

# **Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe**

**Digitale Sammlung der Badischen Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe**

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

**Hugo, Victor**

**London, 1843**

Letter XIII.

[urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-125010](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:bsz:31-125010)

## LETTER XIII.

*Andernach.*

I WRITE to you again from Andernach, where I returned three days ago.

Andernach is an ancient Roman station, succeeded by a Gothic community still existing. The landscape from my window is enchanting: I see, at the foot of a high hill which allows me only a slight glimpse of the sky, a tower of the 13th century, at the summit of which shoots forth another, smaller, octagonal, and crowned with a conical roof. To my right lies the Rhine, and the pretty village of Leutersdorf peeping through the trees; to my left, the four Byzantine steeples of a beautiful church of the 11th century—two at the portal, and two at the apsis.

The two larger towers of the portal are of a strange and irregular outline, but produce a fine effect. They are square, surmounted by four sharp triangular gables, with four slated interstitial lozenges, which, joining at their summits, form the point of the pinnacle. Under my window the ducks hens, and children are cackling in perfect harmony; and yonder I see in the distance the peasants working in the vineyards. This noble view did not suffice to the tasteful being who embellished my room; for suspended near my window is a glazed frame, containing the portraits of two immense candlesticks, at

the bottom of which is inscribed "VIEW OF PARIS." By dint of uncommon penetration, I discovered it to be intended for the *Barrière du Trone*—a striking likeness, certainly.

On the day of my arrival I visited the interior of the handsome church, which is spoiled by white-washing. The emperor Valentinian, and a child of Frederick Barbarossa, are buried in this church. A Christ in the sepulchre, the figures of natural size, of the 15th century—a knight of the 16th, in semi-relief, fixed in a wall—in a loft, a number of minor figures in grey alabaster, fragments of some mausoleum, but admirably executed—this is all a hump-backed ringer had to show me, for a piece of plated copper representing thirty sols.

I must now relate to you an adventure, the impression of which on my mind is that of a painful dream.

On leaving the church, which almost adjoins the fields, I walked round the town. The sun had just set behind the wooded and cultivated hill, which was a volcanic mass out of the memory of history, and is now a basaltic quarry of millstone, which formed the export of *Artonacum* two thousand years ago, and is that of Andernach in the present day, which has witnessed the decay of the citadel of the Roman prefect, of the palace of the kings of Austrasia (from the windows of which those ingenious princes are recorded to have fished for carp in the Rhine); the tomb of Valentinian, the abbey of the noble nuns of St. Thomas, now falling to decay; to say nothing of the ancient walls of the feudal city of the Electors of Trèves.

I traced out the ditch along these walls, against which the peasants pitch their huts, and find shelter for their cabbages and carrots against the northern blast. The noble city, though dismantled, still exhibits fourteen round or square towers, used at present as dwellings for the poor, and the ragged children play at the doors, while the young maidens chatter with their lovers in the embrasures of the catapults. The formidable stronghold, which defended Andernach to the east, is a vast ruin, dolefully opening its shattered bays and windows to the rays of the sun or moon; while the quadrangle, overgrown with beautiful turf, is used by the old women for bleaching their linen.

Leaving behind me the high Gothic gateway of Andernach, shattered by black shot-holes, I found myself on the bank of the river. The beautiful sand, with here and there patches of soft turf, allured me towards the distant hills of the Sayn. The evening was gratefully mild, and nature sinking into repose. The reed-sparrows flew to the water, then back to their haunts. Beyond some fields of tobacco I saw carts yoked with oxen, dragging loads of the basaltic tufa with which the Dutch construct their dykes. Close beside me was moored a boat from Leutersdorf, having on its prow the austere but endearing word "*Pius*."

On the other side of the Rhine, at the foot of a long hill, another vessel with sails was towed along by thirteen horses. The cadenced tread of the cattle and the tingle of their bells reached my ears. A white-looking city was visible in the distant haze; while towards the east, at the extreme verge

of the horizon, the full moon, red and round as the eye of a Cyclops, shone betwixt two lids of clouds, on the tranquil brow of heaven.

How long I wandered thus, plunged in the mysteries of nature, I know not; but night had set in, the country was hushed, and the moon shining at its very zenith, when I suddenly came to myself at the foot of an eminence crowned by an obscure mass, round which black lines defined themselves; some in the form of a gallows, others like masts, with transversal spars. Having reached the eminence, by striding through sheaves of fresh-cut beans, I found the dark object to be a tomb, placed upon a circular foundation of stone.

Why this tomb in the fields? Why this scaffolding? I was full of eager interest and curiosity; and perceiving a low door constructed in the masonry, clumsily closed up with boarding, I knocked with my cane, but the inmate, if inmate there were, did not answer.

By an easy ascent, on turf covered with blue flowers, which seemed to have expanded in the moonshine, I clambered up to view the tomb, which consisted of a large truncated obelisk, placed on an immense block representing a Roman sarcophagus, the whole being in blue granite. Around the monument, and up the shaft, was a scaffolding with a long ladder placed against it; and I perceived four spaces on the four sides of the block, from which bas-reliefs had been lately displaced. At my feet were strewed fragments of cornices and entablatures, visible by the light of the moon.

With anxious eyes I sought the name of the occu-

pant of the tomb. Three sides were blank ; but on the fourth I found in copper letters the following dedication : " THE ARMY OF THE SAMBRE AND MEUSE TO THEIR GENERAL-IN-CHIEF ;" and below, the moon enabled me to read the name of

" HOCHE."

The letters had been removed, but their grooves in the granite still remained indelible.

This name, in such a place and at such an hour, caused a deep and inexpressible sensation in my mind. I always admired Hoche. Like Marceau, he was one of those great men by whose ministry Providence, intending that the cause of the revolution should triumph, and France prevail, prepared the way for Buonaparte ; mere precursors—incomplete ordeals—crushed into dust by Destiny, as soon as she had brought from the shade the complete and stern profile of the one man needful. Such was the fate of Hoche.

The date of 18th April, 1797, occurred to my mind, as bright in the annals of heroism. Not knowing where I was, I looked anxiously around me : to the north was a vast plain ; to the south, at about a gun-shot distance, the Rhine ; and at my feet, at the bottom of the hillock which served for the base of the tomb, a village having at its entrance an old square tower.

At that moment a man passed, at a short distance from the monument, of whom I asked in French the name of the village. He was perhaps an old soldier, war being as active as civilization in

conveying our language to all the nations of the earth; for he instantly answered, "*Weisse Thurm*," and disappeared.

These two words, signifying the "White Tower," reminded me of the "*Turris Alba*" of the Romans. Hoche died upon an illustrious spot; for it was here that Cæsar first passed the Rhine two thousand years ago!

What is the object of the scaffolding? Are they degrading or repairing the monument? I could not guess! Having scaled the basement, and ascended the scaffolding, I looked into an aperture of the base, and discerned the interior of a gloomy quadrangular chamber. The moonlight penetrating one of the crevices, I perceived a white figure, upright and standing against the wall; and having entered the chamber by the narrow aperture, creeping on my knees, I found in the centre of the pavement a hole, through which they had no doubt lowered the coffin into the vault below. A cord was still suspended there, the ends of which were lost in the darkness.

Having approached and looked into the vault below, I vainly attempted to discern the coffin. I could scarcely distinguish the vague outline of a recess, formed in the vault.

I remained there for some time, absorbed in the two-fold mystery of death and darkness. An icy breath appeared to issue from the aperture of the vault, as if blown from the yawning mouth of the grave. I can scarcely express the excitement of my mind. This tomb in this lonely spot—the unexpected recognition of so great a name—the

gloomy chamber—the vault, whether occupied or empty—the mysterious scaffolding—all served to overwhelm my thoughts and depress my mind.

Emotions of pity filled my heart, on seeing how the illustrious dead become neglected when their graves lie in a land of exile! This trophy, erected by a victorious army, is at the mercy of all and every one. A French general lies far from his country, in a common bean-field; and Prussian masons appear to be in possession of his tomb!

Methought I heard a voice issue from the disjointed stones, exclaiming "*France! take back the Rhine.*"

Half an hour afterwards I was on the road to Andernach.