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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 XIV.

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LETTER XIV.

WE returned from Baden to Karlsruhe, by way of Gernsbach and the delightful valley of the Murg, which a Swiss called, for its romantic beauty, "the preface to Switzerland." The drive is picturesque in the highest degree. We wound up a narrow sloping valley by which the little river Os rattles its way through patches of pasture and dark woods, from the mountains where it rises. Sometimes the road leaves the stream at a distance below, and winds through the thick skirt of the Black Forest, which covers the slopes of the mountains. Through the openings, the cones of the Staufenberg and Mercuriusberg appeared on the other side the valley, covered with feathering black firs; and in looking back, we caught occasional glances of Baden with its belfries and towers, through the winding defiles of the valley. The firs of the Black

Forest have a rich, tufted, funereal appearance, which gives a gloomy grandeur to the irregular mountains they cover. Their slate-coloured stems feather down to the ground; and the glimmering of the sun through the thickets gives a slaty, dingy, hue to the wood, which almost increases its gloom. The scene reminded one of the poet's picture : —

“ Black Melancholy sits, and round her throws
A death-like silence, and a dread repose.
Her gloomy presence saddens all the scene,
Shades ev'ry flower, and darkens ev'ry green,
Deepens the murmur of the falling floods,
And breathes a browner horror on the woods.”

On emerging from a fine beech wood, which closed this forest scene, we found ourselves, after a constant ascent, on the top of a range of irregular mountains, with the valley of the Murg beneath us. The prospect, from the brow of the mountain, was rich and diversified. The opposite mountains raised their woody heads in irregular wildness — and on the left, the opening of the Murg valley let in the smooth cultivated plain of the Rhine, presenting a total contrast to the wilder scenes

around us. Gernsbach, once the duodecimo capital of the Counts of Eberstein, lay beneath us on the Murg, at the foot of the mountain, covered with vineyards. Our *kutscher*, who had vented his discontent at the fatiguing hills in some "*hundert tausend heilige sacrament & donner wetters*," (hundred thousand holy sacraments and thunder weathers) to his horses, now lighted his pipe a-fresh, resumed his seat, and set his horses off with a something between a grunt and a holloa, to rattle down the descent to Gernsbach.

The little town stands romantically on the Murg, over which there is a bridge; and the rafts of fir trees, &c. floated down the river from the Black Forest, sawn up in the carpenters' yards on the banks, give it a bustling lively air. It is the residence of an upper Forest Master and a Bailiff, has a school and a Protestant as well as a Catholic Church. Just out of the town, the bold mountain of Eberstein projects its dark pine-covered head over the Murg, crowned by Eberstein Castle, a feudal ruin, now smartened into a little Gothic summer residence of the Margravine

Frederic of Baden. The Margravine had recommended me to explore her abode when I visited Baden; and the beauty of the spot induced me to follow her Highness's advice. At the foot of the mountain, close to the river, stands a quaint little chapel, in which the lamp was, as usual, burning, and where Mass is said every Sunday. You here leave the high road, and commence the zig-zag ascent through the wood of pines to the castle. After following this circuitous course, rendered necessary by the steepness of the mountain, we entered the massy outer gate, on which the arms of the Counts of Eberstein — a boar (*Eber*) in a golden field and a rose — still figured. The Castle — whose rude walls and turrets still retain their antique air in spite of the emendations and ornations of Mr. Weinbrenner, the polished architect of Carlsruhe — is immediately surrounded by a garden, on the narrow apex of the mountain, laid out with taste and simplicity. The view from the terrace is strikingly romantic. The Murg runs perpendicularly below, brawling over its shallow bed. Gernsbach with

its saw-mills, its dams, and busy yards, stands lower on the stream. Looking up the valley, which gradually narrows, the eye traces the stream passing one or two smoking villages, till it is lost in the defiles between the dark mountains, whose irregular shapes indicate the windings of the valley. The southern slopes of the mountain are planted with rich vineyards—a path through which leads down to the nearest village in the valley. It is difficult to give an idea of the picturesque wildness, mixed with the smiling air of comfort of this spot. The grand features of nature are here exhibited in miniature, and their romantic luxuriance has nothing too wild or overpowering to be agreeable in an every-day view.

On quitting Gernsbach, after a comfortable dinner at the best little Inn and a bottle of fresh Margraviate wine, we crossed the Murg and proceeded along the high-road through several of the picturesque little villages on the right bank. Each of these has its dam thrown obliquely across the river, to turn the village mills; and the active industry of the inhabitants is di-

rected to sawing up the fir trees and a trade in wood.

Near the little village of Gaggenau, is a simple monument, by the road-side, erected by the late Grand Duke of Baden, to one of his subjects — a slight inversion of the ordinary course of expressions of gratitude. The inscription is “Elector Charles Frederic, thanks Antony Rindenschwender, the Architect of the Amalienberg, and the advancer of the Agriculture, Industry, and Trade of his country.”

The mountains, on each side the valley, now gradually lowered, and in half an hour we found ourselves at the end of the Murg valley, and again in the vast level of that of the Rhine, across which we drove, by way of Etlingen, to Karlsruhe.

We returned just in time for a ball, to which we were engaged, at his Excellency the Baron ——’s, one of the principal Officers of the Court; which we found in full activity at seven o’clock. The well-known undulations of the waltz, and the scuffle of the waltzers, greeted my ear as soon as I entered the house. The saloons, fitted up with more elegance than is gene-

rally to be found in the residences of the German nobility, were resplendent with wax lights, mirrors, military uniforms, and decorations. The officers of the Grand Duke's guards, a fine body of troops, were in their red full dress uniform, kept for court and drawing-room service. A German ball as invariably begins with a Polonaise (a stately hand-in-hand *promenade* about the room) as a German dinner with weak soup; but the subsequent acts of the entertainment have by no means equal variety—for the favourite waltz is repeated and re-repeated with now and then a half-reluctant deviation to an *Anglaise*, an *Ecossaise*, or a *quadrille*, which serves to sweeten the return to the national whirl. At Carlsruhe, where they are fond of taking fashions from the north, Russian and Polish dances were in vogue—very active and scientific, but which, to be danced in perfection, would require clod-hopping shoes like those in which the clown in a pantomime sometimes dances a hornpipe. Noise is so essential a part of their grace, that a lady remarked to me of a celebrated dancer. “He danced

better the other night when he had on boots and spurs."

The waltz, as it is danced in Germany, is an exhilarating and beautiful dance. The tunes are full, spirited, and yet soft; and there is a precision and an agility in the motion, which, in spite of its monotony, make it gay and graceful. It is now becoming the fashion to waltz with great rapidity—a mode imported from Vienna, and which by no means increases the beauty or pleasure of the dance. It sometimes degenerates into a furious scuffle, in which the couples gallop round the room, to the great terror of the by-standers. This mode, in the opinions of some, has the advantage of being without one objectionable character of the slow waltz, in speaking of which a lady admitted to me, "*Alors j'en conviens, la waltz peut etre une danse à sentiment;*" an expression which struck me as most delicately embodying all the objections which banish the dance from many English drawing rooms. The testimony of my fair acquaintance on such a point was unimpeachable; and the slowness unquestionably gives a melting softness to the

air and a voluptuousness to the motion, which, perhaps, contributes some little danger as well as much additional grace to the dance. Its present rapidity, while it diminishes the latter, reduces its perils, if any remain, to the less romantic shape of vertigoes and contusions, which it requires skill in a small saloon to avoid.

Without wishing to see my own countrywomen become waltzers, I would no more deprive the German ladies of this pleasure, than forbid country dancing in English drawing rooms. The former is as innocent in Germany as the latter in England. The impropriety or harmlessness of the amusement depends on habit and national character. Englishwomen cannot waltz without doing violence to some invaluable notions of delicacy and reserve with which they have been brought up. The amusement is, therefore, improper, because it cannot, at first, be indulged in without a certain consciousness that it is so. But the case is different with the German ladies. A German girl of fifteen, whose cheeks are almost suffused with blushes at the sound of her own voice, lays her arm on her partner's shoulder,

and suffers her waist to be encircled without a symptom of awkwardness or embarrassment. Her own feelings are the best test of the innocence of what she is doing; and she moults no feather of her purity of mind by joining in an amusement sanctioned by usage, and to which she is habituated from infancy. As my fair countrywomen cannot indulge in this amusement with the feelings, nor, from the same want of habit, with the graces of Germans, I trust they will know their own dignity too well, to imitate what does not harmonise with their national habits—I may add, their national virtues. The German ladies will, I hope, also remain national—for waltzing admirably becomes them, and they rarely shine equally in any other dance, or any other occupation.

The Prince of Furstenburg, an amiable young mediatized Prince, and a passionate dancer, was of this and other gay parties. He was come from his retired Capital in the Black Forest, at the source of the Danube, to enjoy the gaiety of Carlsruhe, attended by a Secretary and a Grand Master; for these subject Sovereigns,

though stripped of their sceptres, still cling to as many of the ornamental appendages of a throne as they can muster. Many of them keep up their little Court, as stately and splendid as they can afford; and their degradation is too fresh in their feelings to allow them to mix quite cordially with the noblesse in the amusements of the Courts to which they are subjected. They often divert themselves with their hunts in their forest retirements, without honouring the residence with their presence. The Prince of Furstenburg, now a subject of the King of Wirtemberg, has extensive domains, containing about 80,000 souls; his revenues are about 8000*l.* a year — an immense income, even for a Prince, in Germany. At the Court of his Sovereign he is not received with the greatest cordiality, having, like the rest of the mediatized Princes of Wirtemberg, actively espoused the part of the States of the kingdom. A trait of his generosity deserves mentioning. The young Prince of Hohenlohe, an Aide-de-camp, &c. to the King of Wirtemberg, and who acted as President of the Assembly and a warm partizan of the States, married the

Prince's sister. When the King stripped him for his political conduct of his offices and emoluments at Court, the Prince of Hohenlohe was left almost destitute, and his brother-in-law immediately settled on him a considerable portion of his own income.

At this ball, as well as in the other circles of the place, I met the family of the Countess, now Princess of Hochberg. The young Counts are distinguished officers in the service of the Grand Duke. The Princess Amelia her only daughter is one of the most pleasing women I know in Germany. She has all the simplicity and softness of her fair compatriots, with a grace which they sometimes want. The old Countess of Hochberg is the widow of the late Grand Duke of Baden, espoused, after royal fashion, with the left hand. Since my departure from Karlsruhe, the Grand Duke, being without male issue, has recognised by a public act the legitimacy of the young Counts, and their claims to the throne in the event of his dying without a lineal heir. On this occasion the family were raised to the dignity of Princes.

This step had long been talked of, and the propriety of it long enforced on the Grand Duke; but his irresolution continually postponed it, and at last, in the true spirit of a weak character, selected for the purpose the very moment when his wife's situation held out immediate chances of an heir. He took the same opportunity of decreeing, in all events, the indivisibility of his dominions; that part of them called the Brisgau, formerly the possession of Austria, having been settled to return to that power in case of the Grand Duke's being succeeded by any but a lineal descendant. How far this *sic volo sic jubeo* of His Royal Highness will avail in opposition to previous solemn arrangements, time will show.

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