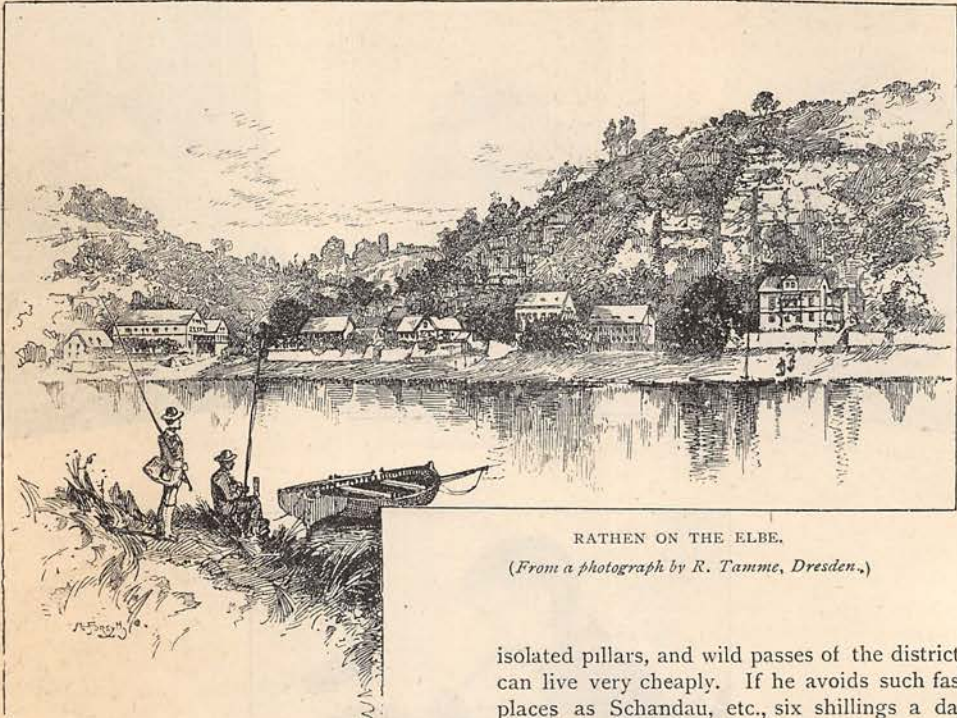


## A WALK IN SAXON SWITZERLAND.

BY JAMES BAKER, F.R.G.S.



RATHEN ON THE ELBE.

(From a photograph by R. Tamme, Dresden.)

**H**OW many people have heard of Saxon Switzerland, but how very few, comparatively speaking, know that it is so easily reached, and that it contains such strange, weird, and romantic scenery.

A very common error is to suppose that it is near or in Switzerland, but it is upon the upper reaches of that wonderful river the Elbe; and a fortnight's holiday could not be more healthily spent than by taking the steamer from Harwich to Hamburg, a remarkably pleasant sea trip of about twenty-four hours, passing by our late little possession Heligoland, and ending up with an interesting run up the lower Elbe; then taking the train to Riesa on that river, passing through Berlin; and from Riesa the river steamboats can be taken up the Elbe through Dresden, and on up to Wehlen, where the lover of mountain scenery and wild rock passes should take to his feet as his means of locomotion.

Of course such a journey suggests halts; but if the traveller wishes to get direct to Saxon Switzerland, he can be in Wehlen, taking the train from Hamburg direct, in, say, two days; but for the traveller with time at his disposal there is plenty to occupy him pleasantly for many a day; and as to cost, a five-pound note will cover his return ticket from Harwich to Riesa if he is of an economical mind, whilst another sovereign will secure him more luxurious quarters whilst *en route*. Once in amidst the gigantic rock-walls, and strange

isolated pillars, and wild passes of the district, and he can live very cheaply. If he avoids such fashionable places as Schandau, etc., six shillings a day should cover all expenses, and he will come back amazed at the strange beauty of Saxon Switzerland, that, like its name-giver Switzerland, hides within a very narrow district an infinitude of beauties. One may walk through a glorious defile or look down from a height upon a strange and charming view, and yet see naught of some peculiar beauty that is distant but an hour's walk; nay, that may be within rifle-shot of the very height from which one looks out from, in confidence that we are grasping the whole scenery of the district.

Those who in Saxon Switzerland visit the Bastei, and Kuhstall, Prebischthor, Winterberg, Lillienstein, and Königstein, skirt close to a walk that is full of strange charm and dramatic surprises, but one that gives just a little stiff climbing.

The starting-point for this walk is the little village of Rathen, where a genuine country inn, yet unspoilt by hotel ideas, gives hospitable and very reasonable accommodation, and from the windows of which, on a moonlight night, one can look out upon the piled-up heights of Königstein and Lillienstein, and down upon the silent broad stream of the silver-lit Elbe, in calm quietude, and be prepared at early morning to start out for this mountain climb.

The mountain clubs of Germany have a saying, "*Ein Zauberstab ist der Wanderstab*" ("A magic staff is the wanderer's staff"); and when one takes it to be a friend on such a walk, the grasping it seems to give health, and interest, and vigour.

We soon get a scene of peculiar beauty, almost ere



the houses of the little village are lost to view ; for on the right are the mighty piers of strange rock columns, whilst nearer a brook winds through a low meadow, beyond which are peeps of these rock-towers above the trees, and soon one is between the gigantic castles, with bartizans and look-out towers on each side : the grey rocks, and tall pines, and deep blue sky forming a lovely view.

The little stream is clear as crystal, and full of "the spotted darlings" ; one can watch them dart, and float, or swiftly swim against the stream, suggesting tickling them on to the bank in dozens. But we leave the trout with the thought that they are somewhat small, and wind on up into the mountain solitudes, past a sign-post that directs to the Schwedenlichen Bastei, where a little beyond a waterfall comes down, still with an ice cascade or two, and a double stream makes pretty music, whilst above, a heavier sound and rush of water soon tells of a greater fall.

This district is a pet district for geologists to sketch and use as an object lesson upon the power of water ; but no diagrams or sketches can convey the sense of the enormous powers that have slowly fabricated this strange scenery. Lying in the brook bed beneath us are gigantic blocks of rock, now all moss and lichen-clothed, blocking up the watercourse that seems to have so little influence upon them ; but as we advance higher up, the rock-towers close in, almost overhanging the pathway, and the brook is lost below masses of flat rock on which pine seeds have rested, started in growth, made year by year sufficient mould for the next year's growth, until tall pines sixty to eighty feet high are seen growing upon the flat rock, throwing out their roots like an octopus all round it, and clinging to it literally for life.

Some steps are soon reached, and then ere long a little picturesque hut is seen crouched under the black rock by the side of the Amselfalle.

In the sunlight as we draw near, the enormous rock-towers on the right glitter with the sulphur lichen, even as though in part rocks of pure gold, and contrast with the black inky cliffs in the deep shade, where the thin stream of water comes down from the fall.

A rustic bridge is just below the fall, and from here the rushing water can be seen issuing from a dark cavern, white and foaming ; and over a higher black rock at the mouth of this dark cave the water is glittering and sparkling in the sunlight, then falling on to where a moss-clad stone diverts the stream. All around and above is very lovely, but one is tempted to clamber up to another little bridge above the fall, where there is a deep clear little pool, into which a white fall leaps, and from whence one can see the rocks of immense size thrown about in terrific disorder.

In summer or autumn these mountain passes are more alive with tourists, mostly German, but in early spring very few passers are met, to break the silent solitudes ; but as we stood looking around at the strange spot, two lads came leaping down the mountain path, and from them we learnt that to gain the Bastei we must retrace our steps a little, and then strike across

the rock-covered brook and ascend the heights to the right.

After resting for a while, we descended the path we had ascended, and soon saw on our right a sign to the Schwedenlöcher. This route we were on is not very well indicated. For the uninitiated in the signs of the various mountain unions that in Germany and Austria do so much to map out picturesque districts, it may be mentioned, that on most of the paths one should notice the first sign, and also note if there are one, two, or three strokes under the name ; then the task is to follow that number of strokes, which will be found blazed on the trees at every doubtful turn, until the aim of the walk is reached. The signs are not always strokes, but sometimes triangles or squares of different colours ; but start by getting the sign, and then the walk is simple enough without guides.

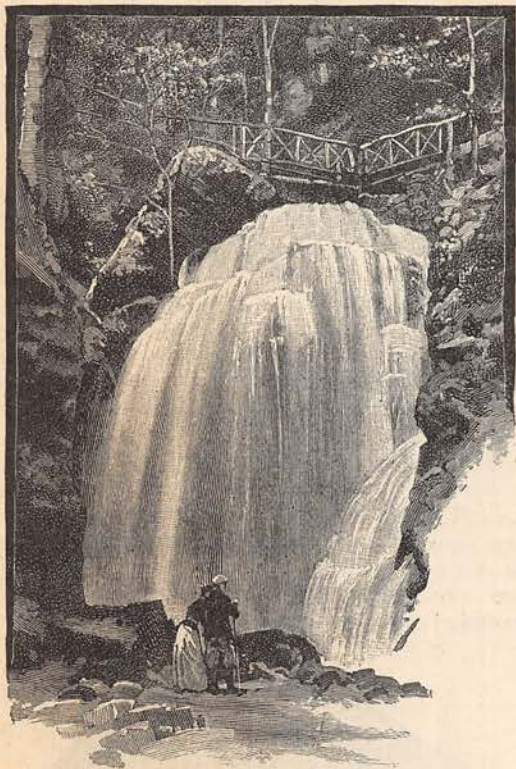
We crossed the brook as indicated, and commenced our climb up a very upright hill ; log steps were placed here and there, but they were broken and sometimes swept away by avalanches. The path twisted by the side of a deep ravine, and in one spot a great pine had gone down, and had fallen across to the opposite hill, forming a bridge ; sometimes the log steps were covered



THE FELSENTHOR.

(From a photograph by R. Tamme, Dresden.)





THE AMSELFALLE.

(From a photograph by R. Tamme, Dresden.)

with a shifting sand that made the climb more difficult. But it was not a long one, and we were shortly at the top, with two curious peaks of rock on each side of us between which we passed, and then descended into a sort of open grotto, where a snow-clad brook trickled slowly downwards. A flight of some very bad steps led us down into a deep slit, and the path then went under a great rock, tunnel-like, where snow and ice lay thick around us.

It was now indeed a strange scene, shut in on all hands by the towering rock, brilliant with the gold-like sulphur; pines and grand specimens of silver-barked birches partly veiled these rocks, and above all a soft blue sky, and the sun lighting up the topmost piers of the stupendous rocks.

The path twisted between these piers, they having split or been water-worn, with just sufficient space for one to pass through; and very awe-inspiring was the effect of this narrow path between these rock masses. The flooring was now thick ice, and at the sides, where the water had oozed through the rocks, the ice glittered in the borrowed light from above; past this slit, and beneath, and blocking the path, was the *débris* of pines and other trees, brought down by the winter floods and spring showers.

But again the scene changes, and the path leads up over ice and pine log steps, between a passage some three or four feet wide, with high rock-walls some hundred feet high on either side, all moss-covered

now with dark green moss, and with pines topping their summits, until again the path widens, and passes between lines of regular buttresses, built as to some immense castle, some ten or a dozen on either hand; and just above this the route changes from its roughness to a fair path, and a rustic seat is placed, where we can sit and look around at this romantic spot of strange beauty.

We were now at the end of our rougher work, and nearing the Bastei, where the roads are wide and well-marked, and where tourists flock in crowds. Even in early spring groups of travellers are quickly met, and we saw a young couple coming towards us with a guide going before them; and we were amused at the care of the gentleman, who pointed out with tender assiduity the fact that three steps awaited the dainty feet of his lady companion. Whether she succumbed at the sight of the hundreds of log, ice, and *débris*-covered steps she would have to descend if they continued on the route, we never learnt.

A sign-post not far above the rustic seat told of two branching paths, leading to the Great and Little Goose; and to the Little Goose we made our way, out to an open plateau, and along a narrow ledge on to a broad flat-topped column of rock. And how strange was the transition from our climbing far down amid the rock piers, to the rock summit from whence we now looked down into a mighty arena, with giant pillar rocks all around as spectators; figure succeeded figure in ponderous tiers, all intersected with pines, and looking down hundreds of feet into the pine-covered depths of the amphitheatre. The rocks, so varied in tone, were touched and painted with the wonderful sulphur hues, that outvied in brilliancy the sulphur butterflies we saw here and there braving the cold air and floating in the sunlight.

Far away the view stretched, embracing the flat mountains of Königstein and Lillienstein, and away beyond to the snowy heights of the Erzgebirge, mostly hid by the Bastei itself, which was but on the other side of this profound arena. But the rocks that encircled this ever allured our gaze, and drew our eyes from the distant view, for strange and magnificent is their form and grouping. One just beneath the flat-topped precipice upon which we lay was worn into a tiny natural arch; others assumed figures and shapes of human beings, and we were tempted for a long time to lie in the hot sun, revelling in the strange scene around us. But we had to pass around this arena, and gain the Bastei, and then descend through the Uttewalder Grund, taking a peep once more at the Felsenthor and Devil's Kitchen ere reaching Wehlen.

Sixteen years had elapsed since the writer in "Days Afoot" described this route from the Bastei to Wehlen in ascending; but we found it unchanged but in one thing. The small restaurant at the Bastei has grown into a big hotel, with annexe, and stables, and other buildings, and shop stalls, that have destroyed the charm of the solitude, but it is impossible to destroy the wondrous views; and one can soon be out of sight of hotel and its tourist crowd, and be in deepest forest solitudes.