

## THE SECOND DAY

LAUTERBACH AND VILM

A RIPE experience of German pillows in country places leads me to urge the intending traveller to be sure to take his own. The native pillows are mere bags, in which feathers may have been once. There is no substance in them at all. They are of a horrid flabbiness. And they have, of course, the common drawback of all public pillows, they are haunted by the nightmares of other people. A pillow, it is true, takes up a great deal of room in one's luggage, but in Rügen however simply you dress you are better dressed than the others, so that you need take hardly any clothes. My hold-all, not a specially big one, really did hold all I wanted. The pillow filled one side of it, and my bathing things a great part of the other, and I was away eleven days; yet I am sure I was admirably clean the whole time, and I defy any one to say my garments were not both appropriate and irreproachable. Towards the end, it is true, Gertrud had to mend and brush a good deal, but those are two of the things she is there for; and

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it is infinitely better to be comfortable at night than, by leaving the pillow at home and bringing dresses in its place, be more impressive by day. And let no one visit Rügen who is not of that meek and lowly character that would always prefer a good pillow to a diversity of raiment, and has no prejudices about its food.

Having eased my conscience by these hints, which he will find invaluable, to the traveller, I can now go on to say that except for the pillow I would have had if I had not brought my own, for the coloured quilt, for the water to wash with brought in a very small coffee-pot, and for the breakfast which was as cold and repellent as in some moods some persons find the world, my experiences of the hotel were pleasing. It is true that I spent most of the day, as I shall presently relate, away from it, and it is also true that in the searching light of morning I saw much that had been hidden: scraps of paper lying about the grass near the house, an automatic bon-bon machine in the form of a brooding hen, and an automatic weighing machine, both at the top of the very steps leading down to the nook that had been the night before enchanted, and, worst shock of all, an electric bell piercing the heart of the very beech tree under which I had sat. But the beauties are so many and so great that if a few of them are spoilt there are still enough left to make Lauterbach one of the most delightful places conceivable. The hotel was admirably quiet; no tourists arrived late, and those already in it seemed to go to bed



extraordinarily early; for when I came up from the water soon after ten the house was so silent that instinctively I stole along the passages on the tips of my toes, and for no reason that I could discover felt conscience-stricken. Gertrud, too, appeared to think it was unusually late; she was waiting for me at the door with a lamp, and seemed to expect me to look conscience-stricken. Also, she had rather the expression of the resigned and forgiving wife of an incorrigible evil-doer. I went into my room much pleased that I am not a man and need not have a wife who forgives me.

The windows were left wide open, and all night through my dreams I could hear the sea gently rippling among the rushes. At six in the morning a train down at the station hidden behind the chestnuts began to shunt and to whistle, and as it did not leave off and I could not sleep till it did, I got up and sat at the window and amused myself watching the pictures between the columns in the morning sunlight. A solitary mower in the meadow was very busy with his scythe, but its swishing could not be heard through the shunting. At last the train steamed away and peace settled down again over Lauterbach, the scythe swished audibly, the larks sang rapturously, and I fell to saying my prayers, for indeed it was a day to be grateful for, and the sea was the deepest, divinest blue.

The bathing at Lauterbach is certainly perfect. You walk along a footpath on the edge of low cliffs, shaded all the way from the door of the

hotel to the bathing-huts by the beechwood, the water heaving and shining just below you, the island of Vilm opposite, the distant headland of Thiessow a hazy violet line between the misty blues of sea and sky in front, and at your feet moss and grass and dear common flowers flecked with the dancing lights and shadows of a beechwood when the sun is shining.

'Oh this is perfect!' I exclaimed to Gertrud; for on a fine fresh morning one must exclaim to somebody. She was behind me on the narrow path, her arms full of towels and bathing things. 'Won't you bathe too, afterwards, Gertrud? Can you resist it?'

But Gertrud evidently could resist it very well. She glanced at the living loveliness of the sea with an eye that clearly saw in it only a thing that made dry people wet. If she had been Dr. Johnson she would boldly have answered, 'Madam, I hate immersion.' Being Gertrud, she pretended that she had a cold.

'Well, to-morrow then,' I said hopefully; but she said colds hung about her for days.

'Well, as soon as you have got over it,' I said, persistently and odiously hopeful; but she became prophetic and said she would never get over it.

The bathing-huts are in a row far enough away from the shore to be in deep water. You walk out to them along a little footbridge of planks and find a sunburnt woman, amiable as all the people seem to be who have their business in deep waters, and she takes care of your things



and dries them for you and provides you with anything you have forgotten and charges you twenty *pfennings* at the end for all her attentions as well as the bathe. The farthest hut is the one to get if you can — another invaluable hint. It is very roomy, and has a sofa, a table, and a big looking-glass, and one window opening to the south and one to the east. Through the east window you see the line of low cliffs with the woods above till they melt into a green plain that stretches off into vagueness towards the haze of Thiessow. Through the south window you see the little island of Vilm, with its one house set about with cornfields, and its woods on the high ground at the back.

Gertrud sat on the steps knitting while I swam round among the jelly-fish and thought of Marianne North. How right she was about the bathing, and the colours, and the crystal clearness of the water in that sandy cove! The bathing woman leaned over the hand-rail watching me with a sympathetic smile. She wore a white sun-bonnet, and it looked so well against the sky that I wished Gertrud could be persuaded to put one on too in place of her uninteresting and eminently respectable black bonnet. I could have stayed there for hours, perfectly happy, floating on the sparkling stuff, and I did stay there for nearly one, with the result that I climbed up the cliff a chilled and saddened woman, and sat contemplating the blue tips of my fingers while the waiter brought breakfast, and thought what a pitiful thing it was

to have blue finger tips, instead of rejoicing as I would have done after a ten minutes' swim in the glorious fact that I was alive at all on such a morning.

The cold tea, cold eggs, and hard rolls did not make me more cheerful. I sat under the beeches where I had had supper the night before and shivered in my thickest coat, with the July sun blazing on the water and striking brilliant colours out of the sails of the passing fisher-boats. The hotel dog came along the shingle with his tongue out, and lay down near me in the shade. Visitors from Putbus, arriving in an omnibus for their morning bathe, passed by fanning themselves with their hats.

The Putbus visitors come down every morning in a sort of waggonette to bathe and walk back slowly up the hill to dinner. After this exertion they think they have done enough for their health, and spend the rest of the day sleeping, or sitting out of doors drinking beer and coffee. I think this is quite a good way of spending a holiday if you have worked hard all the rest of the year; and the tourists I saw looked as if they had. More of them stay at Putbus than at Lauterbach, although it is so much farther from the sea, because the hotel I was at was slightly dearer than — I ought rather to say, judging from the guide-book, not quite so cheap as — the Putbus hotels. I suppose it was less full than it might be because of this slight difference, or perhaps there was the slight difference because it was less full — who shall solve



such mysteries? Anyhow the traveller need not be afraid of the bill, for when I engaged our rooms the waiter was surprised that I refused to put myself *en pension*, and explained in quite an aggrieved voice that all the *Herrschaften* put themselves *en pension*, and he hoped I did not think five marks a day for everything a too expensive arrangement. I praised the arrangement as just and excellent, but said that, being a bird of passage, I would prefer not to make it.

After breakfast I set out to explore the Goor, the lovely beechwood stretching along the coast from the very doors of the hotel. I started so briskly down the footpath on the edge of the cliffs in the hope of getting warm, that tourists who were warm already and were sitting under the trees gasping, stared at me reproachfully as I hurried past.

The Goor is beautiful. The path I took runs through thick shade with many windings, and presently comes out at the edge of the wood down by the sea in a very hot, sheltered corner, where the sun beats all day long on the shingle and coarse grass. A solitary oak tree, old and storm-beaten, stands by itself near the water; across the water is the wooded side of Vilm; and if you continue along the shingle a few yards you are away from the trees and out on a grassy plain, where lilac scabious bend their delicate stalks in the wind. An old black fishing-smack lay on its side on the shingle, its boards blistered by the sun. Its blackness and the dark lines of the solitary

oak sharply cleft the flood of brilliant light. What a hot, happy corner to lie in all day with a book! No tourists go to it, for the path leads to nowhere, ending abruptly just there in coarse grass and shingle — a mixture grievous to the feet of the easily tired. The usual walk for those who have enough energy — it is not a very long one, and does not need much — is through the Goor to the north side, where the path takes you to the edge of a clover field across which you see the little village of Vilmnitz nestling among its trees and rye, and then brings you back gently and comfortably and shadily to the hotel; but this turning to the right only goes down to the shingle, the old boat, and the lonely oak. The first thing to do in that hot corner is to pull off your coat, which I did; and if you like heat and dislike blue finger tips and chilled marrows, lie down on the shingle, draw your hat over your eyes, and bake luxuriously, which I did also. In the pocket of my coat was *The Prelude*, the only book I had brought. I brought it because I know of no other book that is at the same time so slender and so satisfying. It slips even into a woman's pocket, and has an extraordinarily filling effect on the mind. Its green limp covers are quite worn with the journeys it has been with me. I take it wherever I go; and I have read it and read it for many summers without yet having entirely assimilated its adorable stodginess. Oh shade of Wordsworth, to think that so unutterable a grub and groveller as I am should dare call anything of thine



stodgy! But it is this very stodginess that makes it, if you love Wordsworth, the perfect book where there can be only one. You must, to enjoy it, be first a lover of Wordsworth. You must love the uninspired poems for the sake of the divineness of the inspired poems. You must be able to be interested in the description of Simon Lee's personal appearance, and not mind his wife, an aged woman, being made to rhyme with the Village Common. Even the Idiot Boy should not be a stumbling-block to you; and your having learned *The Pet Lamb* in the nursery is no reason why you should dislike it now. They all have their beauties; there is always some gem, more or less bright, to be found in them; and the pages of *The Prelude* are strewn with precious jewels. I have had it with me so often in happy country places that merely to open it and read that first cry of relief and delight — 'Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze!' — brings back the dearest remembrances of fresh and joyous hours. And how wholesome to be reminded when the days are rainy and things look blank of the many joyous hours one has had. Every instant of happiness is a priceless possession for ever.

That morning my *Prelude* fell open at the Residence in London, a part where the gems are not very thick, and the satisfying properties extremely developed. My eye lighted on the bit where he goes for a walk in the London streets, and besides a Nurse, a Bachelor, a Military Idler,

and a Dame with Decent Steps — figures with which I too am familiar — he sees —

. . . with basket at his breast  
The Jew; the stately and slow-moving Turk  
With freight of slipper piled beneath his arm. . . .  
The Swede, the Russian; from the genial south  
The Frenchman and the Spaniard; from remote  
America, the Hunter-Indian; Moors,  
Malays, Lascars, the Tartar, the Chinese,  
And Negro Ladies in white muslin gowns

— figures which are not, at any rate, to be met in the streets of Berlin. I am afraid to say that this is not poetry, for perhaps it is only I do not know it; but after all one can only judge according to one's lights, and no degree of faintness and imperfection in the lights will ever stop any one from judging; therefore I will have the courage of my opinions, and express my firm conviction that it is not poetry at all. But the passage set me off musing. That is the pleasant property of *The Prelude*, it makes one at the end of every few lines pause and muse. And presently the image of the Negro Ladies in their white muslin gowns faded, and those other lines, children of the self-same spirit but conceived in the mood when it was divine, stood out in shining letters —

Not in entire forgetfulness,  
And not in utter nakedness. . . .

I need not go on; it is sacrilege to write them down in such a setting of commonplaceness; I could not say them aloud to my closest friend



with a steady voice; they are lines that seem to come fresh from God.

And now I know that the Negro Ladies, whatever their exact poetic value may be, have become a very real blessing to an obscure inhabitant of Prussia, for in the future I shall only need to see the passage to be back instantaneously on the hot shingle, with the tarred edge of the old boat above me against the sky, the blue water curling along the shore at my feet, and the pale lilac flowers on the delicate stalks bending their heads in the wind.

About twelve the sun drove me away. The backs of my hands began to feel as though they proposed to go into blisters. I could not lie there and deliberately be blistered, so I got up and wandered back to the hotel to prepare Gertrud for a probably prolonged absence, as I intended to get across somehow to the island of Vilm. Having begged her to keep calm if I did not appear again till bedtime I took the guide-book and set out. The way to the jetty is down a path through the meadow close to the water, with willows on one side of it and rushes on the other. In ten minutes you have reached Lauterbach, seen some ugly little new houses where tourists lodge, seen some delightful little old houses where fishermen live, paid ten *pfennings* toll to a smiling woman at the entrance to the jetty, on whom it is useless to waste amiabilities, she being absolutely deaf, and having walked out to the end begin to wonder how you are to get across. There were

fishing-smacks at anchor on one side, and a brig from Sweden was being unloaded. A small steamer lay at the end, looking as though it meant to start soon for somewhere; but on my asking an official who was sitting on a coil of ropes staring at nothing if it would take me to Vilm, he replied that he did not go to Vilm but would be pleased to take me to Baabe. Never having heard of Baabe I had no desire to go to it. He then suggested Greifswald, and said he went there the next day; and when I declined to be taken to Greifswald the next day instead of to Vilm that day he looked as though he thought me unreasonable, and relapsed into his first abstraction.

A fisherman was lounging near, leaning against one of the posts and also staring straight into space, and when I turned away he roused himself enough to ask if I would use his smack. He pointed to it where it lay a little way out—a big boat with the bright brown sails that make such brilliant splashes of colour in the surrounding blues and whites. There was only a faint breeze, but he said he could get me across in twenty minutes and would wait for me all day if I liked, and would only charge three marks. Three marks for a whole fishing-smack with golden sails, and a fisherman with a golden beard, blue eyes, stalwart body, and whose remote grandparents had certainly been Vikings! I got into his dinghy without further argument, and was rowed across to the smack. A small Viking, appropriately



beardless, he being only ten, but with freckles, put his head out of the cabin as we drew alongside, and was presented to me as the eldest of five sons. Father and son made a comfortable place for me in a not too fishy part of the boat, hauled up the huge poetic sail, and we glided out beyond the jetty. This is the proper way, the only right way, to visit Vilm, the most romantic of tiny islands. Who would go to it any other way but with a Viking and a golden sail? Yet there is another way, I found out, and it is the one most used. It is a small launch plying between Lauterbach and Vilm, worked by a machine that smells very nasty and makes a great noise; and as it is a long narrow boat, if there are even small waves it rolls so much that the female passengers, and sometimes even the male, scream. Also the spray flies over it and drenches you. In calm weather it crosses swiftly, doing the distance in ten minutes. My smack took twenty to get there and much longer to get back, but what a difference in the joy! The puffing little launch rushed past us when we were midway, when I should not have known that we were moving but for the slight shining ripple across the bows, and the thud of its machine and the smell of its benzine were noticeable for a long time after it had dwindled to a dot. The people in it certainly got to their destination quickly, but Vilm is not a place to hurry to. There is nothing whatever on it to attract the hurried. To rush across the sea to it and back again to one's train at Lauterbach is not to have

felt its singular charm. It is a place to dream away a summer in; but the wide-awake tourist visiting it between two trains would hardly know how to fill up the three hours allotted him. You can walk right round it in three-quarters of an hour. In three-quarters of an hour you can have seen each of the views considered fine and accordingly provided with a seat, have said 'Oh there is Thiessow again,' on looking over the sea to the east; and 'Oh there is Putbus again,' on looking over the sea to the west; and 'Oh that must be Greifswald,' on remarking far away in the south the spires of churches rising up out of the water; you will have had ample time to smile at the primitiveness of the bathing-hut on the east shore, to study the names of past bathers scribbled over it, besides poems, valedictory addresses, and quotations from the German classics; to sit for a little on the rocks thinking how hard rocks are; and at length to wander round, in sheer inability to fill up the last hour, to the inn, the only house on the island, where at one of the tables under the chestnuts before the door you would probably drink beer till the launch starts.

But that is not the way to enjoy Vilm. If you love out-of-door beauty, wide stretches of sea and sky, mighty beeches, dense bracken, meadows radiant with flowers, chalky levels purple with gentians, solitude, and economy, go and spend a summer at Vilm. The inn is kept by one of Prince Putbus's foresters, or rather by his amiable