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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 XX.

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LETTER XX.

TAKING leave of the polite Grand Master at Ludwigsburg, I started at midnight for Heilbron in the Diligence; a machine which, in Germany, surpasses in dirt, tediousness, motley society, and bad organization, all that you can imagine from observation of those of France or the Netherlands. It affords a curious instance of that strict regard to form and system which the Germans often unite with a miserable disregard of essential comfort. Every thing is perplexed with trifling regulations. The seats are all exactly numbered, and the *Herr Diligence Secretair* (Mr. Diligence Secretary) gives you an elaborate printed ticket to entitle you to one designated spot in the delectable machine: but dirt has generally obliterated the numbers, and the passengers are half an hour squabbling themselves into their appro-

priate places. Your luggage must be sent two or three hours before, or the *Herr Conducteur* cannot be put out of his way to find a place for it. It must be all locked up in a basket, and yet it is often lost. There is a regulated tax to the postillions, but they always grumble if you do not pay more. It is all systematic confusion and organised inconvenience. My place being taken late, I had the felicity of being squeezed, with three others, into a *Bei Chaise*, a crazy vehicle rummaged out of the remises in the yard to carry the overplus passengers. My companions were a couple of heavy speechless Germans, and a young black-eyed bride-elect travelling to Wurtzburg to meet her *Brautigam*, (Bridegroom,) concerning whom, his family, his trade, his person, and prospects, she entertained us with a succession of lively particulars. Her *brautigam* gave her the ring on her hand. Her *brautigam* was a good-tempered, pretty man, and all his family were right good people; and they were very fond of her; and she was sure she should be very happy. In half an hour the girl, in simplicity of heart, had made

confidants of us all. The Germans paid little attention to her; they slept, and snored, in spite of the cold, which the vehicle ill excluded. After four hours' freezing and jolting, we stopped about four in the morning at Besigheim, a little town famous for its wine. Instead of hastening on in order not to prolong a moment the delights of travelling at the rate of a league in an hour, in a stinking carriage, into which the rain had just begun to penetrate, it was more consistent with German ideas to dawdle an hour in procuring the muddling comfort of coffee, schnapps, &c. at a miserable inn. The poor *Haus Knechts* (house boys) and kitchen maid must needs be routed out of their "short and broken snooze" in their beds in the kitchen. A wood fire was presently blazing in one of the furnaces of the fire-place — a jar of ready-made cold coffee was set into the middle of it — while the active scullion ground an additional quantum, fetched fresh fuel, boiled the milk, fined the coffee, and slaved and bustled about with a smutty face of smiling good humour, which none

but a good drudging German woman could have preserved under similar circumstances. She expected nothing from the guests, and overflowed with thankfulness when she received a few *kreutzers*. After our motley party had enjoyed many a replenished pot of coffee, and repeated glass of bad spirits, we groped our way through the dark to our seats, and after five hours more of tedious jolting, arrived at Heilbron, a dirty decayed town, in a fine country, on the Neckar.

Heilbron, once distinguished among the Free Cities of Germany, now belongs to the kingdom of Wirtemberg. The place has still twelve or fifteen mercantile houses, and forms a considerable depot for colonial merchandize, which is brought up the Neckar, and conveyed to various parts of Suabia and Bavaria by land. The King of Wirtemberg has tried in various ways to attract its trade to the little town of Canstadt, his summer residence: but it clings to its old haunt, in spite of Royal allurements. Several families of nobility still reside here, and the place has a tolerably bustling air, plentifully mixed with dirt, shabbiness,

and gloom, announcing that it is not what it has been.

Heilbron and its neighbourhood are rich in mementos of the old doughty iron-handed champion of Germany, Goetz Von Berlichingen. I saw the old tower on the ramparts in which he was confined, and his epistle to the Burgomaster and Magistrates in expostulation is preserved in the city archives.

The table d'hôte of the inn presented a living memento more curious than any — a Mr. Von Berlichingen, who actually boasts some of the Chevalier's pure blood in his veins, though without his iron hand or iron temperament. He was an old superannuated Postmaster-General, with the cross of the Wirtemberg Order; and from his age and second childishness in a state of complete pupillage to the waiters and landlord of the table. This descendant of the grim hero was hardly suffered to eat what he liked, or to drink wine, or change his plate, without the host's permission — restrictions which looked doubly cruel from the well-preserved respectability of the old gentle-

man's appearance. But his great ancestor himself might have lived to a similar end.

“ From Marlbro's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
And Swift expires a driveller and a show.”

From Heilbron to Neckar Gemünd the open fertile country presents nothing beyond that mediocrity of the picturesque which consists in gentle rises, well-cultivated fields, scattered villages, and pleasant avenues. We stopped to bait our horses a moment at a little village called Furfeld, where we found some motley guests crowding round the stove of the dirty post-house. Among these I presently recognised a little Baron of sixteen, whom I had known at Carlsruhe, where he was studying military tactics at the Cadet School. He had walked from Carlsruhe to see his uncle, a crusty old noble, the Seigneur of the village; but it was easy to see that my young friend found “metal more attractive” in the fair daughters of the postmaster and their dirty parlour, than in the aristocratic honours of his uncle's dreary *chateau*. He was obliged to return to his military duties at Carlsruhe that day, and

intended to perform the journey of above fifty miles on foot, assuring us that he knew all the field paths and short cuts, and evidently contemplating his pedestrian task with much less dread than the separation from the two pretty girls, who stood with simple looks, confessing their participation in his low spirits. The young *Frei-Herr*, however, plucking up courage, girded on his knapsack, saluted the kind matronly Postmistress, shook hands with the stiff father, gave a farewell kiss to each of the damsels, and, bowing to us, walked off with all the self-possession he could muster. The scene reminded one of an adventure in Fielding, — or might have furnished a picture to the poet of the present day, whose muse delights in the reality of humble materials. The simplicity of unsophisticated feeling got the better of the prejudices of rank, even where they are most arbitrary; and the young Baron of one of the oldest families in Suabia saluted the humble village hostess with the tenderness of a son — perhaps remembering from his studies at the Gymnasium the poet's genial advice:

*“ Crede non illam tibi de scelestá
Plebe dilectam, neque sic fidelem
Sic lucro aversam potuisse nasci
Matre pudendá.”*

A little before Neckar Gemünd, we approached the fine horizon of wooded mountains which had bounded our view for some distance. A break in the chain, which appeared till we were close upon them majestically continuous, admitted the high road to pass into the narrow valley on the other side. The effect was an instantaneous change of scene. We entered the valley between two majestic mountains, rearing their broad round woody heads in substantial state, and in a moment were on the precipitous brink of the river, along which, under the rocks and mountains of the left bank the high road runs — sometimes coasting round the promontories which indent the course of the stream — at others winding to the left round the bays and angles, where the liquid element has been too powerful for the solid. The scene is a miniature representation of the beauties of the Rhine, which, by the bye, I have not yet introduced to your acquaintance. The

Neckar has not half the breadth or the majesty of the god of rivers; the mountains are proportionally smaller—but, like the banks of the Rhine, they smile under the smooth trim vineyards which crown their rough heads, and which remind one, for their contrast with the rugged features they adorn, of the green ivy chaplet decorating the brows of the old hard-featured Silenus. The opposite bank is the limit of the wild castle-bearing and ghost-teeming mountains of the Odenwald, whose heads rise one above the other, covered with a shaggy brushwood and forest; while the immediate banks of the stream, present gentler slopes adorned by the delicate green of the vineyards, or orchards, and trim inclosures, encircling the spires and villages on the edge of the river. Sometimes a convent, with its chapel and belfry, or a sort of modern chateau, embosomed in poplars and shrubs, seems to repose under the shelter of the mountains and woods.

Neckar Gemünd is a neat little town, which we entered by a gate adorned by the arms of the old Electors Palatine. It

stands at the very edge of the stream, faced on the opposite bank by a grand massy wall of red rock which extends far into the mountain, and forms one of the quarries from whence the multitude of red stone buildings in this part of Germany derive their origin. The workmen split large layers of the stone from the rock, and roll them down the perpendicular height to the valley, where they are cut into smaller masses, and transported by the Neckar and the Rhine throughout the country.

Pursuing the road along the left bank through scenes shifting between the varieties of smiling and reposing nature, and her grander and more rugged features, Heidelberg, the climax of this scene of beauty, was before us, at the close of a clear autumnal evening. It was precisely the suitable moment; for no inhabitant or picturesque describer of the place omits expatiating on the peculiar charms which the setting sun confers on its scenes. Heidelberg stands at the very mouth of the fine Neckar valley, where the parallel chains of mountains abruptly terminate in the sandy level of the Rhine country. These flats

before us were now gradually filling with the evening mists, which were hovering about the town, the noble mountains, and the hollow windows, walls and buttresses of the rambling castle, which, as it were, hangs on the irregular heights above the town. The deep red of the autumnal sun was contending with the fast descending darkness, which gave a black colouring to the towers and steeples of the town and the long stone bridge bestriding the burnished river. The scene was involved in an autumnal atmosphere of mist, twilight, and deep ruddy hues, quite as striking in its way as the sultry brilliance of a July evening. It was the difference between Salvator Rosa and Claude. We entered the town by the red massive *Karls-Thor*, (Charles's Gate,) a splendid work of the Elector Charles Theodore, and drove through the narrow gloomy streets (for Heidelberg boasts none but natural beauties) to the Hotel of the *Badischer Hof*, (Court of Baden,) where we supped in a showy saloon, adorned by *soi disants* representations of English hunting, in which a collection of ladies and gentlemen,

any thing but English, in spite of red coats and riding habits, were galloping about wild valleys, and snow-covered mountains, such as would not a little perplex a Leicestershire fox-hunter.