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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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London, 1818

Letter XVII.

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

LETTER XVII.

THE Court at Stutgard during my stay was devoid of all attractions. The King and Queen, a fond domestic couple, live together in an unostentatious privacy, rarely broken in upon but by a few necessary receptions of the *Corps Diplomatique*, or distinguished visitors. Their marriage was one of mutual affection, as well as of policy on the part of the King. His Majesty separated himself from his former wife, (the present Empress of Austria,) who was strongly attached to him, to gratify the mutual inclination subsisting between him and his present Queen then Duchess of Oldenburg. Though arrangements of this sort are quite *à la mode* in Germany, this was a severe blow to his excellent wife, who bore it with submissive dignity. She was a

Princess of Bavaria; not handsome, but amiable and agreeable. When the marriage was all but arranged, the King, then Crown Prince, visited her at her aunt's, the Duchess of Deux Ponts. The Princess conducted herself with dignity and delicacy, without disguising how agreeable the marriage would be to her. She told the Prince frankly she knew her want of striking personal charms: but she also knew her merits and agreeable qualities; and she recommended him to prolong his visit, and then decide if the latter could make up for the deficiency of the former. The Prince married her from expediency, but without attachment, and always treated her with distant politeness. She was beloved by all ranks in Wirtemberg, and when she left Stutgard the people shed tears, and loaded her with expressions of their good wishes. His Royal Highness gained no popularity by this transaction.

Her marriage with the Emperor of Austria subjected this unfortunate Princess to the painful investigations necessary to procure a divorce for a Catholic wife. As some reward for her sufferings it is, how-

ever, satisfactory to hear, that she is adored by the Emperor, who justly appreciates her merits, and as much beloved by the Austrians as by the people of Wirtemberg.

If the secluded life of the King and Queen speaks well of their domestic tastes, it by no means increases their popularity in their Capital, which, like other little German Capitals, accurately reflects the tone of the Court, is dependent on it for its gaiety, and shares its dulness when it is dull. The upper circles are here a little more extensive than at Carlsruhe; but they are less animated by a social spirit and disposition for amusement. One might suppose that the quietness of the Court would leave individuals more liberty to follow their own plans of enjoyment, and that they would make merry the more freely from the absence of the constraining presence of royalty. But not so in a little German capital — where the Court is all and every thing. Society is composed of courtiers, diplomatists, and *employés*, who look to the Court for their bread and their tone. If the sensorium of life is gloomy, the arteries and mem-

bers obediently sympathise. To indulge in any vivacity of amusement in which the Court has no concern, at all times looks rather like an unseemly spirit of independence or rivalry: but when tranquillity is the avowed order of the day at Court, it would be as rude and inconsiderate as for a dutiful child not to stop his game when papa has got the head-ache.

Besides this, the storms of politics, which generally roll above the heads of the little states, have lately descended low enough to cloud the sun-shine of the kingdom of Wirtemberg, and have created, even in the higher ranks, some discontented spirits, who never contribute much to the gaiety of society.

The king is an active man of talent, courage, and firmness — of a small but important figure — reserved, and little polite — possessing, like his father, more intellect than feeling, but considered warm and hearty in his attachments. His military distinction — his constant opposition, from boyhood, to the severe reign of his father — his detestation of the French, which induced him to feign illness to avoid com-

manding his father's troops, under Napoleon, gained him much popularity as Hereditary Prince. But many expectations were disappointed, on his accession, apparently without any fault of his own. His Majesty found his kingdom in a critical and difficult condition — and with dispositions which impartial persons admit to be highly liberal, he soon found it impossible to satisfy the clamorous demands of an opposition of malcontents, rather than patriots. By the effect of one of those convulsions in politics, which sometimes amalgamate the most opposite interests, this opposition consisted of a junction of the *mediatized* Princes and the champions of the people. The former still smarting under their cruel degradation from sovereigns to subjects, were naturally ready to take every possible revenge on the government which had humbled them; and gladly made common cause with the people whom they had just before oppressed, in the hope of regaining some of their lost privileges.

It is curious to observe how these ill-assorted allies contended, hand in hand,

against the proposals of the King with views the most opposite. In the constitution proposed by his Majesty, the parliament of the kingdom was to consist of an upper and a lower Chamber. This was violently opposed by the States — by the mediatized Princes, because their ambition was to form a separate Chamber of themselves, instead of being classed with the other aristocracy — and by the people, because they hoped to give the democracy a greater ascendant in one Chamber of Commons and Nobles. The mediatized Princes wanted to retain their privilege of taxing the inhabitants of their former sovereignties — the King proposed that the taxes should be voted by the Assembly of States and paid by all subjects, equally; but the States not satisfied with this, loudly demanded the custody of the public chest, which they enjoyed under their old much-lauded constitution. After having voted the supplies, they wished to dole them out piece-meal, as they considered occasion required. The King thought this an undue encroachment on the executive, and the *Caisse publique* became a grand bone of contention. At present every

thing remains stationary, but unsettled. When the States, after tumultuous discussions, refused the constitution proposed (securing civil and religious liberty, the freedom of the press, and all that reasonable subjects, one would imagine, could desire), his Majesty had no other course left than to dismiss them. Their violent partizans, whom one now and then meets, even in the higher circles, assert that this step was owing to the influence of the ministers of different German powers, who were interested to prevent the acquisition of a free constitution by the Wirtembergers, from an apprehension of the consequences of the example.

Since the dismissal, the King has necessarily reigned according to his will and pleasure. Some of his subjects have refused to pay the taxes levied by his authority — but no serious discontents have displayed themselves. The King's Government is economical and prudent — he has reduced the enormous expences of the household — reformed many abuses — and the people are no longer oppressed by the huntings and tyrannical caprices which made his father's

reign odious. Among the *people* he is unquestionably more popular. The *upper circles* are filled with complainers who lament the gloomy tranquillity of the Court, the reserve of his Majesty, and accuse him of injustice for dismissing the cringing servants of the old King, who like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, were often set to spy upon his actions in his disputes with his father. One nobleman, who now fills an office about the Dowager Queen, professed to distinguish himself from the herd of courtiers by his friendship for the Hereditary Prince, and his impartiality in his differences with his parent. Among the first papers which his present Majesty discovered in his father's cabinet, were letters written by this seeming friend to the late King unveiling himself as an authorised spy upon his conduct.

The King, on coming to the throne, was thus compelled to dismiss most of the ministers and court officers as summarily as the kangaroos and camels of his father — in some instances, to the great inconvenience of persons of rank, but small fortune. The Queen, who is a *femme d'esprit*,

and has unlimited influence over his Majesty, is charged with much of this; and is considered to reign supreme in the little cabinet. She has all the tact and vivacity of a Russian — fine eyes animating a plain countenance — a graceful figure, and fascinating manners, which, however, rather captivate than inspire the confidence of her subjects. She is a domestic woman, and it was pleasing to see her driving out with one of her little children on her lap, with very little state. She has two daughters by the King, besides the two little Princes of Oldenburg.

The causes I have mentioned conspire with others to render society at Stutgard more stagnant than is usual in the German residences. Some of the nobility and ambassadors have, however, pleasant houses, where evening visitors are entertained with the usual good-humoured amusements. The houses of the Prussian ambassador and the Grand Master of the Court were of this sort. The family of the former are particularly distinguished for amiable qualities, and possess all that superior refinement of manners, and culti-

vation of mind, which often distinguish the Germans of the north. To their friendly hospitality, and sensible conversation, we were indebted for many pleasant hours during our stay at Stutgard.

A general subject of conversation in the gay circles is the subjugation of the sensible heart of His Majesty of Prussia by a fair damsel whose inequality of years and of birth rendered it doubly romantic. This fortunate fair is the daughter of the French ambassador at Dresden — very young, and of charms well deserving of Royal admiration. Love, which recognises no distinctions, has exacted from its elevated votary as arduous proofs of devotion as it could have required of a humbler swain; and the King has been as assiduous in following the steps of this favoured nymph at Dresden, at Toeplitz, and at Berlin, as he could have been to secure a dowried daughter of the oldest house in christendom. When the lady repaired to Paris in the summer, His Majesty, as you know, lost no time in putting on his romantic *incognito*, and surprising her at the

Tuilleries as the Count Ruppin; and while the politicians of Europe were drawing ominous inferences from this friendly meeting of the Sovereigns, the saloons in Germany were admiring the constancy of the monarch, and envying the honours of its fair object. The Prussians, however, who would have done the same if she had been a German, could not conceal their soreness that a daughter of the nation they hate, imitate, and affect to despise, should hold their monarch in such triumphant chains; and when a report spread that a left-handed marriage either existed, or was on the *tapis*, they were indignant beyond measure. Some German friends who visited the Court of Dresden about the time of the King of Prussia's crusade to Paris, described this as the universal subject of conversation. The Prussians were biting their lips at the compliment paid to their rivals, to the heartfelt amusement of the Saxons, whose detestation of their neighbours, aggrandised at their expence, exceeds all bounds. I have been informed, by persons with every pre-

judice in favour of the existing state of things, that Saxons of all ranks avow their strongest wish to be an indulgence of exasperated revenge on these proud neighbours.

Germany was suffering in the year 1793, and envying the honours of the monarch, and envying the honours of his fair object. The Prussians, however, the world has done the same to the and had a German could not conceal their aversion and a change of the nation, the hatred, and affected to be great, should hold their monarch, should the monarch's claims, and when a report spread, that a half-headed marriage either existed, or was to be, they were indignantly beyond measure. Some courtiers, who gained the Court, in Prussia about the time of the King's Russia's success, and described this as the universal subject of conversation. The Prussians were biting their lips at the coin, and paid to their rivals, to the heart, the amusement of the Saxons, whose de- nation of their neighbours, and what they expand, exceeds all bounds of have been informed, by various means, by the Athens excepted; and you may make a