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## **Excursions along the banks of the Rhine**

**Hugo, Victor**

**London, 1843**

Letter XIV.

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## LETTER XIV.

*Andernach.* "

I CANNOT understand these tourists! This is a charming town, and the country about it beautiful. The view from the summits of the hills includes a circle of giants, from the Siebengebürge to the crests of Ehrenbreitstein. Every stone recalls an historical recollection—every step produces a fresh charm; while the inhabitants exhibit joyous good-humoured faces, such as breathe welcome to the traveller. The inn (*Hôtel de l'Empereur*), ranks among the best in Germany. Yet, in spite of all this, Andernach, though a charming spot, is literally deserted! No one makes it an object! Foreign tourists resort exclusively to Coblenz, Baden, or Mannheim; rarely attracted by memorable scenes of history, the beauties of nature, or such poetry as abounds at Andernach.\*

I returned a second time to the church, the Byzantine ornaments of which are very rich, and in exquisite style. The southern portal has some curious capitals and fine groinings, deeply carved. The pediment, forming an obtuse angle, presents a

\* Victor Hugo appears to have overlooked one of the most interesting objects in this neighbourhood—the lake and convent of Laach.

Byzantine painting of the Crucifixion, still tolerably distinct.

Upon the front, near the arched door, is a bas-relief of the period of the revival of the arts, in which Jesus is represented kneeling, his arms outspread in an attitude of terror, while around him are crowded all the dreadful images and implements pertaining to his passion. The mantle of mockery, the reed sceptre, the wreath of thorns, rods, hammers, pincers, nails; the ladder, lance, and sponge filled with gall; the sinister profile of the bad thief; the livid effigy of Judas, with the purse about his neck; and lastly, immediately before the eyes of the Divine Master, the cross, betwixt the arms of which, as the most supreme and most insupportable of his torments, on the summit of a small column, is a crowing cock, as the emblem of the ingratitude and desertion of a friend! This last accessory is well imagined,—developing the ascendancy of moral over physical torture.

The gigantic shadows of the two towers extend over this mournful elegy. Round the bas-relief the sculptor has engraved a legend which I copy:—

“O vos omnes qui transitis per viam, attendite, et videte si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus, 1538.”

Before this severe façade, at a short distance from this united lamentation of Job and Jesus, some beautiful rosy-faced children were gambolling on the turf, wheeling about an unfortunate half-wild, half-tamed rabbit in a barrow. Such were for the moment the “passers by!” There is another church at Andernach—Gothic, and having a nave of the

fourteenth century, now transformed into a stable for Prussian cavalry. As the door stands open, one perceives within the aisles long ranks of horses. Over the door is inscribed "*Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis ;*" which at present seemed to apply to the horses! I could have wished to ascend into the curious tower I see from my window, which most probably is the ancient watch-tower of the town; but the steps are broken, and the roofs falling in. I therefore gave up the project.

This magnificent ruin is, however, so embellished with flowers, so well taken care of, that it appears to be inhabited. The tenant is at once the most capricious and mildest of inmates, being no other than the presiding genius of ruins, who, whenever she takes possession of an old pile, rips up the floors, ceilings, and stairs, so that man cannot disturb the peaceful nests of the birds she cherishes; and places flowers at all the windows, in pots formed of venerable stones, hollowed out by the wind and rain. The old town of Andernach is literally crested with wild flowers.