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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 IV.

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LETTER IV.

FRANKFORT on the Maine — the ancient place of inauguration of the German Emperors, the residence of the Diet which is to reconstruct the dismembered empire, a centre for colonial commerce, and the great money market of Germany, may, on every account, be considered one of its most interesting cities. The approach from Darmstadt, through a noble beech wood, within the little territory of the free city, is very striking. The road gradually ascends to an old Roman tower, on the brow of the hill, half a mile distant, when the City, with its handsome white slated houses, its venerable Cathedral, and cheerful citizens' mansions and gardens, lies before you in the middle of the rich wide valley of the Maine. On the left you trace the ample course of the river towards Mayence; and a few leagues beyond the town rises the bold wooded chain of the Taunus Mountains,

the highest points of which, above Homberg, are just opposite Frankfort. The road, as far as the suburb, is lined with highly cultivated gardens and vineyards, interspersed with cheerful boxes, whose air of smart comfort announces at once the affluence and mercantile taste of their possessors.

You pass the Maine from the faux-bourg of Saxenhausen, by an ancient stone bridge, to the city. The river on both sides presents a respectable little cluster of shipping, and the quays, with their antique buildings, have a degree of life and bustle which would be more striking to any one than an Englishman familiar with London and Bristol. If the commercial navy of the free city is comparatively insignificant, the general construction of the city itself is, in some respects, more picturesque and interesting than that of the above mentioned money-getting Cities. A cockney would, however, no doubt, prefer the tight tenements of Cornhill, denoting the value of every foot of ground, to the stately rambling mansion, where you enter a large court-yard by a ponderous *porte*

cocher, which does not appear constructed for the momentary ingress and egress of a very lively commerce. In almost every town in Germany the top of one of the church towers, is inhabited by a family, who watch during the night, and give alarm in case of fire. They sound a small horn at every quarter or half-hour, in evidence of their vigilance; and are provided with an immense fire-horn or alarumbell, to rouse the inhabitants in case of danger. From the tower of the church on the central Parade Place, which serves this purpose, we enjoyed a fine panoramic view of Frankfort. The compact oval city, with its handsome buildings, and white cheerful streets, lay beneath us; the Main running along the southern side, and surrounded on all others by the luxuriant shrubberies and gardens of the merchants. The Zeil, a noble wide street, traversing the town, is the only handsome one: but the old narrow lanes, with their lofty houses, quaint casements, and gable fronts, have an antique respectability, and remind one of the early splendour of the Imperial City. The more

modern parts of the town abound with handsome mansions, some of which deserve the name of palaces. The old ramparts are levelled, the ditches filled in, and their place occupied by rich shrubbery walks, laid out in the irregular English style: embellishments, chiefly the work of the Prince Primate, during his occupation of the city and territory. In a fine day you meet here the substantial *bourgeois*, and stately belles of the city, walking with a sedate tranquillity and grave decorum, equally remote from the gay flutter of a Parisian promenade, and the gaping curiosity of the Cockney assemblage in Hyde Park.

Frankfort is one of the four Imperial Cities, which are all that the legislators of Vienna have thought fit to restore to their ancient privileges and republican constitution. A small territory, to the extent of half a league each way, is carved out for it round the city. The two Burgomasters, the Senate, and the Council are again invested with the ensigns of republican sovereignty. The city is garrisoned by its own

civic troop, of about 5 or 600 men, besides a militia of about 3000; and the mercantile commonwealth is ostensibly established on the same footing, as in its old Imperial days. But the free cities are elements of the old constitution, which are, I fear, little calculated to survive it in their former flourishing condition. As long as the Empire existed, their dependence on its head procured the defenceless commonwealth a protection against powerful and despotic neighbours: their gold cementing their friendly union with the Imperial House—but who are the worthy burghers of Frankfort to look to now in times of oppression—more likely to occur since their quiet ecclesiastical neighbours have been wiped away, to make room for keen military sovereigns, ever on the watch for aggrandizement?

As far as I could learn, the government of the Baron Dalberg, Prince Primate of the Rhenish Confederation, and Grand Duke of Frankfort, was by no means unpopular in the city. The impositions were nearly the same as at present, and an ex-

pensive Court produced a circulation of money and a bustle and show which help to content people as much as solid advantages. The visits of Napoleon to his crowned minion, were to be sure rather redoubtable to the good merchants. On one occasion, the happy event of his arrival was announced by an order for a forced loan of an immense sum of florins. The simple Dalberg thought the sum intended for him, and began to beseech his munificent master not to load him with a superfluous bounty. Napoleon departed and left his General to execute his orders. The city sent deputies to Paris with petitions and remonstrances, who returned with the usual success. The Prince Primate is described as a weak man of talents and literary acquirements, more expert as an author than as a sovereign. His family is one of the most ancient and considerable in Germany. An office at the coronation was always filled by one of them, whom the Emperor demanded by calling out, "*Is there no Dalberg here?*" The Prince Primate had been originally Coadjutor, that is, Arch-

bishop elect of Mayence. On the destruction of the Ecclesiastical Electorate he was made Bishop of Ratisbon, and Prince Primate of the Empire. Here Napoleon found him a ready tool for accomplishing his alliance with the German Princes; and for his eminent services, rewarded him with the Grand Duchy of Frankfort, Aschaffenburg, and a territory in the neighbourhood, besides other gifts. His brother is attached to the royalists in France, and has been created Duke Dalberg, by Louis XVIII.

Notwithstanding the sufferings of Frankfort, in the late war, I could not discover among the citizens with whom I conversed, that satisfaction at their present tranquillity which might have been anticipated. I have even observed in some a regret, but half concealed, of the past days of war and activity. They had then a Court, Generals, Staff, and troops. The French army, since the revolution, have generally been well supplied with money, from the General to the private. They spent freely, and conducted themselves tolerably well—is the general account given

of them at Frankfort. In several German towns they were preferred to the native troops. Civility would go a great way with a French soldier, but a German was always grumbling. An old servant of a gentleman of my acquaintance came to him in dismay at having a couple of French Officers billeted on him, not knowing how to provide for them. The gentleman, who had had some experience of the French character, recommended him to treat them with civility, and lent him a few silver forks and dishes to serve up the scanty fare he could afford them. The experiment answered. The Frenchmen ate their bread-soup and potatoes off plate with great content, and returned the man's attentions with so many little acts of generosity, that he came to his master with tears in his eyes when his guests departed. On the occasion of the arrival of Napoleon, or any of his generals, money was scattered about with a profusion, by which all ranks profited. When a body of French troops approached, the poor mechanics and little shopkeepers would rush out of the gates to meet them, sure to re-

turn loaded with the prices of their baskets of small merchandize, which the soldiers would eagerly purchase. Now the complaint is, that every thing is stagnant—the nobility poor—the merchants impoverished—the manufacturers ruined by their English rivals; and the scantiness of expenditure thus produced, is by no means made up by the Ambassadors of the Diet, who live with that mixture of ostentation and narrowness so common among the German nobility.

The citizens, of more enlarged views and consequence, whom I know, are not vastly more pleased with their condition. As their superior wealth drew down on them severer pecuniary calamities, their actual condition is, they admit, ameliorated; but they have little or no faith in its security or duration. Under the Prince Primate they were, at least, attached to a system which could protect them while it existed; if they were oppressed they had but one virtual master; they are now in possession of a freedom which they cannot defend—surrounded by ambitious military sovereigns—an isolated atom in the chaos of unorgan-

ized Germany — without *appui* or support, except in their little civic trainbands, or in their Excellencies, the German Diet.

The affair of Colonel Massenbach, which you have no doubt read of in the papers, has put to the test the value of the free city's independence. The Colonel took refuge in the city on being pursued by the Prussian Government. The Prussian Ambassador at the Court of Hesse, was commissioned to demand his delivery. The Burgomasters hesitated, deliberated, consulted with the Senators, to come at last to the only prudent determination — not to hazard a refusal to the King of Prussia. Their conduct is much condemned by the citizens, who consider the proceeding as the first violation of their newly regained privileges; and no one doubts that the magistrates themselves would fain have evaded the summons, if a compliance had not been the only politic course.

Frankfort, for so considerable a city, is by no means rich in public buildings and objects of curiosity. The Cathedral, a large awkward edifice, possesses little interest but in its antiquity, and as the scene of the

coronation of the ancient emperors. The celebrated Roemer (town-house) has still less architectural beauty: it is an ordinary old white house, on the Roemer Square, in the ranks of the other buildings. In a shabby office of the municipality, you are shown, by one of the clerks, the renowned Golden Bull; a musty parchment, settling the constitution of the Empire, in the time of the Emperor Frederick II. The modern destroyer of the Empire, had conveyed this precious archive to Paris; but it is now restored. Above is the *Kayser Saal*, (Emperor's Saloon,) a large shabby chamber, with an arched boarded roof—the scene of the coronation entertainment. The walls are decorated with old fresco paintings of the different Emperors: the last compartment being singularly enough filled by the figure of His present Majesty of Austria. By another curious coincidence, I have been assured, that in the church of St. Stephen, at Vienna, where the statues of the Emperors are placed in niches round the walls, the present Emperor occupies the last niche. And to complete the list of

incidents of ominous import to the unfortunate house of Austria, a lady who was present at the present Emperor's coronation, as Emperor of Germany, assured me that the crown sat so painfully, during the ceremony, on his Imperial Majesty's head, that he was obliged to relieve himself by taking it off.

The Michaelmas fair, during which I was in Frankfort, commences early in September; and its bustle and vivacity lasts throughout the month. The considerable wholesale transactions are, however, transacted within the first week, when numbers of the merchants flock to the fair at Leipsic. The Exchange, a small neat quadrangle, surrounded by a range of warehouses and shops, called the Braunfels, is thronged during the fair with a respectable cluster of merchants of all nations; perhaps a twentieth part of the number who assemble daily on our Exchange. High Change is about 12 o'clock, from which the merchants return home to dinner; they generally commence business at six or seven in the morning, and toil till 10 or 11 at night; not having, as yet, attained to that methodical celerity, which

in London, dispatches a hundred times the amount of affairs between the commodious hours of nine and six. The large rooms in the Braunfels, are fitted up as show rooms and shops, like those of Exeter Change, loaded with merchandizes, showy and useful, from all quarters of Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Bohemia, &c. as you are apprised by boards, with the name and domicile of every tradesman. Every vacant house, warehouse, or single room, in the busy neighbourhood of the Exchange, is hired by the foreign shopkeepers, for the exposition of their goods. The fairs, which had naturally declined during the obstructions of war, are gradually resuming their former alacrity. Frankfort, at other times, by no means lively, has, during the Fair, the cheerful aspect of a bustling trading city; the inns, the Theatre, the Casino, the Exchange, are thronged and lively; the streets present a respectable number of equipages; the stalls and shops are crowded by well dressed and handsome women; and though there are no extraordinary amusements, or objects of attraction for a mere spectator,

attained to that methodical celebrity which

there is a life and variety in the scene, which gives it an interest.

The Casino at Frankfort, one of the most splendid in Germany, is a noble establishment, occupying one of the handsomest mansions in the city, and furnishing all the literary or political journals of Germany, besides the newspapers of almost all Europe. The order, luxury, and convenience of the arrangements, might tempt the most listless reader. Billiard tables and card rooms find a place in the suite of apartments, which are fitted up with elegance; and present, amongst other *agrémens*, handsome carpets—luxuries confined in Germany to Courts, and the houses of a very few individuals.

The merchants of Frankfort are resolved not to be behind their princely neighbours, in giving their city the attraction of the Fine Arts. A rich banker, M. Städel, has lately bequeathed a sum of above 100,000*l.* sterling, for the foundation of an Academy, together with a respectable collection, containing some morsels of the Flemish school, of considerable merit. His will is litigated by his family; but it is probable, that

the interests of the fine arts will triumph. Private collections are extremely numerous; there is scarcely a merchant or banker in Frankfort, of moderate affluence, who has not his little gallery of *chef d'œuvres*, which with his music, forms his favorite relaxation from the fatigue of business.

But the object of the fine arts, which gave me the greatest gratification, was a single statue, belonging to M. Bethmann, the great banker. In a summer house in his pleasing garden, in the suburbs, you find a collection of admirable casts, executed at Paris, from the celebrated antiques; besides, one marble statue by Danekker, of Stutgard, surpassing any thing I have seen in modern sculpture. It is an Ariadne seated on a Lion — in an attitude of great difficulty of execution, but easy and graceful in the highest degree. She is reclining on one side — her right elbow supported on the Lion's shoulder, her head turned with a pensive grace — one drooping hand holds the clue of thread, while the other lightly supports her right foot. The position is so involved, that nothing but the most consummate art could have

reconciled it with nature. It is one of the happiest conceptions of grace that an artist's imagination ever hit upon. The figure is the perfection of feminine beauty — with none of the pomp of a Goddess — reclining in the soft graces of a voluptuous, but simple form. — The marble seems, from the exquisite truth of execution, to have a warmth — and the *contours* are as soft and as round as those of Titian. The Lion is a majestic beast, worthy of the load he bears. The statue stands on a pedestal turning on a pivot for the convenience of viewing it in various lights. — A rose-coloured window is also contrived, the light through which, when raised, is intended to shed on the marble the warm hue of flesh; but the effect is rather that of salmon-colour — and the natural light is far preferable. — Danekker had this admirable work fifteen years in hand. — He composed it for M. Bethmann, and received one thousand guineas for his inimitable labours. M. B. has, I understand, since been offered for it nearly three times the sum. The artist is now employed for him on another work to match it.

Society at Frankfort is divided into the circles of the Diet and those of the citizens, who, with the exception of *rencontres* at the public assemblies, keep pretty scrupulously apart. At the balls dreadful altercations for precedence have sometimes taken place between the wives and daughters of their Excellencies the Ministers, and of their Worships the Civic Magistrates — but their opposing claims are, I believe, now adjusted in favour of the latter. The rich bankers, some of whom eclipse in their establishments the most splendid of the Plenipotentiaries, are, as you may suppose, often convenient friends for the Diplomats; and their smart wives and daughters, agreeable resources to the young nobles — the belles of their own class being somewhat scanty. A gay young Count, attached to a Legation, was the acknowledged beau of a pretty banker's wife — and a young merchant of my acquaintance was a welcome guest at the Diplomatic balls — purely from being a good dancer. The line of demarcation is in this way frequently broken through, and becomes every day less exclu-

sive — and the *opposition* class of citizens sometimes accuse the Burgomasters and Senators of aristocratic ideas, caught in intermixing with the Representatives of Sovereigns. The Merchants generally live in a hospitable style. As they have no occasion for the Court dresses, carriages, *chasseurs*, &c. which drain the pockets of the *Vons*, they can afford to treat you with a solid dinner, and hock of a good vintage. The lemonade of the evening noble circles is often substantial *bouilli* among the merchants; and instead of insipid sentiment or gossip, you often meet with rational conversation.

The Diet, who have done so little, and have so much to do, is held at the residence of the President, the Ambassador of Austria — a stately gloomy mansion — perhaps not without influence on the character of its proceedings. — A sketch of the composition of the Assembly may throw light on your political acquaintance with Germany in its present state. — There are seventeen votes; eleven of which are enjoyed by eleven Powers, considered important enough to possess a whole vote to

themselves. — These are Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Hanover, Wurtemberg, Baden, Electoral Hesse, the Grand Duchy of Hesse, Denmark for her German Province of Holstein, and the Netherlands for that of Luxembourg. — Then follow about twenty, *οι πολλοι* Principalities, who, with the free cities, divide among them the remaining six votes — the Houses of Saxony possessing one amongst them, of which the King of Prussia comes in for his quatum as Duke of Saxony. — Brunswick shares one with Nassau; and Mecklenburg Strelitz and Schwerin are loving cousins and co-partners. Then comes the respectable firm of Anhalt, Oldenburg, and Schwartzburg — the first of which is subdivided into Bernburg, Cöthen, &c. the insignificance of the latter of which Sovereignties caused a separation between an English lady and her German husband, who had attained the elevated office of Governor to the Prince's sons; and when he wrote to his spouse to join him at the capital of Cöthen, she declined a search for him in a place which she could not distinguish on the Map. — Hohenzollern is at the head of another joint Stock Com-

pany, of five or six tiny Proprietors ; and by a singular disregard of proportion, the four free Cities of Hamburg, Lubec, Bremen, and Frankfort, each, containing perhaps, a score Merchants, of greater opulence and consequence than any of the small reigning fry, are put off with one Vote amongst them. It is easy to imagine their weight in the scale.

Thus the Diet is ordinarily composed of seventeen Plenipotentiaries—besides which, most of the great Powers of Europe have a Minister at Frankfort accredited to the Diet, as the supreme Power of Germany. — On occasions of unusual moment, or matters affecting the basis of the confederation, the Assembly will expand itself into sixty-nine votes — for the benefit of the deliberations of sixty-nine wise heads, instead of seventeen. — The kingly powers, of which Wurtemberg is the last, will then enjoy four Votes ; Baden, Electoral Hesse, and the Grand Duchy of Hesse three — and so in proportion : on these occasions a question must be carried by three-fourths of the votes — on ordinary ones by a simple majority. — The Powers are bound

not to make war on each other, but to submit to the pacific arbitration of their disputes by the Assembly. — Commerce among the States is declared free, and emigrations and transfers of property, which were formerly prohibited or taxed, are freely permitted. — They engage early to occupy themselves with general regulations for securing the Freedom of the Press, and the restoration of the States General to every State.

The deliberations take place in German, and of course are private. — Hitherto territorial and statistic arrangements have principally occupied attention. During my visits to Frankfort the Diet was not sitting. The more interesting and difficult task will soon be brought before them, of settling the constitutions of each State, and arranging the extent of the concessions which absolute monarchies must make to the demands for rational freedom.

An address to the Diet, praying for the establishment of the States in all the Governments, in compliance with the express engagement in the act of the Confederation, is now circulating from house to house

for signatures. No one knows whence it comes — a request to sign and circulate it is annexed — and it is loaded with names of inhabitants of almost all States. How far the Serene Assembly are likely to fulfil the expectations of the people, and to hold the scales with prudence and authority, as head of the Germanic Confederation is a subject on which the Germans are far from sanguine. The slow forms, and the preference of trite details, to momentous points, which they have hitherto displayed, have subjected them to much ridicule and distrust. It is rare to hear the sage Conclave spoken of with confidence, and almost with respect. A French Ambassador, in Germany, replied to my enquiry, what the Diet were doing? "*Ils parlent — ils font de superbes oraisons — voila tout.*" Among Noblesse and Bourgeois the same remark is often made, almost in the same words. Even official Courtiers and brother Diplomats, allude to the Assembly with a smile of doubt, and a sceptical shrug as to its competency to the high functions assigned to it. It would seem hardly probable that the peo-

ple should meet with any great consideration from an assembly of Ministers, from Sovereign Powers. But on my hinting this to one of the Members of the Assembly, he assured me that Russia, Prussia, and the great Powers of Europe who have Ambassadors at Frankfort, are resolved to exert their influence to put the States in possession of Constitutions — whatever may be the reluctance of many Sovereigns. I trust these liberal intentions may be acted on — called for as they are by the claims of reason and enlightened justice, the repeated promises of Sovereigns, when in want of their people's services — and the solemn engagement of the Act of Confederation.