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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 XI.

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LETTER XI.

DURING my stay at Carlsruhe, the Court of the Grand Duke was shut up on account of the approaching confinement of the Grand Duchess, to which the Sovereign and his people were looking forward with anxiety: but their hopes of an heir to the throne have been disappointed, by the arrival of a third little Princess. The respectable Dowager Margravine, the mother of the Grand Duke, holds her pleasant little Court in a handsome house in the town, yclept the Palace, and announced by a couple of sentinels at the door. Her Royal Highness is the sister of the Grand Duke of Hesse, the old Landgravine of Hesse Homberg, and the Grand Duchess of Weimar. Without the intellect or acquirements of her last illustrious sister, she has much of her simple excellence of character. I was presented to the good old lady at

a *soirée* at the palace, which, with a slight addition of stars and uniforms, resembles those at private houses to which the soft charms of the belles, cards, lemonade, punch, and *jeux de société*, give the chief *agrémens*. The Court was in mourning for a Prince of Anhalt, or some other illustrious cousin of the never finishing family. The Grand Master, a veteran administrator of the drawing room, erect in the pride of pedigree, performed his office with due pomp and gravity. The Margravine, who has given birth to some of the handsomest and most estimable Princesses of Europe, is now above seventy years of age—the ruin of a majestic woman. Her noble figure is little bowed by age, and her faded features have still traces of the beauty of her daughters. The Ex-Queen of Sweden strongly resembles her in features and manner, and will, with years, settle into a similar model of matronly dignity and plain simplicity of character.

The evening circles at the palace are pleasant, and tolerably unceremonious. During tea, the Margravine converses af-

fably round the circle with much friendliness; after which, she sits down to her *partie quarrée* with the most distinguished persons present; and the branches and scions of Sovereignty are so multitudinous in Germany, and the numerous courts present so many convenient "*houses of call*" for Princes, that the old lady's party of Boston rarely wants the eclat of a crowned head or two. In the absence of others a *mediatized* Prince is generally to be pressed into the service. The rest of the party follow their own views of amusement, as they either lead them to win or lose a few *kreutzers* at Boston, Whist, or Zwingen—to post their sworded figures against the saloon doors in unoccupied awkwardness, or to trust for amusement to a round table of conversation, judiciously provided, in case of need, with ladies' light works, puzzles, and other resources against flagging vivacity. A fair Russian *Dame d'Honneur* to the Princess Amelia of Baden, whose gaiety and *naiveté* shone by the contrast with the tranquil German belles, generally gave life to this placid coterie. Mademoiselle

——— is a singular instance of fascinating manners unconnected with beauty. Her unpretending vivacity and mildness gave her the privilege of doing and saying every thing. She was the life of every party; the arranger of every pleasure; and the object of more sentiments than half the professed beauties of the residence. Her education under the care of the Empress of Russia, in a convent of noble ladies, had given her a fund of accomplishments, and, amongst others, the very rare one of speaking English like an Englishwoman. Our language, she assured me, is much cultivated at St. Petersburgh, where she had had practice in speaking it. The Russians, and all the Slavonians, are remarkable for their dexterity as linguists, which my fair acquaintance thought in part owing to the barbarous sounds with which their organs are drilled in their own tongues, which render all others comparatively easy. Dr. Spurzheim would probably trace it to organization, and perhaps the following instance of Russian polish he would also ascribe to some important bump.

On making our obeisances to the old

Princess, on her retiring with the ladies of the Court, an officer of rank always expressed his reverence by a retreating scrape with the foot, a squat of the head, and a violent elevation of the shoulders. I attributed it at first to awkwardness: but how was I mistaken! it was a fashionable bow *à la Russe*; a mode of which I afterwards saw several examples in Germany, and which a wicked friend suggested must be borrowed from certain respectable quadrupeds of the vast Empire, which in England we sometimes put under the tuition of a dancing master, but whom we never choose for our tutors in the graces.

The dinner parties at the Court of the Margravine have the hospitable splendour without the unpleasant ceremony of a German Court. An easy round table is generally filled with ten or a dozen guests, who arrive from the drawing room in the usual stately file, and five or six of whom are company invited, and the remainder persons of the Court. The party is thus small enough for a general conversation, carried on with about as much vivacity as conversation ordinarily assumes at a German

meal, and as is consistent with the consciousness — as little unpleasantly felt as possible, but an inevitable *gène* to a certain extent — of a Princess being of the party.

At the end of the ceremony of dinner, the butler of the Margravine would sometimes introduce for her amusement a favourite parroquet, who would perch upon Her Royal Highness's shoulder, and eat out of her hand, or pay his respects to the company in various quaint ways, till, after having gone through all his feats, the royal pet always made his exit in a rage, which brightened his eyes, and ruffled his plumes, to the amusement of the admiring Court. The parroquet was more than commonly amusing one day, out of consideration for His Serene Highness a little fat Prince of Waldeck, a Sovereign of fourteen, travelling between a couple of governors, and who laughed himself nearly into convulsions at the performances of the comic biped. There was something highly droll in this little Dutch built minor *faisant la cour*, in his quaint coat, silk small cloaths, and buckles, to the venerable old Princess, who joked and amused him with the most con-

descending good-humour; while the two tutors stood observing the promising scrapes and repartees of the precious sprig of Sovereignty entrusted to their charge.

The French is the general language of the Court and the higher circles at Carlsruhe, as at all the German Courts. In the South, proximity to France, and the close alliance of the Rhenish Confederation with their liberal Protector, have, however, made it more general than in the North, where, particularly in the great mercantile towns, many persons refuse to speak it, even with foreigners. The Prussians, in particular, set their faces against it; and the Prussian soldiers, whose haughty airs since the successes of the last campaign make them generally disliked, think the language a sufficient pretext for insulting its speaker. German is still, however, far from excluded at Court — it often slides into conversation by accident. The Prince and Princess address their friendly speeches and enquiries to their compatriots in their own tongue. It is still the language of intimacy and friendship; but French is the current coin of the circle, a part of the

Court costume, not less indispensable than the sword and buckles, and which, like them, is laid aside the moment the entertainment is over. The necessity for possessing this accomplishment as a qualification for "*la bonne société*" is carried to such a ridiculous pitch, that in a town where there was no court, I have heard a German of the upper rank, speaking in praise of some persons below him, whose talents, he said, would really be an acquisition to the first circle, (who were *all Germans*;) lament the fatal objection — "*but then, you see, they don't speak French.*" Leave a circle of German noblesse to themselves, and they will naturally fall into the use of their own tongue, just as they speak it at home to their wives and daughters: but whisper to them that one of the party does not speak French, their dignity will take the alarm, and they will think it necessary to parade the high breeding of the acquired language. If this badge of the Court should become common among the *bourgeoisie*, it may go out among the nobles. But the patriotic spirit spreading rapidly among the middling classes shows

itself by a violent hostility to every thing foreign, and in particular to the French language, both as one of the insignia of aristocracy, and as a *memento* of their old oppressors.

The courtiers at Carlsruhe are not quite so rigid as their neighbours, in obtruding their nicety on the point of birth, seeing that the despised *bourgeoisie* have a very high representative among them. The Grand Duchess of Baden, you know, was a *Demoiselle* Tascher, the niece of the Empress Josephine, whom the Grand Duke, when Hereditary Prince, was obliged by Napoleon to espouse. The Grand Duchess owes her present secure seat on the throne of Baden, at one time somewhat in jeopardy, chiefly to her prudence and amiable conduct, which have endeared her to the Grand Duke and his family. Buonaparte, according to custom, little consulted the young Prince's inclinations; and the marriage with a stranger and a Frenchwoman without birth, was so disagreeable to him, that for a long time afterwards he resided at Carlsruhe, while the Grand Duchess lived at Manheim. The Grand Duke,

however, about four years ago, accompanying his father—a worthy man, who treated the French Princess with great kindness—to see her, was so struck with the graces of her person and manners that he has never quitted her since. He is now become strongly attached to her, and they live together on happy terms.

Her Royal Highness is a handsome, graceful woman, described to me as full of the talent and *aimabilité* of a Frenchwoman. Every one speaks in her praise, as engaging and amiable; the more refined belles I could see with sincerity: but the true-bred, slow, soft, German fair, as I have frequently observed, neither understand nor enjoy the brisk charms of a French rival. There is something about this sparkling, smiling, actively graceful person, which they hardly know how to make out, but which they cannot choose but admire. Her presence gives them an evident uneasiness, which, if not precisely that of conscious inferiority, is the sensation which slowness and gravity often experience in the presence of wit and alacrity. The French Ambassador's wife or daughter is

frequently the most interesting lady of the Court Coterie. — When she wins her way, with a graceful glide into the circle, every thing from the air of her turban to the point of her foot, announces a creature of another order, from the erect well-meaning figures around, all looking conscious of their feathers and sattins. The German women are often handsomer and finer women — but they want her air of refinement, her easy grace and self-possession. — Their dignity, in comparison, is burly, and their elegance prim and elaborate. The French lady has the air of consciousness of these advantages, which she announces, simply, by not obtruding them. She enjoys her quiet triumph in the circle of beaux she is sure to attract round her — and when she wishes to carry a point, or take the lead, it is done with a placid irresistible grace which has won success before her good sober friends have had time to consult dignity and decorum. This sort of footing is not that of cordiality; and a scrupulous exchange of titles, on both sides, a smiling sympathy on the part of the Frenchwoman, and a doubly collected dig-

nity on that of the German, seem to preclude any nearer *rapprochement*. “*The French ladies are so light,*” said a languid German lady to me, innocently mistaking heaviness for stability, and imagining her own countrywomen the antipodes of the quality she objected to.

One of the most interesting acquaintances I have made in Germany, is that of a French nobleman and his wife, of one of the most distinguished families in France; but whose graceful manners, urbanity, and domestic affections are far higher claims to esteem. The Countess F—, now the tender mother of six children, has a delicacy of figure and expression which gives a grace to all that she says or does. The freshness of feeling and the maternal fondness which remain unspoilt, after a youth of brilliance; and that innate vivacity, which, needing no stimulus from vanity, can display itself in a circle of friends round an evening table, as charmingly as in the circle of a Court are the rarer qualities which distinguish her. The Count has all the gaiety and the polished ease of his countrymen, with a frank sincerity and

sterling worth, which it is often the fashion in England not to allow to Frenchmen. But English people are much too apt to criticise character *en Anglais*, rather than *en cosmopolite* — and because gaiety and grace are, with us, artificial elements not to be attained but at some expence of nature and sincerity, we are too apt to imagine that all that is not serious must be insincere, all that is not grave must be hollow and light. My friends, the Count and Countess ———, are not the only foreigners I know who delightfully reconcile in their characters the solid with the showy, all that is prepossessing and charming in the drawing-room, with all that is virtuous and affectionate in private life. An instance of their domestic propriety of feeling is worth mentioning.

Private theatricals, at the Palace, form the frequent diversion of a German Court in the long snowy winters. In filling up the lists of the *dramatis personæ*, for the approaching winter, the grace and taste of Madame de F—, were calculated on, as in themselves a host. But when the courtiers were anticipating the diversion

with pleasure, I was surprised to hear her decline it with some trivial excuse — and on being repeatedly pressed, she at last owned that she had consulted her husband, who did not think the constant rehearsals and dress-makings, and studying plays and attitudes, the most appropriate occupations for the mother of a family. — The whole Court, of course, flew upon the husband with reproaches and entreaties; but the supple Frenchman and diplomatist, in whose gaiety you might, at first sight, have seen nothing but levity and polished subservience, was firm as a rock, in defending his homely notions, against the attacks of royalty and rank; and his wife, not less lively, gave up, without a regret, the amusement in which she was sure of shining, in compliance with his sensible objections.

Among the Court visitors at Carlsruhe, was the Hereditary Duke of Mecklenburg Schwerin, a jovial good-tempered man, but a perfectly polished courtier. With his rosy complacent face, and lively but dignified manners, he had something of the air of a hearty English naval officer. His Royal Highness's wife, now dead, was a

sister of the Emperor of Russia — a dignified alliance which once stood him in some stead, in a gay crowd at Paris, where a little German Prince is in some danger of being overlooked, like a king of Lilliput among the Brobdignags. A French diplomatist was about to present his Royal Highness to a Turkish Prince, at that time the splendid novelty of the Thuilleries and the gay circles — and wishing to procure him a distinguished reception, he puzzled himself a few minutes to hit upon the means of offering him to notice with some more imposing character than that of a simple German Prince. At last he bethought him of his Russian spouse's consequence, and instantly led his Royal Highness to the turbaned Grandee, as the "*petit fils de l' Imperatrice Catherine.*" The Turk had too good reason to remember well the "*Imperatrice Catherine,*" not to overwhelm her illustrious grandson-in-law with Oriental civilities. The Duke of Mecklenburg has long been attached to the Princess of Hesse Homberg, the only sister of the husband of our Princess Elizabeth — but there is "one fair daughter and no more,"

and the old sovereign of Homberg loving her more than "passing well," long declared the impossibility of parting with her. He has now, I understand, at last, been induced to consent, with tears in his eyes, to the separation; but he cannot bring himself to remain at Homberg during the marriage, and will return to it only to welcome his married son and his illustrious English daughter-in-law. The old Landgrave is somewhat *bizarre* in his character, and when he at last assented to his daughter's marriage, it was on condition that it should take place the 1st of April.

Another distinguished guest, was his Royal Highness the Hereditary Prince of Weimar, who, like the Duke of Mecklenburg, espoused a sister of His Majesty of Russia. The Prince has some traces of resemblance to his illustrious mother; without any of her personal dignity or her talents—With his tall lolling figure and solemn face, now and then relaxing into a stiff simper, he scrapes round the circle, dropping complacent things with a grave solemnity, and carrying his enormous hat and plume as if about to make an offering of them to the

ladies. His manner had that sort of overpowering unhappiness which you sometimes see in the subordinate gentry of the stage, who deliver three words of message or of graceful politeness from the same declamatory tribune which they mount in a funeral oration.

The separate court of the Margravine Frederic, the widow of the Margrave Frederic, an uncle of the Grand Duke, occasionally offers the attractions of dinners and evening circles. The residence of a German Prince generally presents one or two of these subsidiary courts, — sort of satellites to that of the Sovereign — and the neglect of a presentation to which is a breach of all courtier-like *etiquette*. Her Highness is a pleasant sensible woman, with whom and her Grand Master, we had the honour of forming a quartetto, for half an hour, on our presentation; occupied by lucubrations on the weather, our journey, the suspension of the *habeas corpus*, and the unlucky *rencontre* of the dog and my Lord Castlereagh's hand, &c.; after which we were pleasantly relieved from reminding her Highness that we had had enough of her company, by her signifying as much to us, in a graceful retiring bow and a hope of seeing us again.

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