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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 IX.

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LETTER VIII.

IN the Grand Duchy of Hesse there are still existing several little colonies of French Protestants, descended from refugees who took shelter in the country at the revocation of the Edict of Nantz. Curiosity led me to visit Rohrbach, one of these villages at the edge of the Odenwald, a few leagues from Darmstadt. A walk over gentle hills and valleys, alternately covered with forest and cornfields, brought me to the neat little village, which had a character about it which I am unable to compare with that of a French village, but which was quite distinct from that of the German ones around it. The first person I addressed in the village spoke French—rather Germanized, but fluently—a delicate sound, which came with an ill grace from the mouth of a square-built heavy fellow, in appearance a true German peasant. “*Oui, nous sommes tous*

Français ici," he replied to a question I put him, with a communicative alacrity which might or might not smack of his ancestry. The landlord of the little inn had something more marked in his appearance. His sparkling eyes, sharp features, and thin greyish hair, were decidedly not German. He spoke French with less of the vulgar German accent, and with something of the smartness of a Frenchman: but he had a German figure, broad-shouldered and slouching, and not a little of the stately taciturnity of a German host.

These villages have each a French pastor, and a French school for the children. I visited the pastor at Rohrbach, a paralytic old divine of 80; whom I found reclining on his bed in a dark dirty room, which served for parlour and bed-room, decorated with shelves of dusty books and half-filled phials. He received me with great good-humour, ordered out the best fare of his house — bad Rhenish wine, and good bread, and butter, and cheese — which he pressed upon me with hospitality. During our repast, the old gentleman recounted his his-

tory. He had resided there fifty years. His father had been a French pastor at Walddorff, another French village in the vicinity. He had a niece, who lived with him, and whom, with himself, he was obliged to support upon his *pauvre pension* of 200 florins, not 20*l.* a-year. This, with his house and garden, was the whole emolument of his cure.

Till within about twelve years he had been, like his brethren, in receipt of a pension from our government, which appeared, strangely enough, to have been paid by oversight for nearly a century longer than had been originally intended. When the colonies of refugees first established themselves in the country, they were allowed by the Landgrave of Hesse freedom from taxes, and other privileges, for fifteen years: at the end of that term, if they remained, their pastors and schools were to be put upon the footing of those of the country, and receive salaries from the government. To furnish them the means of instructing their children and of following their religious worship, pensions were allowed to the villages by the

Dutch and English Government. The former, however, have been long since taken off; but the latter, after having been paid for a century, were stopped only twelve or fourteen years ago, on the pretext that they were originally only designed as a relief during the first fifteen years, after which they ought strictly to have ceased. The poor old man thus found his income reduced to his scanty salary from the Grand Duke of Hesse, which he contrasted most feelingly with the fat emoluments of some few of his German brethren, who still retain the tithes, and who, during the enormous prices of corn in the last year had, in some instances, reaped at the rate of near 10,000 florins a year. The instant the old Pastor discovered my country, he earnestly bespoke the interest which he concluded I must of course have with the government, to bring about the renewal of his pension. He conducted me over his house — showed me his parchment covered collection of Latin and French Divinity, slumbering on the dusty shelves of a garret — the picture of his niece, of whom he was very fond — his garden of potatoes and cab-

gages, and his outbuildings, on which and his house he assured me, with pride, he had expended — from first to last, *above 100 Louis d'ors.*

The old man, like his parishioners, spoke much better German than French; but his sermons are always in the language of his ancestors, though German would be easier to himself and more intelligible to his congregation. The little colony intermarrying indiscriminately among themselves or with their German neighbours, have nearly lost all traces of different origin. The circumstance of their adhering, for above 130 years, to their own language in their worship and the education of their children is the more curious from their identity with the Germans in most other respects; and particularly so, considering that their neighbours are all Protestants, like themselves, and many of them, like themselves, of the Reformed or Calvinistic persuasion. As the German language is now become more familiar than the French, this last remaining distinction may fall into disuse. If policy had predominated with them over habit and national attachment

they would, ere this, have dropped it, in order completely to incorporate themselves with the Germans. Their origin would thus have been lost, and they would have acquired the character and full privileges of natives — at present they are still looked upon as colonies of foreigners, to whom the government shows much liberality in affording protection and furnishing a small pittance for the support of their schools and pastors.