

Johann Grimm, A Journey Beyond Strasbourg (1775)

Abstract

Johann Friedrich Carl Grimm (1737–1821) hailed from Eisenach and studied medicine in Göttingen. Later, he was appointed personal physician to the Duke of Saxony-Gotha in Gotha. Grimm became known for his translation of the Hippocratic collection into German. His description of a journey to France emphasized the slow transition from Germany to France and the almost imperceptible change in residential forms and behavioral modes.

Source

[...]

I liked it very much in Strasbourg, and better than in any other city that I have seen up to now, and I was pained to leave it, every time I looked back early yesterday and saw myself further away from it. The soil on the northwest side of the city is blackish brown clay, which I could see well enough, despite the fact that the ground was thinly covered with snow. All the land, which consists of a plain, is used for farming, and only at a distance away, where the land rises somewhat, do the vineyards start.

The road is a good highway with fruit and nut trees on both sides, but populated intermittently. An hour away from the city we reached the first village, Hußheim [Heßheim]. The villages are no different from those located on the east bank of the Rhine. The houses are made of wood filled in with daub, have tile roofs, and vary in size. They are more scattered than in a row. The horizon is rather large, and the road without a real mountain; only now and then there are small hills. Toward the south everything is open, but toward the north at some distance there is some pine forest. It looks good where one highway crosses another, which happens very often here. There are vineyards along the road between the villages. It is the country custom to stake the vines with poles not less than five feet high. We passed through four more villages on a good road, namely Stetten, Offenau, Bibersheim, and Schefferstedt [Schifferstadt], some of which were located an hour, some, a half hour apart and were in outer appearance completely alike. The soil, field cultivation, and vineyards are the same everywhere, and the fencing and trees along the roads have nothing distinct about them. In the meantime, the plain diminished somewhat and hills became more frequent. After ten hours, we arrived in Wilten [Willgottheim], which is located four hours from Strasbourg and is a village like the ones I had already seen but has a passable inn, because there is a post office here and the decent highway to Saverne.

The coachman had to stop for a half hour, and that gave us the opportunity to have another breakfast. The customs are already becoming rather French, even though we are still in Alsace. Wine is drunk in the morning instead of a warm beverage, and people warm themselves at the fireplace rather than at the oven. The German language is also disappearing more and more. Yet the French spoken is more comprehensible to a foreigner and better than Patois. From there to Saverne, “Zabern,” took us two short hours. The road is always a good highway, as before, and field cultivation and vineyards are mixed; the latter are also less prevalent than below at the low level to the east. From Wilten on, more mountains appear, and at Landesheim, a village similar to the previous one, the nearby Vosges Mountains become visible. But from there to Mehlsheim [Molsheim], we had a half hour on a similar road and over hills that alternated with the reddish sand and clay plain, then yet another half hour to Saverne, or “Alsace Zabern,” where we arrived at around one o’clock. It is a small, intolerable place at the foot of

the northern end of the Wasgau Range and a pass over it. As I completely surveyed the place, because it is located in a hollow next to a small river, it may have about 650 houses, which are for the most part passably constructed.

Our coachman fed his horses, but I had not yet completely recovered there from my sniffles and fever, so I was prevented from gathering more detailed information about the place. At about three o'clock, we proceeded on the journey over the pass. On the far side of the city there is a sunken way, which, however, can be easily traveled over because of the good highway. The daylight side of the mountains is red clay and sandstone mixed. The mountains are not even 500 feet high in the perpendicular and forested with oak and beech trees. Zabern Street, which is famous throughout Alsace, begins with this sunken way. [...]

[...] After an hour had passed, we reached a village whose name has slipped my mind, and after two short hours we came to the first city in Lothringen [Lorraine], Pfalzburg [Phalsbourg]. Although we had been allowed to enter through one gate, the other had already been closed before we could exit through it, and as it could not be opened again for anyone except the courier without a great deal of fuss and bother and requests to the mayor, we had to put up with spending the night there. Pfalzburg is a small city that is a kind of fortress and has walls and gates, as well as a small garrison. It is on the west side of the Vosges Mountains, just not as low as Zabern is on the east side. The houses are low, with one story constructed of wood and lime mortar; they are inhabited by peasants and manual laborers. The inhabitants make use of the fireplaces more than the ovens, and conduct themselves and live completely in the French manner. Only the stablemen and household servants still speak some German, but the natives speak almost nothing but French. [...]

Source: Johann Friedrich Carl Grimm (anonymously), *Bemerkungen eines Reisenden durch Deutschland, Frankreich, England und Holland in Briefen an seine Freunde*, 3 Vols, Altenburg, 1775, Vol. 1, pp. 198–201, 203. Available online at: <https://digitale.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/vdi8/content/pageview/9475445>

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