

A Photographic Ramble

in the Millbach Valley.



Julius Friedrich Sachse.

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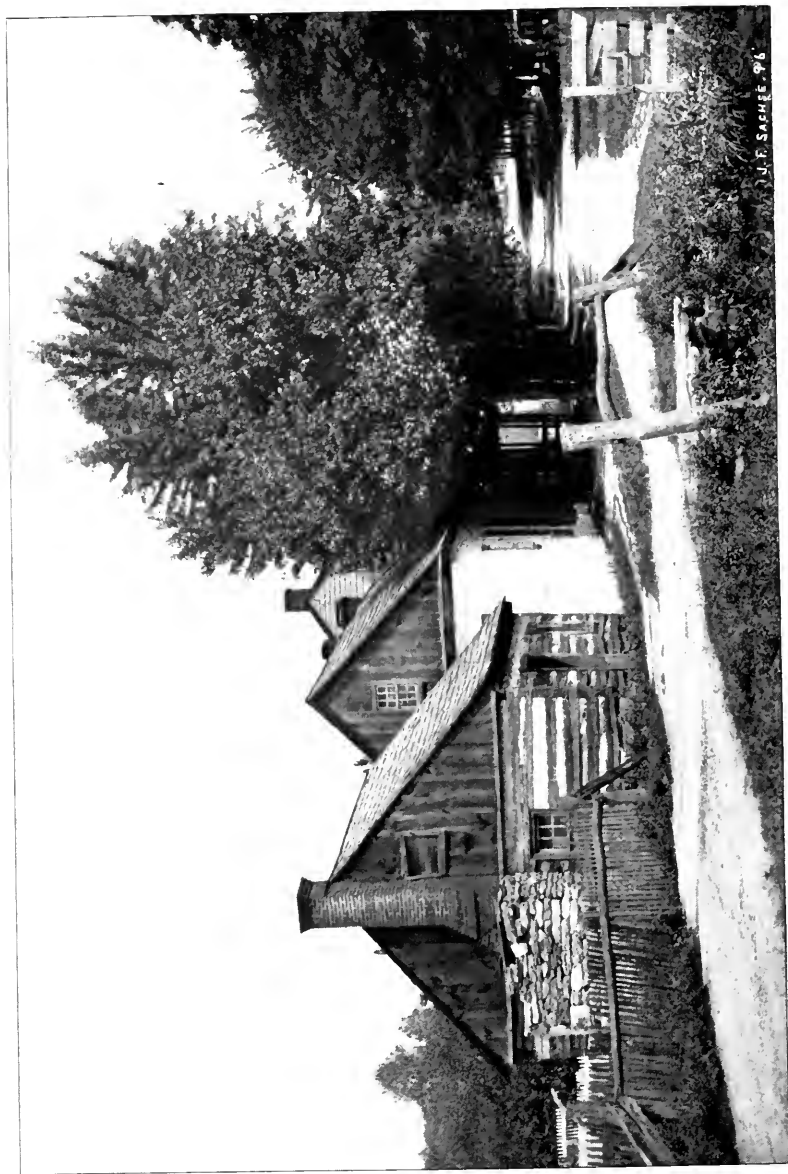
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THE OLD POST-ROAD AT SCHAEFFERTOWN.

NEGATIVE BY JULIUS F. SACHSE.

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PHOTOGRAPHIC RAMBLE

IN THE

MILLBACH VALLEY.

(Lebanon County, Penna.)

BY

JULIUS FRIEDRICH SACHSE.

MEMBER HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA, AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL
SOCIETY, PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN SOCIETY, ETC.

REPRINTED FROM THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY,
SEPTEMBER, 1896.

Philadelphia :

PRESS OF ALFRED J. FERRIS, 29 N. SEVENTH ST.

1896.

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A Photographic Ramble.

ENCAMPED for a few weeks within the bounds of the Chautauqua grove of Pennsylvania, upon the shady hillside of Mt. Gretna, the spare time when not in forum or auditorium was utilized in searching out picturesque bits, food for the camera, and recording them upon the sensitive dry plate.

This pastime naturally carried the thoughts of the writer to the beautiful Lebanon Valley, which nestles between the South Mountain and the Kittatinny Range, and extends southward for some sixty miles.

This valley, one of the richest and most fertile within the Keystone State, is known not only for its natural beauty and mineral wealth, but for its historical associations and the thrift of its inhabitants as well,—typical Pennsylvania-Germans, many of whom still till the paternal acres which were bought from the Indians by their ancestors when the stream of German Palatines came down the Susquehanna from the province of New York into Central Pennsylvania.

The historical student, the artist, and the devotee of the black art (photography) will here within this beautiful valley find enough material to supply their cravings. The valley, watered by innumerable streams and rivulets, is dotted with ancient mill-seats, many of which are still moved by the large, picturesque, un-housed wheels. Here are to be found almost every kind of ancient water-mill, the stone grist and chop-mill, with date stones per-

haps showing some year in the fourth decade of the last century ; the frame saw-mill, with its pit-saw and crude log-carrier ; the fulling mill, where the homespun woolens were stamped which clothed the sturdy pioneers as they sallied forth to protect their homes against the French and Indians in the days of Braddock and Bouquet, and later furnished raiment for our ancestors who shivered upon the hillsides of Valley Forge and subsequently forced the proud Briton to lower his colors to their prowess at Yorktown.

Here also may yet be found a "trip hammer forge," with breast wheel still in place. A little farther on stands a boring mill, where the revolutionary rifle barrel was bored and finished.

In many a vale within this valley may still be seen the original block house or log cabin of the emigrant of old, with its hewn timbers, narrow sliding windows, and loopholes for defence against the murderous savage. It is not uncommon to find one still tile-covered, a precaution taken to make the roof safe against the fire arrows of the Indians.

These humble structures, now vine-clad with mossy roofs, are still kept in repair by the different families as monuments to the early pioneers of the valley. Here and there even a thatched stable is still to be seen, where the seeds, borne upon the winds, have grown and in course of time have transformed the straw thatch into a sod roof, impervious to storm, heat or cold.

A few of the old Indian forts also yet remain as an interesting object lesson for present generations. These are stone houses, built as a refuge for the farmers and their families in case of a sudden attack by either French or Indians. All of these ancient landmarks, mostly standing upon the banks of a stream, so distinct in their humble architecture, and now mossy and vine-clad,

oft set with a background of primitive forest trees, all present exquisite bits of picturesque composition, a delight to the true artist, no matter be he one of the brush, pencil or camera.

To exploit the beauty, topography and historical associations of this valley, a party of four was formed, under the guidance of Mr. J. H. Redsecker, of Lebanon, a gentleman who for years wielded the editorial blue pencil in Central Pennsylvania and is well remembered as the author of "Across the Continent." His companions were the Rev. P. C. Croll, the historian of Lebanon Valley; Rev. W. E. Stahler, a lecturer of note; and the writer with his camera and outfit.

The objective point of the trip was the peaceful and romantic vale within the valley proper known as the Millbach (Mill Creek) Valley. The stream from which it is named, taking its source upon the mountain side, gathers up rill after rill, spring after spring, gushing from the rocks, until it finally becomes a stream with power and fall enough to turn the many mills which stand upon its banks, and finally flows into the historic Tulpehocken, a stream whose name and valley are well known in Pennsylvania-German history.

The start was made from the town of Lebanon early in the morning of the last day of July. The air was clear, cool and breezy. The route led from the county seat towards Schaeffers-town, the oldest settlement within the valley. After a drive of eight miles through a beautiful farming country, our approach to the old settlement was indicated by several log cabins by the roadside, still covered with the red tiles burned by the settler and placed there almost a century and three-quarters ago. Upon getting into the town proper, picturesque bits and artistic vistas opened out at every turn.

The town, originally laid out upon a single street, which later became a part of the old post road from Reading to Lancaster, widens at the intersection with a cross road in the centre of the town into an open space or square, where the markets are held. At one corner stands the old colonial tavern, now modernized. Once the swinging sign-board, as it hung in its yoke high up in the air, carried the effigy of King George; in later days it became known as the "Franklin." The cellar of this old house consists of a series of massive groined stone arches, upon which the tavern proper is built. Tradition states that the cellar was intended as a place of refuge and defence, and upon more than one occasion well served its purpose.

Schaefferstown is also noted as having the oldest public water-works in the United States. The pure spring water is brought down from the mountain side by a series of pipes and supplied to the houses on the main street. At regular distances there are placed public fountains and water troughs, where man and beast may quench their thirst,—thus antedating our modern fountain societies by over a century and a half.

Many are the quaint and picturesque views to be obtained along the old provincial post road as it passes through this ancient country town. Turning southward, a little below the "square" another public fountain meets our view; to the right an ancient hostelry, a "wagon stand," long since relegated to domestic purposes; to the left several primitive log cabins—still happy homes—cool in summer and warm in winter. At the corner of an intersecting lane a modern frame house meets the eye. This house stands upon the site of the first Jewish synagogue erected in Pennsylvania,—an humble log sanctuary, with the Tabernacle of Jehovah, reared here in the wilderness as a

shrine for the German-Hebrew fur traders, who appear to have settled in the valley at a very early day.

No trace of this community remains in the vicinity at the present day, except the old cemetery upon a hill-top less than a mile from town, now neglected, overgrown with briars, and with stones displaced and either broken or carried off. In the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania may be seen a Jewish prayer-book printed by William Weyman at New York in 1762, such as were once used by this congregation.

Walking up the old post road beyond the square, so as to get a shot with our camera at the oldest house within the town, a surprise awaited us. In front of the wheelwright shop stood a covered wagon, bright in its garb of fresh paint and striping of gold. Upon both sides of the door at the back were placed plate-glass mirrors in heavy gilt frames, one oval, the other square.

The legend on the sides told the passer-by that Bair & Son were the photographers of Schaefferstown and vicinity, and if patrons would not come to the studio in town, the artist could come to them and take their portraits, right then and there, at their own homes.

Beside the wagon stood a camera, two chairs, and four pointed rods, to hold a portable top screen and background. Here was certainly a revelation. While taking a survey of this portable outfit, we were joined by the senior proprietor, a typical Pennsylvania-German, to the manor born, and who, after asking us if we could understand or speak "Deutsch," as he knew little or no English, vouchsafed the information that the wagon was built and painted entirely by himself; further, that he had been in the photograph business ever since wet-plate times, but now confined

himself mainly to ferrotypes, as they paid better and gave less trouble than regular photographs. He, however, was ready for all kinds of work within his line, and asking us into his house showed a number of prints, views such as farm buildings, etc., of various sizes, equal to the average work done in larger cities. During dull periods and rainy spells Photographer Bair spends his time in mounting birds and animals, his skill as a taxidermist being second only to that as a photographer.

One of the curious points about this traveling outfit was, why one of the mirrors should be square and the other oval, or in fact why there should be any mirrors on the van at all, unless it be for ornament. This was explained: they were placed there for the use of prospective patrons to show them the kind of picture they would take.

It was further stated that when one wanted a square picture, he looked in the square mirror, or if an oval picture was wanted the counterpart was first viewed in the oval mirror. Where sitters were undecided just how to be "took" they examined themselves in both mirrors and then took their choice.

It was not Professor Bair who gave us this information, but it was told the writer by a by-stander in all sincerity and good Pennsylvania-Deutsch.

After exposing our plates the party left Schaefferstown, and going north on the old post road, were soon upon the top of Prospect Hill, an eminence beyond the town, from which unfolds itself, at the feet of the tourist, a wonderful panorama of rural beauty. The scene is a typical Pennsylvania-German one. The clean and well-kept farms, herds of sleek cattle, large Swiss barns, dwelling houses set, as it were, in frames of brilliant-colored flower beds, waving cornfields, the dark green patches of tobacco,

and extensive orchards all indicate the frugality and thrift for which the Pennsylvania-German is known throughout the length and breadth of our country.

Industrial enterprise is evidenced by the great iron furnaces which here and there dot the landscape. As an illustration, it is but necessary to mention those of Cornwall, Sheridan and Lebanon, as the reputation of their output extends beyond the confines of our own country.

Descending the Prospect Hill we gradually enter into the Valley of the Millbach (Mühlbach, *i.e.*, Mill Creek), a romantic vale within the Valley of Lebanon. Clear, cold and sparkling as it courses, the stream turns burr after burr. Every way one turns romantic bits of scenery meet the eye,—comfortable homes, built when the Pennsylvania-Germans still owed allegiance to Britain's king, houses with stone walls firm enough to defy the storms of a century to come, with timbers of oak as hard as iron, moulded and carved by the craftsmen of last century.

A stop was made at just such a house, the home of Eli R. Illig, Esq. There it stands, near the old mill, with its quaint date stone and legend, which sets forth that "Wehr auf Gott getraut hat wohl gebaut." (He who trusts in the Almighty, builds upon a sure foundation.) The names of the builder and his wife, with the date 1752, complete the inscription.

The pointed walls, the wood-burned lime, now as hard as adamant, the window casings with small panes of glass, some of which may perhaps be specimens from the "Glass hütte" erected by "Baron" Stiegel in this vicinity a century and a half ago, are as firm as if built within the present decade.

Many such architectural specimens are to be found within this valley, and frequently where no deed has ever been made for the

land, except the one which bears the "totems" of the Indian chiefs of old.

Royally welcomed were the four tourists by Miller Illig, and cheerfully shown through the house. Forced to refuse his kind offers of hospitality, we were sent upon our way after drinking several glasses of cool, rich milk.

There is another peculiarity of the romantic Millbach. This vale may be called the cradle of several of the peculiar religious sects for which the German counties of Pennsylvania have become noted. It was here, within sight of Illig's mill, that the Rev. Jacob Albrecht was awakened and founded the Evangelical Association, which is now spread over the whole country, and has lately been rent by a schism, which resulted in a division, thus forming two parties, known respectively as the "Bowmanites" and "Esherites." Within a short distance may be seen the old Albrecht Church, now endowed as a memorial, the founder's grave, and the house where the first conference was held. Here also, near where Illig's mill now stands, tradition points as the spot where once Conrad Beissel, the leading spirit of the Ephrata community of Rosicrucian Mystics, once reared his anchorite hut, and here in the romantic solitude composed a number of his hymns and theosophic epistles.

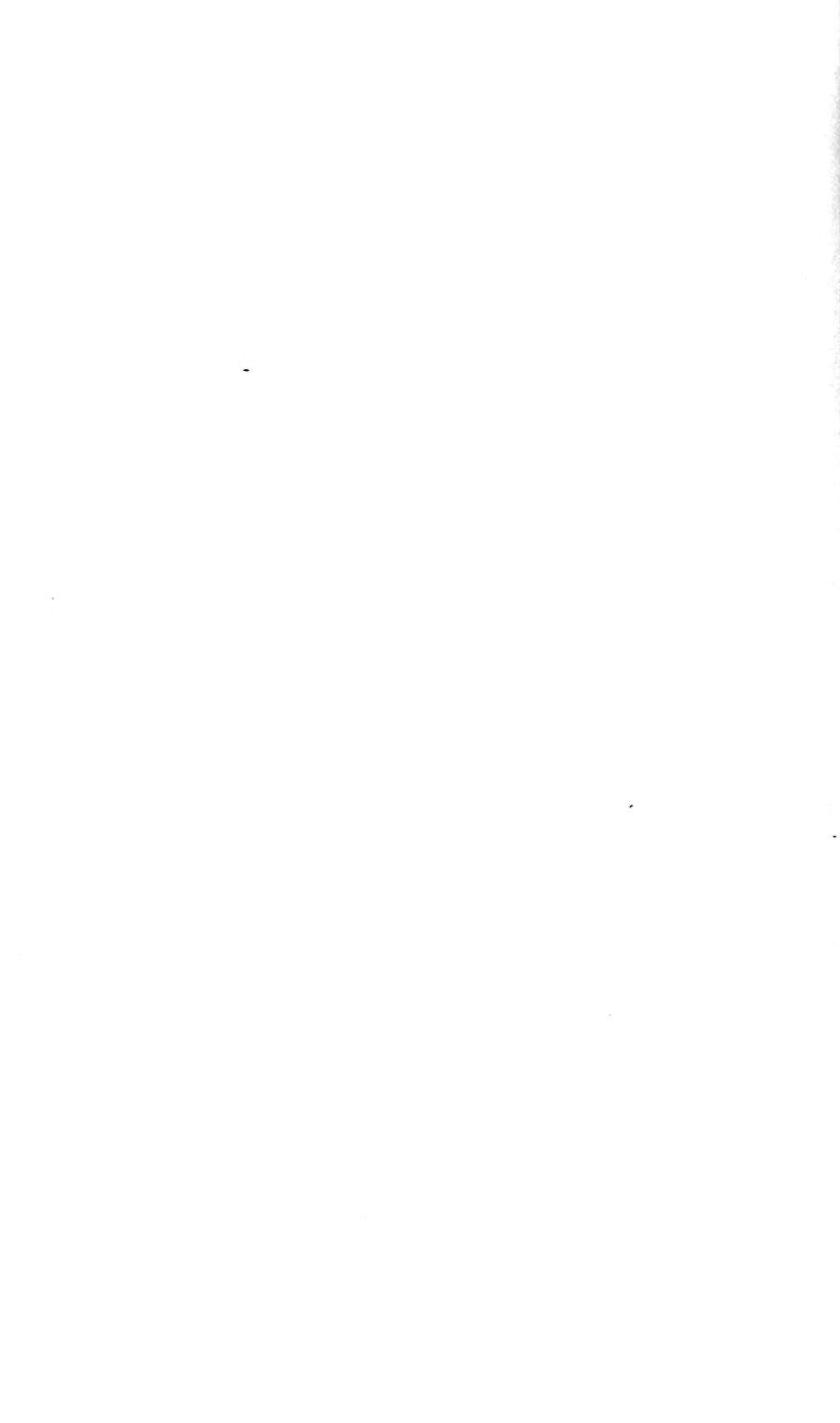
Leaving Illig's mill our path led down the Millbach toward Sheridan, where the party was scheduled for dinner. About a mile down the creek we pass a massive square stone building, reared in a meadow a short distance from the roadside; from under the building issues a stream of water, somewhat as from a modern spring-house. The windows are small and square, the whole appearance giving one an impression of solidity and strength. This quaint structure was one of the military outposts

erected as a barrier against the savages during the French and Indian Wars. It is known as Fort Zeller. The farm upon which it stands is still in possession of the family of the original emigrant, now in the eighth generation.

The old fort is so situated and overgrown with luxurious grape and flowering vines that no satisfactory near-view could be taken of it, and the exposure had to be made from the roadside at some distance.

The old landmark was thoroughly inspected. It is in almost the identical condition as when used as a haven of refuge. The same crystal spring bubbles forth in the cellar, and feeds the stony confine adjoining, wherein sport dozens of speckled trout. The same yawning fireplace, with swinging crane and pothooks, opens out into the kitchen. Although long since disused as a dwelling, and made to do duty as a tool house and workshop, the arrangement of the interior is much the same as when the muzzles of the iron carronades from "Baron" Stiegel's foundry frowned from the loopholes or lower windows.

An interesting episode connected with the old fort is its defence by a German woman, its sole occupant, against three marauding Indians. They approached the house during the absence of the men and women in the harvest field. The solitary occupant observing them, quickly closed and barred the door and started to secure the windows, not, however, before one of the savages reached an open one. The woman, seizing a meat axe, split his skull as he came through the little window, then, seizing the body, drew it into the house, and gave an Indian call to the others, as if nothing had happened. As they followed they both met the same fate, after which the alarm was given. When the men came running in with their arms, they found the victory



won, and the foe annihilated by the prowess of an old German woman. This well-authenticated episode is not an isolated one in the history of the trying provincial period of our state.

As the party were inspecting the old fort, the present owner of the place, Monroe Zeller, of the eighth generation from the sturdy German emigrant, came to meet us. He appeared the typical Pennsylvania-German farmer, who had just returned from the harvest field. His homespun clothing and cowhide boots, wide-brimmed straw hat, horny hands, bronzed face and heated brow seemed to verify the old biblical injunction that "one should earn his bread by the sweat of his brow." Cordial was the greeting; the sun, now at meridian, was exerting its full power, and the invitation to enter the cool stone mansion was cheerfully accepted. Entering the house a surprise awaited us. After inspecting a number of colonial relics, among which was a high case musical clock which played the "Battle of Prague" with drum accompaniment, the party were ushered into the host's private room, the *Sitzstube* or sitting room of the old mansion. On the floor was a plain hemp or rag carpet such as is woven during winter months by tenant farmers who have a loom; the furniture consisted of a few old style high-back chairs, and a plain oaken bench against the wall. This ranged the full length of the room, and was worn smooth and bright by the use of successive generations.

In one corner stood the usual "dish" closet, with a wealth of china pottery and pewter dating back to days long passed. In the opposite corner was an upright grand piano, beside it a rack of bound music. Upon the walls were a number of portraits, not of the ancestors or members of the family, but of the more or less familiar faces of the world's greatest musicians, such as Liszt,

Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Weber, and others, the photograph of the first named, if we err not, bearing the autograph of the great original.

Our host in humble homespun, dust-begrimed from the harvest field, sat down at the piano, and without any flourish entered upon an *étude* of Cramer. This was followed with selections from Bach and Beethoven, and Gottschalk, ending with a rendition of the Faust valse by the Abbe Liszt. Rarely has it fallen to the lot of the writer, even in his extended travels, to listen to better music or see such wonderful fingering as was witnessed upon this occasion. An offer to photograph the room with the owner at the piano was kindly but firmly refused.

Further inquiry elicited the information that this plain, unassuming Pennsylvania-German farmer was no less a person than Professor Monroe Zeller, well known at all the leading musical centres of Europe from Paris to Moscow, and who, strange as it may appear, divides his time between his ancestral farm in the Millbach Valley and the gayest capitals of Europe. In winter he is a petted virtuoso in the old world; in summer he again becomes the plain Pennsylvania-German farmer. Such was the writer's surprise and great musical treat.

After leaving the hospitable Zeller homestead, the trip to Sheridan furnace was a short one. Here dinner was taken. It was a typical Pennsylvania-German one. Resuming the route along the Millbach, the old colonial forge with its trip-hammer and boring mill was inspected and photographed. Here the visitor can see how the muskets were made which, in the hands of the sturdy yeomen of the thirteen colonies, hurled back the finest battalions of Europe. The crudé appliances, the large breast wheel, the ponderous shaft, the quaint trip-hammer, and

the open hearth at which the steel was heated and welded, the boring benches where the steel barrels were "rifled" and received their twist, which insured the accuracy of the bullet's flight,—all this is to be seen in this old mill, which nestles here in its romantic setting of emerald green.

A story is told about an artist who a few years ago was sent here to sketch the old mill. He expected to get through in an hour or two,—in fact, he intended to take the next train home after his arrival. However, as the story goes, after arriving upon the spot, the hours grew into days, the days into weeks, and almost a month passed before this artist again wended his way homeward, with a stock of sketches and studies enough to keep him busy during the winter season; and it may be well surmised that upon more than one canvas, in the following spring exhibition, our old mill found a prominent place.

Leaving the old mill, a short drive brought us to the *Kluft*, a romantic gorge in the mountain through which the "gold spring," a clear, cold, crystal rivulet, forces its way and purls over rock and ledge until it mingles its waters with the Millbach. Through this gorge once led a noted Indian trail. Romantic and picturesque scenery and artistic nooks here open up at every turn, offering ample food for the modern camerist who is a lover of nature and has an eye for primeval beauty.

Retracing our steps a short distance, our horses' heads were turned towards the valley of the Tulpehocken. A drive of two miles brought us to the old Berks and Dauphin turnpike, one of the oldest "hard" roads in the State.

Here, within a short distance, cluster the historic Tulpehocken churches, known respectively as the Rieth, Ulrich, and Reformed; all of which have a history dating back to the early years of last century. A halt was made to photograph the different buildings,

as well as some of the quaint German tombstones, with their curious emblazonry of skulls, cherubim, hour-glasses, scythes, and other mortuary symbols, which marked the resting-places of many early pioneers whose names are well known to history, and whose descendants bear a prominent part in the annals of our country, down even to the present time.

An interesting anecdote is told about a New England writer who once upon a time visited several of these old graveyards. Most all of the inscriptions commence with the line—

“Hier ruhen die Gebeine,” etc.

(“Here rest the remains,” or, literally speaking, the bones or skeleton—a common expression among the Germans a century ago.) Now it happens that the word *beine* is the German for legs or limbs, and with the prefix *ge* (*gebeine*) is used as above stated. Now the Yankee’s knowledge of the German was but superficial, and as he knew that *beine* meant legs, he stated in his account that upon every tombstone in the Pennsylvania Dutch graveyards it stated that *here rest the legs*, etc., but they failed to say where the rest of the remains were buried, and that he has been reliably informed that the old Germans only buried the femors within the churchyard.

By this time the sun stood well in the west, the orb was slowly sinking down behind the Kittatinny Mountains, the shadows were lengthening and admonishing us to turn homewards, so the horses were speeded along the smooth pike, through Myerstown, towards Lebanon, where the party arrived while the glow of the zenith was upon the sky. Boarding the train, nine o’clock found the writer once more in his cottage among the cool shades of Mt. Gretna, with every plate exposed and the mind filled with the pleasant recollections of the photographic jaunt through the Millbach Valley.

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