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A steam voyage up the Rhine

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Letter VII.

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LETTER VII.

BANKS OF THE MEUSE—HUY—LIÈGE.

Liège, August 4.

THE road from Namur to Liège commences with a noble avenue of trees. The luxuriant foliage does its best to conceal the tasteless steeples of the city, which at a distance resemble nine-pins, intermingled with cups and balls.

On quitting the shade of these lofty trees, the fresh breeze from the Meuse salutes you agreeably, and the road follows the cheerful banks of the river. The Meuse, swollen by the Sambre, becomes much wider, but the double rampart of rock soon reappears, representing at every step some giant fortress, dungeons in ruins, or groups of Titanic towers. The rocks on the Meuse are ferruginous, and afford an agreeable variety of tint to the landscape. The elements impart to them a fine rusty coating; but when broken up, produce the odious blue granite with which Belgium is infested, which creates such ugly edifices, and such magnificent mountains.

The rock was created by the Almighty. It

was man who converted it to the purpose of a building-stone.

We passed rapidly through Sanson, a village, above which stand, decaying amid the brushwood, the remains of a castle, built, it is supposed, under Clodion.

There is a rock here, pointed out by the conductor, which exhibits a grim human physiognomy. We next reached Andennes, where I remarked a most inestimable treasure for the antiquarian, in a pure rustic church of the tenth century, in a perfect condition. In another village, Sclayn, I believe there is the following inscription over the principal entrance of the church. "Let no dog enter the house of God." Were I curate of Sclayn, I should think it more important to invite Christians to enter than to interfere with the expulsion of dogs.

After passing Andennes, the mountains recede; a plain succeeds to the valley, and the Meuse disappears among the meadows. The landscape is still fine; but the eye is now and then offended by factory chimneys, the hideous obelisks of modern civilization.

The hills advance once more, the river and the road reunite, and vast bastions are perceptible on the summit of a rock. A handsome church, by the side of a high square tower, with a tower-gate flanked by a decaying watch-tower, are now perceptible. Several modern habitations, the creation of men of opulence, in the old fashioned

Flemish fantastical taste, now succeed, having flowery terraces on either side of an old bridge, reflected in the waters of the Meuse.

We are now at Huy, next to Dinant, the prettiest town on the Meuse, and just midway between Namur and Liège, as Dinant is between Namur and Givet. Huy, which now possesses a formidable citadel, was also of a warlike character in times of yore; having stood sieges against the people of Liège, as often as Dinant against those of Namur, in the times when cities waged war against each other as kingdoms in our own, as Froissart informs us,—

“ La grande ville de Bar-sur-Seigne,
A fait trembler Troye en Champagne.”

After Huy, we have one of those pleasing contrasts which constitute the charm of the Meuse; severe-looking rocks being opposed to cheerful meadows. Vineyards begin to be apparent on the hills; the first, I should think, in Belgium.

From time to time one sees a manufacture of zinc close by the river, in some ravine, whose rent and creviced roof, with the escaping smoke, gives one the idea of a half-extinguished fire; or some alum pit, with its heap of red earth. Here is a hop-garden adjoining a bean-field, there a basking garden, whose fragrant flowers diffuse perfume around.

While fretting against the overpowering gable of innumerable geese, ducks, and poultry,

one detects a red brick house, with slated turrets, stone-framed windows, latticed with lead; dull, clean, and calm; shaded by a luxuriant vine, with pigeons on the roof, bird-cages at the windows, a beautiful child, and a sunbeam on the threshold,—the whole presenting a subject for Teniers or Mieris.

Evening approaches: the wind sinks; the meadows and the woods become hushed; and nothing is heard but the murmur of the mighty streams. Vague lights glitter in the houses; all objects become indistinct; and my fellow travellers out-vie each other in snoring.

Presently some person remarks that we shall soon be at Liège. The scene now becomes truly curious. At the foot of the dark and wooded hills, towards the west, two balls of fire glare and glitter, like the eyes of tigers; while from an orifice, eighty yards above your head, issues a fierce flame, which glances over the neighbouring rocks and forests. A little further on, at the entrance of the valley, is a yawning furnace, which, when occasionally opened, sends forth volumes of flames. These are the forges rendered famous by the engineer Cockerell. After passing the spot called the Little Flemalle, the scene becomes unspeakably grand; the whole valley being filled with what appear to be the craters of volcanoes in eruption. Some emit immense clouds of red vapour, glittering with sparks. Others define upon their reddening

glow the dark circumference of an adjoining village ; in other places the flames are distinguished through the apertures of some mis-shapely edifice.

One might figure to one's-self that a hostile army was marching through the country, sacking and burning the different towns ; some blazing, some smoking, some half extinct. This warlike spectacle, seen in time of peace, like a frightful copy of devastation, is illustrative of the progress of industry, and the vast enterprizes of Cockerell.

A discordant and violent noise proceeds from this chaos ; and, being curious to visit one of these fiery dens, I got down from the carriage. The spectacle is indeed striking, particularly at night ; partaking almost of the supernatural. Wheels, saws, cauldrons, rollers, cylinders, regulators, every portion of those copper giants which we call engines, and to which steam imparts strength and vitality to roar, hiss, grind, groan, to rend asunder brass, to twist iron, to pound granite, are scattered about. The scorched and smoky workmen howl like hydras and dragons at their terrible occupation, as if tormented in that heated atmosphere by the demons of hell.

LIEGE is one of the cities in process of transition from old to new, in which, at every step, the rich old carved and painted fronts of ancient mansions are effaced by modern stucco and plaster casts ; the good old fashioned slated roofs, with their fanciful skylights and weather-cocks,

being daily destroyed by the vile taste of the vulgar burghers of the town, who read the *Constitutionnel* upon a terrace paved with zinc or asphalt.

A Grecian temple, with a custom-house officer for its high priest, constitutes the entrance, in place of some fine old tower bristling with partizans; and the high brick chimneys of steam factories take the place of ancient spires and modern steeples.

Liège no longer possesses the ancient cathedral of the prince-bishops, built by the illustrious prelate, Notger, A.D. 1000, and demolished in 1795, by I know not whom; but, in its place, she is rich in the forges of Monsieur Cockerell. Nor can she now exhibit the cloister of the dominicans, once so famous, and in so noble a style of architecture; for upon the site there stands a theatre, with its cast-iron columns and capitals, of which the first stone was laid by Mademoiselle Mars. In the nineteenth, as in the sixteenth century, Liège is celebrated for the manufacture of arms; competing with France for weapons of war, and with Versailles, in particular, for those of the sportsman.

But the ancient city of St. Hubert, formerly uniting the dignities of a cathedral and a fortress, and exhibiting pictures both ecclesiastical and military, prays and fights no longer. At present her province is to buy and sell; and Liège may be regarded as an immense hive of industry, the mainspring of an extensive national commerce.

The Meuse connects this city with France and Holland; and with these two arms at her disposal, both receives and despatches on either side. Even the etymological derivation of the name has been extinguished. The ancient rivulet *Legia* being now called *Ri-de-Coq-Fontaine*.

Meanwhile Liège lies grouped in a picturesque manner upon the green ridge of St. Walburge, divided by the Meuse into the high and low town, which are connected by thirteen bridges, some of them possessing architectural merit. As far as the eye can reach, it is surrounded by trees and verdure, and still retains a sufficient number of turrets, gabled mansions, Roman towers, and dreary dungeons, such as those of St. Martin and d'Amercœur, to furnish matter of interest to the poet and antiquarian, in spite of the deterioration of factories and forges.

As it rained torrents, I had only time to visit four churches. St. Paul, the present cathedral, a noble specimen of the fifteenth century, having a Gothic cloister, with a curious old portal stupidly spoiled by modern stucco, and a fine tower, which must have been truly beautiful before some ill-judged architect reformed all the angles—the same disgraceful operation now in progress upon the old roofs of our Hotel de Ville in Paris. St. John, built in the severe style of the tenth century, having a fine square tower, with a slated steeple, on either side of which are two lower towers, also square. Behind this façade is the

dome or rather the hump of some nondescript church, the door of which opens upon a cloister disfigured, scraped, white-washed, and overgrown with weeds. St. Hubert, whose Roman apsis, with its arched galleries, is magnificent; and St. Denis, a curious church of the tenth century, having a tower of the ninth, which leaves evident traces of devastation by fire towards the base, perhaps during the irruption of the Normans, in 882. The Roman architects repaired and continued the tower in the very state in which it was left by the fire; so that the newly-built part is carried up on the impaired walls. Thus the outline of the ruin remains perfectly visible upon the tower, even to the present day.

As I was proceeding from the church of St. Denis to that of St. Hubert, through a labyrinth of low narrow streets, in the wake of which were ensconced madonnas surrounded with strips of tin inscribed with religious devices, I found myself under a high and gloomy wall, ornamented in a manner which announced it to have pertained to some palace of the middle ages. A low door having presented itself, I entered a spacious court, and found myself within the precincts of the palace of the ecclesiastical princes of Liège. Never did I behold an order of architecture more strange or more gorgeous. Four granite fronts, over which tower four prodigious high slated roofs, supported by four low-arched galleries, seemingly ready to yield under the pressure of the enor-

mous weight, confine the view on all sides. Two of the façades exhibit the most complete specimens of the elliptical arches which characterize the architecture of the end of the fifteenth, and the beginning of the sixteenth, century. The windows of this clerical palace are much in the style of those usual in churches. Unfortunately two other fronts, destroyed in the conflagration of 1734, have been rebuilt in the mean fashion of that period, and tend to detract from the general effect; though luckily they are not absolutely at variance with the austere style of the old palace.

The prince-bishop who was in power a hundred and five years ago appears to have allowed of no departure from the original simplicity of plan; and two plain fronts were constructed, such as befitted the architecture of the eighteenth century, which allowed no medium between the frippery of exaggerated ornament, and absolute nakedness.

The quadruple gallery enclosing the court is in admirable preservation. Nothing can be more curiously interesting than the pillars supporting these broad elliptic arches, which are of grey granite, like all the others about the palace. In either of the four sides you will find that one-half of the shaft of the pillar disappears, under the embellishment of arabesques—a Flemish fancy of the sixteenth century; and to the confusion of the archeologist, that these ara-

besques, as well as the curiously executed capitals of the columns, abounding with chimerical figures, leaves unknown in botany, apocalyptical animals, winged dragons, and Egyptian hieroglyphics, apparently belong to the eleventh century. In order not to attribute these short gibbous columns to the Byzantine architecture, it is necessary to remark that the episcopal palace of Liège was only begun in 1508, by Prince Erard de la Mark, who reigned thirty-two years.

This edifice is now occupied by the courts of law, by booksellers, and various tradesmen, and who are installed beneath the arches, besides a vegetable market in the midst; and the men of the law are to be seen passing to and fro among baskets of cabbages and flowers. Fat-cheeked Flemings stand chattering and quarrelling before every pillar, and warm arguments are heard through the windows of this gloomy court, in which the silence of the cloister once prevailed. The gossip and the pettifogger have succeeded to the arrogant prelates of old. Above the high roofs is a lofty and massive brick tower, formerly the belfry of the prince-bishop, and now used as a penitentiary for women; a sorry and cold antithesis, such as the disciples of Voltaire might have devised as a jest thirty years ago, but which the prosy utilitarian of to day has executed as a matter of fact.

On leaving the palace by the principal door,

I examined the present façade, the work of the disastrous architect of 1734, resembling a tragedy by Lagrange Chancel, in stone and marble.

There was a wretched man lounging before this frightful building, who insisted upon extorting from me a tribute to its merits; but I would not listen to him, though he taught me that Liège was called by the Dutch, *Luik*, by the Germans, *Lüttich*, and in Latin, *Leodium*.

The room in which I lodged at Liège was hung with muslin curtains, upon which were embroidered, not nosegays, but melons. It was also adorned with engravings, doing justice to our defeats of 1814, but some little injustice to our language. The following is the exact text which figures at the bottom of one of these prints:—“*Bataille d'Arcis-sur-Aube, le 21 Mars, 1814. La plus part de la garnison de cette place, composée de la garde ancienne (probablement la vieille garde) fut fait prisonniers, et les alliés entrèrent vainquereuse à Paris, le 2 Avril!*”

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