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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 XXIII.

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LETTER XXIII.

MANHEIM, the *ci-devant* capital of the Electors Palatine, those showy pillars in the old political fabric of Germany, is now a provincial town in the modern Grand Duchy of Baden—like Mayence, Worms, and other places in the neighbourhood, a striking remnant of ancient splendour humbled beneath a little military sovereign of yesterday. Mayence and Worms are, however, filled with Catholic dirt and decay — one has little regret at their desertion — but Manheim is still a modern elegant little city, bespeaking, in its regular streets and squares, its palace, walks, and gardens, the taste and dignity of its former princes. It does not, however, possess any monuments of architecture that stand out very strikingly from the rest. The Jesuits Church, with its slated dome and belfries, and its rich fresco paintings in

the interior, is handsome and tasteful.— The *Kaufhaus*, or Building of Commerce, in the central square, with colonades filled with shops, rears its tall quaint steeple above the other buildings; but its uniform respectability and neatness, unmixed with meanness or decay, gives to the town that air of compact genteel superiority which has acquired for it the name of Berlin in miniature. A handsome wide public walk, through double avenues of acacias, called the Planken, runs across the town, forming a gay promenade chained in from the carriage way on each side. Baden officers, in blue uniforms and stuffed out breasts, *à la Prussienne*, and the young belles of the town with their plaited hair without bonnets (a common *coeffure*, even in cold weather) were parading under the trees. A police, renowned for activity, strictly keep out of sight all nuisances that might sully the decorous gentility of the town.

The spacious red stone palace of the Electors flanks the town, next the Rhine. This once splendid edifice, which stretches its wings and quadrangles over ground enough to hold half a dozen royal palaces

of Stutgard or Carlsruhe, now looks forlorn under royal neglect. The great clock stands still — the gilded pannels and other symptoms of interior magnificence peep through a mean casement — and the drying shirts of the Baden soldiers hang out of the windows of one wing degraded to a caserne. The wide gravel terrace, under the windows of the palace, is the favourite Sunday promenade of the beaux and belles of Manheim; but the weeds that sprout up in spite of them, the unpruned luxuriance of the shrubberies and lawns, denote the absence of the court gardener. The Rhine flows at the bottom of the gardens, which are protected from this formidable neighbour by a substantial mound planted with shrubs. — On the top runs a fine terrace, commanding the majestic stream as it glides through a bridge of boats, the little cluster of barges, and the scanty bustle of the quay; while behind, the expanse of shrubbery is crowned by the desolate looking *corps de logis* and wings of the palace, once the scene of gay imitations of the splendours of Versailles.

The munificent Charles Theodore, the last Elector Palatine, was the *Louis Quatorze* of the Palatinate — the costly decorator and oppressor of his country. His cypher recals his memory on most of the handsome buildings, and every child is familiar with the name of *Karl Theodor*, who built the right wing of the palace, and erected the noble portals, whose stud drank out of marble troughs, now profaned by the Baden troop-horses — whose German and Italian Opera, and French Theatre, were the admiration of the *cognoscenti* of Germany.

One Theatre still survives, and supports some of the reputation which it acquired as the nursery of Iffland, and a school of great tragedians, to whom Germany looks back as we do to our Garrick, Cooke, and Kemble. I saw a new piece performed on these classic boards, in which the practical jokes, the gorgeous scenery, and a troop of cantering Hussars, headed by a graceful heroine, seemed to denote that modern German managers cater for the public something like our own; but, on admiring the military evolutions, I found they had gone a step farther, and, that no

one might accuse their biped and quadruped performers of want of *nature*, the dramatic troop was neither more nor less than a file of the Baden Light Dragoons from the garrison in the town. Though the theatre is still celebrated and much frequented, it declines, like every thing here, for want of patronage. A German Theatre never supports itself by its prices of admittance, which generally vary from about twelve *kreutzers* (about four-pence halfpenny) for the gallery, to a florin and a half (three shillings) for the boxes. The Grand Duke of Baden allows the Theatre at Manheim 25,000 florins a-year: but the townsmen complain that this is a poor recompence for the favoured rivalry of his Court Theatre at Carlsruhe, to which every successful actor is invited, professedly to amuse the Court only for a few nights, but, if he pleases the Court, he is never permitted to return. This is a slight instance of the spirit of petty despotism which generally extends itself to the pleasures as well as the rights of its subjects.

The monopoly of all consequence by the Prince and the Palace, among the dependants of the little Residence is

sometimes exemplified in the most laughable trifles. — For instance, all the clocks in the duodecimo capitals are naturally regulated by the Palace clock, which, invested with the privilege of its reigning master, never can go wrong. The great clocks at the Palace of course go by the little clock in His Royal Highness's cabinet; and this going according to His Royal Highness's whim, the hour of the day throughout the State is dictated by the Prince instead of the sun. One sovereign, whom I have the honour of knowing, makes very free with this empire over time; and just as it happens that he wishes to cut short a tiresome audience, or to have a favourite piece of music twice repeated at a rehearsal or a concert, the town clocks and the chimes of the Palace are sure to be at odds — half the dinners of the metropolis are spoiled — grave appointments broken — while few but the Prince and his valet de chambre are in the secret.

The people of Manheim, proud of their ancient consequence, do not regard very complacently their desolate buildings, and dreary walks, the rude reign of troops,

whom they do not yet regard as countrymen, and the other marks of their humiliating incorporation with a little State. Many of the nobles cling to the dreary dignity of the old residence instead of mixing freely in the gaieties of the capital of their new Sovereign. At Carlsruhe they are accused of sulky *hauteur*, and the Manheimites in revenge turn up their noses at the narrow ideas and petty spirit of their rivals. These lively jealousies extend to all classes, and are aggravated by continual little preferences and favours shown by the Grand Duke to his capital and residence; so that you rarely hear a good word of Carlsruhe at Manheim, or of Manheim at Carlsruhe. The Grand Duke consequently enjoys very little of the affection of his new subjects. The towns-people complain of his thoughtlessness and indifference, and his submission to favourites at Carlsruhe, who extort any privileges by importunity and intrigue. All the little Princes seek to advance the splendour of their residences by immunities to persons who build houses, &c.; but the Grand Duke of Baden goes the arbitrary length of contributing, besides wood, one-third of the

expense, which he of course draws from the public revenue. The taxes are now very heavy, and the inhabitants of Manheim naturally complain that while their own town declines in population, they are thus compelled to contribute to the extension of Carlsruhe.

The commerce of Manheim is quite inconsiderable, and the little that it has suffers severely from the separation of the left bank of the Rhine, which from Worms to Weisenberg, the frontier of France, has been given by the politicians of Vienna, to Bavaria. This patch of territory is totally unconnected with the kingdom it is assigned to. His Bavarian Majesty probably procured it as comprising (though with great additions) his old patrimonial State, the Duchy of Deux Ponts. He now looks with a covetous eye on Manheim, and his old family possessions on the right bank; but the Grand Duke of Baden is little disposed to accommodate him, and continually refuses his offers of money or exchange of territory. His Majesty, consequently, cannot visit his possessions without the permission of passage through Wirtemberg and

Baden, or by a great *detour* through Baden alone.

The Grand Duchy of Baden is divided into circles governed by resident Directors who are noblemen of some consequence. Mannheim is the residence of the Director of the Neckar Circle, and also the seat of the Courts of Judicature, of the first and second instance, to one or the other of which, people have access according to their birth.

The laws in use in most of the German States on the other side of the Rhine are modifications of the civil code. The pleadings and process are conducted in writing by Schreibers or Notaries; and the Judges examine the witnesses and pass sentence on criminals in private. The convicts for capital crimes are beheaded. The execution takes place out of the town, and if it is for murder, on the spot where the crime was committed. The sentence is generally read to the criminal in a public place in the town. A pause of a few minutes follows to await the possible arrival of the Prince's pardon; if that does not come, the *bâton* of justice is broken before the prisoner — he is reconducted to prison, and the next morning to

the place of execution, accompanied by a priest of his religion. The effect of religious counsels is often however defeated by the absurd custom of granting the prisoner in his last hours every thing he demands; he consequently often leaves the world in a state of intoxication. The Grand Duke of Hesse for many years persisted in not signing a warrant of execution in compliance with a vow of mistaken clemency made on coming to the throne. His country consequently became "the needy villain's general home" for all the neighbourhood; and he was at last induced to uphold the terrors of justice by two or three salutary examples.

We rode over from Manheim to Schwetzingen, an ancient residence of the Electors Palatine, with a garden considered the most splendid in Germany, and not exceeded by many in Europe. The palace is a desolate building without traces of magnificence. The entry into the gardens, through the archway of the palace, is very striking. The stately alleys of limes, the broad gravel terraces, the parterres, the fountains, and the statues present an array of pompous formality not

without its magnificence. In their peculiar style, which is French and formal, it would be difficult to suggest any improvements on the good taste and splendour of the gardens. Every thing is upon a grand scale. The classical Temples, and the fine marble statues, have nothing trumpery and *mesquin*, but are really such as one might imagine adorning a sequestered grove near the Tiber instead of the Rhine. Even the Pan, playing his syrinx on a dripping rock, at the end of a cool grassy alley is so well executed and placed that an Arcadian dream could not be better embodied. You only want the

“ Satyrs and Sylvan boys were seen,
Peeping from out their alleys green.”

to make it complete. The Temple of Apollo is the most beautiful of the many in the garden. In following one of the walks in the thick wilderness which covers the sides of the garden, and happily conceals its limits, you come to an open grassy space inclosed by thick shrubs. In the middle is a large turf basin adorned with sphinxes, on the other side of which you

are struck by the light, graceful, open temple, on a rocky elevation, with the statue of the god in the middle, and the clear sky and the grove beyond appearing through it. The effect is classical and beautiful. Against the rock, under the temple, two naiads of white Carrara marble recline, pouring from an urn a stream which flows down a cascade of steps into a basin. On each side of the cascade, steps lead up to the temple, the round dome of which is supported by simple Ionic pillars. From the temple you look on all sides into the thick green wilderness. On the last visit of the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia to the Grand Duke of Baden, a play was represented on this spot, in the open air—the great basin, now empty, was converted into the pit, with benches for the illustrious guests, and a stage erected in front of the temple. The whole grove was brilliantly illuminated, and the effect was described to me as highly beautiful.

It is unnecessary to describe the many other temples, baths, ruins, fountains, obelisks, &c. which embellish the gardens—One of the most curious is the Turkish

Mosque — an elaborate imitation of an Oriental edifice, the tall minarets of which rising above the trees of the garden, form a striking object in the neighbourhood. The mosque stands in an oblong square court, surrounded by a low Arabian colonnade. The main building is an eastern temple, crowned by a cupola with a lofty, thin, minaret tower on each wing. Over the entrance, as well as on the portal of the court are inscribed, in German, a variety of wise apothegms from the Koran. The interior is rich in Arabesque ornaments; inscriptions, and further Oriental wise saws, and the *keeping* of the whole structure, on which expence and labour have been lavished, is perfect, as far as one can judge who has never set foot in a Turkish capital. The splendid “Karl Theodor,” was the main author of the beauties of Schwetzingen — and the old ragged gardeners, whose huge rusty cocked hats were the only remaining vestige of their *quondam* consequence, recalled his name and his golden days with affectionate regret. Then 66,000 florins were allowed annually for the support of the gardens; not a third

part of that sum is now spent on them. The consequence is, the gaping Tritons look thirsty, the naiads doubly desponding; and the Apollos, and Bacchuses almost as dirty and yellow as real antiques. The yellow leaves of autumn which were beginning to strew the damp walks conspired to increase the melancholy air which characterises the gardens — Perhaps

“ Another age shall see the golden ear
 Imbrown the slope and nod on the parterre,
 Deep harvests bury all that pride has plann'd,
 And laughing Ceres reassume the land.”

It appears difficult to imagine why the Grand Duke of Baden suffers his splendid acquirements, at Manheim and Schwetzingen, which so much surpass any of his hereditary treasures to wither in melancholy decay — while his own little whitewashed capital a “ neat snug tenement, and in good repair,” is his constant and favourite abode. But may it not be for the same reason that the hero hangs up his captured helmets and cuirasses to rust on the wall instead of turning them to serviceable account by fitting them on his person — or that the pick-

pocket refrains from figuring with the diamond ring, or the seals, the fruits of yesterday's cruise, for fear of being accused of owing his splendour to stolen goods? We took leave of Schwetzingen, admiring its vestiges of stately splendour, and regular pomp — but compared with the *comfortable picturesque* of our English gardens, it rather leaves the impression of Timon's Villa,

“Where all cry out — ‘what sums are thrown away!’”