

Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe

An Autumn near the Rhine; or Sketches of courts, society, scenery, &c. in some of the German states bordering on the Rhine

Dodd, Charles Edward

London, 1818

Letter I.

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

LETTER I.

MAYENCE.

ON emerging from the mountainous scenes, through which the *Route Napoleon* had followed the brink of the Rhine as far as Bingen, we entered the vast rich plain, here and there diversified by undulating hills, which stretches nearly as far as the eye can reach. As I shall probably revisit the banks of the Rhine on my return, you shall then hear some description of their beauties, which may comparatively be said to cease at Bingen. Our road now lay through cheerful, stiff, avenues of fruit-trees. The hills of the Rhingau rose in a fine amphitheatre on the opposite side of the river; and the ripe harvest, which the peasants were just beginning to cut, gave an air of fertility to the flat uninclosed

B

district. We stopped at Ingelheim, a neat little borough governed by a burgomaster, whom we had the honour of meeting on a visit at the inn, where his dignity was acknowledged by the fair hostess and her fat spouse, with a profusion of "*Herr burgomeisters*," and ceremonious civilities, of which, Title — whether first or fourth rate — is never defrauded in Germany. Ingelheim was one of the many residences — an Irishman would say birth-places — of Charlemagne; for *some* traditions give it, in common with almost as many towns as claimed to be the cradles of the great Poet, the latter as well as the former honour; and *all* decorate a splendid palace which the grim Sovereign built here, with a hundred columns brought from Ravenna and Rome. This palace, of which some slight remains are still standing, was the scene of the well-known romantic amours of the monarch's fair daughter Bertha with Eginard his secretary.

The Gothic towers and belfries of the old Ecclesiastical Capital rose before us with a gloomy state across the plain, as we approached; but on entering it, the draw-

bridge, the ditches, the sentinels and examinations of passports, reminded one of the military reign which has succeeded to that of the church. The old city is large, rambling, and irregular; the streets generally lofty, narrow, and dirty, with the exception of the Grosse Bleiche, or Great Bleaching Place, a handsome wide street, running from the upper part of the town towards the Rhine, terminating in a cheerful *Place* planted with trees. In spite of its general darkness and dirt, Mayence has an imposing character of decayed consequence. For the *cidevant* second Ecclesiastical City in Europe, it has few remnants of striking splendour; but its old Cathedral, shattered by the balls of the famous siege, its large churches, and desolate red Palace on the Rhine excite an interest in their decay. Stately houses half-inhabited, or occupied by chandlers' shops—handsome public buildings converted into dirty *Casernes* and reeking *Cafés*—here and there a heap of ruins untouched since the bombardment, or a public square presenting forlorn chasms, remind one of the better days of the city, and

of the calamities which have reduced it to its present state, not of tranquil but bustling decay. Doctor Moore, when he visited Mayence thirty years ago, remarked the elegant Abbés with their handsome equipages, and the well-behaved troops who appeared kept under by the Ecclesiastics. The Chapter and the Grenadiers have now changed places. You see the meagre occupants of the pillaged stalls skulking to Mass in threadbare *soutanes*, their looks proclaiming them no longer the monopolizers of the old Hock of the neighbourhood; while the Austrian and Prussian Soldiers, to the number of 14,000, are rioting in the insolence of lawless superiority. The cafés, the billiard-rooms, the promenades are crammed with these smoking and swaggering guests, come to give a sort of unhallowed vivacity to the mouldering haunts of the Monks. The University Building is a Barracks, and Hospitals and Guard-rooms strike one at every corner. The Bishop of Mayence, appointed by the Pope and subject to the Grand Duke of Hesse, is a poor Prelate of little consequence, rarely residing in his See; where

the Governor and Generals rule supreme. The majority of the troops are now lodged in Barracks, to the great relief of the inhabitants, who are, notwithstanding, discontented with their guests. The Austrians are too stupid, and the Prussians too *mechans* and too proud: the former are preferred — but the fault found with both is — that they have no money to spend. When you hint at the past times of the French troops, the countenance of the townsman often brightens: “Ah! that was a different thing. I don’t know how it was — bread was half its present price — there were as many *florins* spent then as *kreutzers* now” — “*Sacre Dieu, ces diables avoient toujours de l’argent*” — said a poor fellow, whose appearance was quite in keeping with his dissatisfaction. A keen, ragged, barber, who performed the functions of Sacristan, was much fonder of entertaining us with the grievances of the town’s people, than the history of the Virgins and Saints in a Church he showed us. He was transported to find a sympathizing listener. His story was the same: the French knew how to spend their money — but these Austrians

were brutes — they bought nothing but beer and tobacco — and the Prussians were such *faquins* and so proud there was no speaking to them without the chance of being knocked down ; and then he would launch into abuse of the latter, and ridicule of the former, in phraseology not the most seemly, and conveyed in a confidential half-whisper apparently proceeding from his habitual apprehension of a Grenadier at his elbow. The Austrians and Prussians, who detest each other, were at first continually disturbing the city with their broils. The most dangerous of these, which the newspapers detailed, was however caused by an Hungarian regiment, complete barbarians, with whom it was impossible to live peaceably, and who are now removed. The animosities of the troops are now somewhat softened by habit, and military regulations. They associate pretty generally, but not very cordially. Prussian conceit and vivacity sometimes treat the *humdrum* gormandizing Austrian rather unceremoniously. A Prussian officer drinking with some Austrians, joined in toasting military exploits with some cordiality, when

an Austrian, by way of compliment, proposed the health of the battle of Waterloo, a favourite theme of Prussian pride—calling to the waiter to bring a bottle of Champagne and *six* glasses. The Prussian taking fire at the paltry honour intended for his achievements, bawled out with an expression of contempt, “bring me *six* bottles of Champagne and *one* glass.”

The policy of dividing a large Garrison between inveterate enemies, and of separating it from the possession of the Town, may justly be questioned; but the Fortress was pitched upon as one of the centres of strength of the German Confederation, and it is found less objectionable for the military and the inhabitants to garrison it with the troops of the two principal powers than with motley contingents of the great and little States. The Grand Duke of Hesse, too, willingly takes the acquisition of the city and a fine *arrondissement* of the ancient French Department of Mont Tonnerre, subject to this drawback. On any rupture, however, between Austria and Prussia, his City is sure to become a scene of bloody struggles, and to fall into the hands of the

strongest party. Mayence and the district extending along the banks of the Rhine from Bingen to Worms, of which it is the Capital, are now under the civil government of the Grand Duke of Hesse's Council of Regency, headed by a President. The French governed the whole department by a Prefect, a Sub-Prefect, and one or two Sub-Officers; but German form employs about forty Counsellors of Regency, bailiffs, upper bailiffs, and other statesmen in detail, who pocket salaries, and clog the movements of government. The people of the Province, are in general, however, contented with their new Sovereign; and the citizens would be more so if they were not incommoded by the troops; but town's people and rustics, all look back to the mild rule of the Ecclesiastical Princes, as to bright days almost forgotten in the changing calamities which have succeeded them. "*Parbleu, alors nous étions bien,*" exclaimed a dirty *désœuvré* citizen, whose drawling Germanized French showed that he had belonged to the old *régime*. The liberal government of the Grand Duke, however, which has wisely left the Courts of Justice,

trial by jury, the Code Napoleon, and other French improvements on the footing he found them with slight modifications, gives pretty general satisfaction. The inhabitants of Mayence, and the whole Province, are of course chiefly Catholics; but though now subject to a Protestant Prince, they have nothing to complain of on the score of religion — they are as well off as under the French. — Their religion is no longer an aristocratical and splendid one — the days of luxurious Chapters are gone by — but they have the freest toleration and every privilege of Protestants — their pastors and schools are upon an equal footing. In short, the new Hessians on this side the Rhine are so well contented with their condition, that they have refused to sign the general Address to the Diet for the restoration of the States — asserting that they have every reason to hope for what is just from a Prince who has shown himself so liberally disposed towards them. This is the conduct, however, of green politicians, who have not yet learnt to appreciate security for the future as well as present comfort.

The massy red stone Towers and pinnacles of the Cathedral are venerable objects in a dirty wretched square in the centre of the town, filled with the barrows and baskets of a littering market, and thronged with passengers of all qualities. The meanness of the lower ranks, the white Austrian, and the blue Prussian, uniforms, here and there a prowling *gendarme*, are, however, the predominant features. The Cathedral has nothing very striking in its architecture beyond a heavy massive grandeur; and after the superb Gothic edifices of the Netherlands it is by no means remarkable. It contains some interesting and handsome monuments of the Electors, in whose arms the old Sacristan begged us to remark the wheel taken from the first Elector, who exercised the profession of a wheel-wright. Besides Albert of Brandenburg and other men of celebrity, Fastrada, the wife of Charlemagne, is buried here, and honoured by an inscription, which I was not linguist enough to decypher. We did not omit paying due respect to the small stone erected to Henry Frauenlob, *Anglice*, "*Praise the Ladies*," the old Minnesinger and Canon, whose

surname vouches for the gallantry of his poems. The fair Ladies of Mayence showed their appreciation of their Bard by bearing him to his Grave, and inundating his bier with tears and red wine.

You know the celebrity which Mayence has acquired by the invention of Printing. The scite of Gutenberg's, the Printer's house, is now not unappropriately occupied by the Casino and the *Cabinet de Lecture*, while Faust's is degraded into a low inn. Just at the invention of Printing broke out the terrible war for the Electorate between Didier of Isenbourg and Adolphus of Nassau. The printers were obliged, among others, to emigrate, and this helped to spread the infant art among the cities of Germany.