blue; the sky was strewn across with loose clusters of pearly clouds; the breeze that had played so gently among the ears of corn round Miltzow danced along the little waves and splashed them gaily against the wooden posts of the jetty as though the freshness down there on the water had filled it with new life. I found the boat empty, a thing of steep sides and curved bottom, a thing that was surely never intended for the ferrying across of horses and carriages. No other boat was to be seen. Up the channel and down the channel there

was nothing visible but the flat green shores, the dancing water, the wide sky, the bland afternoon light.

I turned back thoughtfully to the cottages. Suppose the ferry were only used for ferrying people? If so, we were in an extremely tiresome fix. A long way back against the sky I could see the line of trees bordering the road to Stralsund, and the whole dull, dusty distance would have to be driven over if the Stahlbrode ferry failed us. August took off his hat when I came up to him, and said ominously, 'Does the gracious one permit that I speak a few words?'

'Speak them, August.'

'It is very windy.'

'Not very.'

'It is far to go on water.'

'Not very.'

'Never yet have I been on the sea.'

'Well, you are going on it now.'

With an expression made up of two parts fright and one resignation he put on his hat again and relapsed into a silence that was grim. I took Gertrud with me to give me a countenance and walked across to the inn, a new red-brick house standing out boldly on a bit of rising ground, end ways on to the sea. The door was open and we went in, knocking with my sunshade on the floor. We stirred up no life of any sort. Not even a dog barked at us. The passage was wide and clean with doors on each side of it and an open door at either end — the one we had come

in by followed by the afternoon sun, and the other framing a picture of sky with the sea at the bottom, the jetty, the smack with folded sails, and the coast of Rügen. Seeing a door with *Gaststube* painted on it I opened it and peeped in. To my astonishment it was full of men smoking in silence, and all with their eyes fixed on the opening door. They must have heard us. They must have seen us passing the window as we came up to the house. I concluded that the custom of the district requires that strangers shall in no way be interfered with until they actually ask definite questions; that it was so became clear by the alacrity with which a yellow-bearded man jumped up on our asking how we could get across to Rügen, and told us he was the ferryman and would take us there.

'But there is a carriage — can that go too?' I inquired anxiously, thinking of the deep bottom and steep sides of the fishing-smack.

'*Alles, Alles*,' he said cheerily; and calling to a boy to come and help he led the way through the door framing the sea, down a tiny, sandy garden prickly with gooseberry bushes, to the place where August sat marvelling on his box.

'Come along!' he shouted as he ran past him.

'What, along that thing of wood?' cried August. 'With my horses? And my newly-varnished carriage?'

'Come along!' shouted the ferryman, halfway down the jetty.

'Go on, August,' I commanded.

'It can never be accomplished,' said August, visibly breaking out into a perspiration.

'Go on,' I repeated sternly; but thought it on the whole more discreet to go on myself on my own feet, and so did Gertrud.

'If the gracious one insists ——' faltered August, and began to drive gingerly down to the jetty with the face of one who thinks his last hour well on the way.

As I had feared, the carriage was very nearly smashed getting it over the sides of the smack. I sat up in the bows looking on in terror, expecting every instant to see the wheels wrenched off, and with their wrenching the end of our holiday. The optimistic ferryman assured us that it was going in quite easily — like a lamb, he declared, with great boldness of imagery. He sloped two ineffectual planks, one for each set of wheels, up the side of the boat, and he and August, hatless, coatless, and breathless, lifted the carriage over on to them. It was a horrid moment. The front wheels twisted right round and were as near coming off as any wheels I saw in my life. I was afraid to look at August, so right did he seem to have been when he protested that the thing could not be accomplished. Yet there was Rügen and here were we, and we had to get across to it somehow or turn round and do the dreary journey to Stralsund.

The horses, both exceedingly restive, had been unharnessed and got in first. They were held in the stern of the boat by two boys, who needed all their determination to do it. Then it was that I

was thankful for the boat's steep sides, for if they had been lower those horses would certainly have kicked themselves over into the sea; and what should I have done then? And how should I have faced him who is in authority over me if I returned to him without his horses?

'We take them across daily,' the ferryman remarked, airily jerking his thumb in the direction of the carriage.

'Do so many people drive to Rügen?' I asked astonished, for the plank arrangements were staringly makeshift.

'Many people?' cried the ferryman. 'Rightly speaking, crowds.'

He was trying to make me happy. At least it reassured August to hear it; but I could not suppress a smile of deprecation at the size of the fib.

By this time we were under weigh, a fair wind sending us merrily over the water. The ferryman steered; August stood at his horses' heads talking to them soothingly; the two boys came and sat on some coiled ropes close to me, leaned their elbows on their knees and their chins on their hands, and fixing their blue fisher-boy eyes on my face kept them there with an unwinking interest during the entire crossing. Oh, it was lovely sitting up there in the sun, safe so far, in the delicious quiet of sailing. The tawny sail, darned and patched in divers shades of brown and red and orange, towered above us against the sky. The huge mast seemed to brush along across the very surface

of the little white clouds. Above the rippling of the water we could hear the distant larks on either shore. August had put on his scarlet stable-jacket for the work of lifting the carriage in, and made a beautiful bit of colour among the browns of the old boat at the stern. The eyes of the ferryman lost all the alertness they had had on shore, and he stood at the rudder gazing dreamily out at the afternoon light on the Rügen meadows. How perfect it was after the train, after the clattering along the dusty road, and the heat and terror of getting on board. For one exquisite quarter of an hour we were softly lapped across in the sun, and for all that beauty we were only asked to pay three marks, which included the horses and carriage and the labour of getting us in and out. For a further small sum the ferryman became enthusiastic and begged me to be sure to come back that way. There was a single house on the Rügen shore where he lived, he said, and from which he would watch for us. A little dog came down to welcome us, but we saw no other living creature. The carriage conducted itself far more like a lamb on this side, and I drove away well pleased to have got over the chief difficulty of the tour, the soft-voiced ferryman wishing us God-speed, and the two boys unwinking to the last.

So here we were on the legend-surrounded island. 'Hail, thou isle of fairyland, filled with beckoning figures!' I murmured under my breath, careful not to appear too unaccountable in Gertrud's eyes. With eager interest I looked about me, and

anything less like fairyland and more like the coast of Pomerania lately left I have seldom seen. The road, a continuation of the road on the mainland, was exactly like other roads that are dull as far as a rambling village three miles farther on called Garz — persons referring to the map at the beginning of this book will see with what a melancholy straightness it proceeds to that village — and after Garz I ceased to care what it was like, for reasons which I will now set forth.

There was that afternoon in the market-place of Garz, and I know not why, since it was neither a Sunday nor a holiday, a brass band playing with a singular sonorousness. The horses having never before been required to listen to music, their functions at home being solely to draw me through the solitudes of forests, did not like it. I was astonished at the vigour of the dislike they showed who were wont to be so meek. They danced through Garz, pursued by the braying of the trumpets and the delighted shouts of the crowd, who seemed to bray and shout the louder the more the horses danced, and I was considering whether the time had not come for clinging to Gertrud and shutting my eyes when we turned a corner and got away from the noise on to the familiar rattle of the hard country road. I gave a sigh of relief and stretched out my head to see whether it were as straight a bit as the last. It was quite as straight, and in the distance bearing down on us was a black speck that swelled at an awful speed into a motor car. Now the horses had not

yet seen a motor car. Their nerves, already shaken by the brass band, would never stand such a horrid sight I thought, and prudence urged an immediate getting out and a rushing to their heads. 'Stop, August!' I cried. 'Jump out, Gertrud — there's a dreadful thing coming — they're sure to bolt ——'

August slowed down in apparent obedience to my order, and without waiting for him to stop entirely, the motor being almost upon us, I jumped out on one side and Gertrud jumped out on the other. Before I had time to run to the horses' heads the motor whizzed past. The horses strange to say hardly cared at all, only mildly shying as August drove them slowly along without stopping.

'That's all right,' I remarked, greatly relieved, to Gertrud, who still held her stocking. 'Now we'll get in again.'

But we could not get in again because August did not stop.

'Call to him to stop,' I said to Gertrud, turning aside to pick some unusually big poppies.

She called, but he did not stop.

'Call louder, Gertrud,' I said impatiently, for we were now a good way behind.

She called louder, but he did not stop.

Then I called; then she called; then we called together, but he did not stop. On the contrary, he was driving on now at the usual pace, rattling noisily over the hard road, getting more and more out of reach.

'Shout, shout, Gertrud!' I cried in a frenzy;