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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**

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Letter XXVI.

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## LETTER XXVI.

THE memory of Luther appears to be held in great and general veneration among the members of his religion. “*Notre Luther,*” “*Notre grand Luther,*” are the affectionate phrases with which he is often recalled. A print of the square sturdy champion, often matched by a quaint one of Catharine von Bora his spouse, decorates many an inn-parlour, and is rarely wanting in the houses of the pastors. At Worms a series of daubed prints, of scenes in his many coloured life, was exhibited on the booksellers’ counters; his hymns are sung on all solemn occasions; histories of his life and acts are circulated in all sizes, and adapted to all capacities; and the Lutheran divine rarely concludes his discourse without an allusion to his great prototype. I happened to be at Darmstadt on the 31st of October, the

third centennary of the commencement of the Reformation. The Grand Duke of Hesse and his family being Lutherans, (the Elector of Hesse Cassel is of the Reformed religion,) the day was celebrated with much ceremony and respect. It was far more strikingly observed than a Sabbath; for in addition to the closing of shops, and the suspension of all business, the Protestant ambassadors, nobility, and towns-people made a more conscientious point of attending church in their best equipages and uniforms. The evening of the 30th was announced by a full chorus of solemn hymns sung from the top of the tower of the Lutheran church, and the 31st was ushered in at day-break by a repetition of the same impressive but curious ceremony. The hymns were of a simple and striking melody, and executed with great skill and effect. At ten o'clock the whole Court, with their attendants, *en grand gala*, proceeded to the great church; the Grand Duchess and her ladies, (bating a pretty Catholic *dame d'honneur*, who staid at home to bite her lips and wish Luther *au diable*;) in the grand state coach, with eight cream-

coloured palfreys, ambling in blue velvet trappings. A dusty picture of the Reformer was removed for the occasion from the Hotel de Ville, and suspended in the church, adorned with wreaths and flowers. The church was crowded to excess; the Court and *gens comme il faut* occupied the galleries. A *Te Deum*, and some fine pieces of music, concluding with the grand hymn called, *par excellence*, "Luther's Hymn," were admirably executed by the orchestra of the Court Chapel, accompanied by the swelling voices of the congregation. The effect was solemn and striking.

An additional interest was given to the day by its being made, in many States, the first public recognition of the new union of the two Protestant sects, the Lutheran and the Reformed—which the Grand Duke of Nassau, (in order to prevent differences of religion among his children, himself being a Lutheran, and his wife of the Reformed Church,) has been the first to decree, and which is now rapidly spreading through the other states. In Prussia the King received the sacrament, for the first time, according to the form of the United

Church. The ritual of the Holy Supper was almost the only essential difference in the worship of the two religions. The new "Evangelical Christian Church," most scrupulously unites them. In the Lutheran form, small wafers are delivered whole to each communicant; the Reformed, in more violent opposition to the Catholics, use slices of bread, which are broken and distributed. Each sect now makes a slight concession towards alliance, and the new United Church uses a large Lutheran wafer, with the Calvinistic form of breaking it. The animosity of doctrinal differences, which thirty years ago denied to the Reformed at Frankfort a place of worship in the town, though the Lutherans were upon the most friendly tolerating terms with their Catholic neighbours, having now subsided into the most quiescent apathy, this amalgamation of forms was almost all that remained to be done. If this amity of spirit had not existed, the publication of edicts, and prescription of forms, would indeed be useless: but it is a pleasing evidence of the increased liberality of ideas, that the spirit of union has gradually grown

up between the sects, and that the formal junction was all now wanting.

This cordial alliance between brother Jack and brother Martin is not, as you may suppose, observed by brother Peter without considerable heart-burnings and jealousies. The Catholics have exerted all their little influence with the Protestant governments to throw obstacles in the way; and the *Grand Chambellan* of the Court of Hesse, a sturdy disciple of St. Peter, was obliged reluctantly to obey the calls of office, and figure with a wry face and full costume at the commemoration behind the Grand Duchess. A shrewd French Catholic was for making the union more perfect, and asked me if I did not think there was as much affinity between the Lutherans and the Catholics, as between the Lutherans and the Reformed; and therefore that a union between the two former was not less practicable and desirable. I could only reply, that it remained with them to effect such a union by turning Protestants. The two Protestant religions are as yet not formally united by a Grand Ducal decree in the Grand Duchy

of Hesse. The reigning family consequently received the sacrament after the old form: but, in token of their liberal views on the subject, the Reformed pastors were admitted to assist the Lutherans in the ceremony. An appropriate sermon was preached by a Lutheran divine; and the day ended with such rejoicings among the lower orders as always close the Sunday — dancing, smoking, and a little singing and boozing, in the beer-houses. Celebrations proportionably inferior in splendour were universal in the villages. I happened to visit the day before the pastor of a cure in the neighbourhood. I found him busily engaged in superintending the rehearsal of the music for the commemoration. An excellent band, chiefly of musicians from the Residence, were scraping with enthusiasm at desks in the chancel; and in a little rustic church, with a dozen deal pews, I heard some noble music executed in a style which might have delighted a circle of connoisseurs. The vocal parts were performed by the young men and damsels of the village, whose strong natural voices

were improved by a respectable share of science. Luther's grand hymn concluded the concert. The parson was ready with his florid discourse for the next day, which he showed me in MS., and which he was learning by heart with rhetorical emphasis, according to the common custom of the Lutheran clergy.

If, according to Swift's allegory, it was brother Jack who, in stripping the gold lace from Peter's coat, rent the cloth itself, the Lutherans, in *their* aversion to its ornaments, have reduced it to a Quaker-like drab frock. Their form of worship, in its determined simplicity, appears to me singularly cold, unimposing, and phlegmatic. It has much of the bald, plebeian features of the conventicle, without any of the fervour which, in some eyes, gives them so truly spiritual a character. It is a meeting, not of Methodists prepared to supply with zeal the absence of ceremony and pomp—but of good orderly respectable Germans, addressed by a heavy *Herr Pfarre* in black, who prefers the burly pomp of rounded mystic periods got by heart, alike to the argu-



mentative theology of our orthodox divines, and the off-hand raptures of our inspired tailors and cobblers. A few prayers, without regular form, much singing, and a sermon, form the solemnity. The hymns are the only parts of the service that savour at all of earnestness; and the inspiration is here quite as much that of musical taste as of devotion.

Whether the variations in public rites can or not be considered as at all accounting for the difference, it is obvious to every observer that religion has much less influence as a practical principle in Germany than with us. Our sects and schisms, and controversial theologians, multiplied to infinity, of themselves prove the superior importance which we attach to these momentous matters. With the exception of Madame Krudener, the peasant prophet Adam Müller, and some other *têtes exaltées*, you rarely hear in Germany of any who erect a standard for themselves, or take the trouble to deviate from the beaten track. The pastors and their flocks go on tranquilly, with their sermon and hymns in the morning, their pipe, their waltz, or their play in the

Sunday evening, and no excessive earnestness or spiritual zeal has as yet stimulated the one or the other to an enquiry whether more of the sabbath was not intended for sacred uses; whether this pleasant recreation from the fatigues of the week is or not what the commandment intends by a day of rest. If temporal rest alone were intended, the Lutherans make a point of enjoying it more scrupulously than the Catholics; for the last, as the mass, *salut*, and vespers make almost a Sabbath of every day, revenge themselves by ranking Sunday much on a level with the other days of the week, and keeping open shop, &c. &c.

The Germans are, however, too serious a people to be strikingly deficient in religious feeling; they unquestionably have much: but their religion in general appears to me rather that of moods and impressions—a mounting of the head on hearing a sermon, or being struck with an event—than a sober feeling of practical influence. A Princess, whose conduct savoured little of religion, used frequently to shed a sincere tear at a discourse, and has assured me, with great fervour, “*Tout ce qui tient à la religion*

*me penetrer au cœur.*" A lady making such a speech in England would be set down for an enthusiast; especially if her practice was not more in keeping with her feelings than that of my illustrious German acquaintance.

That the forms of religion are as much respected as they are is almost miraculous, and a result of the serious character of the people, considering the entire separation of all civil consequence from religion and its ministers; for the Lutherans, in their Anti-catholicism, run into the opposite extreme in the organisation of their hierarchy, as much as in the character of their worship. Spiritual pride may be engendered by too much of the pomp of Cardinals' hats, croziers, and mitres: but there is a golden mean, which it is desirable to hit, between these inflating trappings, and the insignificance of a church of poor pastors without dignity or consequence. The German pastor is not only so entirely below the cast of nobility as to rank literally scarcely above an upper servant in the family in which he is tutor; but the bourgeoisie of the first and even second classes

consider themselves in every respect his superiors. The majority of pastors are the sons of low tradesmen, inn-keepers, mechanics, &c. Their cures rarely exceed 100*l. per annum*; and a much greater number produce between 20*l.* and 50*l.* To attain these appointments, which are in the gift of the Prince, they are obliged to study at the University, and to extend their acquirements to a knowledge of Hebrew sufficient to translate the Bible. Being educated vastly above the rank they hold in society, the pastors are not unfrequently discontented. Society affords no opening for their talents. The preachers at the Court Chapel and the members of the Ecclesiastical Board, who manage the affairs of the Church in many of the little States, are at the summit of Ecclesiastical consequence — but in society these Dignitaries of the Church are mere cyphers — and a *Bourgeois* of any importance devotes his son to any trade or any petty provincial office under Government rather than to the Church.