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Excursions along the banks of the Rhine

Hugo, Victor

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Letter XXIV.

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LETTER XXIV.

Mayence, September.

MAYENCE and Frankfort, like Versailles and Paris, now form but a single town. During the middle ages, there were eight leagues between the two cities, or two days' journey; now-a-days, it is only an hour and a quarter.

Between the imperial and electoral cities civilization has established that auspicious means of junction, a railway, which now and then coasts the river Main, and crosses a vast and fertile plain, without viaducts or tunnels, without clearings or fillings up, but merely composed of rails placed upon sleepers, patriarchially shaded with fruit-trees, like a village road. The whole is open and unprotected; and an invisible hand seems to conduct you through gardens, orchards, and fields, which vanish from your eyes like the rejected roll of a pattern-book.

Frankfort and Mayence, like Liège, are beautiful cities, sacrificed by a pretension to taste. I know not what corrosive and destructive property is inherent in that flimsy architecture, with plaster colonnades, theatrical churches, and palace-like public-houses; but certain it is, that wherever this prevails, the ancient city disappears amidst piles of

lath and plaster. I hoped to have found at Mayence the Martinsburg, a feudal residence of the archiepiscopal electors till the seventeenth century. But the French turned it into an hospital, and the Hessians demolished it to enlarge the free port. As to the Guildhall, built in 1347 by the famous League of the Hundred Towns, superbly embellished with statues of the seven electors, with their escutcheons, above which two colossal figures upheld the crown of empire,—it is now demolished, to form a public square. I meant to lodge opposite, in the Inn of the Three Crowns, established in 1360 by the Cleemann family, the most ancient inn in Europe; trusting to find one of those houses described by the gifted Grammont, with an immense chimney, a spacious hall with beams and pillars, of which the wall is one continued leaden trellised window, at the gate a stepping stone to mount your mule. But on arriving, I turned from the door with disgust. The old inn is become a kind of Hotel Meurice, with pasteboard festoons and friezes; while at the windows is perceptible the prodigality of draperies, and want of curtains, characterizing the German inns.

Some day or other Mayence will do with the houses *Bona Monte* and *Zum Jungen*, what Paris has done with the old House of Pillars at the Halles. They will demolish, to make way for some stupid edifice, surmounted by some stupider bust, the birthplace of John Gensfleisch, chamberlain of Adolph of Nassau, whom posterity knows under the name of Gutemberg; just as it recognises by that of Molière, Jean Baptiste Poquelin, valet-de-chambre of Louis XIV.

The old churches, however, still stand their ground, and protect all that surrounds them. It is adjacent to the cathedral of Mayence you must look for Mayence, in the same manner as you must seek Frankfort in its collegial precincts.

Cologne is a Gothic city still loitering in the epoch of the Gauls. Frankfort and Mayence are also Gothic, but trenching on the revival of the arts, and in some respects corrupted by the rusticated and Chinese. There is consequently something Flemish about Mayence and Frankfort, which distinguishes them from the other Rhenish cities. One perceives at Cologne, that the austere projectors of the cathedral, Master Gerard, Master Arnold, and Master Jean, long controlled with their authority the taste of the city. These four great shadows have watched over Cologne for the lapse of four centuries; protecting the churches of Plectrude and Hanno, the tomb of Theophania, and the gilt chamber of the Eleven Thousand Virgins; intercepting the influx of spurious taste; slow to tolerate the almost classical imagination of the revival of the arts; maintaining the purity of Gothic architecture; weeding the endive work of Louis XV., wherever they made their appearance; maintaining, in all the sharpness of their outline, the carved gables of the structures of the fourteenth century; and overawed only (like the lion by the braying of the ass) by the monstrous innovations of the Parisian architects of the present century.

At Mayence and Frankfort the architecture of the Rubens school prevails; the vigorous and flowing outline, the rich fantasies of Flanders; a super-

abundance of iron trellis-work, overcharged with flowers and animals; an endless variety of angles and turrets; indications of a florid complexion and plethoric temperament, possessing more health than beauty; a profusion of masks, tritons, naiads, fleshy exaggerations of pagan sculpture, overwrought embellishments, and hyperbolical designs,—all that is exorbitant and magnificent in bad taste, have invaded the city since the commencement of the seventeenth century; feathering and festooning, according to their poetic fancies, the ancient and solemn Germanic architecture of the city. Seen as the birds fly, Mayence and Frankfort, the one on the Rhine, the other on the Main, having the same position as Cologne, partake necessarily of the same plan. Upon the opposite bank, the bridge of boats of Mayence has created Castel, just as the stone bridge of Frankfort created Sachshausen, and the bridge of Cologne Deutz.

The Cathedral of Mayence, like those of Worms and Trèves, has no front, but terminates at the two extremities by two choirs. They consist of two Roman apses, each having its transept, opposite each other, connected by a great nave, as if two churches were united by their façades. The two crosses touch at their lower extremity. From this geometrical formation, results six towers, *viz.*, one large one between two lesser, like the priest between the deacon and subdeacon; a symbolism I have already mentioned as producing in our own cathedrals the structure of our Gothic windows.

The two apses, whose conjunction forms the Cathedral of Mayence, are of different periods, and

though identified in the same geometrical line, with respect to dimensions, present, as edifices, a striking contrast. The first and lesser of the two is of the tenth century; begun in 978, and terminated in 1009; since which, every successive century has added its stone.

A hundred years ago the prevailing taste of the day assailed the cathedral, and the Pompadour florid style, with its exuberant frippery, degraded the Lombard lozenge and Saxon arch; and the ancient apsis is now disfigured by these fanciful and unmeaning embellishments. The great tower, with its ample cone, three diminishing diadems, rose and facet-cut ornaments, seems built rather with gems than stone. Upon the other tower, which is severe, simple, Byzantine and Gothic, modern architects have erected a sharp pointed cupola, probably from economy, resting at its basis upon a circle of sharp gables, not unlike the iron crown of the Kings of Lombardy. It is in zinc, plain and unornamented, reminding one of the pontifical mitre of the primitive times. One might fancy it the severe tiara of Gregory VII. looking at the splendid tiara of Boniface VIII. ; a grand idea placed there by time and chance—great architects in their way.

The whole of this venerable edifice has been smeared over with pinkish plaster, from top to bottom. The act has been perpetrated with much taste and discernment; the Byzantine tower being of a delicate pink, the Pompadour of a vivid red!

Like the Chapelle of Aix, the Cathedral of Mayence has its bronze gates, ornamented with lions'

heads. Those of Aix are of Roman origin; and when I visited the city, I vainly searched for the hole said to have been made by the devil's foot,* in his indignation at finding he had swallowed a wolf's soul instead of that of a citizen paying scot and lot.

The doors of Mayence can boast of no legendary history. They are of the eleventh century, and were given by Archbishop Willigis to the church of Nôtre Dame, now demolished; from whence they were taken to embellish the majestic portal of the cathedral. Upon these doors are inscribed, in Roman characters, the privileges granted to the city in 1135 by the Archbishop Adalbert, second Elector of Cologne. Underneath is inscribed a still more ancient legend.

If the interior of Mayence reminds one of the Flemish towns, the interior of the cathedral also reminds one of the Belgian churches: the nave, chapels, two transepts, and two apses, without stained glass, being whitewashed from top to bottom, though sumptuously furnished. On all sides abound frescoes, pictures, carved wood, gilt and twisted columns.

But the real ornaments of the Cathedral of Mayence are the tombs of the archbishop electors! The church is literally paved with them, altars are made of them, the pillars propped by them, the walls covered with them. They are of the most costly marble, and more splendid from sculpture and carv-

* The valets-de-place of Aix usually show the holes through the lions' noses, made to contain handles, the rings being defunct, as the work of the devil!

ing than the plates of gold that covered the temple of Solomon! I verified in the church, as well as in the capitulary hall of the cloister, a tomb of the eighth century, two of the thirteenth, six of the fourteenth, six of the fifteenth, eleven of the sixteenth, eight of the seventeenth, and nine of the eighteenth; in all, forty-three sepulchres. Among these I do not include the altar-built tombs, difficult of access, nor the flat tombs of the pavement; a confused mosaic of chronicles of the dead, gradually obliterated by the footsteps of the living. I also omit a few insignificant tombs of the nineteenth century.

All these tombs, five excepted, are sepulchres of archbishops! and of the thirty-eight cenotaphs, dispersed without chronological order, and, as if by chance, amidst a forest of Byzantine columns with enigmatical capitals, the art of six centuries develops itself, with ramifying branches, from which falls a double fruit, the history of romance, and the history of reality.

There Liebenstein, Homburg, Gemmingen, Heufenstein, Brandebourg, Steinburg, Ingelheim, Dalberg, Eltz, Stadion, Weinsberg, Ostein, Leyen, Hennenberg, Tour-and-Taxis, almost all the great names of Rhenish Germany, appear, amid the shining light which tombs create in the solemn obscurity of a church. The prevailing fancies of the period, both of the artist and the dead, prevail in the epitaph. The mausoleums of the eighteenth century are half open, discovering a skeleton with its long fleshless fingers, carrying away archiepiscopal mitres and electoral hats.

The archbishops, contemporaries of Richelieu and Louis XIV., recline upon their sarcophagi, leaning on their elbow. The Arabesques of the revival throw out their tendrils, amongst the exquisite foliage of the fifteenth century, displaying endless and charming complications, escutcheons, statuelings, and Latin distiches, and heraldic emblazements. Great names, such as Mathias Burheeg, and Conradus Rheingraf, (Conrad, Count of the Rhine) figure between the tonsured monk, who represents the church, and the mailed warrior, representing the chivalry of the country, beneath the groined ceilings of the fourteenth century. Upon the gilt and painted slab of the thirteenth, lie gigantic archbishops, with apocalyptical monsters under their feet, who used to crown with their two hands emperors and kings, their inferiors. In this haughty attitude, you behold Siegfried, who crowned two emperors; Henry of Thuringia, and Wilhelm of Holland; and Peter Aspeld, who crowned two emperors and a king—Louis of Bavaria, Henry VII., and John of Bohemia.

Coats of arms, heraldic mantles, the mitre, crown, the electoral cap, and cardinal's hat, abound on all sides, serving to impress the spectator with the power of that great and formidable personage who presided over the nine electors of the empire of Germany, and was styled Archbishop of Mayence: a chaos, already half hid in obscurity, of august and illustrious images, of venerable and redoubtable emblems, by which these powerful princes laboured to create an idea of their grandeur, but which produces only an impression of the nothingness of the great.

It is a remarkable fact, proving to what extent the French Revolution was a providential fact, a necessary, and one might almost say, algebraical result of the old European system, that what it tended to destroy was destroyed for evermore. It came at the very hour, like a woodman in haste to finish his work, to fell all the old trees mysteriously marked out by the Lord. It had, as I have already stated, the *quid divinum*. Nothing that it overthrew has started up; nothing it condemned has survived; nothing it disturbed has been recomposed.

The existence of states is not suspended by the same thread as that of individuals. To destroy an empire, it does not suffice to strike. Cities and kingdoms perish only at their appointed time. With the French Revolution fell Venice, the German Empire, and the electorates. The same year, the awful year, saw swallowed up that demigod, the King of France, that demi-king, the Archbishop of Mayence.

The Revolution did not destroy Rome, because Rome has not foundations, but roots; which ramify under all nations, and penetrate every quarter of the globe—even China and Japan, at the other extremity of the globe.

The Jean de Troyes of Cologne, Guillaume de Hagen, bailiff of the city in 1270, relates in his Chronicle (unfortunately torn during the French occupation, and of which there only remain a few leaves in the library of Darmstadt), that in 1247, under the reign of this said Archbishop Siegfried, whose tomb is such a remarkable object in the

cathedral, an old astrologer named Mabuzius was condemned, as a sorcerer, to die at the stone gibbet of Lorchhausen, which marked the frontier of the electorate, facing another gibbet belonging to the Elector Palatine.

Arrived on the spot, as the astrologer refused the crucifix, and persisted in calling himself a prophet, the monk sneeringly asked him in what year would end the Archbishopric of Mayence.

The old man begged in return that they would unlash his right arm, which was done; and having picked up a nail, and thought for a moment, he engraved upon the part of the gibbet facing Mayence a singular polygram. After which he resigned himself to the executioner, while the assistants laughed at his folly. By adding these three mysterious numbers together, they form the awful figure 93! (four twenties and thirteen).

Observe that this gibbet, from the thirteenth century till the eighteenth, bore the sinister date of its fall, and the declension of monarchy. But the gibbet was part of the old system. The French Revolution no more respected the stability of gibbets, than that of the throne. The edifice of stone and the edifice of marble were overthrown together.

In the nineteenth century both thrones and gibbets have lost something of their dignity, both being now of deal.

Mayence, like Aix, has had but one bishop, named by Napoleon; a worthy and respectable pastor, who sat there from 1802 to 1818; and lies buried, like his predecessors, in the cathedral. It

must be admitted, however, that by the side of the pompous tombs of the archiepiscopal electors, that of M. Louis Colmar, bishop of the department of Clermont-Tonnerre, makes but a poor figure. On the other hand, it would be an admirable model for a Gothic clock for a shop in the Rue St. Denis, if there were only a dial affixed instead of the medallion of a bishop. This unassuming prelate, though emanating from our revolutionary system, was the last link in the chain of archiepiscopal sovereignty. Since M. Louis Colmar there has been no bishop in Mayence, which is simply the capital of Rhenish Prussia.

Here also I found an Arcadian couple of brothers, archbishops buried opposite one another, after having reigned over and governed the same souls, the one in 1390, the other in 1419. John and Adolph of Nassau stand opposite to each other in the Cathedral of Mayence, as do Adolph and Antony of Schauenberg in the choir of Cologne.

I stated that one of the forty-three tombs was of the eighth century. This monument is not that of a church dignitary. I sought it eagerly, and examined it curiously, as being associated in my mind with the sepulchre of Aix-la-Chapelle. It is the tomb of Fastrada, wife of Charlemagne; a plain white slab, fixed in the wall. I deciphered the following epitaph, written in Roman characters, with Byzantine abbreviations:—

“FASTRADANA PIA CAROLI CONIUX VOCITATA
CHRISTO DELECTA JACET HOC SUB MARMORE TECTA
ANNO SEPTINGENTESIMO NONAGESIMO QUARTO.”

Then follow these three mysterious verses :—

“QUEM NUMERUM METRO CLAUDERE MUSA NEGAT
 REX PIE QUEM GESSIT VIRGO LICET HIC CINERESCIT.
 SPIRITUS HÆRES SIT PATRIÆ QUÆ TRISTIA NESCIT.”

And above, the date of the year, in Arabic :

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It was in 794, in fact, that Fastrada, first interred in the church of St. Alban, was deposited under this stone. One thousand years afterwards, for history sometimes imprints on great events a geometrical precision, almost awful—in 1794—the partner of Charlemagne was disturbed from her rest. Her ancient city of Mayence was bombarded, her church of St. Alban reduced by fire to ruins, her tomb opened, and it is not known what became of her bones. The slab of her tomb was removed to the cathedral; and an old beadle in a bob wig, in a sort of veteran's jacket, now gravely relates the event to the lovers of the marvellous.

Besides the tombs, shrines with figures, gold-grounded oil paintings on wood, and altars adorned with basso-relievos, each of the two apses has its especial embellishments. The old apsis of 978, in addition to two beautiful Byzantine flights of steps, has in the centre a splendid baptismal urn in bronze, of the fourteenth century; upon the exterior of which are represented the Twelve Apostles and St. Martin. The cover was smashed in the bombardment of the city. During the empire, an epoch of fine taste, they substituted for the cover of this Gothic gem a kind of saucepan lid!

The other apsis, the largest and least ancient, is all but choked with wood-work and stalls, in black oak, carved in the confused and complicated style of the eighteenth century, rebelling against the straight line, with such frenzy as almost to attain the beautiful. Never was a more delicate chisel, a more powerful fancy, or a more varied invention, degraded by the control of a taste so vile. Four statues, Crescentius, first Bishop of Mayence, A.D. 70; Boniface, first Archbishop, in 755; Willigis, first Elector, in 1011; and Bardo, founder of the Cathedral in 1050, stand around the choir; while above the Asiatic canopy of the archbishop presides the equestrian group of St. Martin and the beggar. At the entrance of the choir stands, in mysterious pomp, the Hebrew high-priest Aaron, who represents the spiritual bishop, and Melchisedech, who represents the temporal. The Archbishop of Mayence, like the Prince-bishops of Worms and Liège, the Archbishops of Cologne and Trèves, and like the pope himself, united in his person the double pontiff. He was both Aaron and Melchisedech.

The capitulary hall, next to the choir, is grand and impressive, and with its Pompadour wood embellishments, repeats the antithesis of the two great towers. There is nothing but a high naked wall; a pavement in which are interspersed tombs in relief; the remains of a stained glass window; a coloured pediment representing St. Martin, not as a Roman knight, but a Bishop of Tours; three sculptures of the sixteenth century, *viz.*: the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension: stone seats round the hall for the monks, and at the further end a broader

stone seat for the president archbishop; reminding one of the marble chair of the early popes, kept at Nôtre Dame des Doms, at Avignon. On leaving this hall, you enter a cloister of the fourteenth century; which must have ever been, and is, an austere and lugubrious place. The bombardment of 94 is everywhere written upon its walls. Amid the rank verdure, lie stones silvered over by the slime of reptiles. The groining of the windows is destroyed, and the tombs are broken by shells, as if made of glass. Knights armed cap-à-pie have been smitten on the face by a petard, and the rags of old washerwomen are drying upon lines across the cloister; and planking is here and there substituted for the shivered granite. A solitude, only interrupted by the cawing of the rooks, now prevails in the cloister of Mayence! The havoc of the bombs is seen in fact in all directions; while two or three abandoned statues in a corner seemed to survey with dismay the scene of desolation.

Under the galleries of the cloisters, there is a basso-relievo of the fourteenth century, of which I vainly tried to discover the origin. On one side are men bound in chains, in every attitude of despair; on the other, a bishop surrounded by a triumphal group. Does it represent Barbarossa?—Louis of Bavaria?—the revolt of 1160?—or the war of Mayence against Frankfort in 1332? What it may be I know not, so I passed and went my way. As I was leaving the galleries, I perceived in the shade a stone head, half protruding from the wall, with a crown, à fleurons, of the eleventh century. It was one of those mild yet severe faces, on which is pour-

trayed the august beauty conferred on the face of man by the sublimity of thought. Above it was inscribed by some visitor, "Frauenlob!" a name recalling to my mind that Tasso of Mayence, so calumniated in his lifetime, so venerated after death. When Henry Frauenlob died in 1318, the women of Mayence, who had insulted and sneered at him while alive, chose to bear his coffin to the grave. The women and coffin, loaded with flowers and crowns, are chiselled in the stone a little below the head. The head is superb, and the sculptor has represented him with his eyes open. Amid the multitude of bishops and princes reposing in this church, the poet alone appears to keep watch with untiring intelligence.

The market-place, which surrounds two sides of the cathedral, is fanciful and pretty. In the centre stands a fountain, of the date of the German revival of the arts, a charming composition of arms, mitres, naiads, croziers, cornucopiæ, angels, dolphins, syrens, the whole forming a pedestal for the statue of the Holy Virgin.

Upon one of the fronts is this pentameter—

"Albertus princeps civibus ipse suis,"

reminding one of the dedication inscribed by the last Elector of Trèves upon the fountain near his palace, in the new town of Coblentz: "CLEMENS VINCESLAUS, ELECTOR, VICINIS SUIS." "To his fellow-citizens" is constitutional; to his "neighbours" is charming.

The fountain at Mayence was built by Alfred of Brandenburg, who reigned towards 1540, and whose epitaph I had just read in the cathedral. "Albert,

Cardinal-priest of St. Pierre-aux-Liens, Archchancellor of the holy Empire, Marquis of Brandenburg, Duke of Stetting and Pomerania, ELECTOR." He erected, or rather re-erected, the fountain in remembrance of the prosperity of Charles V. and of the captivity of Francis I., as is confirmed by the following inscription in letters of gold, lately restored:—

"DIVO KAROLO V. CÆSARE SEMP. AVG. POST VICTORIA GAL-
LICAM REGE IP SO AD TICNICI SVPERATO AC CAPTO TRIV-
PHANTE FATALIQ. RVSTICORVPER, GERMANIA COSPI RATIONE
PROSTRATA ALBERT. CARD ET ARCHIEP. MAG. SANTE HVNC
VETVSTATE DILAPSV AD CIVIV SVORVM POSTERITATISQVE VSYM
RESTITVI CVRAVIT.

Viewed from the citadel, Mayence presents sixteen redoubts, from which are graciously pointed the cannon of the Germanic Confederation; the six steeples of the cathedral, two fine belfries, and the dome of the Carmelites in the Rue de Cassette, thrice repeated, which is more than enough.

Upon the declivity of the hill, crowned by the fortress, one of these ignoble domes crowns an ancient Saxon church, beside which is a charming cloister of florid Gothic, where the Imperial horse drinks out of the Roman sarcophagi.

The beauty of the Rhenish women maintains its reputation at Mayence, only, like the Flemings and Alsations, they exhibit the sad defect of curiosity.

Mayence is the point of junction between the spy-glass of the windows of Antwerp and the watch-turrets of Strasburg.

The city, whitewashed as she is in some parts, still retains her ancient physiognomy, of the com-

mercial marts of the Upper Rhine. On one of the gates you still read—

“PRO CELERI MERCATURÆ EXPEDITIONE.”

In two or three years you will read, “Goods forwarded on the shortest notice.” Thanks to the Rhine, a degree of activity, issuing from its waters, prevails in this city. She is not less crowded with ships and merchandize, nor is there less bustle of trade, than at Cologne. They walk, talk, push, drag, buy, sell, cry, and sing in every house and every street. At night all is silent, and nothing heard but the murmur of the Rhine, and the eternal strokes of the seventeen mills moored to the sunken piles of the bridge of Charlemagne.

Thanks to the different congresses, the void left by the triple domination of the Romans, archbishops, and French is not yet filled up. There is no country for Mayence, and no one feels at home there. The Grand Duke of Hesse reigns but in name. On the fortress of Castel he reads, “CURA CONFEDERATIONIS CONDITUM,” and there he may also see a blue soldier and a white soldier, belonging to Prussia and Austria, pacing to and fro before the gates of his fortress of Mayence. Nor are Austria and Prussia at their ease. They elbow one another, and form a mutual obstacle. This can be but a temporary state of things.

In the wall of the citadel there is a ruin included in the lines of the new rampart—a kind of truncated pedestal, still called the “Stone of the Eagle,”—Adlerstein. This is the tomb of Drusus! An eagle, an Imperial and all-powerful eagle, perched

there for the space of sixteen hundred years, and then vanished. In 1804 it re-appeared, and 1814 flew away for the second time.

At this very hour, however, a black spot is discernible on the horizon, towards the French frontier. What can it be but the eagle hovering in the air, on her way back to her ancient realm?
