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## **An Autumn near the Rhine; or Sketches of courts, society, scenery, &c. in some of the German states bordering on the Rhine**

**Dodd, Charles Edward**

**London, 1818**

Letter XXX.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120472](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-120472)

## LETTER XXX.

THE Casinos to be found in every town of consequence, in Germany, are very rational establishments, fitted up with a commodious elegance, which make their resources doubly attractive. — The reading rooms are stocked with a profusion of journals, reviews, and pamphlets, literary and political, from all parts of Germany; besides the French, and sometimes English and Italian newspapers. There is a conversation room, where talkative quidnuncs may be relieved from the silence prescribed in the reading rooms, besides billiard tables and card rooms, and sometimes a good table d' hôte provided by a restaurateur of the establishment. The assembly rooms, which form part of the edifice, are only opened on occasions of balls and evening societies and are kept sacred from the fumes of tobacco, which frequently perfume

and tinge the other handsome apartments. In some the small minority of *non-smokers* have weight enough to procure a special removal of the journals for several hours every day into a room where the favourite herb is excluded. The casinos are supported by subscriptions — Noblesse and Bourgeoisie, excluding common tradesmen, being alike members. A foreign traveller finds easy access to them by means of his banker; and finds more sociable respectability, as well as more convenience and resources, than in the comfortless *Cafés* in France and the Netherlands, where a few political journals are to be inspected at the price of a cup of coffee or an ice.

The multitude of journals of all sizes, qualities, and characters, from all parts of Germany which load the tables of the casino, though they unquestionably bespeak an increasing diffusion of ideas, result in a great degree from the extent and endless division of the country — each little state and town sending forth its official sheet. Their merit to be sure is not quite upon a par with their number; but still though many of them are filled with

trite dull criticism, and insignificant details, they are so many subjects of occupation for the mind — and the patient Germans wade through them, their pipes in their mouths, with a diligence that exercises the faculties, and may produce a taste for better things. The two or three little gazettes of each petty metropolis are, in general, little more than collections of official notices and announcements from long titled authorities, promotions and conferrings of dignities, lists of strangers at the Inns, &c. without a word of original writing or interesting matter. Even the *Journal de Francfort* which has a sort of metropolitan character, which is written in French and has a wide circulation, is not much above this description. These sort of *Moniteurs* in miniature have naturally no interest or circulation beyond the state where they are published; and within that they are the only papers that circulate generally. The Casino presents a choice of better food, but that is necessarily for the use of the upper classes. The pastors, the peasants, the little townsmen and villagers have no access to it. A German peasant, though he can almost in-

variably read and write well, lolls over the beer-house table without any other occupation than his pipe or his chioppine of wine — I never saw a newspaper in his hands, and if he takes up the gazette of the little capital, it contains nothing more rousing to his intellect than a notice of death, the appointment of a bailiff, or an auction of fire wood. The first of these compositions, which daily crowd the papers, is so curious an instance of old-fashioned German formality that I send you a specimen at the end of this letter, translated as literally as the complex machinery of German sentences allow.

Do not suppose however, that in a country like Germany there are no well written journals — The literary ones come in shoals from the little focuses of letters in the north — and Stutgard and Tübingen in the south, contribute to the number. The papers which (to use a common phrase) make a noise and are to be considered as organs of political opinion, are about five or six, such as the New Rhenish Mercury, the Opposition Paper, the Rhenish Journal, &c. &c. These are *national* journals, conducted with ability, expressing boldly independent prin-

principles, and devoted entirely to original discussion— They occupy themselves with the interests of the confederation, and the affairs of Germany at large, and comment boldly on the conduct of any Prince, when it appears materially to influence these— The rights of citizens and the value of representative constitutions are just now the perpetual and lively themes of all writers— They handle these subjects, as is natural with political tyros, ably, but somewhat theoretically— holding up however our constitution for imitation, with constant eulogies. — The much talked of Massenbach whose patriotism I fear is mainly influenced by his pocket, is an indefatigable pamphleteer, and an inflammatory discussor of the accustomed topics. — By way of frontispiece to one of his addresses he embodied his theory of a good constitution in a pyramidal temple, graduating from a democratical base to a monarchical apex. If his practice was as unobjectionable as his theory he would be the Solon of reformers.

The zealous journals of course resort to some liberal state for publication. Most of them appear under the mild governments of

Saxe Weimar, Saxe Gotha, Hesse Darmstadt, and Nassau; and they circulate freely in Baden, Wirtemberg, Hesse Darmstadt, and all the states near the Rhine, with the exception of Hesse Cassel — In Austria, Bavaria, and some other states, a standing order prohibits most of them — The Grand Duchy of Hesse has long been distinguished among the Rhenish states for the freedom of its press. The Grand Duke passes unnoticed almost any attacks on his government, and in the days of the subjugation of the Rhenish Princes to the French, many patriotic works not permitted to appear elsewhere, were brought to his states for publication; — he suppressed none but works specifically complained of by Napoleon. But an instance occurred the other day which sufficiently manifests how little the minor Princes can be considered sovereigns in their own states in matters which concern their more gigantic neighbours. The New Rhenish Mercury, one of the boldest and most popular journals of Germany, was published at Offenbach, in the Grand Duchy. — No sooner did this journal begin to discuss the affair of the King of Prussia and Colonel Massen-

bach, than it received an order of silence on that topic from the Grand Duke; not choosing to comply with which it sought refuge at Jena, in the Grand Duchy of Weimar, where it published in its first article an explanation of its removal. This circumstance speaks for itself. On the suggestion of the King of Prussia's *wishes*, by his Ambassador, what course was left to the diminutive sovereign but to sacrifice the liberty of his own press, rather than quarrel with so formidable a neighbour?

The freedom and boldness of his press continually involve the Grand Duke of Weimar in altercations with his despotic neighbours; but he refuses to alter the laws, and refers the dignified complainants to the regular remedies they afford. — He is a man of energy — with that weight and dignity which are conferred by talents and the respect of all Germans. The Grand Duke of Hesse is a good paternal sovereign with four times the territorial consequence of the former; but as his liberality is the result of good humour, rather than of political principle, it is more easily influenced by circumstances.



The literary and miscellaneous journals collect a large fund of motley matter. I cannot say much for the vivacity of their criticisms. The Germans say this is owing to their conscientiousness: that they present true, rather than florid pictures. Of this I am an incompetent judge. We English often figure copiously, and in pretty favourable colours, in these works. Minute details of all political transactions, accounts of our institutions, &c. are enlivened by biographies of Lord Byron, Walter Scott, &c., &c.; sometimes with selected *morceaux* from their new works, translations from the Edinburgh and other Reviews; the parliamentary *bons mots* of my Lord Castlereagh, and all the private histories of Watson senior and junior. The reports of visitors to our isle afford sometimes a *sauce piquante* to the miscellanies, one of which communicated to me the novel hints that English physicians always wear black, and sometimes swords; that all the Opposition eat boiled beef; and that a Tory dinner table is distinguished by little rolls, while the Whigs show their sturdiness by uncouth hunches of bread!! You see one may

gain some new lights on one's own country by visiting others.

The main respect in which the German journals are far, very far, behind ours is the want of that active, practical tone of remark and discussion on all subjects which comes home to every one's intellects, and keeps opinion and enquiry alive. This can, in fact, only be the result of that highly advanced state of information which it extends and keeps up. The German journals detail facts and heap together matter: but these are the rough materials of the workshop, which want moulding by the tools of intellect to purposes of practical entertainment or utility. Stated drily and coldly, as in the German journals, they fill the head with confused details, rather than sound conclusions. A worthy Baron of my acquaintance generally spends the whole morning in possessing himself of the contents of the Casino, till he becomes a heavy book of reference in newspaper lore: but, like many other books of reference, rarely musters two clear opinions on any subject. Any thing in the shape of the Edinburgh or Quarterly Review, the Times, or even

William Cobbett, would have cleared away a few of these mists.

*German Form of announcing a Death.*

“I hereby, as in duty bound, make known to all my friends and relations, that it has pleased the Providence of God, on the 30th of the last month of August, at four o'clock in the morning, to call to himself, in a joyful eternity, by means of a for-many-years-enduring painful disorder of the lungs, my dear wife Sophia, born ———, from ———, in the Rhingau, in the 46th year of her age, the sole surviving matrimonial daughter of the at-that-time-Electoral-Mayentzian-Bailiff's-clerk, Mr. ———, deceased. She died in my absence, (as I, for restoration of my own health, weakened by various untoward circumstances, and long-continued sittings at the business of my calling, was staying with my old father at Bensheim, to use the not-far-from-thence-removed baths of Auerbach, which this mournful event only permitted me to use a short time,) in the arms of my sister, provided with all holy sacraments, with the greatest firmness and resignation

to the will of God, and sooner and quicker than our excellent physician or herself conjectured. I lost in her a faithful wife; my five chiefly uneducated children a tender mother. I recommend the deceased to the prayers of my dear friends and relations; myself, with my children, to the lasting friendship and good wishes of the same. Convinced of their participation in the above, I decline all condolence, which could not diminish my just suffering, but only augment it.

“ FRIEDR. ———— ,

“ Grand Ducal Baden Exchequer Chancery  
Clerk.”